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DUAL ENROLLMENT COURSE CONTENT AND INSTRUCTOR QUALITY

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Knowing that the majority of dual enrollment courses are taught on high school campuses by high school instructors, it is critical that mechanisms are in place to ensure the quality of the curriculum and the many components surrounding the curriculum – including textbooks, learning outcomes, course syllabuses, assignments, grading practices, periodic assessments and final exams, etc. It is also essential that colleges ensure high school instructors have a clear grounding in the curriculum and these course components, and have the knowledge and skills necessary to deliver postsecondary-level content.

“Thirty-seven states have policies setting expectations for dual enrollment course content and instructor quality.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The majority of dual enrollment courses today are delivered by high school instructors on high school campuses. This makes it critical for states to ensure that course content and instructor qualifications align with those for traditional postsecondary courses.

Policies fall across a wide spectrum, with those at one end placing all authority for ensuring course content and instructor quality with postsecondary institutions. Policies at the other end of the spectrum encourage or require postsecondary programs providing dual enrollment courses taught by high school instructors to be accredited by the NACEP.

States have taken four distinct approaches within this spectrum, each with its potential benefits and drawbacks.



Dual enrollment courses are most commonly delivered on high school campuses instead of at postsecondary institutions. According to the most recent data from the National Center on Education Statistics (NCES), public high school students in academically oriented dual enrollment courses are, on average, 10 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in those courses on a secondary school campus than on a postsecondary campus – 62 percent vs. 52 percent. For career/technical education (CTE) dual enrollment courses, the odds of taking a course at the high school as opposed to a postsecondary campus are even greater – 42 percent vs. 25 percent.¹

This report explores some of the reasons for the increase in delivery of dual enrollment courses at high schools, and the importance of ensuring course and instructor quality. The report then examines four distinct state approaches to ensuring dual enrollment course and instructor quality, noting the potential benefits and tradeoffs of each.

Laying the Context

As might be expected, high schools in towns and rural areas are slightly more likely than urban and suburban high schools to report dually enrolled students taking courses at the high school.² Nationally, 61 percent of academically oriented dual enrollment courses and 67 percent of CTE dual enrollment courses taught at high schools are led *only* by the high school teacher. Just 11 percent and 14 percent of academically focused and CTE courses at high schools, respectively, are taught by postsecondary faculty.³

Although the benefits of students taking dual enrollment courses on postsecondary campuses might seem obvious – experiencing a “real” college campus and classroom environment, in-person access to campus libraries, labs and other facilities, as well as to student advising and other support services – the logistical challenges of taking a course on a college campus can place dual enrollment courses out of reach for some students.

These logistical challenges present themselves in both time and money, and can’t be solved by simply requiring students to take courses at postsecondary institutions. In rural areas, the closest postsecondary campus may be an hour’s drive away, or more. Transportation costs, which are typically not covered by states, must then be borne by students. Fifty-seven percent of high schools offering dual enrollment courses in the 2010-11 study reported transportation was needed for at least some courses, and that parents/students shouldered some or all of the transportation expense for 86 percent of these courses.⁴ Even in areas where transportation times or costs are minimal, leaving the high school campus during the day poses scheduling challenges both for the student’s other high school courses as well as for any extracurricular, employment or familial obligations.

The goal of dual enrollment – and one of the drivers of significant growth in dual enrollment participation in recent years – is to provide high school students with an authentic college course experience resulting in transferable college credit and, ideally, to shorten the time to and cost of postsecondary degree completion. However, in the absence of policies to safeguard the quality of dual enrollment courses and instructors, those courses delivered in high schools by high school instructors risk not delivering on the potential of dual enrollment. Inconsistencies in dual enrollment course quality may be one contributing factor to the relatively limited number of states ensuring that dual enrollment courses transfer statewide – just 22 states require all public postsecondary institutions to accept college credits earned through dual enrollment programs.⁵

Thirty-seven states have policies setting expectations for dual enrollment course content and instructor quality.⁶ These policies span a broad spectrum for the level of authority for course oversight set in state policy. At one end of the spectrum are entirely local control approaches placing all responsibility for course and instructor quality with postsecondary institutions (and potentially also with K-12 partners).

On the other end are policies that require programs to adhere to very specific quality control criteria, including calling for specific faculty credentials, instructor professional development, course syllabi reviews, site visits to classrooms, end-of-course evaluations and other measures.

