

# **Access and Diversity in the Running Start Program: A Comparison of Washington's Running Start Program to Other State Level Dual Enrollment Programs Hosted on a College Campus**

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## BACKGROUND

Since 1990, high school students in Washington have had the choice of earning college credit through the Running Start program. Running start is a dual enrollment and dual credit program that allows eleventh and twelfth grade high school students to take college courses at any of Washington's 34 community and technical colleges, Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Northwest Indian College, Washington State University and The Evergreen State College. Participants receive high school and college credit while taking classes located on the campus of participating colleges. Running Start gives high school juniors and seniors the option to attend college on either full-time or part-time basis while concurrently earning high school and college credit.<sup>1</sup> Running Start is uniquely different from other dual enrollment programs in Washington because it provides an authentic college experience. Students who enroll in Running Start not only have access to rigorous courses they also have the opportunity to become a regular college student and enjoy the same privileges and responsibilities as any other college student.<sup>2</sup>

During the 2012-2013 academic year, 17,704 students participated in the Running Start program. In its 24th year, there are concerns of access for traditionally underrepresented minority groups and low-income students. In 2012-2013, African-Americans, Hispanic/Latino, Native-American and Pacific Islanders comprised 23.7% of enrolled 11th and 12th grade students but only made up 12.5% of Running Start students. While 46.1% of all students in Washington qualify for free or reduced lunch only 28% of Running Start participants qualify.<sup>3</sup>

The access gap has plagued the Running Start program over the last decade. A 2001 Running Start report conducted by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges notes "While a primary intent of the Running Start program is to increase access to college learning opportunities, current enrollment statistics indicate that African American, Native American, and Hispanic students are underrepresented among Running Start students" (SBCTC, 2001). In fact, the problem has existed since the inception of the Running Start program. A 1991 report by the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges noted; "The socio-economic status of Running Start student families was quite high...Whites and Asian students were over represented in the Running Start group."<sup>4</sup>

This report will explore policy barriers that potentially limit the participation of underrepresented minority and low-income students in the Running Start program. Specifically this report will provide an overview of national practices and policies in other states for potential solutions to increasing the participation of underrepresented populations in the Running Start program.

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<sup>1</sup> State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. (2012). Running Start 2011-12 annual progress report. Olympia, WA.

<sup>2</sup> Olympic College. (2014). *Is running start for you?*. Retrieved from <http://www.olympic.edu/Students/StudentServices/RunningStart/benefits.htm>

<sup>3</sup> OSPI State Report Card and K-12 Data and Reports

<sup>4</sup> Seppanen, L., & Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Olympia. (1991). *The Running Start Program: Impact and Benefits from the First Year in Washington Community Colleges. Operations Report 91-4.*

## **RUNNING START LEGISLATION BRIEF OVERVIEW**

In 1990 the Washington Legislature passed the “Learning by Choice” law. The “Learning by Choice” law included provisions for the creation of the Running Start program. Over the past twenty-four years the law has been tweaked slightly but the essence of the law remains to give high school juniors and seniors the option to attend college on either a full-time or part-time basis while concurrently earning high school and college credit.

Running Start legislation extends college access to any student who has junior or senior status, as established in accordance with a school districts grade placement policy. This includes students attending public or private schools as well as home schooled students. Students participating in the running start program have the option of earning their high school diploma through the community college if they complete an associate degree. The law requires that school districts provide information on the Running Start program to 10th, 11th and 12th grade students and their parents.

The state covers the cost of tuition for Running Start students for up to a combined 1.20 FTE between the high school and the institution of higher education with a maximum of 1.00 FTE at each institution. A student can take more than 1.20 FTE but must pay for the additional cost. Low-income students are eligible for tuition waivers for enrollment exceeding 1.20. Low-income is defined by free or reduced lunch eligibility.<sup>5</sup> Washington law allows for colleges and universities to charge running start students up to ten percent of tuition but currently no higher education institution is charging tuition.

Students are responsible for mandatory and/or student-voted fees, textbooks, supplies, and other materials. Colleges and universities must make available fee waivers for low-income running start students. Transportation to and from the postsecondary institution is not funded by the Running Start program and students and their families must cover the cost.

