The Illinois Constitution makes it clear that a “fundamental goal” of the State is the “educational development of all persons to the limits of their capacities” and that the State “shall provide for an efficient system of high quality public educational institutions and services.”¹

An effective, equity-driven strategy to move Illinois closer to this Constitutional goal is to remove the deep disparities in access to college-level coursework by expanding access to dual credit opportunities. Dual credit courses give high school students a jump-start on community and four-year college and the chance for significant tuition savings.

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Nearly half of all Illinois’ high school students are from low-income families but only 28% of dual credit students are from low-income families.²

Over a quarter of Illinois high school students are Hispanic but only 16% of Illinois dual credit students are Hispanic.³

The situation is even more pronounced for Black students, who make up 16% of all Illinois high school students, but only 9% of dual credit students.⁴

The good news is these inequities can be addressed effectively and, to some extent, quite expeditiously in Illinois. With collaboration and determination, Illinois can get there, even in the face of a pandemic.

Some school districts and colleges have built strong, successful models of dual credit partnerships that are replicable.

And there are smart policy opportunities to expand access and remove barriers, such as costs and admissions practices that have been shown to historically disadvantage low-income students and students of color. To keep Illinois education on the road to equity, it is also essential that the evidence-based school formula is funded at adequate levels.

This report provides school districts, higher learning institutions, and policymakers with critical resources and tools to increase the depth and breadth of equitable dual credit programs.
The Case for Dual Credit

Throughout this report, the term "dual credit" refers to high school programs allowing high school students to complete coursework which counts for both high school and college credit. Often taken during a student’s junior or senior year of high school, dual credit courses give students a jumpstart on earning a postsecondary credential and encourage students to continue their education beyond high school.

A high school which offers dual credit coursework forms a partnership with a higher education institution, which must ensure that the course meets college-level rigor and has an appropriately-credentialed teacher. The institution of higher education can be a community college or a four-year college or university.

Dual credit courses can be taught three ways:

- on the high school campus by a qualifying teacher;
- online during traditional classroom time or as independent study;
- or on the college campus taught by college instructors.

All three models are used in dual-credit partnerships in areas of Illinois. Learn how Eastern Illinois University innovatively approaches dual credit models of instruction in the case study, "Re-thinking Dual Credit Partners." (Page 9)

There is compelling research showing that high school students presented with opportunities to access college coursework are more likely to go to and through college. A Texas study found high school students enrolled in college courses are more than twice as likely to enroll in college and go on to earn a college degree.\(^5\) This is an important takeaway for Illinois where nearly 70% of our high school graduates go on to college but only 45% of them earn their degree.\(^6\)

Dual credit courses are often students’ first experience with college-level coursework. Successful completion can give many students the confidence boost needed to continue their studies after high school. For other students, the low price-tag of a dual credit course is an excellent way to explore career pathways or get a jump start on the general education credits required for a postsecondary degree. Read the case studies of Vienna (Page 5), Pontiac (Page 6), and Rockford (Page 7) to learn how these districts have integrated dual credit into their high school curricula.

However, access to dual credit courses is not guaranteed. Students of color or those from low-income families are less likely to enroll in dual credit courses. This is especially problematic as Illinois works to close degree achievement and pay gaps. Read on to learn more about State and district efforts to cap costs and expand access for students.
Standards, Students, and the Model Partnership Agreement

Statewide efforts to improve dual credit affordability and access centers on the Dual Credit Quality Act (DCQA). Originally passed in 2010 and updated in 2018, the DCQA establishes statewide standards for dual credit programs to protect course rigor while expanding access. The DCQA can be thought about in three broad categories: Standards, Students, and the Model Partnership Agreement.

The first, Standards, ensures that dual courses keep college-level rigor by requiring courses to be taught by qualified instructors, uphold the same learning outcomes and content, and provide academic supports similar to college-level courses. Maintaining rigorous standards is critical to ensure dual credits are transferable across institutions. To uphold high standards, the DCQA outlines steps for course approvals, instructor qualifications, and the newly added process for high school instructors to become “interim-qualified instructors”.

