Pennsylvania
State Board of Higher Education

State Policy Approaches to Support Effective Dual Enrollment

A Review of Research and Evidence-Based Best Practices

September 2026

Executive Summary

The terms dual enrollment and dual credit typically refer to policies and practices that allow high school students to enroll in college-level courses and earn college credit. While there is wide variation in how these programs operate across states, when effective, dual enrollment can increase college enrollment, decrease the time and money needed to obtain a postsecondary credential, and help fill critical workforce needs.

This brief presents robust research on the effectiveness of dual enrollment, identifies program parameters and funding strategies that increase impact, and provides examples of how leading states fund and utilize this tool effectively.

Introduction

High school dual enrollment is widespread and growing across states, and is especially prevalent at community colleges. Indeed, nearly 2.5 million high school students take dual enrollment courses each year across the nation, up from about 300,000 in the early 2000s.[1] Dual enrollment allows high school students to take college-level courses at their high school, at the partnering college campus, or online to gain college credit; courses may be taught by qualified high school instructors or college faculty.

The costs and eligibility requirements for dual enrollment participation vary widely by state. More specifically:

- Costs: Students may have to pay all program costs (e.g., college tuition and nontuition fees for books or activities), or the school, district, college, and state may cover some or all of these costs.
- Eligibility: To participate, students typically must meet certain eligibility requirements, which also vary based on state policy and local agreements, and can include an age or grade-level threshold; minimum grade-point average; qualifying scores on a college placement test, PSAT, SAT, ACT, or state assessment; and/or written approval from a teacher, counselor, principal, or parent.

Research on dual enrollment programs has shown promising student outcomes. A review of the research by What Works Clearinghouse found positive effects on general academic achievement in high school, high school completion, college access and enrollment, credit accumulation, and postsecondary degree attainment, with a medium to large extent of evidence.[2] When looking at *postsecondary degree attainment* in particular, all five studies included in the What Works Clearinghouse review found statistically significant positive effects. Similarly, four studies reviewed by What Works Clearinghouse also found statistically significant positive effects for dual enrollment on *college access*

[1] *John Fink, Davis Jenkins, Sarah Griffin, & Aurely Garcia Tulloch. (2025, October). College Business Models for Scaling Purposeful Dual Enrollment [Executive summary]. Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University; Alonso, J. (2025, September 8). Dual Enrollment Research Shows Far Reach, Strong Outcomes. Inside Higher Ed.*

[2] *U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. (2017, February). Dual Enrollment Programs (What Works Clearinghouse intervention report); Velasco, T., Sparks, D., Schudde, L., Levin, E., Lin, Y., Ryu, W., & Fink, J. (2026, May). Dual Enrollment Momentum Metrics: Leading Indicators for Program Improvement (Research Report). Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.*

and enrollment.[3] The Community College Research Center (CCRC) similarly looked at dual enrollment program outcomes based on National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data, and found that dual enrollment students have strong postsecondary outcomes after high school. More specifically, 81% dual enrollment students in their fall 2015 starting cohort went to college in the first year after high school, and 42% completed a college credential within four years of finishing high school, with 29% completing a bachelor's degree. Further, completion rates for dual enrollment students cohort were well above those of recent high school graduates entering postsecondary education without dual enrollment.[4]

At the same time, challenges exist with the dual enrollment model. While the research consistently shows promising student outcomes for those involved in dual enrollment, not all approaches are equally effective or aligned with state goals. The common challenges associated with dual enrollment include the following:

- Lack of alignment with high demand and high-wage careers: Dual enrollment course sequences often do not align with postsecondary programs of study in high demand, high-wage fields.
- Limited access for low-income students and students of color: Students who are white and come from families with higher incomes are more likely than Black, Latino and low-income peers to take dual enrollment courses.[5]
- Eligibility barriers: Requirements such as test score and GPA thresholds and teacher recommendations can prevent students from participating.[6]
- Quality of Instruction: Issues relating to the quality of dual enrollment program instruction are also commonly mentioned as a concern.

To address these issues and allow more students to participate in dual enrollment as a strategy to improve college access and success, states and postsecondary systems are reconsidering their policies and investment strategies. We provide an overview and leading state examples of both below.

