
Making Equity Intentional

The role of state policy in removing
barriers for underserved students to
access dual enrollment opportunities

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Introduction

With the heightened need to create a more educated workforce, states are using various approaches to improve postsecondary attainment rates, including policies that foster students' transition from high school to college. Dual enrollment is perhaps the most common or well known of these transition-focused policies.¹ Dual enrollment and/or concurrent enrollment programs afford high school students the opportunity to take college-level courses and earn college and high school credit simultaneously.

Such programs expose students to the academic rigor of postsecondary education and, when classes are held on a college campus, to its social demands. Credits earned are then transferable to higher education institutions and apply toward the completion of a degree and/or attainment of an educational credential.¹

Dual enrollment continues to grow in prevalence. As of 2017, more than half of the states mentioned dual enrollment in their state plans under the Every Student Succeeds Act.ⁱⁱ The National Center for Education Statistics has estimated that the number of students in dual enrollment increased by 67 percent from 2002 to 2010, with an upward trend continuing since then.^v This trend is

likely to continue as dual enrollment program effectiveness increases. Unfortunately, however, dual enrollment program access and completion are not equitable among different populations. With interest in dual enrollment expanding, a closer look at the development and implementation of these policies nationwide is warranted with a keen eye to equity.

State Growth in Dual Enrollment Participation

The number of Georgia public school students participating in dual enrollment increased 181 percent from 8,438 in academic year 2011–2012 to 23,693 in academic year 2015–2016.ⁱⁱⁱ

During the 2016–2017 academic year, 41,857 Colorado high school students participated in dual enrollment programs, representing more than a third of all 11th- and 12th-graders in Colorado public high schools. The number of participating public high school students grew by 3,338 students from academic year 2015–2016, nearly a 9 percent jump in dual enrollment participation.^{iv}

¹ This paper does not explore alternative programs to earn college credit, such as Early College, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate programs.

Recommendations

This paper provides a research base and state examples to support the following recommendations to inform state development and refinement of dual enrollment policies with a goal to support greater opportunity and outcomes for low-income students and students of color. To best advance equitable access and success of dual enrollment policies, state education policymakers and leaders should:

- Create a statewide dual enrollment task force with cross-sector stakeholders.
- Enact policies that prioritize access and outcomes for low-income students and students of color in dual enrollment.
- Effectively communicate the opportunity and benefits of dual enrollment with targeted strategies for priority populations.
- Reframe eligibility requirements to broaden access.
- Establish consistent and adequate funding sources for dual enrollment.
- Collect and use disaggregated state-level data to monitor access.
- Create structured programs to narrow dual enrollment course offerings and ensure credits taken will count toward a credential of value.

These recommendations are driven by research and practice and provide a framework for states to place the need for equity squarely at the center of dual enrollment opportunities.

Federal Definition of a Dual or Concurrent Enrollment Program

Under Title VIII, General Provisions Section 8002, of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), a dual or concurrent enrollment program is defined as follows:

“The term ‘dual or concurrent enrollment program’ means a program offered by a partnership between at least one institution of higher education and at least one local educational agency through which a secondary school student who has not graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma is able to enroll in one or more postsecondary courses and earn postsecondary credit that—
(A) is transferable to the institutions of higher education in the partnership; and
(B) applies toward completion of a degree or recognized educational credential
as described in the Higher Education Act of 1965.”^{vi}

Need for Equity

Although dual enrollment programs aim to increase opportunity and access to postsecondary attainment, poor design and implementation often exacerbate gaps in achievement among traditionally underserved populations—most notably Blacks/African Americans, Hispanics/Latinx, American Indians/Native Americans and other racial and ethnic groups the state identifies as traditionally being underserved.

Due to a lack of needed infrastructure, such as targeted funding, restrictive eligibility requirements and limited awareness of opportunities,

too often the broad benefits of

dual enrollment accrue to more privileged and/or academically advanced students. Even with program offerings expanding, without explicit attention to crafting policies with equity in mind, states and stakeholders run the risk of increasing gaps in opportunity for the students who need it most—students of color.

State investments and policies that guide higher education perform a crucial role in creating equity in students' access to and completion of postsecondary education. Yet, too often, states implement policies in ways that do not reflect the heightened equity imperative. States and higher education providers need not only to support the increased matriculation of priority populations, but also to provide the necessary financial, structural and programmatic elements required for student success.

