

## Dual credit and educational attainment

### Why are dual credit programs connected to our educational attainment goal?

The increasing importance of earning a postsecondary degree to access employment prospects across Washington led the state to affirm WSAC's educational attainment goal of 70 percent of Washington adults ages 22-44 earning a postsecondary credential. It has become clear that reaching this goal will require multiple pathways to higher education and family-wage careers.

There is no longer one linear path. To meet the demands of a rapidly changing workforce, students that have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education – students of color, low-income students, rural students, and first-generation college students – must not only have access to postsecondary pathways, but these pathways must also seem viable for students who may not readily see themselves as fitting into the traditional college system.

A critical tool in ensuring equitable pathways is participation in dual credit across the state. Dual credit programs give secondary schools the opportunity to build college-going cultures while helping students see a pathway to career and college readiness, thus boosting postsecondary enrollment and completion. This is especially true for underrepresented students who may not have considered college an option prior to engaging in advanced-level course work through dual credit participation.

### Research

Research shows that dual credit participation across all programs leads to increased postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion rates for students.

- [76 percent of RS students](#) that graduated from high school in Washington in 2015 enrolled directly in a two or four-year college, compared to only 55 percent of those not enrolled in RS.
- [In 2017, 3,111 students](#) graduated high school in Washington with an associate's degree earned through RS, saving up to \$39 million in tuition.

### Running Start

A [recent report](#) by the Community Center for Education Results (CCER) supports the idea that RS participation not only leads to increased postsecondary enrollment, but also improved persistence and completion rates. The findings showed RS participation was a key indicator of increased student success at the postsecondary level, with 62 percent of students who participated in RS completing a college credential and/or transferring to a four-year institution within three years, compared with just 37 percent of their peers who did not participate in the program.

### Advanced Placement (AP)

A 2018 study published in the [American Educational Research Journal](#) found that students who participate in AP in high school take higher-level courses in college, are more likely to earn a double-major, and are more likely to earn their degrees in a shorter length of time.

## International Baccalaureate (IB)

A [2015 study](#) by SRI International concluded that “that low-income students who participate in IB coursework, or who complete the IB Diploma Programme (DP), persist and graduate from college at a higher rate than low-income students who do not.” The data showed positive persistence indicators as well, with an 87 percent one-year retention rate for low-income diploma candidates at four-year colleges and universities. By comparison, the national first year retention rate for all income levels at the same institutions was 77 percent.

## Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Nationally, there has been evidence that student participation in CTE programs creates a pathway to postsecondary success. Citing the New Skills for Youth initiative, [one report](#) found that “today’s CTE students—of all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic levels—are receiving rigorous and engaging educational experiences that equip them for postsecondary careers and education in advanced, highly skilled, and more technical industries.” [A 2013 study](#) found that providing opportunities for youth to learn about and experience careers through access to high-quality CTE programs would increase postsecondary attainment, pointing to research that indicates CTE program participation encourages postsecondary enrollment and leads to more industry-endorsed postsecondary certificates.

## Considerations

These findings are compelling, but it’s also important to note that they should be taken within context. As a recent [New York Time’s article](#) pointed out, “Research confuses correlation with causation; highly motivated students tend to take more AP classes, and they also tend to do better in college and graduate on time. But once all the variables, like parental education and income, are stripped away, there is no indication that those who take AP do better in college.” This comment is focused on the AP program, but the same could potentially be said of all dual credit programs – academically driven students tend to be the ones tracked into these programs; therefore they are already more likely to enroll in and succeed in postsecondary education.

The research does show that when students not categorized as high-achieving are given an accessible pathway to participate in dual credit programs, they thrive academically and succeed at similar rates as their more high-achieving peers. [In a 2018 report](#), Education Commission of the States urged states to adopt policies that support “differentiated dual enrollment — defined as dual enrollment options for a wider range of learners — (as) a promising approach states can adopt to extend the benefits of dual enrollment participation (including higher rates of postsecondary enrollment and attainment) to middle- and lower-achieving students. This approach offers programs of differing academic challenges to high-, middle- and lower-achieving students, while trying to help them to participate in progressively more rigorous options.”

## What does the dual credit environment look like now and how is the state addressing challenges?

With a robust suite of dual credit programs, Washington is well-positioned to offer students multiple and personalized dual credit pathways that can lead to greater educational attainment. In the 2017-18 academic year, almost all districts in the state offered dual credit (97 percent), over half of high school students took one dual-credit course (59 percent of 9th-12th graders), and popularity is increasing ([11 percent increase in enrollment between 2010 and 2018.](#))

The various programs are organized into three categories. The first category is credit by college course completion through either the Running Start (RS) or College in the High School (CiHS) programs. The second is credit by articulation through the CTE Dual Credit (formerly TechPrep) program. The third is credit by exam and includes the Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Cambridge International (CI) programs. Students can choose to participate in one program, or braid together different programs throughout their high school career to maximize their ability to earn college credit and bolster their confidence in their capacity to master college-level course work.

