

STATE POLICIES AND DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAM VARIATION

INTRODUCTION

An increasing national focus on the need for high academic standards, coupled with the growing importance of obtaining a postsecondary degree, has led to the expansion of programs that allow high school students to take college-level classes and earn college credit while still in high school. These initiatives, known as credit-based transition programs, include Tech Prep, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and middle college high schools.

This brief presents what is known about the state policies that shape and promote one kind of credit-based transition program, dual enrollment. It is one of several reports that will be produced for the Accelerating Student Success Project, which seeks to explore a number of the areas in which we lack knowledge about credit-based transition programs. In particular, the project will yield a better understanding of the current policy mechanisms that promote or limit program expansion and the ways in which programs support the transition into and success in postsecondary education of a broad range of students.

Dual enrollment is part of a set of efforts to create smoother and more successful transitions from high school to college. Advocates believe that students in dual enrollment programs are likely to remain engaged in and challenged by their coursework. Advocates also believe that dual enrollment programs may also help eliminate the fragmentation that currently exists between the secondary and postsecondary systems of education. Researchers have found, for example, that high school exit requirements are not aligned with college entry

requirements—meaning that many high school students successfully complete high school but are not ready for college-level work (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio, 2003). Proponents of dual enrollment argue that the programs can also:

- Prepare students for the academic rigors of college by exposing them to the type of intense high school curriculum that research has found to promote bachelor's degree attainment (Adelman, 1999).
- Increase communication and collaboration among education systems, helping high schools convey to students the things they need to know and be able to do to achieve their educational goals (Orr, 1998; 1999).
- Make the senior year of high school more meaningful by offering interesting, challenging and college credit-bearing courses to students who might otherwise “slack off” (National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001).
- Lower the cost of postsecondary education for students by enabling them to earn free college credit and shorten their time to degree completion (Orr, 2002).



- Provide more realistic information to students about the skills that they will need to succeed in college through their participation in actual college courses (Orr, 1998; 1999).
- Provide curricular options for students, particularly in schools that, due to their size or limited resources, are unable to offer interesting and exciting electives (Adelman, 1999).

In this brief, we define dual enrollment programs, investigate the range of program options, and examine the influence of state policies on program structure. For a full review, including information on participation rates and the research on program effectiveness, please consult Bailey and Karp (2003), *Promoting college access and success: A review of credit-based transition programs*.

WHAT IS DUAL ENROLLMENT

Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to “become”—even if for only one course—a college student. In this way, high school students are exposed to the demands of college-level academics. At the same time, they often begin to experience, in a modified form, the social and behavioral expectations required of successful college students.

If dual enrollment programs operate the way that they are intended to, postsecondary institutions work closely with high schools to ensure that dual enrollment courses are identical to those offered on a college campus. Thus, dual enrollment programs might be considered more “authentic” college-level experiences than other credit-based initiatives such as Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, which use specially created college-level curricula. Dual enrollment programs also

require more collaboration and communication between the secondary and postsecondary education sectors.

Additionally, dual enrollment students receive a transcript from the sponsoring postsecondary institution. Therefore, assuming students pass the course, they are eligible to receive college credit upon matriculation at a postsecondary institution.¹ In contrast, AP and IB students must take and score well on an end-of-course exam to be eligible for college credit, even if they successfully pass the course itself. Scores on AP and IB examinations may be used to grant college credit, but postsecondary institutions may also decide to exempt students with strong test scores from introductory courses instead of granting them credit towards graduation.

Variation within Dual Enrollment Programs

Dual enrollment programs can vary along a wide array of features. Some programs require students to pay their own tuition and fees, while others ensure that participation is free. Some dual enrollment programs have extensive eligibility requirements, often requiring students to gain admission to the postsecondary institution in order to participate. But others, in an attempt to expand participation beyond the most academically successful students, have less stringent rules.

According to Orr (2002), dual enrollment programs can also be distinguished along the following features:

- Location: Courses can be offered on a college campus or at the high school.

Program

- Financing
- Entrance criteria
- Location
- Instructors
- Student Mix
- Intensity

- **Instructors:** Courses can be taught by regular college faculty or by specially certified high school teachers. High school teachers are usually required to have the same credentials as adjunct professors at the sponsoring postsecondary institution.
- **Student Mix:** Some dual enrollment programs teach high school students separately, in their own classes, while others combine high school students and college students in the same course.

Dual enrollment programs can also vary in their intensity (Bailey and Karp, 2003). Some programs could be categorized as “singletons,” meaning that they are only a small part of students’ high school experiences. Students take one or two dual enrollment courses at a time, spending the rest of their school day in regular high school classes. Other programs adhere to a “comprehensive” model and encompass most of students’ junior and/or senior years. Students in these dual enrollment programs take virtually all of their courses through dual enrollment, sometimes even leaving their high school for full-time study on a college campus. Generally, dual enrollment programs do not adhere to the third form of credit-based transition program, the enhanced comprehensive program. Enhanced comprehensive programs include intense counseling, college preparation activities, and close teacher-student relationships; dual enrollment programs usually do not address the non-academic aspects of the secondary-postsecondary transition.