In many states, success in meeting postsecondary attainment goals is tied directly to the ability to increase equitable educational access and completion for increasingly diverse populations.^{vii} While attainment goals in some states reflect a focus on equity, socioeconomic status (e.g., low income) too often is used as a proxy for equity. Socioeconomic status can be a way to identify equity gaps, but it cannot be the only identifier. Such a substitute overlooks the structural barriers that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic communities.^{viii} State policymakers and higher education providers must consider race and ethnicity when addressing equity, as is seen in Pennsylvania's Postsecondary Attainment Goal to "Ensure 60 percent of the population ages 25–64 holds a postsecondary degree or industry-recognized credential by 2025, with a particular focus on closing attainment gaps for historically underrepresented populations."^{ix}

According to the University of Southern California Center for Urban Education, equity is the acknowledgment of the patterns of imbalance in various structures, policies and practices that affect student outcomes for people of color and awareness of the social and historical context of exclusionary practices in American higher education.^{vi}

Effectiveness of Dual Enrollment

Research shows that students who have participated in dual enrollment programs, compared with their peers with similar demographics and high school academic performance who have not participated, are more likely to:

- Meet college readiness benchmarks;
- Enter college and matriculate shortly after high school;
- Maintain a higher first-year grade point average; and
- Achieve higher four- and six-year college completion rates.^x

Qualitative benefits also accrue from participating in dual enrollment programs, such as participating students self-identifying as “college material” and having increased educational aspirations.^{xi} One study surveyed students in 10th grade who initially reported they did not plan to earn a bachelor’s degree. Students who took one dual enrollment course were 12 percent more likely to graduate with a bachelor’s degree than their peers who originally had indicated they planned to earn a bachelor’s degree but did not participate in dual enrollment.^{xii} Dual enrollment also benefits those pursuing an associate degree or a credential of value to meet workforce needs.

In September 2017, the Community College Research Center released a report echoing similar benefits and highlighting findings on priority populations.^{xiv} The report cites a 2013 study by the What Works Clearinghouse that identifies positive effects that were particularly strong for dual enrollment students who were first-generation college students and students with parents who had taken some college courses but did not earn a degree.^{xiii} These findings are encouraging because they highlight the benefits of exposure to dual enrollment.

Why Equity in Dual Enrollment Matters

While the above findings around the effectiveness of dual enrollment are encouraging, the benefits of dual enrollment for priority populations may vary based on local or state context.^{xv} This issue of context reaffirms the essential role state policies can play in promoting equity in both student access and completion. With states' growing interest in dual enrollment, policymakers must recognize potential unintended consequences and avoid perverse incentives that exacerbate existing inequities.

A May 2018 report by the Education Commission of the States notes that "... [a]ll other factors being equal (similar grade point average (GPA), test scores, demographics, etc.), students who dually enroll are more likely than their non-dually enrolled peers to complete high school, matriculate in a postsecondary institution and experience greater postsecondary success."^{xvi} However, due to systematic barriers confronting students of color, "all other factors being equal" is more of an anomaly than the standard.

Historically, systematic barriers existed as a result of federal actions such as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld racial segregation under the "separate but equal" doctrine and led to inferior schools for students of color. In more recent years, these barriers persist in the continuation of poor-performing schools; the reliance on racially biased college entrance exams; increased statewide admissions standards for public postsecondary education; and the decline of need-based financial aid, among other challenges.^{xvii}

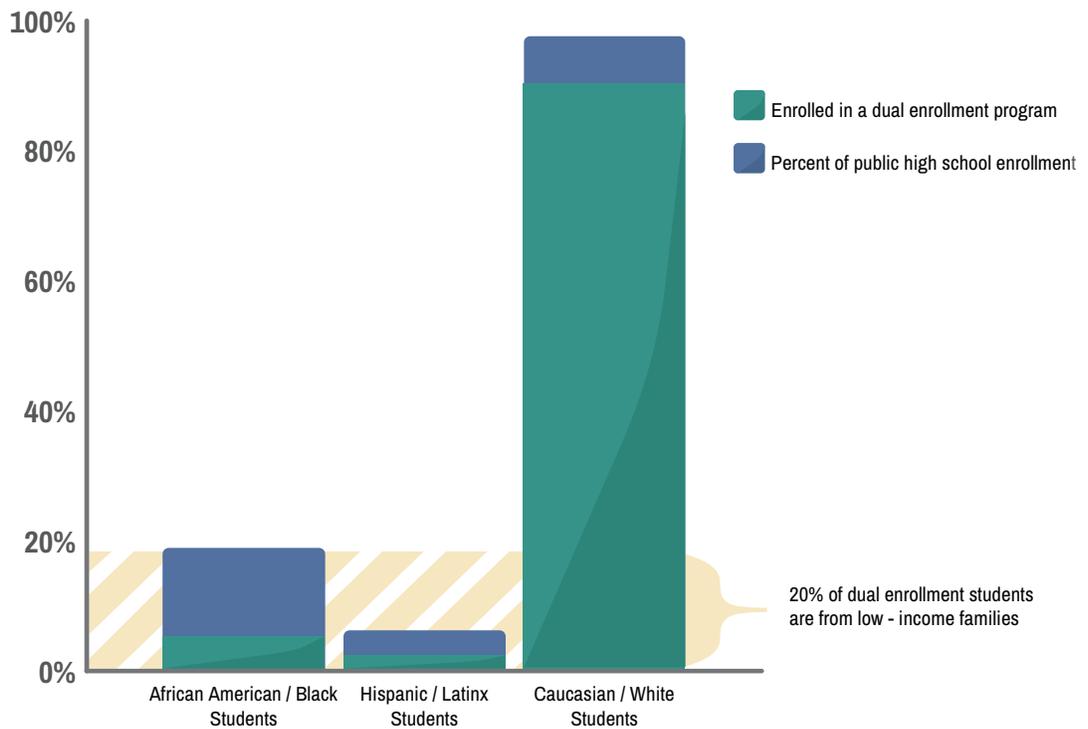
Further, cycles of educational attainment persist across underserved populations. In a recent report, the National Center for Education Statistics found that 42 percent of students whose parents had earned a bachelor's degree or higher took courses for postsecondary credit in high school, compared with 26 percent of students whose parents' highest level of education was lower than a high school diploma.^{xviii}

