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Dual enrollment can improve high school graduation rates.

Dual enrollment may increase postsecondary success for some students.

Dual Enrollment: Opportunities and Risks

By Vincent Badolato

State legislatures continue to consider policies to improve high school graduation rates and increase the number of students who enroll in college and acquire at least some postsecondary credit. One common policy option used by states to achieve these important goals is dual enrollment. This term describes a variety of accelerated learning practices, including middle and early college high schools, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, and Tech-Prep. Under these options, college-level courses are offered to high school students so they can satisfy high school graduation requirements while earning college credit.

Opportunities. Proponents of dual enrollment view it as a way to increase the academic quality and rigor of high school classes, lower the need for postsecondary remediation, reduce the high school dropout rate, reduce student costs of attending postsecondary institutions, and prepare young people to succeed in college.

Several recent studies have confirmed the role of dual enrollment in meeting some of these goals. A study of New York City's dual enrollment program, College Now, showed that it helped high school students learn about the expectations for college students and may therefore improve their postsecondary success. Another study of dual enrollment for Career and Technical Education and traditional students in both Florida and the College Now program found that students enrolled in these programs were more likely to earn high school diplomas, enroll in postsecondary education and earn, on average, 15 more college credits than their non-dual-enrollment peers. More important, some evidence suggested that dual enrollment may increase the likelihood of postsecondary success for disadvantaged students.

Risks. Several risks warrant attention when considering these programs. Key aspects of a high-quality dual enrollment program include ensuring that courses meet high academic standards and are available to a wide range of students. This can be difficult, however. One option for broaden-

Accelerated Learning Options

Middle college high schools are situated on community college campuses, generally serve disadvantaged youth, and offer high school and postsecondary credits.

Early college high schools integrate high school and college programs and allow students to graduate from high school in five years with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree or two years toward a bachelor's degree.

Advanced Placement, a cooperative program between secondary and postsecondary schools, allows high school students to take college-level courses and earn college credit through national exams developed by the College Board.

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is a demanding, two-year high school curriculum that leads to final exams and postsecondary credits that are accepted by universities worldwide.

Tech-Prep, a federally funded program that combines at least two years of secondary and two years of postsecondary education, leads to a postsecondary degree or certificate in a specific field.

ing participation and still maintaining quality is to offer dual enrollment credit for both technical and academic courses. Washington's Running Start Program and Georgia's Technical College Dual Enrollment Program are examples of this option.

Financing dual enrollment programs can be complex. The courses can take place on the high school or college campus or both. Funds for such programs come from the state, postsecondary institutions, school districts and, sometimes, the students themselves. If funding sources are not balanced, however, one entity can be unduly strained to cover the entire cost of the program. Low-income students can be unintentionally shut out of dual enrollment programs if a funding system is not in place that helps cover all or most tuition cost. In Utah, the New Century Scholarship Program exemplifies a statewide dual enrollment policy that distributes costs among program partners, allowing students to participate without incurring personal costs.

The level of state regulation of dual enrollment also is an issue. Limited state-level regulation in favor of institutional control generally allows more program innovation and increased student participation. A vague state dual enrollment policy, however, may result in weak programs and poor student results. Finding the right balance between state policy and institutional control is important for success.

State Action Forty-seven states currently have official policies regarding dual enrollment. Some states have a strong history of state-level dual enrollment policies, while others are in the early phases of developing a policy. Most recent state developments focus on creating new or expanding existing programs to encourage more participation by economically diverse students and those who are in danger of dropping out of high school. New Mexico legislation mandates a statewide "dual credit" program, open to all high school students in the state, that defrays student costs for textbooks and fees, and calls for review of the higher education funding formula to encourage tuition waivers. Nebraska created the Access College Early Scholarship Program to provide financial assistance to low-income high school students for credit courses taken at a qualified postsecondary institution. Maryland established a Dual Enrollment Grant Program that, in cooperation with postsecondary institutions, will provide state funds for high school students who need financial assistance to enroll in postsecondary classes.

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