Interim-qualified instructors are those who may have a master’s degree, but not in the discipline to be taught; or those currently enrolled in a discipline-specific master’s degree program. This new category of instructors is permitted to teach dual credit courses if they are making steady progress on a professional development plan approved by the partnering high education institution and shared with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

The addition of an interim-qualified instructors category comes at a critical time as Illinois is facing an unprecedented teacher shortage. In 2020 there were nearly 5,000 unfilled teaching positions across the State, double the number of vacancies reported in 2017. The COVID-19 pandemic may further impact teacher vacancies. This dire shortage of teachers means districts are being left to do more with fewer teachers and having enough qualifying instructors remains a significant barrier to dual credit expansion. Embracing interim-qualified instructors allows districts the flexibility to launch dual credit programs with available teaching staff while respecting the quality standards of traditional dual credit coursework.

Next, the DCQA codifies flexible academic standing policies. It permits students to drop dual credit courses within a timeframe without negatively impacting their grade point average (GPA) and students may take unlimited dual credit courses.

One of the most significant and exciting developments since passage of the DCQA took place in 2019. With the help of EdSystems, the ISBE and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) adopted the Model Partnership Agreement (MPA). The MPA is a template agreement for forming a dual-credit partnership between a high school district and an institution of higher learning. Going forward, the MPA is the default contract unless the dual-credit partners otherwise agree. Until the MPA, school districts were fending for themselves – they were responsible for seeking out and negotiating dual credit partnerships.

The piecemeal approach pre-MPA resulted in a patchwork of course costs, eligibility criteria, available instructors, course availability, and delivery methods across the state that must be addressed if Illinois is to advance equity.
Stand for Children, with support from The Analysis Group, conducted a statewide audit of dual credit course costs across Illinois. The audit revealed that where a student lives will determine if they pay hundreds of dollars or thousands of dollars for a dual credit course, or maybe, nothing at all. It was expected that costs to school districts and students would vary dramatically across the state, but the audit found that even within community college districts different high school districts, and subsequently their students, are paying considerably different rates.

The expense of dual credit has at least three potential layers of inequity.

First and foremost, the higher the price tag for families, the less accessible programs are to students.

Second, while some schools shield students from the cost by picking up the tab for dual credit coursework, others cannot afford to do so. For decades, the State distributed education dollars in a manner rated as the most inequitable in the nation.⁸ The result is 1.4 million of the State’s 2 million students attend districts that have less than 80% of the funding they need.⁹

Third, higher education partners sometimes help offset costs for high school districts and students, but they also suffer from structural inequities in State funding: community college funding remains based on the unfair distribution of local property wealth, and public colleges and universities have suffered from significant cuts in State funding after several years of unstable State budgets.

The MPA places caps on dual credit course costs based on the course delivery model. The lowest cost courses are taught at the high school by a qualified district instructor while the costliest courses are taught on the college campus by college faculty. Additionally, the MPA honors the importance of embedding dual credit into the curriculum by further discounting priority courses which are typically general education courses required by most Illinois public and private colleges and universities. These priority courses, as defined by the Illinois Articulation Agreement, can help students get a low-cost start on their college degree and avoid remedial courses once in colleges so maintaining low costs for these foundational courses is critical for expanding equity.

The MPA also establishes the responsible party for course costs, textbooks, and additional fees and requires districts to notify low-income families of applicable waivers and discounts.

The MPA is a critical tool for improving equity by providing a framework for overcoming some of the most common barriers faced by districts and students. For students, the MPA lowers costs and ensures unlimited access. For districts, the MPA offers lower course costs and a strong partnership agreement that simplifies negotiations with institutes of higher learning while protecting rigor and student access.

