

Excerpts from *On Ramp to College: A State Policymaker's Guide to Dual Enrollment*¹

INTRODUCTION

“Educational attainment correlates with personal income and state economic strength” (1).

“Many states are raising high school graduation standards and building better bridges between secondary schools and higher education to help ensure that more students start on the path to a postsecondary credential and stay on that path to earn one. Within states, this work entails:

- aligning high school exit and college entrance standards;
- requiring a rigorous academic curriculum;
- building incentives into the state's accountability system for schools to retain and graduate all students;
- promoting collaboration between education sectors through K-16 councils; and
- installing data systems to track student progress” (2).

“State policymakers can use dual enrollment...as a valuable part of a comprehensive, statewide effort to expand college opportunity for all...When properly designed, it can serve as an ‘on ramp’ to postsecondary education for students otherwise unlikely to attend college. Dual enrollment gives students practice at doing college-level work while receiving support from collaborating high school and college instructors. In addition, dual enrollment can serve as a powerful impetus for integrating high school and postsecondary education into a continuous system spanning grades 9 through 16” (2).

SECTION ONE: *Overview of Current Dual Enrollment Policies and Practices*

“Many dual enrollment programs offer free or discounted tuition, providing a significant savings for families who otherwise could not afford to send their children to college” (6).

“The availability of dual enrollment data varies by state, but the data that do exist suggest that dual enrollment has become a common option in American high schools, including as a component of Career and Technical Education programs (Karp et al. 2007)” (6).

The National Center for Education Statistics found that “dual enrollees accounted for a total of 1.2 million course enrollments in 2002-03” (6).

“Several studies conclude that high school students who take college courses subsequently perform better in college than those with no history of dual enrollment course-taking (Spurling & Gabriner 2002; University of Arizona 1999; Windham & Perkins 2001)... Dual enrollment also had a positive impact on retention and grade point average. Strikingly, dual enrollment students

¹ Hoffman, Nancy, Joel Vargas, and Janet Santos. “On Ramp to College: A State Policymaker's Guide to Dual Enrollment.” Jobs for the Future, 2008. <http://www.jff.org/Documents/OnRamp.pdf>

had earned 15.1 more credits than their non-dual enrollment peers three years after high school graduation (Karp et al. 2007)” (7).

“Many dually enrolled students stay with the same institution to finish their degrees because they already have the school’s transcript and credits—providing colleges with well-prepared, nonremedial students” (7).

“As a key component of an educational equity agenda, dual enrollment can help a state’s education system to both raise achievement levels of all students and close the achievement gap between members of different income and racial/ethnic groups. Groups that may benefit from dual enrollment programs but do not now participate at proportionate rates include low-income students, students of color, first-generation college-goers, English Language Learners, overage students, and students in isolated high schools that cannot offer a wide variety of courses (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education 2006). Once extended to a broader range of students, dual enrollment programs have the potential to spur these important improvements. Thomas R. Bailey and Melinda Mechur Karp (2003) note four ways to make this occur:

- Increase the pool of historically underserved students who are ready for college;
- Provide realistic information to high school students about the knowledge and skills that they will need to succeed in postsecondary education;
- Help high school faculty to better understand the preparation their students need for college; and
- Promote formal, long-term partnerships between postsecondary institutions and high schools.

In addition, dual enrollment can create a feedback loop between K-12 and postsecondary systems regarding issues of standards, assessments, curriculum, and transitions from high school to college” (8).

“In 2006, **TEXAS** moved from a voluntary dual enrollment option to a state guarantee that all qualifying high school students have the opportunity to earn 12 free college credits. Texas provides \$275 per student for this and other college-readiness activities. In 2003, **NORTH CAROLINA** added the Innovation Education Initiatives Act to its 1983 dual enrollment program policies. The act supports the establishment of 75 Learn & Earn early college high schools in partnership with the state’s system of community colleges. Students in the 42 schools already open—reflective of their communities in social and academic background—earn a free Associate’s degree concurrent with a high school diploma...**RHODE ISLAND**’s new statewide dual enrollment plan expands opportunities for low-income students to participate in greater numbers. It includes pilot-testing a ‘pathway,’ or sequence of pre-selected courses, as an on ramp to college in an urban high school...**GEORGIA** and **UTAH** use financial aid to reward students for earning college credits in high school...**TEXAS** and **FLORIDA** share the goal of increasing choices and options for all young people by granting a wide range of students access to college-level courses. In Florida... and in Texas... dual enrollment is part of a state strategy to promote college readiness. In both cases, college readiness includes reducing the number of students taking developmental courses after having successfully completed high school” (12-13).

