



dual enrollment

Dual enrollment programs allow students to create a “nest egg” of college credits that ultimately may encourage them to complete their postsecondary education.

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THE MISSING LINK TO COLLEGE READINESS

Dual enrollment programs have sparked the interest of educational researchers and practitioners who want to determine whether offering college courses to high school students might positively affect their persistence in college or other postsecondary education. In 2002–03, 71% of high schools in the United States offered dual enrollment options to their students (Waits, Setzer, & Lewis, 2005). Many of the courses were offered on college campuses and were taught by college faculty members, but 55% of colleges who sponsored dual enrollment programs offered their courses in the high schools (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). Concerns about rigor, credit transfer, funding, and data are among the challenges facing dual enrollment programs. New research, national standards and accreditation, articulation agreements, and legislation governing dual enrollment are helping programs become more effective and also gain legitimacy.

The “Nest Egg” Effect

Only a very few educational research projects have explored postsecondary outcomes of dual enrollment participation using statewide or regional data. I analyzed data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS): 88/2000 to investigate high school dual enrollment course participation and its subsequent effects on postsecondary academic success, persistence, and degree completion. My research, which was published in 2008, compared the high school and college transcripts of students who participated in dual enrollment courses with the transcripts of students who had similar GPAs and class rankings but who took no accelerated learning courses, such as AP or International Baccalaureate. This research marked the first time that a set of nationally representative student transcript data was used to evaluate student outcomes for participants of dual enrollment courses.

My research indicated that:

- Students who participated in dual enrollment programs were 11% ($p < .01$) more likely to persist through the second year of college and were 12% ($p < .001$) more likely to enter college within seven months of high school graduation than nonparticipating students
- Students who participated in dual enrollment programs in high school and who completed 20 or more credits in the first year of college were 28% ($p < .001$) more likely to persist through the second year in college than were students who did not complete dual enrollment courses

The potential for dual enrollment participation to influence students' to develop the attitudes and behaviors of successful college students may be the most difficult outcome to measure, but it perhaps is the most beneficial aspect of dual enrollment course participation.

- Students who participated in dual enrollment programs and who entered college within seven months of graduating from high school improved the likelihood that they would receive a BA by 16% to 20% ($p < .001$) as compared with nonparticipants
- Students who earned 20 credits in their freshman year and who enrolled in college classes every semester up to the end of their sophomore year increased the likelihood that they would earn graduate-level degrees or complete graduate-level courses by 14% ($p < .05$) and 34% ($p < .001$) respectively, as compared to nonparticipants.

Factors that increase students' persistence create academic momentum toward earning a degree. Participation in a dual enrollment program, therefore, suggested statistically significant effects upon students' academic momentum. By accumulating credits in high school, students create a nest egg effect, thereby influencing their decisions to remain in college.

My research also suggests that dual enrollment participation influences behavioral or attitudinal changes in high school students. For example, inferential statistics indicated a 12% ($p < .01$) greater likelihood that dual enrollment students who had not anticipated earning a BA would graduate with a bachelor's degree than nonparticipating students who had originally intended to earn a BA.

The potential for dual enrollment participation to assist in the development of attitudes and behaviors of successful college students may be the most difficult outcome to measure, but it also is the most beneficial aspect of dual enrollment course participation. Academic integration and socialization with postsecondary education seem to make a positive impact in college persistence.

National Standards

In 1999, the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) began to discuss national standards and an accreditation process for dual enrollment programs that offered college courses that were taught by high school teachers. The standards and the accreditation process were developed over a number of years as a way to encourage and validate high-quality concurrent enrollment programs. There are currently more than 40 accredited concurrent enrollment programs in 14 states. Eight states have referenced NACEP accreditation or standards in dual enrollment policies or laws.

The standards that accredited programs must meet are designed to ensure that in every way except where the classes are held, college classes offered in the high school are the same as those offered on campus.