While tools like the MPA can help districts close equity gaps, they are only effective if districts know they are available to them. To help educators navigate the policies and protections available to them, the Resources and Research section (Page 18) includes a summary of the DCQA, a quick reference MPA course cost table, links to the MPA in full, the IAI course approval criteria, and IBHE faculty credentialing guidance.
Vienna’s Quest for Equitable Access

Across Illinois, 44% of community college students must enroll in at least one remedial course before they are able to take a credit-bearing course in math, reading, or communications.¹⁰ But near the Southern tip of Illinois, half an hour from Paducah, Kentucky, is a district that has defied this trend. At Vienna High School District 133, which educates 386-students, just 3% of its community college-bound graduates enroll in a remedial education class.¹¹

What is their secret? The answer appears to lie in Vienna’s dedication to embedding dual credit programming deeply into every student’s course of study. For Vienna, dual credit courses are not just for the exceptionally gifted students, or for those whose families can pay tuition. They are for nearly every high school senior.

The cornerstone of Vienna’s dual credit policy is schoolwide Accuplacer testing.

Traditionally, students hoping to enroll in a dual credit course complete some type of placement exam, such as Accuplacer, to demonstrate their readiness for the course content. The exam is typically administered on a set date and time on the campus of the partner community college. This approach can be a significant barrier for students without reliable transportation to the community college campus. Schedules may compete with available testing times. Students may simply forget or be unaware of the steps required to sign up for testing. In any case, the result is students can fall through the cracks and miss critical learning opportunities.

Seeing a golden opportunity to enroll more students in dual credit, Superintendent Joshua Stafford took steps to bring the test to Vienna students.

Vienna administers the Accuplacer test to each student, achieving two objectives: creating a schoolwide college-bound culture; and ensuring access to college-level courses to as many eligible students as possible. Students take the test in their classrooms. They know this test will inform which courses they want to pursue in their junior and senior years, so they prepare, they take it seriously, and they support one another. A schoolwide test means all students have the opportunity to access dual credit courses, not just those labeled as gifted during their early academic years or those with favorable teacher recommendations. It helps level the playing field for those who may have personal challenges at home that have made taking prerequisite courses and registering for testing deadlines elusive.

Schoolwide placement testing also enables Vienna to embed college-level coursework into all course sequences. Advanced students are enrolled in dual credit courses their junior and senior year to satisfy their high school graduation requirements and at the same time begin chipping away at their college general education requirements. Less advanced students are enrolled in transitional math and English which fulfill high school graduation requirements and guarantees against the need for remedial courses in college. Embedding dual credit opportunities into the standard curriculum helps students avoid a scattershot approach where students are enrolled into courses that do not support their individual academic and career goals.
Casting a wide net has worked for Vienna -- 45% of all students enroll in dual credit courses, compared to just 10% of students statewide.¹² Their enrollment numbers are significantly more equitable -- 49% of Vienna’s dual credit students come from low-income homes, compared to the statewide rate of 28%.

Listen to Vienna’s Superintendent Joshua Stafford discuss the district’s dual credit success in this Systems Sessions podcast with EdSystems’ Jon Furr and Heather Penczak.

Pontiac’s Equity-Centered Articulation

Located nearly 100 miles south of Chicago along I-55, the small town of Pontiac is making big moves to connect students to life after high school with its dual credit Agricultural program. Pontiac Township High School partnered with their local college, Heartland Community College, to offer dual credit for three courses: Introduction to Animal Science, Introduction to Horticulture, and Introduction to Crop Science. All three courses can be taken at the high school campus for both high school and college credit.

Jesse Faber, an agricultural educator and Future Farmers of America adviser at Pontiac Township High School, says of the program, “Dual credit is important to connect students with postsecondary opportunities and to introduce students to possibilities. With so many careers in need of talented young people, connecting students to programs and degree pathways that lead to careers, such as agriculture, is exceptionally important.”

