# Expanding Dual Credit - Myth Busting

#  Shifting Current Practices Toward Equity and Access

By Jason Boatwright, Multiple Pathways Dual Credit Program Supervisor OSPI; and

Kim Reykdal, OSPI Program Supervisor Lead Secondary School Counseling

Over the past six months, OSPI has supported two rounds of the Building Equitable, Sustainable Dual Credit Program grant. Over these two rounds, we reviewed over 50 applications and gained insight into what districts and schools think would improve their enrollment by underserved student groups.

In addition to being able to fund some exciting proposals that we believe will work to systematically reduce opportunity gaps in dual credit participation and completion, we learned a lot about how educators think about these challenges. Across both rounds of grant review, we noticed some approaches to dual credit growth based on long held believes about “what works.” There are a variety of reasons students choose not to take dual credit, but the myths and assumptions reflected in these grant applications should be reevaluated in the spirit of ensuring equity and continual improvement.

Below are the top myths and assumptions we saw within these statewide grant applications. Since we believe continued adherence to these ideas could perpetuate the existing inequities in participation by underserved students, we’ve tried to reframe each myth to shift toward more equitable practices. We have also provided some initial system analysis questions to assist staff in planning and building access to dual credit courses for all students.

# If You Build It, They Will Come

Yes, it is true that if you do not offer dual credit courses, students cannot participate. However, just offering dual credit does not mean that students will enroll. We have years of data showing that even when there are plenty of dual credit opportunities, many students still are not encouraged or choosing to access them.

* Will students who have never enrolled in a dual credit course see this class as a class they belong in?
* Will these courses improve students’ preparation for the next step after high school?
* Were student course requests, information in High School and Beyond Plans (HSBP), and/or disaggregated student enrollment data used to inform which courses to offer?
* Is there connection between courses offered and the local communities, regions, or state’s workforce needs and in-demand careers?
* Are courses from more than one dual credit program being developed to meet varying student interests and needs?
* Has your board yet adopted an Academic Acceleration policy, as is required to be in place by the 2021–22 school year? [see RCW 28A.320.195: Academic acceleration for high school students.]

# Informing Students is Sufficient to Increase Enrollment

While there is a bit of truth to this statement, sometimes students need to have more information beyond what is available. Ideally, all educators would understand and use common language within their building to promote participation in dual credit and reassure all students that they are capable of success with the right supports.

* When and how do students and families learn about available dual credit options? RCW [28A.600.320](https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.600.320) and [28A.600.290](https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28a.600.290) outline what information on Running Start and College in the High School high schools are required to provide students and families.
* Is information made available in at least the top two non-English languages spoken by families per [RCW 28A.230.090](https://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.230.090)?
* Are there clear connections made between taking dual credit courses and achieving post-high school goals?
* Are students needing special services receiving the same information from the same staff as their general education peers per [RCW 28A.230.090](https://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=28A.230.090)?
* Are your HSBP’s active, living documents or just an annual task to checkmark?
* Is there a peer network that can support students who wouldn’t automatically consider themselves dual credit students?
* Are administrators, paraprofessionals, and teachers able to share basic information about available dual credit courses?
* How are middle school students informed of the upcoming opportunity to take dual credit?

# Expanding CTE Dual Credit Programs Will Increase Latinx Participation

Expanding CTE Dual Credit programs is good for ALL student groups. When CTE Dual Credit is part of a sequence of CTE courses a student takes, postsecondary outcomes improve. What we see, though, is too often underserved student groups are over-represented in one-off enrollment in CTE Dual Credit courses that don’t connect to their HSBP goals or their other coursework. Equitable access to dual credit means that students participate in the available dual credit course(s) that best support THEIR goals outlined in their HSBP.

* In looking at your school’s disaggregated enrollment data, are there student groups that are over- or under-represented in CTE Dual Credit courses?
* Are CTE Dual Credit options as robustly promoted by all staff as AP/IB, College in the High School, or Running Start?
* Are dual credit courses being built into CTE Course Sequence Graduation Pathways? How are those and other Dual Credit Graduation Pathways being communicated to students and families?

# Removing Cost Barriers Will Increase Participation by Underserved Students

Student-borne costs is a barrier to dual credit access that OSPI is continuing to work to remove for all students. Removing this barrier alone; however, is not a change sufficient enough to make the dramatic changes in dual credit access we all are aiming for. Washington state has several programs in place (and being piloted) that aim to remove cost barriers. Even with these programs, we see underserved students continue to lag behind White and Asian students in dual credit participation. Assuming that Black, Hispanic, American Indian, ELL, or Students with Disabilities are not participating strictly because of cost ignores the other systemic barriers in place keeping these students out of dual credit courses. We know that many underserved students do not participate because dual credit courses are not promoted to them, they don’t feel they belong there, or don’t see the relevance to preparing them to achieve their post-high school plans. Along with removing cost, these other barriers must also be addressed.

* Do staff know about state and local resources to mitigate the costs of dual credit courses?
* When and how are students and families made aware of available state and local resources?
* Are district or building staff applying for or requesting available fee waivers, subsidies, and/or other forms of financial assistance?

# Having One or Two “Dual Credit Info Nights” is Sufficient

Seven times, seven ways. Minimum. With all the information students and families have coming at them, it is too easy for families and students to miss these sessions. Maybe they didn’t get the email or flier or hear the announcement. Are these announcements available in your students’ primary languages? Maybe they must work, or their family can’t attend on the night that is scheduled. Maybe they didn’t receive the session information in a language they could understand.

Staff must also consider that for students who belong to an underserved group, too often their friends aren’t participating, taking dual credit is not promoted at home, and adults in the building might not be encouraging them to try and letting them know that they could be successful.

* When and how often do students and families hear about available dual credit options?
* What communication methods (emails, phone calls, newsletters, fliers, etc.) do you use to get the information into the hands/heads of your students and families?
* Are families who speak a language other than English at home receiving any kind of translation services at these information nights?
* Is discussing dual credit options part of the HSBP and/or course registration discussions happening each year?
* Are middle and high school staff promoting these dual credit information sessions with their students?

If you have questions on dual credit, how to expand course offerings, or rules regarding dual credit; please contact OSPI’s Dual Credit Program Supervisor: Jason Boatwright at jason.boatwright@k12.wa.us