NACEP standards cover such areas as curriculum, faculty member selection and training, ongoing training and support of faculty members, students' rights and responsibilities, student assessment, and program evaluation. Accredited programs offer college- or university-catalogued courses to high school students, who are held to the same learning outcomes and grading standards that are expected of students in on-campus sections. Further, programs that adopt NACEP standards ensure that their students are assessed using the same methods of testing—formative and summative—as their on-campus counterparts.

High school teachers who are approved to teach accredited college courses must meet the same qualifications that are required of adjunct faculty at the cooperating or sponsoring college. High school adjuncts receive annual training and ongoing support in course curriculum, assessments, instructional delivery, and expected levels of class rigor at the sponsoring college. Information about the standards and accreditation process are available on the NACEP Web site (www.nacep.org).

Legislative Action

To meet the challenges and take advantage of the possibilities that dual enrollment programs offer, representatives of school districts, colleges, and legislative bodies across the country have formed

committees, such as the Illinois Dual Credit Task Force of 2008. According to Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE, 2006), state boards of education—representing the K–12 public schools—and boards of higher education have been working with state legislators to craft dual enrollment program regulations and laws to oversee such topics as:

- Student eligibility (e.g., GPA, test score, and entrance test requirements)
- Transfer of credit
- Financial costs to the state, the college, and the student
- Information sharing and counseling, especially for at-risk students
- Accountability safeguards to track students' progress
- Participation incentives (e.g., tuition, book, and fee assistance).

Although articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year colleges or universities have established a long-standing tradition of allowing students to transfer either individual credits or all credits earned toward an Associate of Arts degree, some universities have challenged the application of articulation agreements to dual enrollment courses because students have earned credits from a two-year college before graduating from high school.

State budget woes have called attention to dual enrollment programs that allow K–12 local education agencies and community colleges to seek attendance credits for students who are enrolled simultaneously. Iowa and Illinois, for example, have invested legislative time and energy over the past two years in developing rules and regulations for their dual enrollment programs. This work seems especially important in the state of Illinois, where all 39 community college districts offer college credit programs in the high schools (Marshall & Andrews, 2002).

School Leadership

With so many two- and four-year colleges offering

their courses in high schools, finding and retaining high school staff members who have the credentials to teach dual enrollment courses is a struggle. Personnel decisions made by the principal and district-level administrators have the potential to greatly affect high schools' ability to make dual credit courses available to their students. High school liaisons and district-level administrators play a pivotal role in identifying teachers who have the prerequisite degrees and experience to teach courses. Shortages of teachers who have degrees in specialized content areas—such as economics, sociology, or mathematics—reduce a district's ability to offer those highly sought after entry-level college courses. Classes that grant credit in vocational and technical areas require a different set of prerequisites for adjunct faculty.

A district liaison is essential in establishing a viable dual enrollment program. The district liaison helps students with the college enrollment process in cooperation with staff members from the college or university. The liaison may also help the principal and district-level administrators publicize the dual enrollment programming to parents and students.

To enroll, students must meet entrance requirements that have been established by the state legislature and individual college partners. Entrance requirements vary by course, and the high school liaison must know those requirements to effectively counsel students and help high school faculty members understand the levels of knowledge and skill that are required for successful college course completion.

Finally, the school board and the superintendent play a vital role in maintaining a healthy and vibrant dual enrollment program. Their support enables schools to advertise dual enrollment programs to local community foundations and service groups. In states where students are charged tuition, scholarships and other financial incentives can provide important supports for participating students and enhance the district's overall educational programming.



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Conclusion

Current research suggests that participating in dual enrollment programs improves students' likelihood of continuing on and completing degrees in postsecondary education. By earning college credits while in high school, students are more likely to earn a benchmark level of credits before the end of the first year of college. High-quality instruction and assessment, supported by implementation standards, will help ensure that high school students receive credit for college-level courses that are taught in their high schools. Local school district personnel play a vital role in the health and vitality of dual enrollment programs. For all participants to have confidence in the quality and viability of dual enrollment programs, rigorous quality standards—such as those promoted by NACEP and endorsed by increasing numbers of state legislatures—are essential. **PL**

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