Establishing a strong partnership with Heartland has been critical to the success of Pontiac’s dual credit program. The Agriculture faculty at both the high school and community college established semi-annual check-ins to share resources, collaborate on the syllabi, share success stories, and address challenges and equity barriers. “These meetings strengthen our partnership by forging relationships between faculty and brings different perspectives together to improve the program,” according to Faber, a primary architect of the program.

At one such meeting, the concern over prerequisites came up. Some faculty had noticed that dedicated agricultural students were progressing through the program only to learn their junior or senior year that they did not meet the eligibility criteria for critical dual credit courses that would give them a jump start on their postsecondary studies. In order to enroll in one of the three agricultural dual credit courses, students had to meet prerequisites in other disciplines like math or English, or travel to Heartland Community College to pass a placement exam. This eligibility criteria presented a significant barrier for students without reliable transportation to make the drive to the Heartland campus. The existing policy also limited students who may not be strong test takers or whose schedules conflicted with the testing dates and times.

Believing that all students can benefit from taking dual credit courses, the faculty at both institutions set to work to break down barriers and create a fully articulated prerequisite course within the Agricultural program. The newly

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**Policy Highlights**

4. Articulate prerequisite courses taught at the high school

5. Establish regular communication channels with partners

“It’s important to maintain a strong channel of communication among partners. Our semi-annual program evaluation provides an opportunity to assess what’s working and change what’s not.”
created introduction course provides a pathway for students to meet prerequisites within the Agricultural program and without having to leave the high school campus. Students can now meet the prerequisites at both schools by completing course work in the program or traveling to the community college to take a placement test.

In the first year of implementing the change, all three dual credit courses have strong enrollment. For other districts looking to expand access to their dual credit programs, Faber advises, “It’s important to maintain a strong channel of communication among partners. Our semi-annual program evaluation provides an opportunity to assess what’s working and change what’s not. Without that check-in, I’m not sure we could have responded to student’s needs so quickly and have the solution to bridge both institutions. Having a team of both high school and community college faculty was the key.”

**Rockford’s Public Safety Pathway**

Rockford School District 205 students interested in a career in public safety have a robust, equitable opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school. All five Rockford high schools offer the Public Safety Pathway, a program of study that includes three courses: Sociology, Intro to Criminal Justice (articulated credit), and Intro to Crime Scene Investigation (dual credit). Students who complete the sequence receive early college credit through Rock Valley College. All courses are taught on their high school campuses with the final course in the sequence taught by Rockford Police Department detectives and lieutenants who bring their real-world experiences to the classroom.

“The Public Safety Pathway serves as a model for the rest of the work we’ve yet to do,” says Bridget French, Executive Director of College & Career Readiness for Rockford Public Schools. “Students are learning in an inquiry-based, flexible setting with real world problems to solve, all while earning college credit.”

There were barriers to overcome in setting up this pathway, and Rockford’s approach provides a playbook to help other districts tackle them.

The first was finding teachers qualified to teach dual credit in a high school setting. Because the courses are Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses, the district was able to leverage their partnership with the Rockford Police Department to find detectives and lieutenants who had recently retired or had a flexible enough schedule that allowed them to teach. Because all of them had over 8,000 hours in the field directly correlated to the CTE content area, they were able to get their CTE Provisional license through the Illinois State Board of Education.¹³

Another barrier was student readiness for the course. Rock Valley College requires students to test at a college reading level on the Accuplacer exam. Rock Valley staff visited each high school to provide study and preparation tips for the exam, and then returned to administer the test during students regularly scheduled dual credit class time.
Approximately half of students did not test at a college reading level, and Rock Valley College recommended those students not continue the program. The school district was hesitant to do so. “Our pushback was grounded in equity,” explains French. “In many instances, the students who did not test college-ready in reading were the students who would benefit from a college credit bearing class the most.” Additionally, the same students who did not test college ready were already reading college-level text and successfully completing assignments. The solution: Students who did not pass the Accuplacer remained in the program and received targeted reading interventions.

