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### My Brother's Keeper Initiative Helping to Ensure Access to Advanced High School Classes

This time each year, millions of students across the country are preparing to complete Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and other advanced course exams as part of their high school experience and in preparation for the rigors and opportunities of higher education. However, there are hundreds of thousands of students in our nation's schools who demonstrate the academic readiness to participate in advanced courses, but aren't enrolling for a number of reasons.

These "missing students" have the skills to achieve at the highest levels, but lack equitable access to a more rigorous curriculum that will prepare them for college and beyond. Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to participate in the *National Roundtable on Equitable Educational Excellence* – a conversation between education, philanthropic and business leaders who will work together during the next three years to identify and enroll 100,000 low-income students and students of color in AP and IB classes across the country.

This is one of several independent commitments made over the last year in support of the goals of President Obama's [My Brother's Keeper](#) (MBK) initiative, aimed at addressing persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensuring that all young people can reach their full potential. In May of 2014, the MBK Task Force, comprised of 18 federal agencies, [published a report](#) with key recommendations for the public and private sector, including expanding students' access to and successful completion of rigorous courses, such as AP, IB and dual enrollment options in high school.

A study by our National Center for Education Statistics found that a rigorous high school curriculum, which included at least one advanced course or exam taken, "was strongly related to their persistence in postsecondary education." Encouragingly, 90 percent of high school graduates had at least one AP, IB or dual enrollment opportunity in their school. However,

our [Civil Rights Data Collection](#), which has surveyed every public school in the nation, found that, despite this widespread access, there are still disparities in the availability and number of advanced courses available to students.

In short, hundreds of thousands of qualified students are not enrolling in the courses for which they are prepared. Black, Hispanic, and Native American students are particularly under-represented in AP, and at many of the most diverse high schools, the advanced courses do not fully reflect the diversity of the student body. Moreover, young men of color lag substantially in their participation when compared with all other students. For example, 35 percent of White males were enrolled in AP classes compared to 17 percent of Black males and 25 percent of Hispanic males.

The time is now to make smart, strategic investments in our young people that will translate into real success.

The students and staff at Arvada High School in Jefferson County, Co., understand the value of such an investment first-hand. Last year, Arvada was recognized by the state of Colorado for achieving over 95 percent growth in the number of students passing AP exams. This accomplishment was made possible through a partnership between Arvada and the Colorado Legacy School Initiative (CLSI), which is funded, in part, by ED's Investing in Innovation (i3) grant program, and by focusing on increasing the diversity of students who participate in and complete advanced courses.

We are excited to see schools, districts, and organizations across the country collaborating to expand access to college prep courses and make real what is possible in so many of our young people. We applaud the commitment of Equal Opportunity Schools, The College Board, the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, Tableau Software, and the International Baccalaureate Organization and their new effort to increase advanced course participation.

Students across the country are rising to the challenge of advanced courses and exams to pave a path toward success after high-school. We, as leaders in education, must rise to the challenge of bridging the gap to ensure more students graduate from high school with the tools they need to excel in college and beyond.

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Posted by  
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