State Policies That Shape and Promote Dual Enrollment Programs

Given the potential benefits to dual enrollment participation, many states hope to encourage the program’s growth. According to the Education Commission of the States (2001), all but three

states have some form of dual enrollment. Some states merely ensure that students are allowed to enroll in college courses, while others mandate that all schools provide dual enrollment opportunities. Likewise, some states have rigorous dual enrollment guidelines, with requirements specifying eligibility, teacher qualifications, credit transfer, or even pre-enrollment student counseling. Other states offer programs very little guidance.

The Education Commission of the States (2001) classifies state policies as either “comprehensive” or “limited.” Comprehensive policies ensure that students pay minimal or no fees, have few course restrictions, and have liberal credit-granting policies; twenty-one state policies could be categorized as such. Twenty-six states have limited policies, which do not provide funding for student tuition and have more restrictions on credit and student access.

State policy can vary along five major dimensions:

- Eligibility requirements
- Program structures
- Funding mechanisms
- Accountability measures
- Presence or absence of additional policy requirements

The impact of policy decisions on dual enrollment participation and growth has not been explored, in part because of the wide variation among state policies. However, it appears that state policy plays a role in dual enrollment expansion. Funding decisions, for example, seem to have important ramifications. In Illinois, a policy change allowing both high

schools and colleges to receive average daily attendance (ADA) funding went into effect for the 1997-1998 school year (Andrews, 2001). In the two school years following the change, the number of participating high schools grew by 240 percent. Likewise, interviews conducted by the Community College Research Center in Washington State indicate that the policy requiring high schools to lose funding when students participate in *Running Start* has led some high schools to downplay the option.

Two state policies: Minnesota and Texas

Two examples of state policies can be found in Minnesota and Texas. While both states have policies supporting dual enrollment, the degree of support and regulation varies. Minnesota's policy can be categorized as "comprehensive" while Texas' is "limited" (ECS, 2001). Perhaps the biggest difference between the two lies in the degree to which various program features are mandated: Minnesota's statutes require school participation and state funding, while Texas' leaves many more program decisions up to the schools themselves.

Minnesota was the first state to develop a dual enrollment program, called the Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) Program (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, 2001). It has explicit state policies guiding the development and administration of dual enrollment programs. State statutes mandate that schools provide students with dual enrollment opportunities, and that school districts make students aware of the program. Minnesota state policy sets forth some participation guidelines: Students may not take more than the equivalent of two years of coursework through the PSEO program, and students may not participate in the program once they have graduated from high school. Additionally, colleges may not offer

Policy features — Minnesota

- Mandated program
- Students may not pay tuition or fees
- Course requirements
- Implementation flexibility
- Guaranteed credit transfer

students developmental or remedial coursework through the PSEO program.

State policy allows for two different funding mechanisms. Typically, the Department of Education withholds aid from school districts in proportion to PSEO participation, redirecting that funding to the postsecondary institutions. Alternatively, districts may contract and pay colleges directly for PSEO students. This second funding stream offers more flexibility to local partnerships and typically is more financially favorable to high schools. No matter the financial arrangement between the secondary and postsecondary institutions, students enrolled in a postsecondary institution through the PSEO program may not be charged tuition, fees or for books.

Despite these mandates, the state offers flexibility in implementation of the PSEO program. State statutes permit postsecondary institutions and high schools to enter into an agreement to offer college courses at the high school, but such agreements are not required. The state also allows high school teachers to teach high school-based PSEO courses. The result is that dual enrollment is offered through a variety of program models.

An important component of the state policy addresses the transfer of credit earned through PSEO. State statute mandates that colleges

accept all PSEO credit that they award to dually enrolled students. In other words, students are guaranteed that college credit earned through PSEO will transfer if they matriculate in the institution through which they attended the PSEO program. Colleges are not, however, required to accept credit earned through PSEO participation at another institution, meaning that students who attend college elsewhere in the state are not guaranteed transfer credit.

Texas, on the other hand, has voluntary dual enrollment. Schools are not mandated by the state to provide students with dual enrollment opportunities, though they are permitted by the law to do so if they desire. Likewise, although colleges or high schools may choose to waive and/or reimburse students for tuition and fees, they are not required to do so. Since high school students are not eligible for federal financial aid until they graduate from high school or get a General Education Diploma, institutional decisions requiring students to pay their own tuition may have important ramifications. Students without the financial means to pay tuition may not be able to participate in dual enrollment.

The state does, however, offer strict eligibility requirements for participation in dual enrollment. Students must achieve a cut-off score on the state's exit assessment, SAT or ACT test, or pass a diagnostic test at the college. They must also meet the college's admissions requirements. Unless they receive special permission, students are unable to enroll in more than two dual enrollment courses per semester.