French is excited for the future of the program, “Now we have a scenario where all students are getting the support they need to earn college credit while engaging in a robust program of study that connects relevance with rigor.” By meeting students where they are and clearing paths to help them soar, the district hopes the Public Safety pathway will continue to attract students and serve as a bridge between academics and career.

**Elgin Community College’s Dual Credit Advisory Council**

Elgin Community College has embraced dual credit and used its higher-education seat to drive equity in college access among several partner high schools. The college’s [FY 2018-2022 strategic plan](#) is explicit in supporting an increased emphasis and the restructuring of its Division of College Transitions and School Partnerships reflects this equity focus.

The centerpiece of Elgin’s commitment is the Dual Credit Advisory Council it formed in 2019 with 11 public high schools in the college’s district. A school counselor and assistant principal from each of these schools sits on the Council along with Elgin staff and administrators.

The Council has prioritized analyzing its policies and procedures with the intentional purpose of identifying programmatic improvements to increase access and equity.

During its first year, ECC’s Dual Credit Advisory Council completed an analysis of enrollment and student demographic data, reviewed program eligibility policies and practices, and revised communication content and delivery methods.

During its first year, the Council completed an analysis of enrollment and student demographic data, reviewed program eligibility policies and practices, and revised communication content and delivery methods.

The Council works to ensure all dual-credit offerings align with the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships’ standards, which are measurable criteria addressing quality in concurrent enrollment and college provided faculty model programs.

In creating the Council, both the college and school districts prioritized equal representation of stakeholders, and more importantly, grounded the Council’s work in advancing practices and policies dedicated to increasing student participation in dual credit, especially students from underserved communities. Using an equity lens, the Council conducted a comprehensive study of institutional data and practices and, as a result, determined Preliminary SAT (PSAT) scores was a reliable alternative measure of student competency for admission.

**Policy Highlights**

8. Adopt multiple eligibility measures

9. Form an advisory council with other districts
to dual credit programs. The Council advocated for this use of PSAT scores, and Elgin Community College adopted this policy. In fall 2020, the Council will study critical program eligibility requirements, such as the current use of grade point average (GPA), with the intent to eliminate deficit practices associated with the use of GPA to determine a student’s opportunity to participate in dual credit courses.

With the release of the Model Partnership Agreement (MPA), the college and its school districts amended their local agreements to incorporate it into its programming. The Council has been instrumental in implementing new policies and procedures prescribed by the MPA. The need for increased academic advising and counseling has been identified by the Council as a priority. Thus, the MPA will guide the Council to develop new initiatives that will enhance its current advising and counseling resources.

As the Council looks to the future, it is cognizant that the work which lies ahead can bring about significant changes.

**Eastern Illinois University on Rethinking Dual Credit Partners**

Eastern Illinois University (EIU) considers dual credit programming part of their mission to serve the community. A four-year public university located in Charleston, Illinois may seem like an unlikely dual credit partner for districts as far north as Lake Zurich and Arlington Heights, but since the program's founding in 2017, EIU has been partnering with school districts up and down the state to expand their dual credit programs.

