

Essential Elements of State Policy for College Completion

SREB

Policy Brief

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Southern
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592 10th St. N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30318
(404) 875-9211
www.sreb.org

Dual Enrollment Courses and Credits

Greater numbers — and a more diverse mix — of public high school students are turning to dual enrollment programs to get a head start in college and move more quickly toward a career. Dual enrollment plays a role in college completion because it allows students to take college courses while in high school and often earn college credit. Recent research shows that taking these courses in high school can shorten time-to-degree and potentially reduce students' college costs.

This paper — one in SREB's series on the essential elements of state policy to increase college completion — highlights recent state actions on dual enrollment, offers six issues for policy-makers to consider and summarizes recommendations from SREB's 2012 publication *Redesigning Dual Enrollment to Promote College Completion*.

Key Policy Questions

In some states, the policies that guide dual enrollment programs were established more than 30 years ago, specifically for one small group of high-achieving students who needed a more challenging curriculum. Today, dual enrollment policies in many states may need to be redesigned to ensure that a wide mix of program participants are well served and can complete college degrees more efficiently. Questions that policy-makers should consider include:

- *Does your state policy encourage and support all public secondary schools and postsecondary institutions in providing dual enrollment options?*
- *Are accountability provisions in place to ensure that high-quality dual enrollment options are also cost-efficient for students, institutions and the state?*
- *Are financing policies for dual enrollment programs equitable for schools and postsecondary institutions?*
- *How should your state policy hold schools and institutions accountable for providing high-quality dual enrollment programs?*
- *Does state policy identify how tuition and other associated costs for dual enrollment courses will be covered?*
- *Does state policy provide access to dual enrollment courses for all students, regardless of their ability to pay?*
- *Does state policy specify where dual enrollment courses can be taught?*

This paper is based on work by Crystal Collins, former policy analyst, Southern Regional Education Board, with updates by Cheryl Blanco, vice president for Special Projects, and Megan Root, senior policy associate, President's Office. It is part of SREB's Essential Elements of State Policy series, which is supported by grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation. The conclusions presented here are those of SREB and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the funders.

Dual Enrollment's Link to College Completion

Research suggests that dual enrollment may contribute to college enrollment, persistence and completion. The benefit for historically underrepresented students is of particular interest as states work to close achievement gaps by increasing both access and completion.

Survey results from the SREB-State Data Exchange on the status of graduates from two- and four-year public colleges in 2008-2009 found that taking college-level courses in high school shortens time-to-degree for many graduates. Students who completed bachelor's degrees in 2008-2009 at the same institution where they first began and had a record of taking college-level credits in high school completed college in 4.6 years on average in the 10 responding SREB states. Their counterparts without a record of taking college-level credit in high school completed in an average of five years. Students who did not attempt college credits in high school also took longer to complete associate's degrees in the nine responding SREB states — 1.6 years more — than those who did.

In another example, New York City's College Now dual enrollment program allows students to earn college credit that can be applied toward a degree at a City University of New York campus or toward many college programs outside the system. Public school students participate free; 20,000 students generated 28,000 enrollments in 2010-2011. Outcomes show that 90 percent of students who participated and graduated enrolled in college versus 58 percent for New York City public high school graduates overall. African-American and Latino students taking college-credit classes showed more positive gains in credits earned during the first semester, in their grade-point averages (GPAs) and in persistence rates than did Asian and white students.

A 2007 report from the Community College Research Center found that Florida students who took dual enrollment courses were more likely than their peers to earn a

high school diploma and enroll in college — and often were more successful after they arrived. The report also found that dual enrollment students who went to college were more likely to persist into the second year of college and had "statistically significant" higher GPAs in college than their college peers who had not participated in dual enrollment. These results were true for students in both high school career/technical and academic concentrations. They also were true regardless of whether students attempted many or only a few dual enrollment credits. Simply participating was enough to benefit from these courses.