Like Minnesota, Texas state statutes do not specify where dual enrollment courses must be offered or who may teach them. Schools can choose whether to offer courses at the high school or at the college, and may allow high

school teachers to teach dual enrollment. However, the state does require any high school teacher teaching a dual enrollment course to have the same credentials as regular professors hired by the college.

In an effort to encourage dual enrollment opportunities, both high schools and colleges are reimbursed the average daily rate for dually enrolled students. The exception is for students who are not enrolled in the high school credit courses full time; secondary schools do lose funding for these students.

Policy Implementation: Two Dual Enrollment Programs in Texas

Despite functioning within the same policy guidelines, programs can look very different. An example of this can be found in Texas, where dual enrollment guidelines offer schools a large degree of program flexibility. The result is that "dual enrollment" programs look very different in different parts of the state. We offer two examples by way of illustration.

"Suburban High School" is on the outskirts of a large city. It serves a rapidly-growing, affluent student population. It partners with a local community college to provide dual enrollment courses to its students. Dual enrollment courses are offered on the college campus. College professors teach all dual enrollment courses, but the student mix varies. In some courses, all students are dually enrolled high school students; in others, high school students are mixed with regularly matriculated college students. To compensate for the extra time required to communicate with the high school, professors are offered a small stipend by the college for teaching dually enrolled students.

Students in Suburban High School's dual enrollment program pay their own tuition

(waivers are available for those students unable to afford the program). In the past, the high school paid for students' textbooks, but it has stopped doing so, effective the 2003-2004 school year. The cost was prohibitive for the school.

As required by state law, all dual enrollment students at Suburban must pass the state college placement test or score very well on the high school exit exam. The school works with students individually, as well, in order to ensure that dual enrollment students are prepared both academically and emotionally for college-level work. Students in all grades are eligible to participate. During the 2002-2003 school year, Suburban High School had approximately 275 students enrolled in four dual enrollment courses, out of a student body of 2100.

Policy features — Texas

- Voluntary program
- Students may pay tuition and fees
- Student eligibility requirements
- Implementation flexibility

In contrast, "Rural High School" is a small school on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area. Like Suburban, it partners with a community college to offer dual enrollment to its students. All dual enrollment courses are offered at the high school, taught by teachers approved by the partnering college. Some dual enrollment teachers are high school teachers, but one course (in government) is taught by an attorney. Because of the location of the program, dually enrolled students do not have regular college students in their classes.

The high school pays students' tuition, but the students pay for their own books. All students

must pass the college placement exam or the high school exit exam, and are not required to receive any guidance from the school prior to enrollment in the program. Rural High School's dual enrollment program is, however, limited to students in the Twelfth Grade. In the 2002-2003 school year, approximately 15 students at Rural High School were enrolled in four dual enrollment courses, out of a student body of 600.

CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Dual enrollment programs have the potential to help students enter and succeed in postsecondary education, and to bridge the secondary-postsecondary divide. Yet there is much that we do not know. First, it is important to gather information about how many—and what types—of students currently participate in dual enrollment, and what program features are most common. Rigorous evaluation research is needed to ensure that programs are living up to their potential. A clearer sense of existing state policies and their impact on participation is also necessary.

In addition to the lack of good information regarding the prevalence and efficacy of dual enrollment, policy-makers face a number of other challenges:

- Ensuring that all students have equal access to dual enrollment courses. There is some evidence that schools continue to track some students, particularly members of minority groups, out of advanced course work (Viadero, 2001) and that rural and disadvantaged students have fewer opportunities to participate in dual enrollment (MN State Legislative Auditor, 1996).

- Ensuring that, despite differences in implementation, dual enrollment courses maintain the rigor of regular college courses. A number of authors have expressed concerns about the quality of dual enrollment programs particularly with regards to school-based programs (Clark, 2001; Johnstone and Del Genio, 2001). Some fear that the rigor of the curriculum is compromised by virtue of the fact that it is high school students who are enrolled in the course. Others fear that some models of dual enrollment, particularly models that do not involve courses on a college campus, differ little from traditional high school coursework.
- Creating mechanisms that promote and sustain successful secondary-postsecondary collaborations. Because dual enrollment programs are dependent upon inter-sector cooperation, partnerships between high schools and colleges are key (England, 2001). Creating clear and sustainable linkages between these two systems is difficult and requires a re-thinking of the role of high school and postsecondary school.
- Addressing criticisms of dual enrollment. Although there is much enthusiasm about dual enrollment, some state- and district-level officials and legislators are skeptical. This resistance generally stems from two concerns: if both the colleges and the high schools receive funding, the state is paying twice for dually enrolled students, and that the quality of dual enrollment courses is often questionable. In some states, a “backlash” against dual enrollment is developing, and dual enrollment’s funding, support, or participation has been threatened.

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