

PROJECT SUMMARY

STUDY OVERVIEW

An increasing national focus on the need for high academic standards, coupled with the growing importance of obtaining a postsecondary credential, 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, collectively known as credit-based transition programs, include Tech Prep, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and middle college high schools. These programs traditionally target high-achieving students; but many policy-makers and educators today believe that a broader range of students can benefit from participation. However, there is little research information to guide efforts at expanding credit-based transition programs. In particular, educators need better information on the various features of these programs and how these programs help middle- and low-achieving students enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

To identify state-level policies and statutes that support (or inhibit) the development and implementation of credit-based transition programs.

To describe the practices of credit-based transition programs, focusing on developing a deep understanding of their curriculum, instruction, staffing, program structure and management, leadership, and financing.

To develop an explanation for how and why credit-based transition programs may support the secondary-to-postsecondary transition of middle- and low-achieving students.

METHODS

This two-year study will use case-study methodology, combined with a state policy scan, to explore the policies and practices that

help students prepare for and transition to college. The study builds upon two U.S. Department of Education funded studies of credit-based transition programs: a comprehensive review of the literature released in September of 2003, and a set of high school and postsecondary surveys currently underway.

Work will proceed in four phases:

Phase 1: Focus Groups

Four focus groups with instructors and administrators of credit-based transition programs will be conducted to identify, first, the programmatic features of credit-based programs and, second, those features that specifically support the transition of middle- to low-achieving students.

Phase 2: State Policy Analysis

Using publicly available state legislation and guidelines, this analysis will identify current policy mechanisms that promote or limit the expansion of credit-based transition programs.



Commonalities across states will be identified, and the ramifications of policy decisions explored.

Phase 3: Site Selection and Outreach

Site selection will be guided by a set of criteria defining exemplary credit-based transition programs. The criteria focus on both program feature and program outcomes. Sites will be geographically diverse and selected to represent the range of comprehensive and enhanced comprehensive programs.

Phase 4: Case Studies

Case studies will explore the programmatic features that support the transition of middle- and low-achieving students from secondary to postsecondary education. Teams of investigators will conduct multi-day site visits to collect data on practices and policies guiding program operation. Data analysis will focus on the state and local context, the history of the program, how the program is structured and administrated, and the outcomes achieved by students that participate in these programs. Analysis will be conducted at both the individual site level as well as across cases.

PRODUCTS

- 1) A *State Policy Report* aimed at policy-makers will outline state policies and the ways these policies support or prevent the growth of programs that serve mid- to low-achieving students. The report will also present policy options for expanding student participation in credit-based programs.
- 2) *One-Page Briefs* describing each site selected for in-depth study will be developed as part of the study's outreach efforts.

- 3) *Case Study Reports* targeting practitioners will offer descriptive information on the features of each, especially in the areas of instruction, curriculum, staffing, program structure and management, leadership, and financing.
- 4) A *Cross-Case Report* aimed at instructors and administrators will present the common or essential practices used by programs to promote the transition of middle- to low-achieving students.
- 5) A *Final Report* will synthesize the findings from the case studies, state policy scan, literature review, and FRSS and PEQIS surveys. This report will use all available data to draw conclusions about the prevalence of credit-based transition programs, the program structures that best support middle- and low-achieving students, and possible policy options to promote student participation in credit-based transition programs.

For further information on this project, contact:

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