Growth in Dual Enrollment

Larger numbers of students are participating in dual enrollment programs. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 9 percent of all U.S. public high school students who graduated in 2009 — or 249,000 — earned credits in dual enrollment. In comparison, among high school students who graduated in 2005, 216,000 (also 9 percent) had earned dual enrollment credit. Recent growth in numbers of participants suggests that several states in the SREB region may be using dual enrollment programs to meet college-readiness goals. For example:

Florida. Florida's program increased by nearly 44 percent — or close to 14,000 students — from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011. These numbers are projected to increase as policy-makers expand the state's accountability indicators for high schools to include student participation in accelerated learning programs such as dual enrollment and AP.

Kentucky. The participation rate of 11th- and 12th-grade Kentucky students in dual enrollment and dual credit increased from 17 percent of the classes in 2002-2003 to nearly 28 percent in 2010-2011, when close to 25,000 students participated. Kentucky policy-makers have used dual enrollment in recent years as a way to afford all high school students the "right to participate in rigorous and academically challenging curriculum."

Texas. An American Institutes for Research report commissioned by the Texas Education Agency in 2011 found the state's dual enrollment program grew by 31 percent to just over 94,000 participants from 2007 to 2009. Nearly three of four dual credit courses were in core academic subjects, and one of five was in a career or technical education course.

Definition

Dual enrollment: High school students earning college credits for courses taken through a postsecondary institution. Other terms often used synonymously are "dual credit," "concurrent enrollment" and "joint enrollment."

SREB State Policy Actions on Dual Enrollment

All SREB states have statewide dual enrollment policies either in law, state Board of Education rule, or both. The level of detail and specific issues addressed in these policies vary widely. Recent state actions concerning dual enrollment programs in SREB states include:

- **Arkansas** used administrative rules to address concurrent college and high school credit by making students responsible for all costs of higher education courses. The rule also requires school districts that pay for higher education courses to have a signed memorandum of understanding with the applicable postsecondary institution, and it requires districts to accept credit earned in postsecondary education, even if students transfer schools. (See Department of Education Rules 170.94.37.152/REGS/005.01. 12-009F-13218.)
- **Florida** has had a dual enrollment policy for decades, but recent legislation on dual enrollment repeals some sections of the previous law and makes significant modifications in others. It replaces references to district “interinstitutional articulation agreements” with references to “dual enrollment articulation agreements,” and it authorizes such agreements with state universities, eligible independent colleges and universities, and private secondary schools. It amends student eligibility requirements and specifies standards for the rigor of dual enrollment courses. The law also requires “home education articulation agreements” for home education students participating in a dual enrollment program. (See House Bill 7059, 2012.)
- **Georgia** legislation directs the state Board, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia jointly to: (1) establish eligibility requirements for entering dual credit programs; (2) develop appropriate forms and counseling guidelines for dual credit courses; and (3) establish policies to ensure dual credit courses reflect college-level work. The law establishes parameters for district/state Board recognition of a dual credit course and revises the districts’ funding method. Additionally, the law specifies that students enrolled in the Georgia Youth Apprenticeship Program must be eligible to earn dual credit under certain conditions. Separate legislation dealt with online dual enrollment offered by a postsecondary institution. (See House Bill 186, 2011; and Senate Bill 289, 2012.)
- **Kentucky’s Council on Postsecondary Education** approved a Dual Credit Policy in 2012, with implementation in fall 2013. The policy outlines the terms and conditions under which courses for dual credit will be offered to secondary school students by public postsecondary institutions. The policy specifically addresses opportunities to take college-level courses and receive college and high school credit.
- **Maryland’s** Senate Bill 740 (2013) revised existing legislation related to dually enrolled students, including changes to the payment structure, reporting requirements, and a requirement that each county board make all high school students who meet mutually agreed-on enrollment requirements aware of the opportunity to dually enroll.
- **Mississippi** revised existing provisions, defined dual enrolled students and specified that course prerequisites be the same for dual enrolled students as for regularly enrolled students at that university, community or junior college. (See Senate Bill 2869, 2011.) A bill to create a Mississippi Works dual enrollment-dual credit options pilot program for school dropouts and potential dropouts failed in the 2012 session.
- **North Carolina’s** Legislature overrode the governor’s veto of House Bill 200 (2011), directing the state Board and the North Carolina Community College System to establish the Career and College Promise program for high school students to enroll dually in community college courses that provide pathways (a CTE pathway, college transfer pathway or Cooperative Innovative High Schools program) that lead to a certificate, diploma or degree and help build entry-level jobs skills. The bill required that credits earned through Promise allow students to complete a postsecondary credential in less time than normally would be required.
- **Tennessee** law now provides that a dual credit course created by a high school and community college, as either an elective or major core requirement, be transferable to all public postsecondary institutions. (See Senate Bill 2809, 2012.)

