

Expanding Equity in Dual Credit



State Policy Recommendations



1. Require dual credit partnerships to demonstrate evidence of multiple eligibility measurements

Since students enrolled in dual credit courses are more likely to enroll in college and earn their degree in less time, policymakers and districts should prioritize expanding college coursework experiences for all students, not just a few. Dual credit courses are often the final courses in a sequence of advanced coursework, and entry is often predetermined based on a student's freshman or even 8th grade course selections. For these students, their path to dual credit was decided early. However, research tells us that most students can benefit from dual credit coursework, so districts should be casting a wide net to enroll as many students as possible in dual credit courses rather than weeding students out.

Recent research demonstrates that when the eligibility criteria for accessing college coursework in high school is broadened to include middle-achieving students, their final grades did not differ significantly between the higher-achieving students who self-selected into the course.¹ Indicators that traditionally predict secondary and postsecondary success like grade point average improvement over time, assessment results that indicate proficiency in math and/or reading, and Freshman-On-Track status could be used in combination as eligibility criteria.

While the Dual Credit Quality Act (DCQA) requires partnership agreements to include multiple eligibility requirements, the degree to which this has been implemented is unknown. Illinois should amend the DCQA to require evidence of multiple eligibility measurements in the annual program reviews conducted by the Illinois Community College Board and the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The Education Commission of the States issued a [Promising Practices brief](#) in May 2018 which includes a list of suggested evidence-based eligibility criteria that can help districts implement equitable eligibility requirements.





2. Require public reporting of the real cost of offering dual credit courses by instructional site

The [Illinois Report Card](#) data provides the most inclusive data set for disaggregated dual credit enrollment numbers while the Illinois Community College Board's report, [Dual Credit in the Illinois Community College System](#) supplies enrollment by region, course counts, transfer vs career and technical education credits, and instructional site data. The DCQA also mandates collection and reporting for the following data:

1. Number and description of dual credit courses
2. Faculty teaching dual credit courses and their academic credentials
3. Enrollments in dual credit courses
4. Sites of dual credit offerings

Notably missing from these reports is the cost of dual credit courses.

Stand for Children sent Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to all 48 community college districts in Illinois for cost data related to course-level dual credit enrollment for the most recently available three fiscal years. Specifically, which high schools or school districts the institution partners with to offer dual credit courses, the cost per course and the responsible party (college, school/district, or student), and the teacher credentials per course.

Unfortunately, the data received was highly variable, making comparisons across community college districts or even within community college districts impossible. The biggest takeaway from the FOIA request was that the cost per dual credit course varies wildly and this variance is invisible to students, parents, and school administrators.

A solution is to require community colleges to publicize the real cost of offering dual credit courses by instructional site. This data should be included in the annual Illinois Community College Board report. In addition, high school districts should be required to publicly report both the cost of each dual credit course to the district along with any costs paid by students and families on the Illinois Report Card.





3. Adopt a statewide policy of academic acceleration that uses objective measures to identify proficient students and enroll them in the next most rigorous course

Academic acceleration seeks to reduce systemic barriers to dual credit and advanced classes particularly for those whose potential has been historically overlooked. It uses objective measures to identify proficient students and enroll them in the next most rigorous course in that content area.

Illinois should embrace academic acceleration by adopting a statewide policy to eliminate identification barriers, like statewide proficiency assessments, to identify proficient students and enroll them in the next most rigorous course in that content area. This approach would eliminate identification barriers, allowing students to opt out rather than opt in. Districts may add additional eligibility criteria, like attendance, writing performance, or teacher recommendations, provided they do not create enrollment disparities. This approach would be inclusionary, meaning this policy would not cut students from a program, but instead seek to identify more middle-achieving and diverse students in rigorous coursework.

Washington state recently passed [similar legislation](#) after a pilot program resulted in a dramatic increase in enrollment in advanced courses while maintaining rigor. Most notably, schools enrolled in the pilot academic acceleration program enrolled twice as many Black and Hispanic students as the statewide average.² Currently, only 10% of Illinois students take dual credit courses but nearly 40% of 8th graders demonstrated ELA proficiency on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness, including 28% of Hispanic students who represent only 16% of dual credit students.³

The reach of an academic acceleration approach would extend beyond dual credit courses as it would enroll students in the next most rigorous course available. For some students this would be a dual credit course, for others it may be an AP or IB course, and for others it could be a transitional course. A significant body of research indicates that students of all academic achievement levels can benefit from college prep coursework, whether it be transitional, preparatory like an AP course, or full-fledged dual credit.⁴ An academic acceleration policy would act as a launching pad for students to explore new career pathways, attempt challenging courses without the college price tag, or get a head start on their degree. Giving all students, not just those who know they are college-bound, the opportunity to explore new academic challenges is quintessential to achieving more equitable outcomes for our students.



State Policy Recommendations Continued

¹ Jennifer Zinth and Elisabeth Barnett, “Rethinking Dual Enrollment to Reach More Students”, Education Commission of the States, May 2018,

http://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking_Dual_Enrollment_to_Reach_More_Students.pdf.

² Claudia Rowe, “Gifted programs across Washington leave out black and Latino students—but Federal Way is one model for change”, Seattle Times, April 4, 2017, <https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/gifted-programs-across-washington-leave-out-black-and-latino-students-except-in-federal-way>.

³ Illinois Report Card, 2019, <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com>.

⁴ Gabriela Montell, “Getting To & Through College: The Benefits of Taking Advanced Coursework”, The Education Trust, January 8, 2020,

<https://edtrust.org/the-equity-line/getting-to-through-college-the-benefits-of-taking-advanced-coursework>



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