A. Dual Enrollment State Policy Approaches to Consider

Several analytic tools and policy guides designed to guide state-level dual enrollment policy have emerged recently. Jobs for the Future and the College in High School Alliance developed a *comprehensive data dashboard*, the Education Commission of the States created a *policy guide*, and the Aspen Institute and the Community College Research Center coauthored a *playbook* on dual enrollment. The following policy guidelines and examples are drawn from those sources and support dual enrollment programs that increase access, decrease time to credential, ensure quality and support, and lower costs.

[3] *U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. (2017, February). Dual Enrollment Programs: What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report [Intervention report]*
[4] *Velasco, T., Fink, J., Bedoya, M., & Jenkins, D. (2025, October). The Postsecondary Outcomes of High School Dual Enrollment Students: Executive Summary [Executive summary]. Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.*
[5] *Velasco, T., Fink, J., Bedoya, M., & Jenkins, D. (2025, October). The Postsecondary Outcomes of High School Dual Enrollment Students: Executive Summary [Executive summary]. Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.*
[6] *Velasco, T., Fink, J., Bedoya, M., & Jenkins, D. (2025, August). The Postsecondary Outcomes of High School Dual Enrollment Students: Revised Report [Research report]. Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.*

1. Early Outreach to Students and Families

Early awareness — years before students would engage in dual enrollment programs — is essential for students to participate in dual enrollment. Students need to understand the benefits of programs and believe that they are capable and qualified to engage. Just over half the states (27) states require education providers to notify students and parents of at least one state-level dual enrollment program.

Most state dual enrollment programs are established in statute and addressed in regulations, which could include requiring early communication to all families about available opportunities. State policy may also mandate outreach and advising that specifically addresses the needs of historically excluded student groups.

For example, in 2019 **Washington** became the first state to pass an "academic acceleration" law, requiring all districts to automatically enroll students in advanced coursework, including dual enrollment, based on their scores on eighth-grade or high school standardized assessments. Districts are required to notify students and families of this policy and the courses available to their students. However, families can request an alternative course as well. The law's funding provisions also support dual credit programs, subsidized AP/IB exam fees, and reduced financial barriers for low income students. An analysis by Stand for Children for the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) found increased enrollment of historically underserved students in advanced classes as a result of the law.[7]

2. Increasing Access to a Broader Range of Students

Ensuring that dual enrollment opportunities are widely available to students is critical to increasing access and participation. However, barriers exist for low-resourced and rural schools, including long distances to postsecondary campuses, reduced ability to hire and retain qualified instructors at the high school level, and limitations to broadband access.

Best practices that have been identified to address these issues include the following:

- Mandate that dual enrollment courses be available through all high schools in person and/or online; and
- Pair requirements to offer dual enrollment with dedicated and predictable funding for initiatives designed to build capacity and infrastructure, such as pathways for educator credential attainment, statewide plans to expand broadband capacity, and financing equipment purchases and student transportation options at under-resourced schools.

Indiana provides an example of these practices, and is one of over 20 states that require all high schools to participate in the state's dual enrollment programs. *Indiana's Next Level Connections Broadband Program*, which is designed to fund broadband infrastructure to increase access, defines schools as community anchor institutions prioritized to receive funding. The broadband program supports the dual enrollment policy mandate by developing the capacity of every high school in the state to deliver online dual enrollment courses.

[7] High School Success Coalition. (2019, May 7). Washington adopts first-in-nation law to reduce barriers to advanced classes. High School Success Coalition blog.

3. Expanding Student Eligibility

At its best, dual enrollment can expand college-going by providing an opportunity for high school students to experience college-level learning and assess their ability to succeed at this level. Yet access to dual enrollment is often restricted to high-performing students who are already likely to attend college. Expanding eligibility requirements to include multiple measures, such as teacher recommendations, curricular writing assessments or GPA performance over time can improve access to dual enrollment programs.

Best practices that have been identified in the field to address these issues include the following:

- States can include more inclusive eligibility criteria in program requirements, which would create statewide expectations for expanded access.
- States can also provide program eligibility guidance for local implementation and require that eligibility criteria be reported to the state through established partnership agreements.

For example, state regulations in *Delaware* require that dual enrollment participation eligibility be based on multiple indicators of readiness, including a combination of test scores, course grades and teacher recommendations or portfolios. Postsecondary institutions such as Delaware Technical Community College have made this requirement visible and transparent for students by listing the full set of institution-specific eligibility measures on the program *website*.

Similarly, the Michigan Dual Enrollment Task Force just released a series of *recommendations*, including using multiple measures to determine eligibility, such as GPA, student portfolio, teacher recommendations, and successful workplace learning experience.