Purposes of Dual Enrollment - Florida

“The purposes of dual enrollment in Florida are: to reduce the time associated with completing a high school diploma and a postsecondary credential; to broaden and add rigor to the curricular options available to high school students [F.S. § 100.27(1)]; and to reduce the number of students enrolling in developmental courses [F.S. § 100.24]” (14).

Ensuring Quality – Florida

“Articulation agreements must present the criteria used to judge quality of dual enrollment courses and programs [F.S. § 1007.235]. Faculty teaching dual enrollment courses must meet the qualifications to teach college-level courses [Statement of Standards, Dual Enrollment/Early College Programs in the Florida Community College System]” (15).

Ensuring Quality – Texas

“Institutions of higher education are to assist school districts in the development of dual enrollment programs [HB 1 Sec. 28.009]. Dual credit instructors must be employed faculty members of the college or have the same qualifications as staff teaching the course at the college. The college is responsible for overseeing the instructional quality of dual enrollment courses [Texas Administrative Code § 4.85(e)]” (15).

Academic and Social Supports for At-Risk Students – Florida

The state is “mandated to develop and implement a statewide ‘computer-assisted student advising system’ whereby students have access to information on course registration, information to meet requirements set forth for the academic path they have selected [F.S. § 1007.28]” (15).

Funding and Finance

“Florida waives community college tuition for dual enrollees [F.S. §1007.271 (13)]” (16). North Carolina waives community college tuition for dual enrollees also (52).

SECTION TWO: *Guiding Principles for Designing State Dual Enrollment Policies*

“States can use their college- and career-ready high school exit standards as one of the measures of student readiness for college-level work in high school. In addition, states can require that postsecondary institutions provide feedback to “sending” high schools about student performance in introductory college courses, especially those that follow in a sequence from high school requirements” (19).

a. Eligibility

“It is important to underscore publicly that dual enrollment students do not take remedial courses and that one goal of dual enrollment is to lower the need for such courses in postsecondary institutions” (21).

“Not all high school students will be able to handle college-level work; readiness must be monitored closely. Allowing students to take college courses when they are not ready does a disservice to all and must be discouraged” (21).

“A better assessment, which would result in improved alignment between high school and college coursework, would be for the secondary and postsecondary partners to set a required level of student performance on an end-of-course high school exam, exit assessment, or portfolio of work in the particular subject that the student wants to continue studying—with both sectors agreeing on standards of quality” (22).

State Examples

“Florida: *Lower Requirements for Technical Courses*

Florida has two sets of admissions requirements, one for technical courses and another for academic courses. This helps ensure that most students have access to some dual enrollment options, even if they are not ready to participate in an academic course. Concerns about this approach are that it could reinforce curricular ‘tracking,’ as well as the historic perception that technical courses are ‘less than’ academic courses.

Maine: *Tiered Rules*

To maintain a balance between open access and high standards, Maine has a tiered eligibility system. Dual enrollment is open to high school students of any age if they meet course prerequisites, have a 3.0 grade point average, and have parental and high school permission to participate. If students do not meet these criteria, they must be in eleventh or twelfth grade and have high school and postsecondary permission.

Ohio: *Performance-Based Advancement*

Students must be academically advanced in the subject of their dual enrollment course but not necessarily in other courses. A student seeking to take a dual enrollment mathematics course would need a 3.0 grade point average in his or her mathematics courses but not necessarily in English or other classes. This ensures that students who are ready for college-level work in one subject but weaker in another subject can still participate.

Utah: *State and Local Shared Responsibility*

Local schools and higher education institutions have considerable autonomy within the eligibility requirements, which may include:

- Junior or senior standing, sophomore by exception;
- GPA, ACT, or a placement score that predicts success (generally a B average or ACT of 22 or higher);
- Supportive letters of recommendation; and/or
- Approval of a high school or college official” (23).

b. Equitable Access

“Anecdotal evidence suggests that low-income students who may meet eligibility criteria are often unaware of the opportunity to participate—especially if they attend schools in low-income communities” (24).

“States should feel no obligation to support courses that neither ‘count’ nor transfer” (25).

“Students and their families must receive detailed information about ‘college-ready’ standards, the costs of participation (if any), and the pros and cons of generating a college transcript while still in high school. Some states, such as Ohio and Washington, require that high schools inform students of dual enrollment opportunities and requirements. To go one step further, states that require each student to have an individual learning plan (e.g., Rhode Island, Vermont, Maryland) could mandate that schools ask the students to consider college course options” (25).

c. Quality

“Concern grows as greater numbers of high school teachers provide college credit for courses taught in high schools, and postsecondary institutions hire adjunct professors to meet the demand for college classes for younger students, both on their campuses and in secondary schools” (27).