The state funds Running Start enrollment by transferring funds per full-time equivalent for basic education from the school district to the college or university. The funding provided to school districts is based upon the Running Start enrollments reported to Office of the Superintendent of Public Instructions. In 2013-2014, funding for Running Start students is provided at the rate of \$5,296.73 per non-vocational annual average full-time equivalent (AAFTE) and \$6,043.16 per vocational AAFTE. The school district is allowed to keep seven percent of the funding for administrative purposes while the college or university receives the other 93%.<sup>6</sup>

Interested students are responsible for applying to the college or university. Each university or college determines if a student is qualified to take college course work. Colleges use their regular admissions procedures which may include placement tests. Students who place into college level English and/or math can participate in the Running Start program. A few colleges also require a minimum high school GPA. Once accepted into the program students can take any college-level academic or vocational courses in the college catalog, including online courses.

## POTENTIAL BARRIERS

Before proceeding it is important to identify potential barriers for underrepresented student populations.

The policy structure of the Running Start program has barriers that make it difficult for students to participate. These challenges include the following:

- Admissions eligibility is determined by the postsecondary institution.
- Only college level courses (100 or higher) are paid for by the Running Start program.
- Students and their families must provide their own transportation.
- Books and fees are the responsibility of the student and their family.
- Colleges can charge up to 10% of tuition cost (although, at the time of this report, no college has implemented this option).

Other barriers include social and cultural barriers that are less apparent.

- College classes may conflict with high school extracurricular activities (sports, drama and music).
- Students and families have to determine if the student is socially and emotionally prepared for the college environment.

In addition to the aforementioned barriers, Running Start Coordinators/Advisors have identified other potential barriers.<sup>7</sup> Running Start Coordinators/Advisors are postsecondary employees responsible for the recruitment, application, registration, and documentation for the Running Start program. Running Start coordinators identified the following list of challenges that are most pertinent to underrepresented student populations.

- Cost of placement tests
- Lack of funding for transportation
- Lack of funding for lunch
- Validity of placement test for non-native English speakers
- Parents' lack of knowledge regarding dual enrollment programs
- Lack of diversity in the coordinators may create a negative perception for Running Start students of different ethnic backgrounds

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<sup>7</sup> State Board of Community & Technical Colleges. (2012). Running start coordinator's fall meeting notes 10.25.12. Retrieved from [www.sbctc.ctc.edu/.../studentsvcs/20121025rs\\_coordinator\\_mtg-notes.pdf](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/.../studentsvcs/20121025rs_coordinator_mtg-notes.pdf)

Before considering solutions to policy, social, and practical barriers it must be determined whether the barriers above disproportionately affect underrepresented minority populations and low-income students. The table below has categorized the aforementioned barriers for simplicity purposes.

<b>Potential Barriers for Participation in the Running Start Program</b>		
<b>Cost Related</b>	<b>Criteria Related</b>	<b>Social Related</b>
Students and their families must provide their own transportation	Admissions eligibility is determined by the postsecondary institution	College classes may conflict with high school extracurricular activities (sports, drama and music)
Books and supplies are the responsibility of the student and their family	Only college level courses (100 or higher) are paid for by the Running Start program	Students and families have to determine if the student is socially and emotionally prepared for the college environment
Colleges can charge up to 10% of tuition cost (although, at the time of this report, no college has implemented this option)	Validity of placement test for non-native English speakers	Parents' lack of knowledge regarding dual enrollment programs
Cost of placement tests		Lack of diversity in the coordinators may create a negative perception for Running Start students of different ethnic backgrounds
Free or reduced lunch options are not provided by the college campus		

## **Cost Barriers**

It is apparent that any cost related barriers will disproportionately affect students from low-income backgrounds. The Running Start program does provide a waiver for participants that cover mandatory fees that are not associated with the delivery of the course. If postsecondary institutions start charging the 10% of tuition cost allowed by recent legislation, low-income students will be able to receive a fee waiver for the cost. Cost-related barriers disproportionately affect underrepresented minority students. Data shows that a higher percentage of Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander qualify for free and reduced priced lunch than Asian and White students.