4. Adopt Quality Standards

Clear, explicit dual credit quality standards can increase confidence that these courses are rigorous and meet college-level requirements. More than half of states (36) have adopted a quality standard for dual enrollment courses, and at least 10 states have a mechanism to assess dual enrollment quality, either through accreditation from the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) or another state-approved mechanism. Further, postsecondary partners are responsible for ensuring that their dual enrollment courses meet the same quality standards as any other course offered by the institution. However, because in many states courses may be taught on high school campuses by high school faculty, to ensure quality postsecondary partners must verify the quality of instructional materials delivered outside of their campuses, as well as the qualifications of instructors who are not their employees.

Best practices that have been identified in the field to address these issues include the following:

- States can require that all postsecondary providers of dual enrollment programs be institutionally accredited.
- State leaders can also require that institutions meet the standards of the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, the dual enrollment programmatic accreditor, or equivalent requirements set and recognized by the state.
- States can offer scholarship programs for high school faculty to obtain necessary credentials or financial support to offer hiring incentives for qualified instructors. At the postsecondary level, states can require and support instructional certification for college faculty expected to teach dual enrollment courses.

Minnesota provides an example of this type of reform. State lawmakers amended statute governing the state's alternative teacher professional pay system in 2017 to specifically direct incentives to schools and districts for hiring teachers with dual enrollment certification. The state's targeted *graduate program for dual enrollment certification*, Pathway to 18, is offered through the Minnesota State University System and includes opportunities for high school faculty to leverage credit for prior learning toward dual enrollment certification.

5. Hold Programs Accountable

Data collection and reporting are key building blocks for a strong accountability system and a culture of continuous improvement. When data is disaggregated by key student characteristics, states and program providers can identify access and success gaps, and make informed decisions to facilitate effective policy and program improvements.

Best practices that have been identified in the field to address these issues include the following:

- States often include dual enrollment success and/or participation as an accountability indicator in at least two of the following three systems: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Perkins V, and a state accountability system, with ESSA is the most common among accountability systems used by states.
- Over half of the states (34) have publicly reported statewide data on dual enrollment since the 2022-2023 school year, while 11 states disaggregate data by race, gender, economic status, disability status, and English language learner status, and 24 states report college enrollment after high school, cost savings or return on investment in dual enrollment.

As part of the **Tennessee** ESSA plan, for example, the Ready Graduate indicator measures the percentage of high school students who earn a diploma and meet milestones that set them up for postsecondary success, with dual enrollment being a key factor. Ready Graduate, in combination with other state accountability systems, uses participation in early postsecondary opportunities to indicate school quality and student success throughout the state. Tennessee has also incorporated these indicators into its district funding formula, incentivizing access to quality dual enrollment for students.

Similarly, the Michigan Dual Enrollment Task Force *recommendations* call for the establishment of:

- a **tracking and reporting system** that modernizes longitudinal tracking and aligns reporting requirements with existing data-collection systems, and to establish clear definitions and reporting requirements for dual enrollment participation and completion, collected from institutions; and
- a mechanism to collect and disaggregate all participation data reported by districts and institutions by demographics (race, income, and disability status), instructional modality, course location (including building type and urbanity or geography), and course participation (number of courses attempted) to identify equity gaps.

6. Support Credit Transfer and Advising

Adopting clear credit transfer policies overall and for dual credit courses as well as providing dedicated advising that supports postsecondary transitions ensures that dual enrollment coursework meaningfully contributes to students' progress towards degree and credential attainment.

Best practices that have been identified in the field to address these issues include the following:

- Most states (39) have adopted at least two credit transfer policies: a common course numbering system, an approved transfer course list, and a statewide transfer block or associate's degree; the third is the most common.
- Statewide articulation agreements can be developed specifying the courses and credits that
    - are guaranteed to transfer across postsecondary institutions.
- Some states require that students receive advising on transferring dual enrollment credits. States can also help build advisory capacity through dedicated funding allocations.