Essential Elements of State Policy for College Completion: *Dual Enrollment*

To update dual enrollment policies to reflect college- and career-readiness policies and strategies, SREB recommends the following six key policy considerations as a starting point for review and discussion:

I. Type and Amount of Credit Awarded

State policy determines whether students can earn both high school and college credits or college credit alone for successfully completing a dual enrollment course. States that do not offer students the opportunity to earn both high school and college credits may discourage capable high school students from participating in these courses. States that do not define high school credits clearly in Carnegie units may confuse students and parents about how the credits apply to high school requirements and college admission.

SREB recommends that state policy address both the type and amount of credit awarded:

- State policy should identify the type and amount of credit a dual enrollment student may earn by successfully completing approved courses.
- State policy should provide every dual enrollment student with the opportunity to earn both high school and college credits that count toward graduation and degree completion, respectively.
- If high school credit is awarded for completing these college courses, state policy should define the equivalency in Carnegie units.

II. Funding

Funding has drawn much scrutiny in recent years. Students participating in dual enrollment courses typically attend two state-funded institutions simultaneously — a public high school and a public college or university — potentially earning credit at both for a single course. Policy-makers have struggled to find the best way to fund both institutions for serving the same student at the same time. With little current research on return on invest-

ment in dual enrollment programs, education leaders have tried to assure policy-makers and stakeholders that they are getting value for their investment and that the state is not unnecessarily paying for the same instructional hours at both institutions.

States can choose to fund participating high schools and colleges at the same level for a dual enrollment student as they would a student separately enrolled in each institution. Or they can reduce the funding to one or both institutions to reflect the shared instructional responsibilities for a dually enrolled student. Most often, states fund both institutions at their full levels in order to promote institution participation in the programs. While state policies that favor this funding model may not be sustainable in tight economic times, reducing funding creates a disincentive for high schools and colleges to participate. If a college's funding is reduced, it may pass some of the costs on to high school students who do not have access to financial aid through tuition and/or fees. If a high school's funding is reduced, it may choose to limit dual enrollment opportunities for students. States also may consider providing funding incentives to high schools or colleges that promote student participation or performance in dual enrollment courses.

SREB recommends that state policy address funding issues:

- State policy should identify equitable ways to fund the high schools and colleges that educate the same students through dual enrollment courses in order to maximize savings to the state while also providing incentives to institutions to participate.
- State policy should tie reimbursement to actual contact hours with institution personnel.
- State policy should provide incentives to high schools and colleges to participate in dual enrollment by tying certain accountability measures or performance funding to student participation and success in dual enrollment courses.

III. Tuition and Cost Responsibility

Responsibility for paying student tuition and fees for dual enrollment courses varies among states and may include students, the states, colleges, school districts, or a combination. Sometimes a state that requires students to pay tuition for dual credit courses will offer discounts to students with financial need. A few states cover costs for their dual credit courses through a state lottery for qualifying students or by reimbursing institutions based on credit-hours. A few waive tuition for certain students or allow individual institutions to make the decision to waive tuition. Other variations on covering student costs include policies that allow students to earn a certain number of tuition-free credit-hours, require families to pay for the courses, or incorporate a combination of sources.

A recent study of postsecondary institutions by the National Center for Education Statistics found the most commonly reported source paying tuition for courses taken within a dual enrollment program was the postsecondary institution (77 percent). Parents and students were reported as additional sources of tuition by 66 percent of responding institutions, and high schools and districts were reported by 44 percent.

Dual enrollment policies that require students or their families to pay tuition and fees make it difficult for students from low-income families to participate because high school students do not qualify for state financial aid programs or federal need-based Pell Grant and direct loan programs.