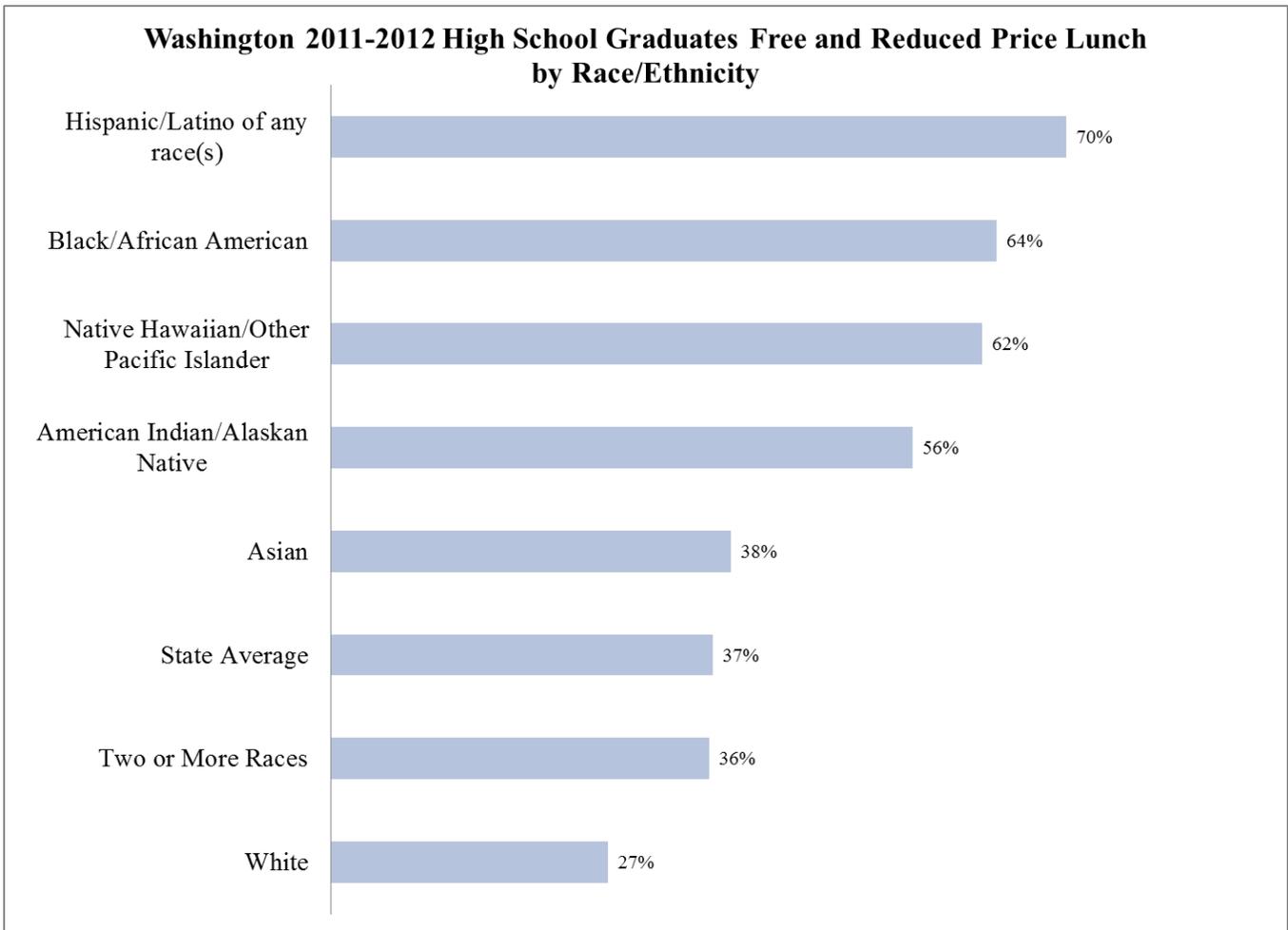


Figure 1 Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management, Education Research & Data Center, High School Feedback Report 2011-12; file created November 2013

It is likely the hope of policy makers that free tuition and fees would outweigh the cost of placement test, transportation, books, supplies and lunch. However it should be noted that the cost of books, supplies and transportation at a community college is estimated to be \$2,370 for three quarters. For families on a tight budget this comes to \$790 per quarter or \$263 per month. The true cost of Running Start enrollment was first reference in a 1991 report by the SBCTC which read “Because of the cost of books and travel, Running Start is a viable option for few low-income high school students.”<sup>8</sup> The Running Start program has not addressed the true cost of attendance which significantly affects all low-income and disproportionately affects underrepresented minority student populations.