Florida and Arkansas provide examples of these types of reforms:

- Florida has a comprehensive *Statewide Course Numbering System* that is set in statute and encompasses all public institution courses, postsecondary adult vocational courses and accredited nonpublic institution courses. The state's articulation manual includes dual enrollment as part of the system; the state also provides a separate statement on dual enrollment articulation that specifically guarantees transfer of system courses offered through dual enrollment to all public postsecondary institutions in the state.
- Arkansas' *College and Career Coach Program* brings counselors into the state's middle and high schools to support students in developing postsecondary aspirations and plans. Initiated as a pilot program in 2010 to support the state's 21 most economically disadvantaged counties, the program was codified in 2013 and expanded in 2015 to be available statewide. State policy outlines responsibilities of counselors and specifies program evaluation metrics including rates of core curriculum completion, high school graduation, financial aid application, college attendance and remediation.

7. Make Dual Enrollment More Affordable

State investment in dual enrollment is critical in reducing or eliminating cost barriers for students, especially those from households with low incomes. To do so, resources are needed to adequately fund K-12 and postsecondary education partners responsible for program delivery. There are also *logistical costs* associated with access to dual enrollment programs. If courses are offered on a postsecondary campus, *transportation costs* can be a barrier. If courses are offered online, *computer and internet service costs* are a factor.

Best practices that have been identified in the field to address these issues include the following:

- States often (29) provide at least partial funding for dual enrollment program delivery, with 12 states providing funding through an annual or biennial legislative appropriation.
- Some states (16) provide financial assistance to students from low-income households, making dual enrollment tuition either free or low-cost.
- States can also require local education agencies and postsecondary institutions offering dual enrollment programs to cover transportation and meal costs for participating students.

Georgia offers dual enrollment through a single statewide program. The funding associated with the program covers the cost of tuition, mandatory fees and required books for up to 30 semester hours. The state provides a publicly available course directory indicating which courses at state public postsecondary institutions qualify for dual enrollment funding.

To remove financial barriers and incentivize participation in dual enrollment, the Michigan Dual Enrollment Task Force *recommendations* included:

- An expansion of eligible reimbursable charges directly associated with participation in dual enrollment. If available funding is insufficient to fully reimburse all eligible charges, the State should prioritize reimbursement *for students in school districts with higher concentrations of poverty*. This could include transportation, student parking, required course materials, books, and campus access fees.
- Incentivizing enrollment by preventing K-12 districts from requiring families to repay fees for failed or withdrawn courses and explicitly including summer terms within the definition of the mandatory enrollment window.

8. Facilitate K12 District and Postsecondary Partnerships

State guidance can clarify expectations of local K12 and postsecondary partnerships and require local providers to file partnership agreements with the state. Best practices that have been identified in the field to address these issues include the following:

- State leaders can specify what must be included in partnership agreements, such as partner-specific responsibilities for programmatic services, costs and data reporting.
- States can link the approval of partnership agreements to the receipt of state subsidies, as well as use reporting requirements to track (and help adjust) cost-sharing and instructional load across partners.

The Ohio *Alliance of Dual Enrollment Partnerships*, a statewide coalition of practitioners and advocates, serves to link school and college partnerships across the state, promote and disseminate national standards, provide professional development and advocate for quality initiatives in service of the state's dual enrollment programs.

B. Funding Options

Bellwether studied several leading statewide dual enrollment programs (California, Idaho, Minnesota, and Texas) and identified their funding strategies. Table 1 below outlines each of the state dual enrollment programs, as well as the level of state investment.

Table 1. State investment in dual enrollment

State	Program Description	State Investment in Dual Enrollment	Tuition and Nontuition Costs
California	California's College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) provides high school students with the opportunity to participate in college courses without paying tuition or nontuition costs.	The state provided a one-time investment of $100 million for CCAP Competitive Grants for school districts in 2022.	CCAP students do not pay tuition or nontuition costs.
Idaho	Idaho's Advanced Opportunities program created a fund of up to $4,625 for each student in Grades 7-12 that covers various eligible advanced courses, including dual enrollment.	The state investment covers up to $75 per credit for dual enrollment courses offered at the high school level.	Funding covers tuition but not non-tuition costs.
Minnesota	Minnesota has three dual enrollment programs: Concurrent Enrollment, Traditional PSEO, and PSEO by Contract.[8]	The state provides $4 million annually for Concurrent Enrollment; the other programs are not funded.	Across all three programs, the students do not pay for tuition and nontuition costs.
Texas	The FAST program fully subsidizes the costs of dual enrollment courses for economically disadvantaged public high school students.	The state allocated $78.6 million in funding	FAST dual enrollment students do not pay for tuition or nontuition costs.