The gap in attainment between Caucasians/Whites and people of color reaffirms the imperative for policies to be crafted with an eye toward equity. A deliberate focus on priority populations is needed to close attainment gaps. On a national scale, low-income and racial/ethnic minority students lag far behind their Caucasian/White and more affluent peers in postsecondary matriculation and degree completion.^{xix} These differences in attainment are mirrored in dual enrollment program participation. Caucasian/White and affluent students are significantly more likely to participate in dual enrollment programs compared with less affluent and racial/ethnic minority students.^{xx} More often than not, differences in access and the availability of supports explain the differences in dual enrollment program participation among these groups of students.

Dual Enrollment Participation Trends

More than a decade ago, Pennsylvania State University reported that only five percent of African-American/Black students in the state were enrolled in a dual enrollment program even though they accounted for 15 percent of public high school enrollment. Hispanic/Latinx students comprised five percent of students in public high schools, but just 2 percent of this group participated in dual enrollment programs. Comparatively, Caucasian/White students comprised 78 percent of the public high school population and constituted a whopping 90 percent of dual enrollment students. In addition, students from low-income families represented 20 percent of the dual enrollment students; students from more affluent backgrounds represented 69 percent.^{xxi} Even with the upward trend in dual enrollment matriculation, the gaps surfacing in Pennsylvania more than a decade ago still persist today in states nationwide.

Participation in Pennsylvania Dual Enrollment Programs by Race/Ethnicity

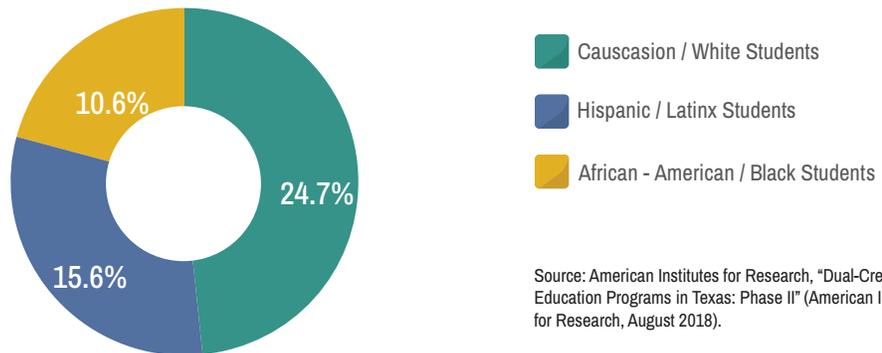


Source: Samuel D. Museus et al., "Access and Equity in Dual Enrollment Programs: Implications for Policy Formation," Higher Education in Review 4: 1-19 (2007).

More recently, the Texas Dual Credit Task Force, with representatives from the University of Texas System and the Texas Association of Community Colleges, released a report that highlighted dual enrollment as one of the strategies the state is using to help reach its 60x30TX attainment goal. The report also notes that while dual enrollment programs are offered in various forms statewide, access is not consistently equitable in terms of demographics, geography, availability and funding. According to the task force report, “statewide equity gaps exist for certain student populations in terms of access, eligibility, enrollment and participation.”^{xxii}

These findings support those of the RAND Corporation’s dual enrollment report released in 2017.^{xxiii} The RAND study found that as Texas has expanded access to dual enrollment across the state and, as a result, has increased participation, racial and economic gaps have widened, favoring Caucasian/White and more affluent students. In July 2018, the phase 2 report by American Institutes for Research expanded on the findings of the RAND Corporation’s phase 1 report. While the 2017–2018 academic year saw 151,669 students enrolled in Texas dual enrollment programs, Caucasian/White students had the highest participation at 24.7 percent, followed by 15.6 percent for Hispanic/Latinx students and 10.6 percent for African-American/Black students.