<sup>8</sup> Seppanen, L., & Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Olympia. (1991). The Running Start Program: Impact and Benefits from the First Year in Washington Community Colleges. Operations Report 91-4.

## Criteria Barriers

Since its inception, Running Start was created to allow high school students to take rigorous college-level courses. While Running Start legislation does not explicitly create academic achievement criteria for participation it does implicitly create the criteria that high school juniors and seniors should be prepared to take college level course work. The community and technical colleges have defined college readiness as the combination of skills, knowledge, and habits of mind necessary to fully participate in college-level courses. College readiness is demonstrated by a student having completed intermediate algebra (typically algebra 2 in high school) and can demonstrate readiness on college English and math placement exams. There is ample evidence that a higher percentage of underrepresented minority students are likely not prepared to take college level course work while in high school.

A study conducted by the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges analyzed the 2008-2009 public high school graduates who enrolled in a Washington community or technical college immediately following graduation. The study found Hispanics (70%), African Americans (70%), and Native Americans (60%) were substantially more likely than Whites (54%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (55%) students to enroll in pre-college courses.<sup>9</sup> A 2012 study of all high school graduates conducted by the Washington State Board of Education found that a higher percentage of African American (19.3%), Hispanic (19.6%), low-income (17.0%) and limited English (23.9%) graduates enrolled in precollege or remedial courses following high school graduation than White (13.3%) and Asian students (15.5%).<sup>10</sup> Based on the evidence, it is apparent that a disproportionate percentage of underrepresented minority and low-income 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders are ineligible to participate in the Running Start program due to not meeting the minimum threshold for participation.

## Social Related Barriers

The decision to participate in Running Start is ultimately a choice of the student and likely with the support of their family. Students may be academically prepared for college-level classes, but may not feel prepared for the emotional or social demands of college life. Materials produced by Running Start coordinators ask the basic question “Is Running Start Right for You?”<sup>11</sup> To date there have been no published surveys asking qualified non-participants about their decisions not to enroll in the Running Start program. There have been several reports that inquire about the experience of Running Start students.

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<sup>9</sup> State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (2012). Role of pre-college (developmental and remedial) education 2009-10 public high school graduates who enroll in Washington community and technical colleges in 2010-11. Olympia, WA

<sup>10</sup> Washington State Board of Education. (2013). An overview of the statewide indicators of educational health, their current state, goals/objectives, and recommendations for future enhancements. Retrieved from <http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/legislative/2013/5491report1.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> *Olympic College. (2014). Is running start for you?* Retrieved from <http://www.olympic.edu/Students/StudentServices/RunningStart/benefits.htm>

A 2006 survey conducted by Clark College (1 of 34 participating community and technical colleges) on enrolled Running Start students asked several questions about the student’s participation in the Running Start program. The survey revealed that the most important reason that students participated in the Running Start program was to get an early start on college, free tuition, and the ability to take classes not offered at their high school.<sup>12</sup>

