

Executive Summary

Excerpted From: Pathways to College Access to Success

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education

This report looks at the ways that credit-based transition programs (CBTPs) may help middle- and low-achieving students enter and succeed in college. It highlights promising practices used by CBTPs to help students who might have been considered noncollege-bound prepare for college credit course work. The report also discusses the challenges that credit-based transition programs face when trying to include such students.

This report is the final report from the Accelerating Student Success Through Credit-Based Transition Programs study, which was initiated by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) in the fall of 2003. The goal of the study is to better understand the characteristics of credit-based transition programs (CBTPs) and the students they serve. These programs, such as Tech-Prep, dual or concurrent enrollment, International Baccalaureate (IB) and Middle College High School (MCHS), allow high school students to take college-level classes and earn college credit. They sometimes also provide services to support the main aspects of the high school-to-college transition.

CBTPs are widespread and interest in them by policymakers, educators, parents, and students has increased in recent years. In addition, while these programs are not new, the idea that they should be accessible to a broader range of students is a new approach. In the past, CBTPs enrolled primarily academically proficient and high-achieving students. Today, however, a growing number of policymakers,

education reform groups, and researchers argue that middle- and even low-achieving high school students may benefit from participation in these programs.

Yet, despite their popularity nationwide, there is limited research-based information on CBTPs, particularly those programs that include a broad range of students. The research for this report was conducted in the spring and fall of 2004. Case studies were undertaken in five states—California, Iowa, Minnesota, New York, and Texas. Two dual enrollment programs, an MCHS, an International Baccalaureate program, and a Tech-Prep program were studied.

The first section of the report describes the sites and examines some of the ways in which contextual features influence program implementation. The report then highlights findings regarding four key program features—student recruitment and selection processes; curriculum; support services; and data collection and use. For each feature, the researchers investigated the current practices of the case study sites, identified those practices that seemed most promising in meeting the needs of middle- and low-achieving students, and identified barriers to implementing them. Readers should note that the data reflect program practices at the time the research was conducted in the spring and fall of 2004. In addition, in order to give the study participants anonymity, the specific research sites were given pseudonyms. When given permission, the name of the general program is used.

Key Findings

Student Recruitment and Selection

At the sites studied, student recruitment is typically done informally. The result is that students in CBTPs tend to be motivated, mature, and responsible. In addition, some sites are becoming more selective because of conflict with the sponsoring postsecondary partner over unprepared or disruptive students. Some sites set admissions requirements or select only some students into the program. Other sites have no such requirements, and students need only to sign up for the CBTP to participate. Programs without formal admissions requirements can still pose informal barriers to admissions. For example, relying on word-of-mouth to inform students about the program does not maximize knowledge about the program among the high schools' student bodies as a whole. Open participation does not necessarily ensure broad access.

- In order to ensure that all students—including those not usually seen as college-bound—learn about the program and have the opportunity to enroll, programs should initiate formal recruitment strategies involving middle school and high school guidance counselors and parents, as well as teachers.

Curriculum

CBTP course work falls into three categories: high school course work, which meets graduation requirements but also may give students the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college-level

classes; developmental course work, which is explicitly designed to prepare students for the demands of college-level work; and, college credit course work. These courses may be organized into a curricular pathway, a clear route moving students from one level of course work to another. Developmental course work and the presence of curricular pathways help ensure that students from a range of academic backgrounds are able to participate in the CBTP. Creating these pathways and helping students take advantage of them are often challenging for programs, however, because they require high schools and colleges to work together closely.

- In order to maximize the range of students participating in CBTPs, programs should implement clear curricular pathways. Pathways should include high school courses aligned with college admissions requirements, and developmental course work leading to college credit courses. These pathways should be clearly communicated to students.

Support Services

Nonacademic as well as academic support services are essential in helping students understand and meet the demands of a postsecondary environment. This is particularly important for students who have previously not been successful in school. In general, services vary along two dimensions. They may vary in their sponsor, meaning whether they are offered by the high school, by the college, or through a collaboration. They also may vary in their content, for example whether services provide academic support, general personal support, or specific college-preparatory activities, such as assistance with college applica-

tions or financial aid. Services offered through collaboration often are more cohesive and tailored to students' needs.

- Students in CBTPs should ideally have access to both high school- and college-sponsored services, as well as customized services that are developed collaboratively by the institutional partners.

Data Collection and Use; Perceived Benefits of the Programs

Most sites do not have systematic data collection procedures, and most of the data available at the sites indicate short-term outcomes, making program evaluation difficult. There is little data sharing between high school and college partners, and many sites lack staff time and knowledge to collect and use data effectively. Despite these limitations, study participants do indicate that there are three primary benefits to students who participate in CBTPs: the opportunity to earn free college credit, gaining "a taste" of college, and increased confidence in their academic abilities.

- Perceived benefits are not yet supported by evaluation research. Programs should engage in data collection in order to confirm that students, particularly middle- and low-achieving students, do achieve these outcomes from their program participation.