Texas Dual Enrollment Participation by Race/Ethnicity, 2017 - 2018



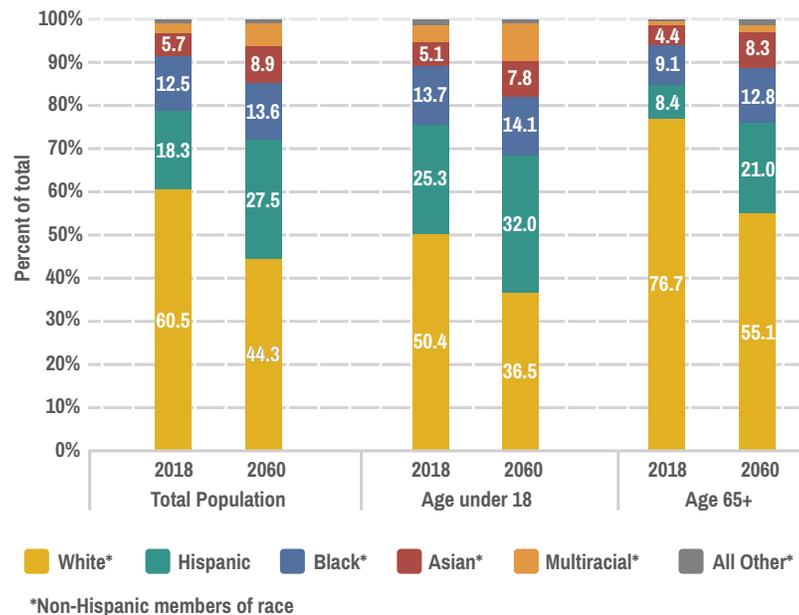
Through their analysis, findings indicated that if African-American/Black students had the same characteristics—all factors being equal—as Caucasian/White students, then their participation rate would be 22.7 percent, which is quite close to the 24.7 percent for Caucasian/White students; the participation rate for Hispanic/Latinx students would also increase if all factors were equal.^{xxiv}

A March 2017 report on Oregon included comparable findings. Dual enrollment students at Oregon community colleges are more likely to be Caucasian/White, female, academically sound, affluent students. Furthermore, across all racial/ethnic groups, students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches were less likely to be enrolled in dual credit courses.^{xxv}

Although the reports focus on the challenges Pennsylvania, Texas and Oregon are facing to ensure opportunity and equitable access to dual enrollment programs, these states' experiences can provide broader insights on the national landscape and the implications of inequitable dual enrollment policies mirrored in states nationwide.

For example, Texas' demographic makeup reflects the nation's changing demographics. The state's current population of 59 percent non-Caucasian/White is projected to increase to 70 percent by 2037.^{xxvi} Similarly, new census population projections assert that the nation will become "minority white" by 2045. By 2060 one in three Americans will be a race other than white (see U.S. Race-Ethnic Profiles, 2018 and 2060).^{xxvii} These projections support the need for a nationwide call to action to better support people of color who will soon be the primary drivers of the U.S. economy.

U.S. Race-Ethnic Profiles, 2018 and 2060



Source: Chart was recreated using data from Brookings Institution, William H. Frey, "The US will become 'minority white' in 2045, Census projects youthful minorities are the engine of future growth" (March 14, 2018).

Recommendations for State Policy Design to Drive Equity and Access

Increasing the number of students in dual enrollment programs, creating more dual enrollment programs and/or pouring additional funding into dual enrollment programs are not enough. What is needed is a state approach that seeks to ensure dual enrollment policies are designed equitably. Only then can the disparities known to exist and persist be eliminated.

If crafted with equity in mind, dual enrollment policies have great potential to increase access and opportunity for priority populations. Most states are far from achieving equitable outcomes in dual enrollment, however, and they must urgently consider how best to prioritize dual enrollment opportunity and outcomes for students of color.

Following are recommendations to help inform state development and refinement of dual enrollment policies with a goal to support greater opportunity and outcomes for students, particularly low-income students and students of color. The proposed approaches make equity a deliberate focus and promote structures more likely to advance equity.



Create a statewide dual enrollment task force with stakeholders from the K–12 system, higher education entities, the legislature and employers to advocate sound, equity-minded implementation of dual enrollment policy.

What Does the Research Reveal?

Dual enrollment is implemented differently across states and even within states. Variation exists in program features; location of courses; instructor qualifications; eligibility requirements; responsibility for cost—state, district and/or student; entity with oversight; reporting; and/or portability of credits.^{xxviii} Given these complexities, the multiple stakeholders who must be engaged and the systematic barriers that deny priority populations access, states must act deliberately to create alignment when scaling programs statewide. Key elements are transparent communication; asset mapping to identify what is already in place; and leadership to drive effective implementation.