**“The importance of these factors in deciding to become a Running Start student”**

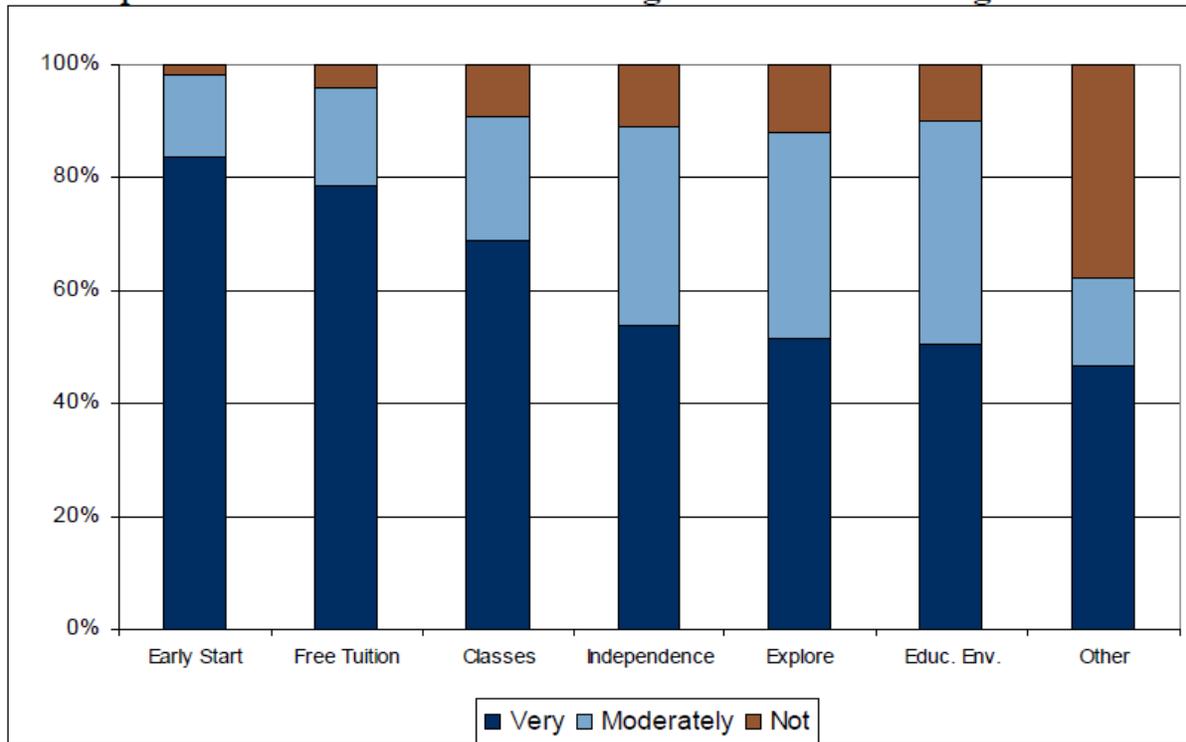


Figure 2 Source: Clark College Office of Planning and Advancement Survey of High School Seniors In Running Start Spring 2006

In addition the survey found the following:

- 58% of Running Start students took classes at both their high school and Clark College
- 31% indicated that they did not participate in extracurricular activities at either their high school or Clark College
- 60% of students who did participate in extracurricular activities only participated in activities at their high school.
- 9% of students who did participate in extracurricular activities only participated in activities at Clark College
- 5.7% of students indicated that they participated in extracurricular activities at both their high school and Clark College

<sup>12</sup> Survey of high school seniors in running start spring 2006. (2006). [Report], The Office of Planning and Advancement, Clark College, Vancouver, WA.

Issues that Running Start students faced included juggling high school and college schedules, and maintaining connections with high school friends and activities.

**“These issues made my Running Start experience difficult”**

	# of Students	% of All Students
None - my experience was not difficult at all	74	20%
Students with an issue (or multiple issues)	295	80%
Total response	369	100%
Students with more than one issue	198	54%

Issue	# of Students	% of All Students
Transportation	84	23%
Cost of books	130	35%
Juggling high school and college schedule	110	30%
Getting classes at the time of day I needed them	146	40%
Getting into the classes I needed	57	15%
Maintaining connection with high school friends & activities	56	15%
College courses - faster pace, more rigorous demands	101	27%
Negative comments from Clark College students or faculty	12	3%

Figure 3 Source: Clark College Office of Planning and Advancement Survey of High School Seniors In Running Start Spring 2006

There is little evidence that these social issues disproportionately affect underrepresented minority or low-income student populations. Social challenges are faced by all students and it cannot be definitively stated that cultural differences lead to the decision not to participate for eligible students. More investigation needs to be done to determine what impact cultural preferences have on Running Start participation.

## **DUAL ENROLLMENT BEST PRACTICES AND SURVEY OF POLICIES IN OTHER STATES**

Even with all of its flaws, the Running Start program aligns with many current best practices for state level dual enrollment policies. The Education Commission of the States recommends thirteen key components of state-level policies on dual enrollment.<sup>13</sup>

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13 Education Commission of the States. (2014). Increasing student access and success in dual enrollment programs 13 model state-level policy components. Denver, CO: Zinh, J.

