Putting our nation's 50 million students at the center of the learning process requires a wide range of high quality courses. Through Course Access, states can create a central hub in a community-wide ecosystem of integrated learning opportunities that are student-centered and aligned with community and workforce needs. Course Access can fill a significant gap in these learning opportunities for rural students, career and technical education, and high-quality core courses. To fully realize the benefits of Course Access, states must adopt the following fundamental principles:

1. Clearly define student eligibility and opportunity to select courses and providers
2. Design program to provide access to a range of delivery models and course types
3. Develop meaningful and rigorous state review of prospective providers and/or courses
4. Create strong monitoring systems to ensure course quality
5. Establish flexible and sustainable funding models
6. Align with the state's broader education system
7. Engage with districts and schools in a sustained and deliberate manner
8. Communicate effectively with students and parents

DETAILED COURSE ACCESS FUNDAMENTAL PRICINPLES

1. Clearly define student eligibility and opportunity to select courses and providers

States should ensure that clear standards exist in legislation and regulation to define which students are eligible to enroll in Course Access program courses. These standards should provide clear guidance to school systems, schools, parents, and students on how many courses a student can take that will be funded by the program, and if a student and their family can pay tuition to enroll in additional courses.

States may decide to phase in Course Access programs by initially limiting eligibility to students in particular grade spans (e.g. high school), to those attending low performing schools (e.g. those receiving D or F grades or in turnaround status), or to low-income students.

States should also clearly express that students, and their parents, are able to select the Course Access courses and providers that best meet their needs to prepare for college and career. Schools should have an opportunity to review students' enrollment requests, but should not preemptively restrict students' ability to identify the courses, formats, schedules, and instructors that are most likely to meet their needs.

2. Design program to provide access to a range of delivery models and course types

States should structure Course Access programs to accommodate a range of instructional approaches that could benefit students. Many courses may be delivered online, but States should also consider courses that are delivered face-to-face or in blended settings. The programs should also be flexible enough to offer students an opportunity to take courses that are delivered on fixed or flexible schedules throughout the day or week – and that start at different times throughout the semester.

No single school is going to be able to offer the full range of courses that their students require, so Course Access programs should aim to accommodate the full range of core academic, remedial, advanced, elective, early college, and career and technical courses that may meet the needs of some students in the state.

3. Develop meaningful and rigorous state review of prospective providers and courses

States need to set a high bar to ensure that students receive effective instruction in Course Access program courses. This review process should ensure that courses are aligned to appropriate state standards, that instructional materials and assessments are of high quality, and that the provider's instructors are effective.

The review process also needs to ascertain that organizations offering courses are stable and financially healthy, offer students needed support, and are committed to continuously improve their offerings based on student outcomes, engagement, and feedback.

States' review processes should focus on issues that will directly impact the quality of instruction, and not include extraneous requirements designed to advantage a particular provider or set of providers.

4. Create strong monitoring systems to ensure course quality

An authorization process is not enough to ensure the success of Course Access programs, states must put monitoring systems in place to ensure students succeed in the program's courses. Monitoring systems should look beyond course completion to independent measures of student success such as state end of course exams, Advanced Placement results, and receipt of industry recognized credentials.

The monitoring process should also review provider practices to ensure the protection of student data, that necessary accommodations for students with special needs are in place, and that systems are integrated to ensure students receive the credits they have earned.

Successful Course Access programs will require a portfolio of diverse, accountable providers, so monitoring systems should be transparent and collaborative in nature to ensure that the best providers want to participate in the program.

5. Establish flexible and sustainable funding models

Course Access programs can support a wide range of courses – from a fully online Advanced Placement English, to a blended remedial Algebra, to an in person welding class. As such, States will need to develop innovative funding models that are flexible enough to accommodate the time, technology, and support required for different types of courses.

States have a new opportunity with these courses to encourage successful outcomes for students as part of the funding model. Initially this may be based on successful course completion, but over time states could incorporate success on end of course exams, AP tests, or other externally validated measures.

If Course Access courses are structured in a sustainable fashion as part of overall per pupil expenditures, states should ensure that districts have an opportunity to adjust their financial practices over time. This could be accomplished by limiting enrollment in the program's early years or appropriating additional funds. States should also be sure to provide adequate funding and staffing to the state department of education in order to administer the provider review and monitoring systems.

6. Align with the state's broader education system

Students earn full credit for courses they enroll in through Course Access programs, so states need to ensure the program is fully aligned with the state's education system. The website where students search for and request to enroll in courses needs to communicate with the schools where students are enrolled full-time, course numbering protocols need to match so students receive appropriate credit on their transcripts, providers need to have clear ways to communicate with schools and share information about student progress, and providers need to administer and report on any required assessments.

7. Engage with districts and schools in a sustained and deliberate manner

School systems and schools where students are enrolled full time have an important role to play in the success of Course Access programs. States need to communicate with and train district leaders, principals, guidance counselors, and teachers so they understand the goals of Course Access and their role in the program.

Schools need to review and approve appropriate enrollment requests from students and understand the impact of Course Access enrollments on scheduling and finances in the district. The state should consider including district representatives on provider and course review panels, and consult with them on how to ensure the Course Access program is aligned with the state's broader education system.

8. Communicate effectively with students and parents

Students and parents of all backgrounds need to be made aware of the opportunities created by the Course Access program. This means the state should ensure that information about the program is presented clearly and widely disseminated.

The program's website and the Course Access catalog should allow students and their families to search for/filter course listings to find the courses that are relevant to them, and also enable them to submit enrollment requests online.