Approach 1: Local control – Postsecondary institution as arbiter

Under this approach, which falls at one end of the spectrum in establishing authority for determining dual enrollment course and instructor quality, state policy is silent on the requirements that dual enrollment courses or instructors must meet, and places responsibility for setting course and instructor quality with the partnering postsecondary institution.

Colorado's dual enrollment policy applies this mode of quality assurance. State statute provides, "If a qualified student concurrently enrolls in a course offered by an institution of higher education, the institution shall be responsible for course content, placement of the student in the course, and the quality of instruction."⁷

Upside: This approach allows freedom to postsecondary institutions to establish their own instructional requirements and procedures for ensuring their curriculum content is delivered. This may build faculty buy-in and support for postsecondary institutions to participate in dual enrollment partnerships, while ensuring that courses adhere to quality and instructor requirements set by regional postsecondary accrediting bodies.

Downside: Since policy is silent on the role of the K-12 partner in arbitrating course content and instructor qualifications, districts or schools may be discouraged from partnering with entities that set more challenging programmatic requirements than other available postsecondary partners, leading to a race to the bottom.

Approach 2: Moderated local control – K-12/postsecondary agreement

Under this approach, taken in a handful of states, state policy directs that an agreement between a postsecondary institution and a K-12 school or district establish course and instructor requirements, but does not specify the metrics that the course or instructors must meet.

For example, **Delaware** requires all dual enrollment courses to be governed by an Articulation Agreement between the postsecondary institution and the district or school that sets forth "student eligibility and participation requirements, the course syllabus, the expected course competencies, grading policy, attendance policy, and conditions for awarding Dual Credit." Under the same policy, a dual enrollment instructor is an individual meeting the requirements of a faculty or adjunct faculty set by the postsecondary institution.⁸

Similarly, provisions governing partnerships between **Texas** public two-year institutions and secondary schools require a partnership agreement between a secondary school and college to be approved. Any partnership agreement must include, among other provisions, student eligibility requirements, faculty qualifications, provision of student learning and support services, eligible courses and grading criteria.⁹

Upside: Both this approach and the entirely postsecondary-driven local control method in Approach 1 may result in equally rigorous course and instructor requirements. However, including the K-12 partner in establishing course and instructor expectations may enhance the K-12 partner's buy-in and support, helping them feel like an "equal partner" in providing high-quality dual enrollment opportunities.

Downside: States must carefully consider, in the interest of student access and program quality, which dual enrollment policies should be set statewide versus those that may be left to local partnerships (e.g., instructor qualifications, grading practices, etc.) For example, establishing course prerequisites entirely at the local level may result in widely varying access to similar courses across the state, with students under one partnership with basic eligibility thresholds accessing far more courses of a similar rigor than students under another partnership setting more stringent eligibility requirements.

Approach 3: Adopting NACEP standards – or a variation thereof

The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) is a membership organization of K-12 and postsecondary providers of concurrent enrollment, defined by NACEP as programs in which a high school student enrolls in a college-credit-bearing course taught by a postsecondary-approved high school instructor. (Some state policies use the term “concurrent enrollment” to apply to other dual enrollment program arrangements.)¹⁰ NACEP has developed 17 program standards grouped in five categories – curriculum, faculty, student, assessment and evaluation (see Appendix A). An applicant concurrent enrollment partnership program must demonstrate evidence of meeting these standards to be awarded NACEP Accreditation – a type of “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval” for dual enrollment programs offered in high schools by high school instructors.

In an effort to both ensure program quality and a degree of consistency of rigor across programs statewide, eight states or statewide systems of colleges and universities – **Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Montana, Utah** and **Washington** – have either wholesale adopted the NACEP Standards into state policy, or adopted language closely modeled after the NACEP standards.¹¹

In other words, statute, regulations or other policy documents in these states establish the expectation that dual enrollment programs offered in high schools meet the standards established by NACEP or similar ones, although not requiring postsecondary partnerships to undergo the formal NACEP accreditation process.

For instance, the Idaho State Board of Education’s “Dual Credit Standards for Students Enrolled in Courses Taught at the High School” are the NACEP standards word for word, and are grouped under the same five categories as the original NACEP language.¹² Meanwhile, Illinois standards set in statute and regulation are similar to but do not entirely mirror the NACEP standards for curriculum, instructors, assessment, etc.¹³

Upside: The NACEP standards are thoughtful, rigorous standards that, if faithfully applied, should result in authentic college courses being offered in high schools. The NACEP standards also steer clear of student eligibility requirements – age, grade level, GPA, high school test scores, letters of recommendation, etc. – that may be more reflective of a student’s engagement (or lack thereof) in the high school environment than his/her ability to succeed in college-level coursework. Rather, the NACEP standards focus on establishing college faculty ownership and academic oversight over course content and instructors and are flexible enough to adapt to a wide range of institutions.