Education Commission of the States Model Components of State-Level Policies on Dual Enrollment	Running Start Legislation Aligns With the Model
<b>Access</b>	
All eligible students are able to participate. To ensure program access, state law must be unequivocal on this point.	X
Student eligibility requirements are based on the demonstration of ability to access college-level content, not bureaucratic procedures or non-cognitive factors.	X
Caps on the maximum number of courses students may complete are not overly restrictive. Cost should not be a driving factor for states to establish caps.	X
Students earn both secondary and postsecondary credit for successful completion of approved postsecondary courses. While it may sound obvious, such policies are not universal.	X
All students and parents are annually provided with program information. Less-advantaged parents are typically less likely to be aware of dual enrollment opportunities.	X
Counseling is made available to students and parents before and during program participation. State policies should promote the availability of counseling.	X
<b>Finance</b>	
Responsibility for tuition payments does not fall to parents. Requiring parents to pay tuition up front and receive reimbursement later may preclude participation by some students.	X
Districts and postsecondary institutions are fully funded or reimbursed for participating students. At least one state is tying full funding to course quality.	
<b>Ensure Course Quality</b>	
Courses meet the same level of rigor as the course taught to traditional students at the partner postsecondary institution.	X
Instructors meet the same expectations as instructors of similar traditional postsecondary courses, and receive appropriate support and evaluation.	X
Districts and institutions publicly report on student participation and outcomes. Only 30 of the 47 states with state-level dual enrollment programs require such reporting.	X
Programs undergo evaluation based on available data. Nearly 30 states require dual enrollment programs to undergo internal or external evaluation.	
Postsecondary institutions accept dual enrollment credit as transfer credit, provided measures of quality are ensured. More than 20 states require dual enrollment credits to be treated for transfer credit in the same manner as credits earned at the receiving institution.	X

Washington Running Start legislation aligns with all six access recommendations and eleven of the thirteen policy recommendations.

Furthermore, combining analysis from the Education Commission of the States and the U.S. Department of Education, Washington has implemented many key state-level dual enrollment policies from around the country.

1. Washington is 1 of 47 states to have statues and/or regulations governing dual enrollment policies.
2. Washington is 1 of 40 states that allow students to access college classes on a postsecondary campus. Three states allow dual enrollment classes to only be offered on a college campus.
3. Washington is 1 of 24 states that specify that dual enrollment students earn both high school and college credit.
4. Washington is 1 of 16 states that explicitly prohibit dually enrolled students from participating in remedial courses.
5. Washington is 1 of 14 states that require that students be in at least the 11th grade.
6. Washington is 1 of 8 states that require all students in eligible high school grades to be notified of dual enrollment programs.
7. Washington is 1 of 23 states that require students to meet course prerequisites set by the institution and/or meet other course placement criteria.
8. Washington is the only state in which the school district receives reduced funding for dual enrollment (Running Start) participation.
9. Washington is the only state in which the postsecondary institution receives less funding for dual enrolled students than traditional students.<sup>14</sup>

The Running Start program compares favorably to other state-level dual enrollment programs in all aspects except for the funding model of high school and postsecondary institutions. Thirty-one states provide schools with the same level of funding for dual enrollment students and traditional high school students. Ten states have allowed for double funding. In double funding both the high school and the postsecondary institution are funded at their full rate. The funding structure for the Running Start program directs high schools to send up to 93% of the pupil's funding to the post-secondary institution. In Washington, high schools are mandated to participate in the program and provide information to all 10th–12th grade students. While information is being provided, it is highly unlikely that high schools faced with the implication of losing funding have outreach and recruitment plans to increase the number of students who participate in the Running Start program. There is likely an alternative strategy to increase dual enrollment opportunities offered at the high school. This would include Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, College in the High School and the recent creation of “Running Start in the high school”.<sup>15</sup>

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14 Education Commission of the States. (2014). Increasing student access and success in dual enrollment programs 13 model state-level policy components. Denver, CO: Zinh, J.

15 While not a formal program “running start in the high school” is a model where the running start funding model is used to support what would be traditionally classified as College in the High School (CHS). The

## Similar State Level Dual Enrollment Programs

Several states have dual enrollment programs similarly structured to Washington's Running Start program. In these states, students have the option of participating in dual enrollment courses provided on the postsecondary institution's campus, access is restricted to 11th and 12 grade students, and secondary institutions are required to participate in the program. For context, and to give a perspective of the uniqueness of the Running Start program, brief dual enrollment program descriptions for four states are provided below.

