Dual Enrollment Programs

Dual enrollment programs have the ability to offer high school students college-level course work, college credit, and a college experience within a supportive environment. Traditionally, dual enrollment programs have catered to high-achieving students as a means of accumulating college credit and improving résumés for college applications. But with increasing attention nationally being paid to the goal of having all students college ready by the time they graduate, many state policymakers are reexamining the role dual enrollment programs will play in ensuring all students smoothly transition from high school to postsecondary education. As part of this effort, states have been working on two fronts:

1) Developing statewide dual enrollment agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions, and

2) Expanding the student population that is served by dual enrollment programs.

Currently, about 813,000 high school students per year (or five percent of the student high school population) took college courses through dual enrollment opportunities. In addition, in states that offer dual enrollment programs at no cost to students, between 10 and 30 percent of juniors and seniors earn college credit through dual enrollment, and this percentage continues to increase.¹ Research shows that dual enrollment programs provide a range of benefits to students, including:²

- Enabling students to earn college credit that is free or highly subsidized;
- Reducing high school dropout rates;
- Increasing the academic rigor of a high school curriculum;
- Assisting students in the transition and acclimation to college life;
- Helping low-performing students meet academic standards;
- Providing more academic opportunities to students; and
- Increasing the expectations of teachers and aspirations of students.

However, dual enrollment participation rates and opportunities are not uniform across the country. Almost 20 percent of schools with a high proportion of black and Hispanic students offer no dual enrollment opportunities.³ In addition, eligibility requirements deter some students from participating in such programs even if they are available. There is little doubt that access to dual enrollment programs will continue to challenge policymakers as they work toward the goal of college readiness for all students. Pursuing the following policy and program options can help state boards develop a dual enrollment program that will help all students successfully transition to postsecondary institutions.

1. Developing statewide dual enrollment agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions

Dual enrollment agreements, also known as articulation agreements, between high schools and postsecondary institutions allow students to earn college credit while still

State Dual Enrollment Policies

- 46 states have statewide policies governing at least one statewide dual enrollment program.
- 12 states require all high schools and eligible public postsecondary institutions to provide dual enrollment opportunities.
- In 21 states, dual enrollment programs are based on voluntary partnerships between K-12 and postsecondary partners, or schools, districts, or institutions may limit eligible students from participating.
- 15 states require all public two- and four-year institutions to accept transfer credits earned through dual enrollment programs.

in high school. However, some articulation agreements are only between a single high school and a community college. As a result, there are instances where the college credits attained from these agreements do not transfer to institutions in other parts of the state. Statewide articulation agreements can ensure that dual enrollment credits will transfer to many more postsecondary institutions, regardless of where in the state the student took the course.

Florida has some of the most comprehensive policies and supports behind its dual enrollment program. First, the state standardized all college course numbers. A student can take any course in the system for dual enrollment credit. This allows all students to easily transfer credits between the dual enrollment program and higher education institutions. In addition, the Florida Articulation Coordinating Committee is charged with developing guidelines for articulation agreements, reviewing difficulties that students face when transferring credits and recommending policy to the Board of Education.

2. Expanding the student population that is served by dual enrollment programs

Policymakers may need to reexamine eligibility requirements to attract more academically ready students into dual enrollment programs. Eligibility requirements for dual enrollment programs are a significant barrier to participation for some students. There are 27 states that have minimum eligibility requirements for students to participate in dual enrollment programs, including attaining junior or senior class status, having a recommendation from a teacher, or being a “mature (and) academically directed high school student.”

Two states have recently reevaluated eligibility requirements to expand participation while keeping academic rigor. Maine developed a tiered eligibility system that increased access while maintaining high standards. The program allows all high school students to participate if they have a 3.0 GPA, meet course prerequisites, and obtain parental and school permission. Eleventh and twelfth graders only need to have permission from the high school to participate. Ohio requires students to demonstrate advanced proficiency (i.e., a 3.0 GPA) only in the subject area of the dual enrollment course they wish to take.

In addition, NASBE recently highlighted the work of Georgia on this issue in a State Innovations that explores its new Move on When Ready (MOWR) and the long-established and more traditional Accel dual enrollment programs. The MOWR program is allowing students to directly enroll in college while still in high school with tuition being paid for by the state. To access a copy of the brief, visit www.nasbe.org/index.php/educational-issues/all-educational-issues/functionstartdown/1184/.

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) proposes several innovative strategies for increasing participation, including requiring a dual enrollment course for high school graduation. Such a requirement would ensure that all students receive at least one college-level course while still in high school. While no state has yet implemented such a strategy, policymakers will need to discuss this kind of innovative approach in order to expand dual enrollment programs to all students.

Dual enrollment programs have the ability to provide high school students with college-level coursework to help them transition to postsecondary institutions. However, these programs should be a part of a comprehensive state strategy to prepare all students for postsecondary success. With a greater emphasis on participation and successful transition, state boards can utilize these programs as a vehicle for ensuring all students are prepared for college.

Resources


Endnotes

2. Melinda M. Karp, Juan C. Cakagno, Katherine L. Hughes, Dong W. Jeong, and Thomas Bailey, Dual Enrollment Students in Florida and New York City: Postsecondary Outcomes (Community College Research Center, February 2008).