Bellwether's analysis also identified three common best practices in state funding strategies:

- School districts receive full per-pupil state allocations for dual enrollment students: This policy ensures that school districts are not financially disadvantaged when students take dual enrollment courses.
  - In California, K-12 systems receive full per-pupil funding for all high school students who attend school at least 240 minutes (four hours) a day, enabling CCAP and other dually enrolled students to still generate full funding for their districts.
  - Idaho and Texas provide full per-pupil funding to K-12 districts for all students, regardless of dual enrollment participation.
  - Minnesota also follows this model, allowing K-12 districts to receive their full per-pupil state allocation when offering dual enrollment.
- The state includes dual enrollment students in the community college full-time equivalent (FTE) calculation for state allocations: This policy ensures that community colleges are adequately funded for all of the students they serve.
  - In California, dual enrollment students are counted as "special admit" FTEs under the community college funding formula's base allocation.
  - In Idaho, dual enrollment students count toward an IHE's FTE count in the same way as all other students.
  - Texas, which has an outcomes-based funding formula, provides state funding for dual enrollment students who complete at least 15 credit hours of dual enrollment coursework.
- The state (partially) reimburses community colleges for tuition costs: This policy allows states to keep costs low for students while also supporting the instructional costs borne by community colleges.

[8] *Concurrent Enrollment:* Offered at the high school and taught by qualified high school teachers or college faculty, concurrent enrollment integrates college-level content into the high school curriculum. *Traditional PSEO:* Offered at IHEs, including community colleges, PSEO is taught by college faculty and provides a more traditional college experience. The tuition is covered through a statutory formula. *PSEO by Contract:* The same as PSEO, except that the tuition is covered through individual MOUs between an IHE and a district.

- The Idaho state legislature capped the tuition at $75 per credit hour for dual enrollment courses offered at the high school, where the vast majority of these courses are offered. These courses are taught by high school teachers who meet adjunct teaching requirements set by the community college offering the credits.[9]
- In Minnesota, postsecondary institutions are reimbursed at a flat, state established rate, which was $241 per semester credit in SY24-25.
- During its 2023 legislative session, the Texas Legislature unanimously passed House Bill 8, overhauling the state's community college funding formula and adopting provisions designed to increase postsecondary and workforce readiness and success. A landmark component of House Bill 8 was the creation of the state's FAST program, which fully subsidizes the costs of dual enrollment. To support dual enrollment, the state legislature allocated $78.6 million in state funding — marking the first time Texas provided dedicated additional funding.[10]

All four of these states have experienced dual enrollment participation growth across student groups in the wake of these funding policies.

Additionally, the Michigan Dual Enrollment Task Force's *recommendations* included the following:

- Sustainable Funding: Establish an ongoing line item in the state department of education's base operational budget that must[11] be used to reimburse public K-12 districts for the eligible costs of dual enrollment.
- Nonpublic School Dual Enrollment Reimbursement: Include a General Fund appropriation to support dual enrollment opportunities for eligible nonpublic school students through reimbursement of eligible postsecondary tuition and mandatory fee costs.
- Reimbursement Model: Establish a payment infrastructure to enable the State to reimburse K-12 school districts for dual-enrollment costs. To ensure uniform administration, reimbursement for nonpublic school dual enrollment should be administered by the same department that administers public dual enrollment funding.
- Reimbursement Cost Ceiling: Establish a cap on dual enrollment reimbursement for eligible tuition and mandatory fees to maximize the impact of the proposed funding model.

These recommendations come as Michigan also strengthens its support for dual enrollment with a $40 million appropriation in the FY2027 state budget to reimburse eligible school districts for dual enrollment costs.[12]

This brief was developed in partnership with Research for Action, an independent non-profit research organization with deep expertise in postsecondary education policy and practice. We are grateful for their contributions.

[9] Jennifer Zinth, Alex Perry, and Amy Williams, Funding for Equity: Designing State Dual Enrollment Funding Models to Close Equity Gaps (College in High School Alliance, 2025); Boise State University, Idaho Dual Credit Program: College Credit Opportunities for High School Students (2022),
[10] Renzo Soto, "Understanding HB 8: Bolstering Supports for Low-Income Students," Texas 2036 (blog), 2023,
[11]
[12] Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP). (2026, August 28). Dual enrollment task force outlines path to remove financial eligibility and other barriers to participation [Press release]. State of Michigan.