The complexities in dual enrollment can be managed by regularly convening state policymakers and relevant stakeholders as members of a statewide task force to demonstrate shared commitment and encourage thought leadership. Such a forum would afford experts and stakeholders the opportunity to hone in on the challenges, elevate best practices and craft recommendations.

A taskforce would provide a focused approach for identifying barriers and implementation challenges that must be addressed to foster equitable dual enrollment outcomes across the state.

Task force responsibilities could include:

- Coordinate relevant stakeholders, such as institution leaders, legislators and K–12 faculty and students;
- Discuss issues of implementation and quality, such as credit portability, course selection and/or enrollment standards;
- Analyze data to understand the gaps in the state and help create targeted strategies;
- Ensure proper communication with all stakeholders; and
- Suggest frameworks to monitor trends, elevate best practices and help ensure outcome measures are consistent across the state.

Task forces can be effective in providing a vision and clear direction for next steps to help strengthen and/or scale best practices in the state. Although the dual enrollment task force can be the impetus for thought leadership, the state and relevant stakeholders at the system, institutional, district and school levels must share the responsibility for implementing policy recommendations.^{xxix}

What Actions Are States Taking?

Texas

The University of Texas System and Texas Association of Community Colleges convened a Dual Credit Task Force that brought together stakeholders from across the educational and workforce sectors. The task force recommended that Texas establish and fund a dual credit advisory committee to develop policy solutions grounded in data to address the issues identified by the task force, including access and equity, funding and alignment. Additionally, the committee would address questions of quality and rigor, preparation and subsequent success of students; help organize and analyze relevant data; follow up on implementation of recommendations; and ensure enhanced coordination, cohesion and communication of quality dual credit policy and programs to help achieve the goals of 60x30TX.^{xxx}

Oregon

A 2007–2008 Dual Credit Task Force recommended that Oregon adopt common standards for dual enrollment. All 17 community colleges in Oregon are statutorily required to offer dual enrollment opportunities to school districts within their college district boundaries. The task force was reconstituted as the Dual Credit Oversight Committee in 2009. The committee has three community college representatives, two public university representatives and one high school representative. The department of community colleges and workforce development, in collaboration with the department of education, staffs the committee.^{xxxi}

Ohio

Ohio's chancellor of higher education and superintendent of public instruction established the College Credit Plus Advisory Committee. The seven members help develop performance metrics for College Credit Plus, the state's dual enrollment program, and provide advice on ways to monitor the program going forward.^{xxxii}



Enact state-, system-, district- and/or school-level goals or statements of purpose that prioritize access and outcomes for low-income students and students of color in dual enrollment.

What Does the Research Reveal?

Most states have articulated a statewide higher education attainment goal seeking to increase the educational levels of their constituents and meet the workforce needs of their state.^{xxxiii} Just as states have adopted these robust goals with a clear commitment to equity, the strategies used to meet those attainment goals must be crafted with the same commitment in mind. Setting the goal is the catalyst for change to occur, but leaders must develop and implement policies with a deliberate focus on equitable outcomes to move the needle.

Federal legislation such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) also affords the states the opportunity to leverage policies to improve dual enrollment programs operated by state and local education agencies. ESSA introduced new ways of measuring school effectiveness using School Quality and Student Success (SQSS) indicators that allow for greater accountability and reporting to occur in policies and practices such as dual enrollment.^{xxxiv} Clear, transparent policies are needed to support states in implementing dual enrollment with an equity lens.

States should consider adopting a statement of purpose in statute or regulation to reinforce dual enrollment programs as a strategy and create accountability to increase postsecondary participation among all students, particularly low-income students and students of color. This statement of purpose should encourage these programs to provide supports alongside the academic course taking that are needed for students who are least likely to succeed without them, including:

- Unbiased academic counseling and advising;
- Encouragement of academic aspirations that help ensure dual enrollment is seen as a concrete step toward a degree;
- Encouragement of parental involvement;
- Increased parent and student awareness of opportunities; and
- Financial support for books and transportation in addition to that for tuition.

What Actions Are States Taking?

Washington

The Washington State Board of Education's strategic plan and the Washington Student Achievement Council's 10-year roadmap—a vehicle for ensuring underrepresented students have equitable access to college opportunities—outline the importance of increasing access to dual credit and of ensuring adequate supports are available to support students' success. In addition, the federal Every Student Succeeds Act introduced new ways of measuring school effectiveness using School Quality and Student Success. For its ESSA plan, the state office of superintendent of public instruction selected three SQSS indicators, including dual enrollment completion.^{xxxv}

Ohio

Under the amended H.B. 59, Section 363.590, the chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents was charged with making recommendations to the general assembly to establish the College Credit Plus program, through which high school students may earn credits from Ohio institutions of higher education. The recommendations include increasing the participation rates of underrepresented and low-income student populations in programs that result in higher graduation rates and postsecondary persistence.^{xxxvi}



Effectively communicate the opportunity of dual enrollment and its benefits to relevant parties and increase efforts to reach priority populations.