### House Bill 1599

With the recent passage of HB 1599, Washington has proved itself a national leader in the practice of differentiated dual enrollment as the first state in the country to require schools to adopt Academic Acceleration policies. This practice requires that students who meet standard on state-level exams are automatically placed into the next most rigorous course in the matching content area, including dual credit courses, and it has proven successful in closing equity gaps in dual credit participation. According to Stand for Children, “As of 2018, at least 50 school districts in Washington have already implemented the policy and a majority have improved the equity of advanced classes by enrolling more historically underserved students.” OSPI’s Academic Acceleration Incentive Program supplies grants for school districts to implement the policy, and the results are impressive. Some stand-out districts include:

- [Federal Way](#): “Implemented in 2010-11 and saw a dramatic rise in enrollment of advanced classes with a notable increase for students of color. According to 2019 data, passing rates for advanced classes at Federal Way are at 92 percent and all racial subgroups are passing at rates of 87 percent or higher...”
- Tacoma: Enrollment in advanced classes has doubled from 27.5 percent to 71.1 percent for all students since 2013 and tripled for historically underserved students of color from 19.5 percent to 60 percent.”
- [Yakima- Toppenish High School](#): “Tripled the number of students enrolled in advanced classes in four years from 10.4 percent to 29.8 percent. In 2016-17, the number of Hispanic/Latino students and low-income students actually exceeded the district average, with 44.2 percent and 40.2 percent enrolled, respectively.”

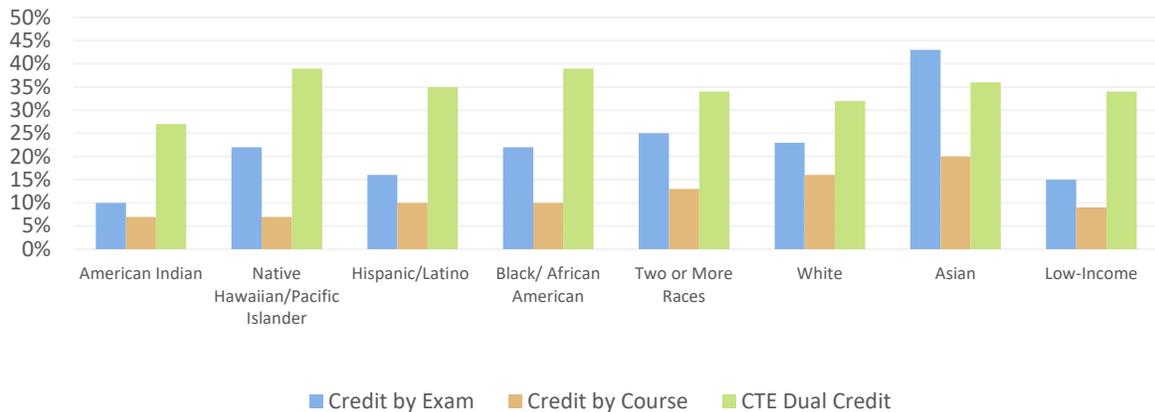
### Disparities in participation

To understand how impressive this impact is, it’s important to look closer at the current dual credit participation disparities in Washington.

- Historically underserved students of color (students identifying as Black, Hispanic, Native American, or Pacific Islander) are about [half as likely to participate](#) in the RS program statewide than their White or Asian counterparts.
- [SBCTC reports](#) that only 10 percent of FRPL eligible students participated in RS in the 2016-17 school year, compared to 20 percent of their non-FRPL peers.
- Rural students do not have the same opportunities to participate in the full suite of dual credit programs as their urban/suburban peers.

- A common thread among [dual credit participation](#) for many underrepresented students of color and low-income students is that they are well-represented in CTE Dual Credit programs, and underrepresented in Credit-by-Exam (AP/IB) and Credit-by-College Course (RS/CiHS) programs.

Dual Credit Participation, 2016-17



## Dual credit and transfer

Overall, a critical piece of the research puzzle that is missing when we discuss dual credit participation, the student experience with dual credit programs, and postsecondary success factors is the question of transferable credit that can lead to some type of postsecondary degree or credential. As one recent [Education Week article](#) noted, “very little research has been done on the proportion of students’ dual-enrollment credits that are accepted by the colleges they attend. Only a handful of small studies have explored the transfer question.” If credits earned in high school are accepted for transfer, it would presumably save students time and money, and lead to more awarded credentials. This transfer question is at the crux of the dual credit conversation because understanding how credits transfer can set students up with realistic expectations and allow them to better plan for their futures. More data is needed to accurately capture the types of courses students are taking through dual credit in each program, students’ academic performance and success within dual credit programs, and the effectiveness of programs in generating transferable post-secondary credit.

