DUAL ENROLLMENT RESEARCH BRIEF

With the right amount of support, dual enrollment programs, or programs that allow high school students to earn college credit while also taking a class for high school credit, can provide a variety of benefits to students. These programs can encourage college access across a variety of students, ease students' transitions from college into high school, and provide a faster track toward degree completion. While these programs vary, this research brief examines the general scope of dual enrollment programs, the benefits of these programs, and evidence-based recommendations for implementing these programs.

What is Dual Enrollment?

Any conversation regarding earning college credit that meets both high school graduation requirements while counting for college credit naturally leads to discussion of the terms "dual credit," "concurrent enrollment," and "dual enrollment," without always distinguishing between these terms (Gamez Vargas et al., 2014; Taylor, 2015). Dual enrollment primarily refers to programs that allow students to take college-level courses at their high school or on a partner institution's campus.

Dual enrollment programs must meet the following criteria: participants can enroll in courses that allow them to simultaneously earn college credit while meeting high school requirements, the program offers college-level courses at a discounted or free rate, and a partnership between the institution and school to make sure credits earned will transfer.

Benefits of Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment can lead to a variety of benefits for students including an increased interest in postsecondary education, increased student academic performance, and decreased time to degree completion (Hughes et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2022; Vargas et al., 2017; Jones, 2014; Dingess, 2018).

Edwards et al. (2011) assert that dual enrollment fosters strong connections between high school and postsecondary content, generating an increased participation in postsecondary education that prepares students for college while also building career-focused skills. Dual enrollment offers practical and relevant content that can guide students as they begin exploring and deciding on possible career paths (Edwards et al., 2011; Vargas et al., 2017). When dual enrollment programs bring students to college campuses, they offer students more opportunity to learn while immersed within college culture and postsecondary-level expectations, all while surrounded by college-going peer groups (Edwards et al., 2011; Klopfenstein & Lively, 2012). Students who earn credit through dual enrollment are also able to enter university with momentum toward their degree, contributing to a decreased time of degree completion.

Dual enrollment programs are not monolithic. However, most forms of programs can take important steps in order to maximize benefits for students. To minimize challenges for staff and students, dual enrollments can take on the following design characteristics: Comprehensive support from the high school administration. This includes high school counselors, dual enrollment liaisons, or other support

from the partnered institution (Johnson et al., 2017; Vargas et al., 2017; Witkowsky & Clayton, 2020).

- Immersion in the university experience. For example, dual enrollment courses should feature the same syllabi, assessments, and grading policies as the equivalent postsecondary course (Vargas et al., 2017).
- Enhanced opportunity for all. Dual-enrolled students disproportionately come from more affluent backgrounds, so opportunity must be a central concern to combat the socioeconomic disparity seen in postsecondary success (Liu & Xu, 2022).

Enhanced Opportunity for All

Though dual enrollment programs have been shown to have considerable benefits for students, barriers may exist that prevent some students from participating. By including additional resources for first-generation college students, a dual enrollment program will be able to make strides toward opportunity for all students (Mehl et al., 2020). With proper support and structure, dual enrollment programs can encourage college access among all students.

Mehl et al. (2020) recommend having a shared vision and goals that prioritize opportunity and access to dual enrollment programs for all students. This offers students the ability to see themselves as college students and incorporates that ability into their academic identity (Johnson et al., 2021) even if they may have previously had trouble doing so.

School-Level Supports

Students participating in dual enrollment programs should have access to a comprehensive academic support system complete with tutoring and counseling to prepare them for the rigors of college (Vargas et al., 2017). Dual enrollment programs have the potential to greatly benefit students, but the expectations and pressures these programs can place on students should not be discounted. In a study conducted by Witkowsky and Clayton (2020), high school counselors considered three types of criteria to determine if a student is prepared for dual enrollment:

- **Academic:** The student demonstrates consistent academic performance in both test scores and grades
- **Personal considerations:** The student has the ability to meet the time commitment for dual enrollment courses, set individual goals, and acquire means of transportation
- **Non-cognitive factors:** The student possesses individual maturity, time management skills, organizational skills, integrity, attendance, communication, self-advocacy, and confidence

One key intervention that can support dual enrollment students is the development of services to help them transition from high school expectations to college-level expectations. Career and life-planning classes can also help students learn how to set and achieve goals. In a survey conducted by Lile et al., students expressed that these types of classes helped them pursue career goals in college (2018). Counselors interviewed by Witkowsky and Clayton (2020) stated that colleges often expect dual enrollment students to be responsible for themselves, but these students can often benefit from services provided by high school counselors.

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