What Does the Research Reveal?

Lack of awareness and poor communication can be barriers that contribute to inequality in access and lack of participation of low-income students and students of color in dual enrollment programs. Historically, students from priority populations are not as engaged in the school community and, therefore, are not aware of all the programming being offered.^{xxxvii} Students' lack of awareness paired with parents' lack of involvement can cause a ripple effect in students not having access to programs such as dual enrollment that could help increase their chances for success. A concerted effort is needed to make students and their families aware of these programs and, just as importantly, help them navigate and succeed in them.

Targeted, consistent and effective communication strategies must be used to ensure students and their parents are aware of the benefits of dual enrollment programs. Open dialogue on the benefits of dual enrollment can lead to a larger conversation on the benefits of postsecondary attainment and pathways to credentials of value.

Effective, transparent communication not only is beneficial for students and their parents, but also is critical for properly framing messages to legislators and policymakers so they understand the need for equitable dual enrollment policies. Marrying this recommendation with the recommendation to form a task force that can serve as messenger and using disaggregated data to tell the story can build a powerful case as to the effectiveness of such policies.

What Actions Are States Taking?

As of 2016, 12 states require all students in specified high school grades and/or their parents to be notified of the availability of dual enrollment programs.^{xxxviii}

Colorado

Each district and charter school in Colorado must annually notify all students and parents of the opportunity for concurrent enrollment by qualified students in postsecondary courses, including academic courses and career and technical education courses, which may include coursework related to apprenticeship programs or internship programs.^{xxxix}

Texas

Texas school districts must annually notify parents of students in grades 9–12 of opportunities to earn college credit, including through dual credit programs and joint high school and college credit programs. The notification must include the name and contact information of any public or private entity offering a college credit program in the district. A school district may provide this notification on the district's website. In addition, during the first school year a student is enrolled in a high school and again during each successive year of enrollment in high school, a school counselor must provide information to the student and the student's parent on the availability of programs in the district under which a student may earn college credit, including Advanced Placement programs, dual credit programs, joint high school and college credit programs, and International Baccalaureate programs.^{xl}



Reframe eligibility requirements to broaden access and not limit dual enrollment to certain populations of students.

What Does the Research Reveal?

The eligibility requirements students must meet to participate in a dual enrollment program vary considerably across states. Some set statewide eligibility requirements, while others leave decisions to participating districts and schools. Whatever the case, rigorous eligibility requirements for dual enrollment directly impede the effort to mobilize more students from priority populations to pursue concrete pathways to credentials of value. Many state eligibility requirements restrict dual enrollment participation to "the most academically advanced students," who are likely to continue education after

high school regardless of their participation.^{xli} Importantly, however, underserved students' participation in dual enrollment increases their likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary institutions. Consideration must be given to the population of students who on the surface may not meet the eligibility requirements but who would likely succeed in a dual enrollment course with the proper support.

States must carefully think about how to craft eligibility requirements that do not hinder enrollment for students who would benefit most substantially from participation. A recent report by the Education Commission of the States offers guidance on potential alternate eligibility criteria that would likely broaden enrollment for all students.^{xlii}

Alternate Eligibility Criteria That Might Predict Success in a Dual Enrollment Class

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grade level (incoming juniors). | <input type="checkbox"/> GPA (improvement over time versus a certain point on a four-point scale). |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular high school attendance. | <input type="checkbox"/> Eighth- and ninth-grade criterion-referenced test scores. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Near proficient writing performance in a multi-trait essay assessment (organization, clarity or thought, convention of grammar, content, voice, persuasiveness). | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher nomination:
a. Regular, on-time attendance in class.
b. Responsibly hands work in on time.
c. Asks questions and participates in class discussion.
d. Coursework demonstrates higher-order thinking, like the ability to formulate an opinion.
e. Is persistent in his/her own learning.
f. Seeks out resources or help when needed. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sophomore ACT Plan score within two to three points of benchmarks. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recent assessment results that indicate the student is reading at (or within one) grade level. | <input type="checkbox"/> (For the rural school) Student self-recommendation/ application to participate:
a. List special recognitions, awards or projects completed or any other special achievements.
b. List participation in school and community activities or extracurricular school activities.
c. Make a statement of financial need to continue education.
d. Make a statement of plans (including vocational and educational) for the future. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Course-taking patterns:
a. A student who has been successful in 11th grade secondary language arts may not have the organizational or study skills to be successful in a college-level writing class or any college-level course (assumes readiness but may not be ready; need to be informed on requirements of college level instruction).
b. A student takes AP human geography in ninth grade, scores a 1 or 2 on the exam and never takes another rigorous course (lacks resilience to try again; need to be prompted).
c. A student who expresses interest in honors but does not enroll in honors (lacks self-motivation; needs to be prompted). | |

Source: Chart was recreated under data from Education Commission of the States, Jennifer Dounay Zinth and Elisabeth Barnett, "Rethinking Dual Enrollment to Reach More Students" (April 30, 2018), <https://www.ecs.org/rethinking-dual-enrollment-to-reach-more-students/>, (accessed July 31, 2018).