## CTE Dual Credit

The question of earning credits for transfer becomes particularly thorny with CTE Dual Credit. The participation numbers outlined above point to students who enroll in a CTE Dual Credit course at a school that has an existing articulation agreement with an institution of higher education – however, it does not necessarily mean that these students actually received college credit for the course. To receive college credit, students must earn at least a B in the course, register for the CTE credit in the statewide enrollment and reporting system (SERS), and complete the college’s administrative process. The SERS system is not linked to the K12 student tracking system (CEDARS), so there is no data about the percentage of students completing this process.

The awarding of college credit (how much and what kind) is based on individual articulation agreements between the high school or K12 district and the higher education institution. There are currently no state-wide articulation agreements, and awarding of credit outside the institution in the articulation

agreement is based on institutions offering an equivalent course. Since TechPrep lost funding in 2011, many articulation agreements between school districts and colleges have lapsed, reducing student opportunities to earn college credit through the CTE Dual Credit program.

This system results in students often not earning college credit at all. For many rural students, CTE Dual Credit is the only game in town when it comes to dual credit programs. Because student participation in CTE Dual Credit is so high amongst underrepresented groups, this lack of clear information and data is an equity issue. As career connected learning, apprenticeships, and CTE course sequences become more and more central to K12 education, CTE Dual Credit will continue to be an essential tool in closing equity gaps in dual credit participation.

### **Awarding college credit**

Inequities can also exist within the awarding of college credit. CiHS courses are taught at the high school, by high school teachers, with college curriculum, college textbooks, and oversight by college faculty and staff. Any qualified student in grades 10-12 can enroll in the course, but in order to receive college credit, students must pay tuition, up to \$65 a credit, or \$325 for one 5-credit course. This price-tag is well below matriculated tuition rates, but it is still far too steep for low-income families.

As a result, many low-income students are participating and succeeding in a CiHS course, doing the same work as their more affluent peers, and the only reason they aren't receiving college-credit is because they cannot pay tuition. There are some state subsidies for rural and small schools and for low-income students, but they are awarded based off a three-tiered priority system, and there is not enough funding to subsidize and make CiHS affordable for every student.

In recognition of the inequitable access low-income students have to CiHS college-credit, [HB 1973](#) creates a new WA Dual Enrollment Scholarship Pilot program to provide funding for tuition costs to low-income students enrolled in CiHS. Administered by WSAC, the program will also provide textbook vouchers and funds for course/lab fees for low-income RS participants. Eligible students must be in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade, eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), have at least a 2.0 GPA, and be enrolled in at least one CiHS or RS course at pilot locations.

### **Dual Credit and financial aid**

Uncertainty around the maximum timeframe policy and financial aid can lead to students being discouraged from pursuing college credit. Questions regarding dual credit participation and how it can affect access to state financial aid through the maximum time frame policy, enrollment deadlines, and quarters of eligibility leave many students frustrated and confused. In some cases, misinformation about this topic causes students to decide not to participate in dual credit programs. This is especially true for underrepresented students who often need financial aid to pursue postsecondary education.

In response, WSAC is currently developing a Dual Credit & Financial Aid Myth Busters document that provides clear information in a straightforward and simplified way – the goal is to put technical financial aid language into layman's terms. There are currently no sources made specifically for students that address how dual credit can affect financial aid eligibility. There are practitioner manuals, but these are lengthy and technical. Many practitioners might already be aware of the policies around state financial aid and dual credit, but with high staff turnover, this is not always the case, and misinformation can spread rapidly.

WSAC has also heard from practitioners that this is a very difficult topic to explain to students in terms they can understand. This document will be a resource for practitioners to distribute to students. High school students will understand the different ways dual credit can impact financial aid, and be empowered to make decisions around dual credit that align with their interests and postsecondary plans. College students will understand the different options they have around appeals if they transfer in too many credits that do not apply to their program of study and be able to advocate for themselves. Practitioners will have a source of clear and straightforward information to share with colleagues, students, and families about how dual credit impacts financial aid. They will know how to best advise their students so they understand the financial aid implications of participating in dual credit without dissuading students from pursuing dual credit opportunities.

### **Further discussion**

Equity in dual credit is about more than just access. Washington's educational leadership has displayed a high-level of determination to make dual credit programs accessible to all with a demonstrated legislative commitment to expanding programs across the state. But access alone is not enough. We have to grapple with important questions that put student voice at the center of this work. Why are students of color and low-income students not participating in programs beyond CTE? What are the barriers that students see to participating? Are these programs being designed to meet the needs of all students? Do these programs honor the multitude of postsecondary plans that students will pursue? What can we do to better understand and meet these challenges?

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