More high school students are getting the message that exposure to rigorous coursework is a good move if they want to be college ready, the 10th annual AP Report to the Nation released Tuesday shows. Still, higher-income, white students are more likely to take and excel in Advanced Placement courses than low-income students or Latinos or African-Americans.

The College Board, the New York-based nonprofit that administers the AP program, reports that 33.2 percent of public high school graduates in the class of 2013 took an AP Exam, up from 32.4 percent last year and 18.9 percent of graduates in the class of 2003.

Test participation broke the one million mark, up from about 955,000 last year and double the number of examinees in 2003.

Performance is also improving, with 20.1 percent of the most recent public high school graduates earning a 3 or higher on an AP Exam, compared to 12.2 percent of graduates in the class of 2003. (The exams are scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest possible score and a 3 or higher often considered a successful, or passing, score.)

In the past decade, there has been a 7.9 percentage-point increase in the percentage of students scoring a 3 or better on an AP exam. There are 17 states that exceed the national average. Maryland again leads the list with 29.6 percent of students succeeding on an AP exam, followed by Connecticut at 28.8 percent, and Virginia at 28.3 percent, according to the report.

While progress is being made, AP participation and success still vary among groups of students.

Of the students in the class of 2013 who took at least one AP exam, 27.5 percent were from low-income families, up from 11.4 percent in 2003. Looking strictly at volume, there where nearly 276,000 low-income students who took an AP exam during high school, which increased from nearly 59,000 in 2003, the College Board reports.

Overall, white students make up 58 percent of the 2013 graduating class, 56 percent of the AP exam population, and 61 percent of test takers scoring a 3 or higher. Asian-Americans also performed well in relation to their overall representation. Meanwhile, nearly 14.5 percent of the recent class is African-American, making up 9.2 percent of the AP exam takers, yet only 4.6 percent of test takers who got at least a 3. Latinos were 18.9 percent of the class of 2013 and 18.8 percent of AP examinees, but about 16.9 percent of those who passed.

In a press release, the College Board acknowledges the challenges, but emphasizes advances in closing equity gaps. It notes that progress was made among AP participation and performance in 30 states for African-Americans and 28 states for Latino students.

The College Board is creating an "All In" campaign, working with its membership to encourage 100 percent of underserved students who have demonstrated the potential to succeed in AP (through their scores on the PSAT) to take at least one AP course.

In this year’s report, three districts were honored for achieving the most significant increase in AP exams scores while expanding AP access to a greater diversity of students. The winners for 2013 were: Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Fla. (large district), El Monte Union High School District, Calif. (medium-sized district); and Leyden High School District 212, Ill. (small district).