### Minnesota Postsecondary Enrollment Options

In 1985, Minnesota became the first state in the country to formalize a student's right to apply to eligible post-secondary schools and receive both college and high school credit. Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) allows high school students to enroll in courses taught by college professors on a college campus. Admissions standards are determined by the postsecondary institution. The college also sets the number of classes that a student can take. Both public and private institutions are eligible to participate in the program. PSEO courses must be non-sectarian, college-level courses. Most PSEO are only open to 11th–12th grade students. The state covers the cost of tuition, fees and books. The state also covers the cost of consumable supplies required for a course (ex: art supplies and film). Students are responsible for general school supplies and their own transportation. Low-income students may qualify for mileage reimbursement from the state. Postsecondary institutions are not allowed to charge mandatory fees or fees for placement tests.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that a 2005 report reads "The majority of PSEO are female, white and middle to upper income."<sup>17</sup> African American, Hispanic, and low-income students are underrepresented in PSEO. In 2005, African Americans made up 8% of all 11th–12th graders but only 4% of PSEO, Hispanics made up 4% of 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders but only 2% of PSEO and low-income students made up 24% of 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> graders but only 13% of PSEO.

Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Sample Minimum Admissions Requirements:

- Minnesota State University Moorhead
  - Seniors: Be in the upper half of your class or score at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on a national test such as the ACT, SAT, PSAT or Plan
  - Juniors: Be in the upper one-third of your class or score at or above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on a national test such as the ACT, SAT, PSAT or plan
- Rochester Community and Technical College: Juniors 3.0+ GPA, Seniors 2.5+ GPA

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Running Start funding allows colleges to offer these courses without need to charge tuition which is normally required for CHS.

<sup>16</sup> Minnesota Department of Education. (2014). Postsecondary enrollment options reference guide. Minnesota, Minn. Retrieve from: [http://teacherweb.com/MN/NewPragueHS/MikeBartusek/Postsecondary-Enrollment-Options\\_Sept-20-2013.pdf](http://teacherweb.com/MN/NewPragueHS/MikeBartusek/Postsecondary-Enrollment-Options_Sept-20-2013.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Nathan, J., Accomando, L., Fitzpatrick, D. H., & Hubert H. (2005). *Stretching minds and resources: 20 years of post secondary enrollment options in Minnesota*. Minneapolis, Minn: Center for School Change, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.

## Georgia's Move on When Ready

Georgia's Move on When Ready (MOWR) legislation was passed in 2009. The MOWR program is intended as another option - not a replacement for 11th and 12th grade. Legislation requires that all 10th and 11th grade students receive information regarding the MOWR program, and that school districts must accept credit and award a high school diploma to any eligible student. High school students who are homeschooled and students who attend private schools are ineligible for the MOWR program. Public and private institutions are eligible to participate in the MOWR program. MOWR requires that students enroll full-time at the postsecondary institution. Students are not allowed to take high school courses on the high school campus while enrolled in the MOWR program. Remedial courses are not allowed. Post-secondary institutions establish admissions policies which may include SAT scores, ACT scores and/or a minimum GPA.<sup>18</sup> The admissions process mimics the admissions process for all other students. Colleges and universities are able to limit the number of MOWR students and participation in extracurricular activities. Tuition and fees are paid by the Georgia Department of Education. Students are responsible for their own transportation and food cost.<sup>19</sup> Qualified low-income students can qualify for a grant to cover the cost of books. In 2010, only 3,390 students enrolled in the program, 1,266 through the community college system.

Move On When Ready Sample Minimum Admissions Requirements:

- Georgia Institute of Technology Minimum Requirements: 2100+ SAT I Score, high school GPA 3.9, students expected to have completed highest level of math and science course work offer at the high school
- Darton State College Minimum Requirements: 550 Critical Reading, 550 Math, high school GPA 3.4

## Wisconsin's Youth Options

The Youth Options program allows public high school juniors and seniors who meet certain requirements to take postsecondary courses at a Wisconsin technical college, a University of Wisconsin systems college or university, a Wisconsin tribally-controlled college, or a Wisconsin private nonprofit college or university. The law requires participation from all public high schools. The school board determines if the postsecondary course is eligible for high school credit and must approve student participation. The school board must pay the cost of tuition, fees and books for a course that is taken for high school credit that is not comparable to a course offered at the school district. The student may be required to reimburse the school district for tuition and fees if the student drops or fails the course. A student must pay for a postsecondary course that is not used for high school credit and/or a course that is comparable to a course offered at the school district. Parents or students