EIU has two models of dual credit programming: one serves high school students from smaller nearby Downstate schools and the other serves students farther away. The “Downstate Model” offers students from schools in the surrounding region opportunities to enroll in online courses taught by EIU faculty. Downstate districts, often small and rural, face several unique challenges to expanding dual credit programs. First, rural districts are often located many miles from a community college, making it impractical for students to travel to a community college campus for a single course. Additionally, the ongoing teacher shortage is particularly acute in rural districts and having enough instructors credentialed to teach a dual credit course, especially one that has just one or two interested students, poses a barrier to expansion. The digital Downstate Model helps rural districts overcome these barriers by offering flexible, online courses taught by tenured EIU faculty.
The “Course Coordinator Model” pairs EIU with school districts that are larger and farther away, where a qualified teacher from the school provides the instruction and EIU faculty reviews the curriculum to ensure rigorous content. While this delivery model relies on high school faculty for instruction, EIU is no less an engaged partner. EIU case coordinators travel to the district for in-person observations and work closely with district-based program administrators to develop the courses. Each district determines its own eligibility criteria for students. EIU’s hands-on approach to dual credit engages students and faculty. Dual Credit Day is an open invitation for any dual credit students to visit EIU to experience campus life. The result of all this engagement and collaboration has been stronger community partnerships and new relationships with cohorts of students who may not have connected with EIU before. EIU’s enrollment numbers suggest this strategy is working. EIU boosted both spring and fall enrollments in the 2019-2020 school year which build on several years of growth.¹⁴

EIU Provost Dr. Jay Gatrell says dual credit programs serve as a strategic on-ramp for students. “Students can learn all that EIU has to offer. Many of our online dual credit courses are taught by tenured professors, experts in the field, and because we’re a university we’re able to offer classes you might not typically see in traditional dual credit courses.”

EIU is currently hiring to fill an administrative position dedicated to dual credit programming for the first time. This individual will manage the partnerships with school districts and accreditation compliance issues. The recent changes to the Dual Credit Quality Act allow provisional dual credit licensure for high school teachers who do not have the required 18-hours content-area graduate credits, but so far, no high school has approached EIU about allowing such a teacher to teach dual credit.

However, Dr. Gatrell says he would not have a problem working with a partner high school to develop a plan and enable that teacher to teach dual credit. “Since it’s the law, we have an obligation to follow the public interest. If the instructor, district, and postsecondary partner are working together in good faith to get an instructor credentialled then I don’t think the Higher Learning Commission is going to jeopardize anyone’s accreditation status over that.”

In the meantime, EIU’s dual credit program is moving full steam ahead. By re-thinking tradition, school districts across Illinois have opened doors to dual credit to hundreds of students by partnering with this four-year university. For EIU, dual credit is about bringing equitable access to college-level courses for students, building pipelines of high schoolers to access higher education. By the looks of it, this approach is working for all involved. This approach may prove to be particularly pragmatic in the pandemic era in which school districts and higher education are grappling with different distance-learning models.

**Policy Highlights**

10. Consider non-traditional partners and delivery models

11. Prepare teachers with Professional Development Plans

"Many of our online dual credit courses are taught by tenured professors, experts in the field, and because we’re a university we’re able to offer classes you might not typically see in traditional dual credit courses."

EXPANDING EQUITY IN DUAL CREDIT
District Policy Recommendations

1. Leverage the Model Partnership Agreement
Illinois has a newly created Model Partnership Agreement (MPA) that can help schools and community colleges as they hammer out their dual credit arrangements. Utilizing the MPA as the foundation for a dual credit partnership is an equitable strategy for increasing access through course cost caps and protections for students while maintaining course quality through rigorous standards.

2. Offer schoolwide placement testing
If a placement test is required for students to enroll in dual credit, providing the test on-site in the high school is convenient and accessible for students and establishes a school culture that values dual credit. Vienna High School District 133 uses school wide Accuplacer testing to remove barriers to access such as scheduling, transportation, or even simply knowing that the test is required for dual credit courses.

3. Embed dual credit opportunities in the curriculum
To receive a high school diploma in Illinois, students must meet certain graduation requirements, such as four years of English and three years of Math. Embedding dual credit into course sequence expands opportunities for every student. All roads lead to some college credit in Vienna High School District 133, which embeds dual credit or transitional courses into all course sequences, ensuring each and every student graduates college ready.