In addition, students may have uneven access to dual enrollment courses and be uncertain about their ability to pay for them because many states allow postsecondary institutions to determine tuition policy for these courses, deciding whether to offer them at full, reduced or no cost.

SREB recommends that state policy address tuition and cost responsibility:

- State policy should clearly define the parties responsible for paying tuition and other costs associated with dual enrollment courses that high school students

take, and states should communicate the policy clearly.

- State policy should promote access to dual enrollment courses for all students — regardless of ability to pay — either by opening state aid programs to high school students or providing tuition and fee waivers for needy students.

IV. Quality Assurance

Few states have policies defining the quality of instruction provided to dual enrollment students; most leave it up to the colleges and universities awarding the credit. Most states, however, do address the minimum credentials an instructor must have in order to teach a dual enrollment course, although few establish rigorous measures for those instructors, including those who teach in partner high schools. Existing policies may need to be revised to enable qualified postsecondary faculty to teach dual enrollment courses in secondary schools.

Course quality is often referenced in state policies, however, with a requirement that course content mirror that of the equivalent postsecondary course. Dual enrollment courses that are not monitored for instructional quality and rigor may not be comparable to their college counterparts.

SREB recommends that state policy address quality assurance for courses and instructors:

- State policy should require dual enrollment faculty to be evaluated by the same effectiveness measures as their non-dual enrollment college faculty peers.
- State policy should require colleges to evaluate dual enrollment courses to ensure they are taught to the same level of quality as other similar courses or sections of the same courses at those colleges. This may require the use of the same syllabi, instructional materials, exams and quizzes as similar college courses.
- State policy should require that all dual enrollment courses be evaluated to guarantee they meet at least the same level of rigor as their non-dual enrollment counterpart courses.

V. Student Eligibility Requirements

Most states set minimum academic requirements in state-level policy for students to participate in dual enrollment courses. These qualifications vary widely, and their restrictiveness often determines the reach of a state's dual enrollment program. Eligibility requirements may include class standing, minimum GPA, minimum standardized test scores, a written recommendation and academic progress. Many states also require that students meet the basic college entrance requirements of the college offering the dual enrollment course, and they outline statewide minimum eligibility requirements.

States that rely on strict academic requirements for participation in dual enrollment courses may prevent some high school students who would benefit from taking certain specialized, college-level academic courses from being able to enroll. States that require a minimum standardized test score may exclude some students who have otherwise demonstrated readiness for college-level courses.

SREB recommends that state policy address eligibility requirements for participating students:

- State policy should outline the eligibility requirements for high school students who take college courses while still enrolled in high school so they reflect the admission criteria for the participating colleges.
- State policy should balance the eligibility criteria to guarantee that students who participate in dual enrollment meet college-ready standards, while not restricting participation so much that many students who would benefit from participating in courses are prevented from doing so.

VI. Location of Instruction

Generally, state policies permit dual enrollment courses to be taught on either high school or college campuses. With the expansion of distance learning, several states allow college-administered online programs to offer dual enrollment courses.

Students taking dual enrollment courses on a high school campus may not experience the full benefits of college, including interactions with college students and professors, or access to college libraries and laboratories.

Colleges offering online dual enrollment courses to high school students without providing adequate academic support may put students without independent learning skills at higher risk of failure. But locating dual enrollment courses exclusively on college campuses may prevent some students from participating, if dependable transportation is not available.

SREB recommends that state policy address course location and institution eligibility:

- State policy should promote participation among secondary and postsecondary institutions and identify the locations where dual enrollment courses can be taught.
- State policy should encourage dual enrollment courses to be taught on college campuses to ensure high school students fully benefit from participation — and ensure that students from low-income families have transportation options whenever possible.
- Courses taught on high school campuses or through college online options should promote full use of the college's resources, including visits to the campus.

Increasing enrollments and a greater diversity of students in dual enrollment programs in the past several years have created a need for policy-makers to consider an update of state policies to ensure that all students who participate are successful. The issues and recommendations in this paper should help policy-makers effectively redesign these programs to enhance college completion efforts.

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