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<sup>18</sup> Georgia Department of Education. (2012). *Fy 2013 move on when ready guidelines*. Retrieved from <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/CTAE/Documents/MOWR-Guidelines-for-FY13.pdf>

Georgia Department of Education. (2010). *Move on when ready frequently asked questions*. Retrieved from [http://archives.gadoe.org/DMGetDocument.aspx/MOWR\\_FAQs011910.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6FF1A14A2EED51346FE7B547491D03537B251D1ECD2A16FD1&Type=D](http://archives.gadoe.org/DMGetDocument.aspx/MOWR_FAQs011910.pdf?p=6CC6799F8C1371F6FF1A14A2EED51346FE7B547491D03537B251D1ECD2A16FD1&Type=D)

are responsible for transportation between the school and the postsecondary institution. However, transportation assistance is available for qualified low-income students. In 2009-2010, approximately 3,600 students enrolled in Youth Options courses, or about 2.5% of all 11th and 12th graders in the state.<sup>20</sup>

Youth Options Sample Minimum Admissions Requirements:

- University of Wisconsin Rock County GPA 2.5
- University of Wisconsin Madison GPA 3.00 and exhausted their high school curriculum in the subject

### **Maine's Early Study, Early Enrollment & Aspirations**

The High School Aspirations Program gives qualified high school juniors and seniors the chance to experience college by registering for on-campus college courses at a reduced tuition and fee rate. The cost of books and transportation is the student's responsibility. Participants can take up to six college credits in an academic year. The program is open to high school juniors and seniors in public school with at least a B average. Students must meet course prerequisites. The program is typically not open to private school or homeschooled students. The state pays 50% of the tuition for 3 semester credits. In the 2011 academic year only 653 students enrolled in the Aspirations Program.<sup>21</sup>

### **Early Study, Early Enrollment & Aspirations Sample Minimum Requirements**

University of Maine: GPA B average, Counselor Recommendation

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<sup>20</sup> Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2011). Summary of options available for students to earn college credit in Wisconsin high schools. Retrieved from <http://youthoptions.dpi.wi.gov/files/cte/pdf/dualenrollop.pdf>

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2013). Youth options frequently asked questions and answers. Retrieved from [http://youthoptions.dpi.wi.gov/files/youthoptions/pdf/yo\\_faq.pdf](http://youthoptions.dpi.wi.gov/files/youthoptions/pdf/yo_faq.pdf)

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<sup>21</sup>Maine Department of Education (2012). Expanding access, increasing participation: post-secondary educational opportunities during high school.

## CONCLUSION

The Running Start Program is an important dual enrollment option. Evidence shows underrepresented minority and low-income students are underrepresented in the Running Start program. Evidence also shows that many Running Start access policies align with national best practices. However, current best practices have not consistently increased access for minority and low-income students. According to the Education Commission of the States, “minority and/or low-income students tend to be underrepresented in statewide dual enrollment programs.”<sup>22</sup> Many of the challenges related to access for underrepresented minority and low-income students in the Running Start program are also experienced in other state-level dual enrollment programs. These challenges include cost, eligibility criteria, and social factors.

Strategies should be explored to address barriers that discourage students from underrepresented backgrounds from participating in the Running Start program. At minimum, targeted outreach and recruitment strategies to increase underrepresented student populations should be developed and implemented as soon as possible. Addressing issues of cost and transportation are major issues; policy makers, postsecondary institutions and school districts should explore policies and practices in other states that have successfully addressed these issues.

Finally, all outreach efforts and policy changes should be evaluated against student and family preferences. In the quest to make the Running Start program more representative of Washington’s student population, policy makers should not forget the spirit of the Learning by Choice Law that was the catalyst for the program. The goal of Learning by Choice legislation was to create options for high school students. If students and families prefer to participate in other dual enrollment or dual credit programs, then the answer is to explore options to increase participation in other programs. Ultimately, the goal is to give high school students access to rigorous academic courses.

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<sup>22</sup> Education Commission of the States. (2014). Increasing student access and success in dual enrollment programs 13 model state-level policy components. Denver, CO: Zinh, J.

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