4. Articulate prerequisite courses taught at the high school
If a dual credit course requires a prerequisite, communicating that to students early in their high school career as they map out their course schedules is important to increase access. Pontiac Township High School students can meet the prerequisites for high school and college courses by completing course work in the pathway or traveling to the community college to take a placement test.
5. Establish regular communication channels with partners
Developing a process for communicating among partners is the first step in building a successful partnership built on a foundation of continuous improvement. Pontiac Township High School and Heartland Community College use semi-annual check-ins to conduct program reviews and discuss innovative ideas rooted in practice.

6. Provide targeted supports
Research and practice tell us that students who may not meet certain proficiency benchmarks can still be successful in dual credit courses, so it is vital to meet students where they are in order to expand access to this important courses. Rather than requiring students meet a certain benchmark to be eligible for a dual credit course, Rockford Public School District 205 provides targeted supports to help students reach proficiency in key subject areas.

7. Embed dual credit into CTE pathways
Dual credit courses are often only offered in traditional academic subjects like English or the sciences but offering dual credit CTE courses not only offers students a chance at college credit while in high school but helps solidify the link between academics and careers. Rockford Public School District 205 embeds dual credit courses into CTE and traditional academic pathways because it knows that most students will need some college to land a job after high school.

8. Adopt multiple eligibility measures
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. Using program data and research-based best practices, Elgin Community College is adopting multiple eligibility measures to implement more inclusive eligibility practices.
9. Form an advisory council with other districts
While communication between partners is key for a successful dual credit program, consider collaborating with institutions and districts outside of your partnership to share best practices, discuss barriers, and pool resources. To support a model of continuous improvement, Elgin Community College created the Dual Credit Advisory Council, comprised of assistant principals and counselors from each partnering district. Rather than putting each partnership in a silo, Elgin continues to bring all of its partners together to solve problems and improve equity.

10. Consider non-traditional partners and delivery models
Community colleges are the primary partners for high schools seeking to offer dual credit, but four-year college and universities are also standing up to serve students. Eastern Illinois University offers two models of dual credit delivery, one online and one at the high school campus, to provide students with unique dual credit courses and a chance to see themselves as college students during their visit to the Eastern Illinois University campus.

11. Prepare teachers with professional development plans
Teacher credentialing is a significant, and growing, obstacle to dual credit, but a new provision of the Dual Credit Quality Act allows high schools and higher education partners to provide four-year professional development plans to teachers who want to earn the graduate credits they need to be fully qualified. Eastern Illinois University knows that leveraging this opportunity can be a win-win-win: more dual credit options for students, high-quality professional development for teachers, and more graduate students enrolled in college.
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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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 collegebound, the opportunity to explore new academic challenges is quintessential to achieving more equitable outcomes for our students.
Endnotes

¹ Constitution of the State of Illinois, Article X, Section 1.
Resources

- Dual Credit Quality Act
- Dual Credit Quality Act Summary
- Model Partnership Agreement
- Illinois Articulation Initiative course approval criteria
- Faculty credentialing guidance
- Dual Credit in the Illinois Community College System: 2018
- Illinois Report Card
- Cost Data Obtained through Stand for Children's Freedom of Information Request
- Stand for Children Washington Academic Acceleration Resource Guide

Research

- Unlocking Potential: A State Policy Roadmap for Equity & Quality in College in High School Programs
- Rethinking Dual Enrollment to Reach More Students
- Funding for Equity: Designing State Dual Enrollment Funding Models to Close Equity Gaps
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Stand for Children is a non-profit education advocacy organization focused on ensuring all students receive a high-quality, relevant education, especially those whose boundless potential is overlooked and under-tapped because of their skin color, zip code, first language, or disability. We make an impact by:

- Partnering with parents to support their children’s education journey and become strong advocates.
- Advocating for proven policies and funding primarily focused on helping students reach the make-or-break milestones of: (i) reading well by the end of third grade, and (ii) graduating from high school ready for college, career training, or a career.
- Ensuring the changes we fight for reach classrooms and directly support students.