



MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

S.1111 (Liu) / A.4407 (Peoples-Stokes)

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to expanding access to advanced courses to improve educational equity

The Capital Region Chamber, representing 2,900 businesses and organizations from throughout the Capital Region that employ more than 160,000 area residents, strongly supports S.1111/A.4407 which would expand access to advanced coursework in order to improve educational equity around the state.

The passage of this legislation would enable more students of color, students who are low-income, and other historically under-served groups of students to enroll and succeed in advanced middle and high school courses that will prepare them for college, careers, and civic engagement.

In 2018-19, New York's education system was on average approximately twice as likely to enroll White and non-low-income students in a diverse range of advanced classes in high school than their Black and Latinx peers and their peers who are low-income. These advanced classes include Physics, Calculus, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, Computer Science, advanced foreign languages, and music. This is both because students who are low-income and students of color were less likely to attend schools where these courses were offered *and* because even when they attended schools that had the classes, these student groups were less likely to be given access.ⁱ

In fact, even when students who are low-income and students of color scored proficient on the state math assessment in grade 7, they were less likely than their non-low-income and White peers to be enrolled in an advanced math class in grade 9. Enrollment in advanced math was 22% higher for students who are not low-income compared to students who are low-income who were also proficient, 16% higher for White students compared to their Black peers who were also proficient, and 20% higher for White students compared to their Latinx peers who were also proficient.ⁱⁱ

The passage of this bill would address these disparities in two important ways. First, it would ensure that school districts provide every family with clear and concise information, in multiple languages, beginning in the late elementary grades about the courses their child can take in middle and high school to prepare for college, careers, and civic engagement, including the benefits of enrolling in advanced courses and the support available. Second, the bill would enable automatic enrollment in the next available advanced course for students who demonstrate readiness using one of multiple measures. Families would always have the right to decline this automatic enrollment.

This legislation is important because of the unnecessary and inequitable barriers that many school districts currently have in place. The New York Equity Coalition's review of thousands of pages of documents detailing enrollment practices, support services, and methods of communicating with students and families in the 100 largest school districts in the state plus 10 rural high-need districts found that:

- Only 12 school districts provided examples of positive messaging that encouraged all students to enroll in gatekeeper and advanced courses and signaled high expectations for all students;
- Only 33 school districts provided examples of multiple entry points to advanced coursework in at least one subject area at the high school level, and in some cases a student had to be deemed “accelerated” as early as middle school in order to be eligible for course opportunities later in their academic career;
- 68 school districts provided examples of heavy reliance on GPA requirements and teacher recommendations at the high school level, which can reflect implicit bias;
- 42 school districts provided examples of a large number or nonessential course prerequisites at the high school level; and
- Only four school districts provided examples of information made available to families in multiple languages about accelerated or advanced courses.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Capital Region Chamber strongly supports the expansion of equitable access to advanced courses for all students, regardless of their race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status, and therefore recommends the passage of this legislation.

i The New York Equity Coalition. See www.EquityInEdNY.org/PassedOver for additional details.

ii Ibid.

iii The New York Equity Coalition, “The Gatekeepers” (New York, NY: November 2019). Available at: <https://equityinedny.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2019/11/Gatekeepers.pdf>. Based on documents requested in Summer 2018

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