What Actions Are States Taking?

Ohio

Ohio's College Credit Plus Program changed its eligibility standard for dual enrollment participants to reflect the standard of "college ready," which is determined by students passing an assessment test. Acknowledging this requirement could be a hindrance to certain student populations, legislation allows the use of innovative program options, including the ability to request unique eligibility requirements when needed. In addition to clearly identifying which unrepresented population a waiver is for, applying entities must identify what additional supports will be available. In the spring of 2018 (in preparation for the 2018-2019 academic year), all received requested student eligibility waivers.^{xliii}



Establish consistent and adequate funding sources for dual enrollment participation at the state, district and/or provider level that alleviate the cost to students.

What Does the Research Reveal?

Affordability continues to be an issue that affects the access and success of postsecondary students.^{xliii} Under-resourced students often face obstacles throughout their education, regardless of their academic accomplishments. Many of these students lack the support and resources to navigate college preparation. Even more specifically in this case, any costs students must incur pose a barrier that hinders low-income students and students of color from participating in dual enrollment programs. Many states that eliminate financial barriers to participation see larger numbers of low-income students and students of color participating.^{xliii}

To ensure all students have equal access to dual enrollment programs, regardless of their socioeconomic background, states should consider how the state or district could cover costs and/or create targeted funding for populations of low-income students who would benefit the most. For example, a state could specifically allocate funds to students based on need, such as Nebraska's Access College Early Scholarship Program. When looking to provide full, equitable access, states must also consider roadblocks besides the cost of tuition, such as costs for transportation and textbooks. States wanting to offset the cost of dual enrollment for students should look at the Every Student Succeed Act. ESSA recognizes dual enrollment as a component of college and career readiness and allows states to use federal funds in the following ways, among others. States wanting to offset the cost of dual enrollment for students should look at the Every Student Succeed Act. ESSA recognizes dual enrollment as a component of college and career readiness and allows states to use federal funds in the following ways, among others:

- Targeted Assistance Schools (Use of Funds for Dual or Concurrent Enrollment): Allows secondary schools operating a targeted assistance program to use their funds for dual or concurrent enrollment. Targeted assistance programs provide additional services to individual students who have been identified as low achieving or at risk of becoming low achieving.
- Schoolwide Programs (Use of Funds for Dual or Concurrent Enrollment): Allows secondary schools operating schoolwide programs to use their funds to run dual or concurrent enrollment programs.
- Participation of Children Enrolled in Private School: Requires local education authorities to provide services, including dual or concurrent enrollment, to low-income students enrolled in private schools if they are using Title I funds to do so in public schools.
- Formula Grants to States (State Use of Funds): Dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment are allowable uses for a state's Title IV Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment formula grant program allocation.^{xlvi}

What Actions Are States Taking?

Georgia

The dual enrollment program in Georgia is funded through state appropriations. Students who meet all eligibility requirements receive a student-specific award amount to be applied to tuition (for a maximum of 15 semester or 12 quarter hours per term), mandatory fees and textbooks. The postsecondary institution cannot charge the student for any additional tuition or mandatory fees for approved dual enrollment courses, as listed on the student's dual enrollment funding application. The postsecondary institution must provide the required textbooks for the approved dual enrollment courses.^{xlvii}

Nebraska

Authorized by the Nebraska Legislature in 2007, the Access College Early (ACE) Scholarship Program aims to encourage well-prepared high school students from low-income families to enroll in college courses. The program pays tuition and mandatory fees for qualified, low-income high school students to enroll in college courses offered by Nebraska colleges or universities, either through dual enrollment or early enrollment agreements with these institutions. High school students may apply for funding under this program by completing the ACE Student Application, which the Coordination Commission reviews for award consideration. To qualify for the scholarship, the student or student's family must have experienced an extreme hardship that affects family income, be participating in a designated career education program as established by the Nebraska Department of Education or be approved to participate in one of these federal need-based programs:

- Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program;
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI);
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF);
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); or
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).^{xlviii}



Collect and use more state-level data disaggregated by race to monitor access to and outcomes of dual enrollment programming in order to hold education systems accountable for serving all students.

What Does the Research Reveal?

