

Illinois Dual Credit Task Force

Report to the General Assembly

~December 2008~

Recommendations

The Task Force was presented with a substantial amount of information to supplement their experiences with dual credit. To focus the work of the Task Force, dual credit was distinguished from other forms of early college credit programs. Dual credit was defined using the Illinois Community College Board designation as a college course taken by a high school student for which the student is granted both college and high school credit. This involves a formal arrangement between a high school or school district and a college regarding the structure of the program. These courses are clearly distinguished from remedial or developmental coursework for which students do not receive college credit. Dual credit courses are distinct from other types of early college credit such as dual enrollment in which a high school student is taking a course at a college without a formal arrangement for dual credit with the high school, or Advanced Placement (AP) courses which meet established criteria set by the College Board and which qualify students to take an exam to potentially qualify for college credit. The members of the Task Force agreed that dual credit is a valuable tool for improving education in Illinois. Members focused on potential benefits for program participants, such as:

Reducing college costs:

Dual credit courses help families offset the expense of college tuition. College credits acquired through dual credit programs are considerably less expensive than tuition costs incurred during traditional college study.

Speeding time to degree completion:

One of the most consistent findings in studies of dual credit programs is that students participating in dual credit program are able to complete their degrees in less time than students who do not.

Improving the curriculum for high school students:

The addition of college coursework to high school curricula enhances the options available to high school students while adding college level rigor.

Facilitating the transition between high school and college:

Dual credit courses help prepare students for the transition to college by engaging them in college level work and developing pathways to degree attainment.

Enhancing connections between high schools and colleges:

Relationships established between high schools and colleges in developing dual credit programs improve communication between secondary and postsecondary education. This aids in developing alignment of curricula as well as articulation of courses.

Offering opportunities for improving degree attainment for underserved student populations:

Dual credit programs provide chances for offering college credits to underrepresented students who are able to meet academic standards for participation. Some students may not even consider attending

college, but are encouraged to attempt such courses through dual credit because the costs are lower for college credits, the setting is more familiar, and the courses are readily accessible. Achieving success in these courses can act as a gateway to continue in college.

The Task Force also recognized concerns about implementation of dual credit programs.

Academic quality and consistency:

One of the most frequent concerns expressed in the academic literature about dual credit involves academic rigor and consistency of dual credit courses with traditional college courses. The Illinois Community College Board has established oversight policies for community colleges as part of its administrative rules. Review of dual credit programs is a part of the regular recognition process performed by ICCB staff and is conducted according to standard procedures. There is no direct oversight of dual credit programs involving independent institutions in Illinois.

Faculty quality:

There is concern that faculty do not have the proper qualifications. For courses to be accepted as equivalent to other college level work, dual credit faculty must meet college faculty qualifications. Additionally, for teachers to meet the high school qualifications they must have the appropriate certifications.

Transferability problems:

Due to concerns about quality or consistency with other college courses, some higher education institutions are unwilling to accept dual credit courses, or choose to limit the number of dual credit courses they are willing to accept.

Limited access for low-income and minority students:

Access to dual enrollment programs is uneven, with some districts more involved than others, and tuition costs presenting barriers for some students. Districts serving more low-income and minority students are less likely to participate in dual credit programs.

Lack of policies to ensure students are prepared to begin college-level work:

Since dual credit courses are defined as college level, students must meet the same requirements as college students to take these courses. There are concerns that these requirements are not adequately met in some dual credit settings.

Lack of strong quantitative data supporting the proposed benefits of dual credit:

Difficulty in isolating the effect of participation in dual credit programs from other factors that influence student success, plus a lack of data to make such assessments limits the ability of researchers to determine the real effects of dual credit programs. There are many factors as likely to affect student achievement as participation in dual credit programs, including academic ability, student motivation, student background, concurrent participation in other programs (such as AP, International Baccalaureate, tech prep, high school early college or college prep courses), career goals, differences in instructor qualifications and teaching methods, and differences in counseling at the schools. Without data to account for differences in students and the programs in which they are participating, it is very difficult to substantiate claims of success by dual credit programs. A few studies have attempted to control for such factors but these have produced mixed results. The most frequent findings suggest that dual credit may contribute to decreased time to degree and improved persistence to degree. In Illinois,

there are problems with both availability of data and quality of data. Limited data is collected and where it is collected it does not include enough different types of interconnected data to be of use.

To address the expansion of dual credit in Illinois and the recognized benefits and concerns related to dual credit, the Task Force focused on three goals that were identified early in the process. Recommendations were developed based on these goals.

Goal 1: Ensure quality

Goal 2: Improve access, equity, and attainment

Goal 3: Increase accountability

For a copy of the entire report, go to: <http://www.ibhe.state.il.us/DualCredit/materials/DCTFReport.pdf>