Downside: The NACEP standards are rigorous, and in some areas are prescriptive on how a college or university should go about conducting academic oversight. For example, the curriculum standards call for “faculty site visits [to] ensure that college/university courses offered through the CEP (Concurrent Enrollment Partnership) are the same as the courses offered on campus.” The faculty standards set the expectation that, among other criteria, “The college/university provides new CEP instructors with discipline-specific training and orientation regarding, but not limited to, course curriculum, assessment criteria, pedagogy, course philosophy and administrative responsibilities and procedures prior to the instructor teaching the course.” The faculty standards also expect CEPs to deliver “annual discipline-specific professional development activities and ongoing collegial interaction to address course content, course delivery, assessment, evaluation, and/or research and development in the field” – and ensure CEP teacher participation.

As a result, some high schools, districts or postsecondary institutions may argue that more funding is needed for dual enrollment programs to commit sufficient faculty and administrative resources to meet these additional academic oversight requirements. Regardless of supplemental funding, some K-12 or postsecondary partners may view these requirements as overly prescriptive and seek to discontinue dual enrollment programs that must adhere to these standards.

Approach 4: Requiring or encouraging NACEP accreditation

Recognizing the potential benefits to adhering to NACEP Standards, but also recognizing that some programs that consider themselves aligned to the standards may in reality not be meeting the standards, six states or statewide systems of colleges – **Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Oregon** and **South Dakota** – have policies to encourage or require postsecondary programs providing dual enrollment courses offered by high school instructors to be NACEP accredited.¹⁴

Policies in these states fall into two categories. In Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Oregon and South Dakota, programs must undergo NACEP accreditation or state review. For example, Indiana statute provides, “A state educational institution or campus of a state educational institution that offers concurrent college courses in liberal arts, professional, or career and technical disciplines must be either: (1) accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships; or (2) approved by the commission for higher education.”¹⁵

In an alternative approach, Minnesota ties NACEP accreditation (or comparable standards or state approval) to district receipt of state aid. Statute clarifies, “districts only are eligible for aid if the college or university concurrent enrollment courses offered by the district are accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnership[s], in the process of being accredited, or are shown by clear evidence to be of comparable standard to accredited courses, or are technical courses within a recognized career and technical education program of study approved by the commissioner of education and the chancellor of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities.”¹⁶

The same upsides and downsides to this approach would apply to those raised in Approach 4 – with the additional considerations that NACEP Accreditation involves modest accreditation intent filing and processing fees, time devoted to self-study, collecting evidence and preparing documentation, and that programs must apply for re-accreditation after six years of earning accreditation.¹⁷

Conclusion

This brief is not intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of policy issues impacting dual enrollment course and instructor quality. Further issues remain:

- ◆ Many high school instructors do not possess the master’s level coursework or other qualifications necessary to lead dual enrollment courses. Getting high school instructors qualified to teach dual enrollment courses can pose financial and logistical challenges, but particularly for high school teachers in rural areas. ECS’ 2014 policy brief, [Dual enrollment: A strategy to improve college-going and college completion among rural students](#), provides examples of state approaches to assist and incentivize high school instructors to complete the advanced coursework necessary to be eligible to teach dual enrollment courses.
- ◆ Course and instructor quality metrics are the “what” of oversight. What are the “how” of oversight (i.e., program approval, periodic program reviews, student outcome analysis, regular collegial meetings, course approvals, review of district/college agreements, and annual reporting)? And what are the benefits and potential drawbacks of involving various stakeholders in the review process?
- ◆ What is the role of regional accrediting bodies in establishing instructor qualifications for postsecondary institutions, and what are the implications for dual enrollment policy?

To address the fact that the majority of dual enrollment courses are taken in high schools and taught by high school instructors, states policies should deliver the message that dual enrollment courses and instructor qualifications should mirror those of traditional postsecondary courses. States must weigh the desirable with the feasible, with the end goal of ensuring that any course awarding high school and college credit truly prepares students for expectations upon postsecondary matriculation and entry into the workforce.

Appendix

NACEP Concurrent Enrollment Partnership Standards

Curriculum

Curriculum 1 (C1)	Courses administered through a CEP are college/university catalogued courses with the same departmental designations, course descriptions, numbers, titles, and credits.
Curriculum 2 (C2)	College/university courses administered through a CEP reflect the pedagogical, theoretical and philosophical orientation of the sponsoring college/university departments.
Curriculum 3 (C3)	Faculty site visits ensure that college/university courses offered through the CEP are the same as the courses offered on campus.