Recommendations for Policymakers, Practitioners, and Researchers

The data indicate that three broad areas should be addressed by programs and policymakers seeking to help middle- and low-achieving students enroll and be successful in CBTPs: student access, institutional collaboration, and data collection for program evaluation.

Broad access to CBTPs should be encouraged by:

- Developing multiple ways to ensure that all students—regardless of academic background and level of motivation—learn about the CBTP;
- Developing a program culture that is supportive of and encourages students from different backgrounds and academic levels to participate; and
- Structuring the program and the curriculum with an eye towards increasing access, such as by creating developmental sequences of courses.

Policymakers can support programs in these efforts by providing incentives for programs that enroll middle- and low-achieving students.

Collaborative relationships should be encouraged by:

- Clearly establishing the roles and benefits for each institution in the partnership,
- Supporting broader integration between the secondary and postsecondary sectors, and
- Simplifying the credit earning and credit transfer process.

Policymakers have a strong role to play. They can compel the two institutional sectors to rethink and align their standards, curriculum, and assessment practices. Aligning high school graduation requirements with college entrance requirements is an important first step. Articulation of high school with college course work also would help students transitioning to college know that they are prepared. Policymakers also should support dual credit programs, in which students receive high school and college credit for their program course work, as opposed to receiving one type of credit or the other.

Practitioners should work with researchers to collect outcomes data that can be used for outcomes analyses. Policymakers should support outcomes analyses that begin with students' performance prior to program participa-

tion, include comparison groups, and follow students through college matriculation and graduation.

In order to assist researchers in their efforts to evaluate the outcomes of CBTPs, the report presents a conceptual model. The model suggests ways that program features may work together in order to promote the success of middle- and low-

achieving students as they make the transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Future research should test the model.

The findings from the Accelerating Student Success Through Credit-Based Transitions Program study lend credence to the enthusiasm many policymakers and educators

have for CBTPs. CBTPs have the potential to help a wide range of students, not only the most academically advanced, but also the middle- to low-achieving students, become prepared for postsecondary education.

Exhibit 1. Features of Credit-Based Transition Programs Case Study Sites

Case Site Name (Pseudonym)	Type of Program	Case Site Partners	State	Is there a state policy applicable to the program?	Does the program offer Dual credit?	School Demographics (2003-04)	Program Admissions Requirements?	Location of College Classes
Southern California Middle College High School	Middle College High School	Secondary Partner: Southern California Middle College High School Post-secondary Partner: California Community College	California	Yes	Yes	Total High School/Program Enrollment: 330 FRL ¹ : 75% Racial/Ethnic Comp: Afr-Am: 45% Hispanic: 55%	Yes	College
Metropolitan Counties, Iowa Dual Enrollment	Dual Enrollment	Secondary Partner: Rural High School Post-secondary Partner: Iowa Community College Academy: Nursing Academy Hospital Partner: Regional Medical Center	Iowa	Yes	Yes	Total High School Enrollment- 400 FRL: 18% Racial/Ethnic Comp: White: 95% Afr-Am or Hispanic: 5%	No	Hospital Partner or College

¹ FRL = Eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Exhibit 1, continued.

Case Site Name (Pseudonym)	Type of Program	Case Site Partners	State	Is there a state policy applicable to the program?	Does the program offer Dual credit?	School Demographics (2003-04)	Program Admissions Requirements?	Location of College Classes
Minnesota International Baccalaureate	International Baccalaureate	Secondary Partner: Minnesota International Baccalaureate Post-secondary Partner: None	Minnesota	Yes	Yes (but not automatic)	Total High School Enrollment: 1,415 IB Program Enrollment: 692 FRL ¹ : 45% ELL ² : 10% Racial/Ethnic Comp: White: 75% Afr-Am or Hispanic: 10% Asian: 15%	No	High School
New York City Dual Enrollment	Dual Enrollment	Secondary Partner: New York City High School Post-secondary Partner: New York Community College	New York	No	No	Total High School Enrollment: 3,255 FRL: 23% ELL: 14% Racial/Ethnic Comp: White ³ : 45% Afr-Am: 11% Hispanic: 21% Asian: 22%	Yes for college-credit courses No for developmental courses	High School

¹ FRL = Eligible for free and reduced lunch.

² ELL = English Language Learners

³ Includes immigrants of former Soviet states.

Exhibit 1, continued

Case Site Name (Pseudonym)	Type of Program	Case Site Partners	State	Is there state policy applicable to the program?	Does the program offer Dual credit?	School Demographics (2003-04)	Program Admissions Requirements?	Location of College Classes
Dallas, Texas Tech-Prep Program	Tech-Prep	Secondary Partner: Dallas Tech-Prep High School Post-secondary Partner: Texas Community College Consortium: The Global EDGE Tech Prep Consortium	Texas	Yes	Yes (but not automatic)	Total High School Enroll: 1,640 Racial/Ethnic Comp: White: 82% Afr-Am: 5% Hispanic: 12%	No	High School

This executive summary was reprinted from: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Pathways to College: Access and Success, Washington, D.C., 2005. The report is available in its entirety at: www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cclo/cbtrans/index.html.