Data is an invaluable tool to help state policymakers understand the effectiveness of policies and programs in improving student outcomes. However, the inequities within higher education that persist do not always surface at the broad data collection level. Racial and ethnic disparities and inequities can only be eliminated if high-quality information is available to identify the gaps and track progress. Currently, most states and/or districts do not disaggregate data by race and ethnicity when tracking their dual enrollment progress. Disaggregation of data creates the visibility that is needed and provides information that can guide the systemic change necessary to address equity gaps.^{xix}

Disaggregating data by priority populations, whenever possible, is essential to track progress and address equity gaps. If states are to understand the dual enrollment landscape and the return on investment that dual enrollment can have on matriculation and degree attainment, particularly for priority populations, they must, at a minimum, collect the following data disaggregated whenever possible by race/ethnicity, gender, age and income level:

- Number of students enrolled in dual enrollment programs;
- Number of students who completed dual enrollment programs;
- Number of credits in which students enroll;
- Number of credits student completed;
- Number of students who graduated high school;
- Number of students who use credit from a dual enrollment course toward a credential of value;
- Places where students enroll after high school; and
- Number of students who complete postsecondary education and/or attain postsecondary credentials.

In a report released in 2017, the College Board Policy Center recommended collecting additional information, such as enrollment rates at two- and four-year postsecondary institutions; persistence from freshman to sophomore year of college; success in subsequent courses; college grade point average; degree attainment; and time to degree.[!]

The report also called for research on other factors, for example, funding appropriated at the state, district and/or city level. Other questions are whether costs vary according to how the course is delivered—online, at a high school or on a college campus; what outcomes are achieved by the state, institution, student, etc., for all funds invested in a given program; and whether it is possible to calculate cost per successful outcome by program level.

Capturing such data will help states better gauge educational attainment level across population subgroups, which will then enable them to more efficiently track progress in meeting their attainment goals and overcoming equity gaps. By using the data to craft targeted strategies, more priority populations can enroll and successfully complete, enabling states to prioritize their investment in supporting students who, in many cases, are often not reached.

What Actions Are States Taking?

Washington

Beginning in 2018, as part of Washington's transition to comply with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, the office of the superintendent of public instruction is providing every school district with access to data, including statistics on local dual credit completion. District and school leaders are uniquely positioned to use this data to drive positive action, such as increasing equitable participation in and staff support for dual credit programs and closing gaps in high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment and completion, and career preparation for historically underserved students.ⁱⁱ



Create structured programs and guidance to narrow dual enrollment course offerings and ensure credits taken will count toward a credential of value.

What Does the Research Reveal?

While participation in dual enrollment continues to increase, a growing concern is why participation does not always translate to degree acceleration or even completion. Research across states indicates dually enrolled students are often earning credits that do not aid them on their path to a credential of value.ⁱⁱⁱ This could be the case for many reasons, including not enough guidance on course taking, too much variety that allows students to take unnecessary electives and/or issues with credit portability.

A study of North Carolina's dual enrollment program found that students' freedom to enroll in any course resulted in their mainly taking electives and entering college without having earned any college-level math or English credit.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ This trend is likely similar across states. More thought must be given to how

to structure dual enrollment programs so they achieve their intended outcomes—especially for priority populations—because these students’ time and resources are limited and must be well spent.

States should provide the oversight needed to help systems, districts and/or institutions offer courses that are transferable and relevant to a credential of value. Using a quality over quantity approach in course offerings will help target resources to maximize the investment. Priority populations need more guidance and resources to be successful, and more structured dual enrollment programs will enable them to begin a more concrete pathway to degree completion.

What Actions Are States Taking?

North Carolina

North Carolina implemented the Career and College Promise Program to help ensure the state’s investment in dual enrollment leads to its intended outcome: college completion. Students are limited to courses that lead to a transfer degree or that are related to specified career pathways. With this structure, dually enrolled students will be set on clearly structured pathways to degrees.^{liv}

Challenges Remaining

Despite state efforts to increase educational attainment, many students are failing to gain access to postsecondary pathways and complete degrees or credentials of value. Substantial progress toward meeting state attainment goals and workforce needs will require deliberate attention to student outcomes and strategic policies that focus on improving outcomes for priority populations. Much remains to be learned about how to develop, implement and support policies that increase equitable outcomes. However, dual enrollment programs offer the potential to propel more students toward a credential of value, ultimately spurring the economies of the state and the nation.

To derive these benefits from dual enrollment, states must ensure policies are crafted with equity in mind to support not only students' participation but also their completion of a postsecondary credential. The policies must also address structural barriers within the education policy landscape, such as transfer and articulation agreements that are not specific to dual enrollment but support completion. Tackling these challenges will require states to bridge often-siloed sectors, policies and programs into a comprehensive and navigable system that best serves students and, more specifically, students deemed most at risk.

Endnotes

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