NACEP Concurrent Enrollment Partnership Standards

Faculty

Faculty 1 (F1)	CEP instructors are approved by the respective college/university academic department and meet the academic department's requirements for teaching the college/university courses.
Faculty 2 (F2)	The college/university provides new CEP instructors with discipline-specific training and orientation regarding, but not limited to, course curriculum, assessment criteria, pedagogy, course philosophy and administrative responsibilities and procedures prior to the instructor teaching the course.
Faculty 3 (F3)	The CEP provides annual discipline-specific professional development activities and ongoing collegial interaction to address course content, course delivery, assessment, evaluation, and/or research and development in the field. The CEP ensures CEP instructor participation.
Faculty 4 (F4)	CEP procedures address instructor non-compliance with the college/university's expectations for courses offered through the CEP (for example, non-participation in CEP training and/or activities).

NACEP Concurrent Enrollment Partnership Standards

Student

Student 1 (S1)	The college/university officially registers or admits CEP students as degree-seeking, non-degree seeking, or non-matriculated students of the college/university and records courses administered through a CEP on official college/university transcripts.
Student 2 (S2)	The CEP ensures its students meet the course prerequisites of the college/university.
Student 3 (S3)	The CEP provides students and schools with a comprehensive publication that outlines rights and responsibilities of enrolled college/university students.

NACEP Concurrent Enrollment Partnership Standards**Assessment**

Assessment 1 (A1)	CEP students are held to the same standards of achievement as those expected of students in on campus sections.
Assessment 2 (A2)	The college/university ensures that CEP students are held to the same grading standards as those expected of students in on campus sections.
Assessment 3 (A3)	CEP students are assessed using the same methods (e.g., papers, portfolios, quizzes, labs, etc.) as students in on campus sections.

NACEP Concurrent Enrollment Partnership Standards**Program Evaluation**

Evaluation 1 (E1)	The CEP conducts end-of-term student university/college course evaluations for each course section offered through the CEP.
Evaluation 2 (E2)	The CEP conducts an annual survey of CEP alumni who are one year out of high school. Survey includes NACEP essential questions (additional questions may be used). Methodology includes one follow-up contact with non-respondents. Qualified institutional evaluator/researcher collaborates with the CEP to develop the survey and analyze the data.
Evaluation 3 (E3)	The CEP conducts a survey of CEP alumni who are four years out of high school at least once every three years. Survey includes NACEP essential questions (additional questions may be used). Methodology includes one follow-up contact with non-respondents. Qualified institutional evaluator/researcher collaborates with the CEP to develop the survey and analyze the data.
Evaluation 4 (E4)	The CEP conducts surveys of participating high school instructors, principals, and guidance counselors at least once every three years. Survey includes NACEP essential questions (additional questions may be used). Methodology includes one follow-up contact with non-respondents. Qualified institutional evaluator/researcher collaborates with the CEP to develop the survey and analyze the data.

Source: National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, *National Concurrent Enrollment Partnership Standards*, 2009, <http://nacep.org/docs/standards/NACEP-Standards-2011.pdf>.

ENDNOTES

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- 3 Ibid., Table 14
- 4 Ibid., Table 8
- 5 Jennifer Dounay Zinth, *Dual Enrollment: Public Postsecondary Institutions Required to Accept Credits* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, December 2013), <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuestRT?Rep=DE1314> (accessed January 6, 2015).
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- 8 14 Del. Admin. Code 506
- 9 Tex. Admin. Code tit. 19, § 9.144(b)
- 10 National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, *What Is Concurrent Enrollment?* (n.d.), <http://www.nacep.org/about-nacep/what-is-concurrent-enrollment/> (accessed January 6, 2015).
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- 12 Idaho State Board of Education, *Governing Policies and Procedures*, Section III, "Postsecondary Affairs," Subsection Y, "Advanced Opportunities," (June 2012), http://www.boardofed.idaho.gov/policies/documents/policies/iii/iiiy_advanced_opportunities_0612.pdf (accessed January 15, 2015).
- 13 110 ILCS 27/20; 23 Ill. Adm. Code 1501.507(b)(11)
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- 15 IC 21-43-4-19.2
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- 17 National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, "Accreditation FAQ (n.d.)," <http://www.nacep.org/accreditation/accreditation-faq/> (accessed January 6, 2015).

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