“However, the credential [at least a Master’s degree in the content taught] alone may not ensure the quality of dual enrollment programs. Several states are putting in place statewide quality assessment mechanisms” (27).

“For college-level work to promote college success for underrepresented students, quality is synonymous with adequate academic support and advising, properly sequenced high school and college courses, appropriate academic content, and thorough, engaging instruction” (27).

“A state or higher education system may also require that classes taught in high schools use the same syllabi, assignments, and end-of-course exams as those taught on campus; ensure that those responsible for dual enrollment visit classrooms and review student work; limit the kind and number of courses offered; and establish uniform faculty qualifications” (28).

Smoothing the Path for Students

“Once a state puts in place a quality assurance mechanism that creates seamless pathways in key content areas from high school to college, the overlap or lack of sequencing between high school and college courses is likely to become more apparent. Thus, states should be prepared to take the next steps: engaging high school teachers and college professors in sequencing key courses; and ensuring that pedagogy and academic assignments are continually more demanding in consistent ways” (28).

“The smaller the number of courses approved for dual credit, the easier it becomes to monitor quality and to provide high school students with appropriate support where needed. An

additional advantage is that a state can focus on gathering data about alignment in key discipline areas” (28).

Quality Controls

“The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Programs is a voluntary dual enrollment accreditation group. It imposes additional quality measures on its members through classroom visits and audits of student work by college faculty. NACEP accredits only programs taught by high school teachers in their own high schools during the school day” (29).

d. Academic and Social Support for At-Risk Students

At-Risk students “need help in choosing courses for which they are prepared, understanding requirements, and staying on track” (31).

“Effective supports for middle- and low-achieving students include: academic assistance and tutoring; access to adult advisors; college success classes incorporating basic study and organizational skills; a safe environment where questions are welcomed and uncertainty acknowledged; and peer support networks” (31).

“In general, dual enrollment programs should provide non-remedial coursework. Nonetheless, established programs may want to experiment by creating a developmental strand to prepare off-track and overage students, or others presenting particular learning needs” (32).

State Examples - Georgia, Maine, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Utah: Reaching Students Statewide with Early and Middle College

“These states have in part addressed outreach to and success of at-risk students by creating early and middle college high schools. These small, autonomous schools, designed for low-income students and students of color underrepresented in postsecondary education, provide intensive support as well as acceleration that results in up to 60 college credits in high school. The schools are funded through dual enrollment mechanisms” (32).

e. Funding and Finance

“Education finance experts have suggested that early college schools yield a greater return on investment and have a lower cost-to-completion rate to an Associate’s degree compared to traditional high schools” (33).

“A consideration in financing dual enrollment is deciding what mix of campus-based versus high school-based courses to fund. ‘College in the high school’ courses are lower in cost than college campus courses: paying a college professor or adjunct professor to teach 30 high school students costs less than the aggregated cost per credit for the same students on a college campus paying regular or even discounted tuition. The advantage of college campus-based courses is that they allow students to experience the college environment and develop an identity as a college student. Most states hold most of their courses in high schools, but states should ensure that

students have some access to college campus courses—especially those students needing the most support to attend college. The state should study differences in the outcomes and the costs and benefits of each approach” (35).

“At least two states, Georgia and Tennessee, use state financial aid programs funded through state lottery proceeds—not tied to federal aid or rules—to defray the course-related costs of dual enrollees” (35).

f. Developing Data Systems to Monitor Quality and Success

“States should require secondary and postsecondary agencies and institutions to collaborate in the design, collection, analysis, and reporting of dual enrollment data” (38).

“States can ensure that the K-12 and postsecondary systems are able to identify who has participated in dual enrollment. This information should be tied at the student level to each individual’s academic profile (e.g., assessment scores, GPA) and social background characteristics (e.g., race and income)” (39).

g. Governance, Accountability, Alignment

“In strong dual credit programs where secondary-postsecondary alignment is a goal, a joint entity:

- Agrees on content and standards to link high school exit competencies with college first-year competencies;
- Assigns common course numbering across the system; and
- Collects data on progress and reports it publicly.

In addition, such an entity is the vehicle for sequencing and aligning mathematics and English language arts curricula and assessments (using the American Diploma Project benchmarks or other such standards), because these are key ‘gatekeeper’ skills. Cross-sector teams of instructors work together to provide schools and higher education institutions with feedback on student performance and academic standards in the last two years of high school and first two years of postsecondary education” (41).

“Alignment of math and English language arts: To create a feedback loop between high school and postsecondary institutions and to further align high school exit requirements with college admission requirements and non-remedial course taking, the dual enrollment program should require that mathematics, reading, and writing are structured into a sequenced pathway, using state college-readiness standards and data about student performance in college courses” (43).