Recommendations for Improving College Success
By Building Effective Transitions Between High School and College

DUAL ENROLLMENT, CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT, AND EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS are proven, innovative models that allow students the opportunity to take credit-bearing college courses while still in high school. These effective educational options improve the efficiency of the education system by smoothing the transition from secondary to postsecondary education and decreasing the time needed to complete degrees, while increasing college and career readiness and success and saving money for students and taxpayers. Dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and schools with an early college design address several of the most significant higher education challenges facing the country, including, most critically, students’ ability to affordably complete their studies and secure the degrees or credentials they need to pursue rewarding careers and thrive in the modern economy. This document outlines key opportunities the Trump Administration can leverage to help these models scale and to create a more cost-effective and efficient grade 9-16 education system that improves outcomes for students, employers, and the economy.

The College in High School Alliance (CHSA) recommends that the Trump Administration:

1. Improve Federal Management of Postsecondary Transition Programs by Reorganizing Relevant Functions at the Department of Education into an Office of Postsecondary Transitions;
2. Create a Competition to Expand Innovative Strategies that Improve College and Career Success;
3. Support Pathways for Students to Enter into Careers through Partnerships Between Business, School Districts, and Institutions of Higher Education;
4. Continue and Evaluate Pell Experimental Sites for Dual Enrollment to Determine Effective Uses of Pell Funding;
5. Increase the Pool of Instructors Able to Teach College Courses to High School Students; and
6. Enable States and Local Educational Agencies to Leverage Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Opportunities for Dual and Concurrent Enrollment and Early College High Schools.

These recommendations are described in further detail following.
What is the College in High School Alliance?

The College in High School Alliance (CHSA) is a coalition of leading national organizations dedicated to promoting policies in support of high-quality dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high schools. CHSA believes that greater support for these models at the federal, state, and local levels will significantly improve the secondary and postsecondary outcomes of students, particularly those from low- and moderate-income backgrounds.

What are Dual Enrollment, Concurrent Enrollment, and Early College High Schools?

Dual or concurrent enrollment programs are partnerships between local educational agencies (LEAs) and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) that allow high school students to enroll in college courses and earn transferable college credit, setting them on an accelerated path to postsecondary success.

Key characteristics of high quality dual and concurrent enrollment programs are:

- collaboration by high school and college faculty within the same discipline on curriculum and assessment alignment;
- efficient resource sharing between the K12 and postsecondary systems; and
- sustainable professional development to raise the rigor of the high school experience.

Schools with an early college design allow students to simultaneously complete a regular high school diploma and complete college courses as part of an organized course of study leading to a degree or credential. Key characteristics of these successful schools include:

- an integrated, organized, transferable college course of study leading to a college degree or credential provided at no cost to students;
- a comprehensive system of supports that proactively develops students’ academic skills and the behaviors necessary for high school and college completion; and
- a commitment to serving students from low-income families and backgrounds underrepresented in higher education.

Why Dual Enrollment, Concurrent Enrollment, and Early College High Schools Matter

Dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high schools are evidence-based models that promote college and career readiness and success; create a more efficient grade 9-16 education system; and align postsecondary credentials with labor market needs to make our workforce more competitive in the global economy. The models achieve these outcomes by addressing four key challenges in higher education: college readiness, college access, college affordability, and college completion. Numerous rigorous, multi-institution, and statewide research studies in more than a dozen states have proven that early college high schools and dual and concurrent enrollment programs significantly increase high school graduation rates, college readiness, and college access, persistence, and completion. At the same time, these models provide students with course and school options so they can tailor their academic experience to their specific college and career plans, lower the cost of college for families, and reduce the time needed for students to complete degrees and enter the workforce. Across the country, these models are saving money for students, families, and taxpayers while improving efficiencies in transitions between high school and higher education. See the Appendix for more information about the evidence supporting these models.

Too often, secondary and higher education inefficiently operate as silos, with little interaction between the two sectors. This has created a significant challenge for students to transition across this artificial barrier in our education system, as the two systems frequently fail to align their objectives, methods, and desired outcomes, to the detriment of students. Dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high schools disrupt these silos, and foster collaboration between the secondary and postsecondary systems, creating new, entrepreneurial options that address students’ needs. However, by virtue of bridging secondary and postsecondary systems, these programs frequently encounter inefficiencies and lack of alignment at both levels and are excluded from traditional funding streams available to both sectors. As a result, there is a real need for the federal government to develop initiatives to allow these programs to grow to meet the demand and thereby promote smoother transitions for students between secondary and postsecondary education and improved college and career outcomes.
Recommendations for Improving College Success By Building Effective Transitions Between High School and College

1. Improve Federal Management of Postsecondary Transition Programs by Reorganizing Relevant Functions at the Department of Education into an Office of Postsecondary Transitions

As the Trump Administration considers ways to make the Department of Education operate more efficiently, it should create an Office of Postsecondary Transitions whose mission is to break down the silos between K-12 and higher education and promote programs and policies that do so, thereby improving students’ postsecondary success. This office should administer a Postsecondary Transition Innovation Fund that invests in innovative partnerships between IHEs, employers, school districts, and intermediaries that strengthen the transition between secondary education, postsecondary education, and the workforce. This fund should emphasize strategies that create a seamless pathway from secondary to postsecondary education and careers, including but not limited to dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school programs.

2. Create a Competition to Expand Innovative Strategies that Improve College and Career Success

Launch a competition for college and career success to encourage investment in solving higher education challenges through evidence-based models such as dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high schools. The competition should provide matching grants, potentially based on a Pay for Success or tiered evidence model, to states and/or IHEs that invest in strategies that increase students’ degree completion and/or career preparation and placement.

3. Support Pathways for Students to Enter into Careers through Partnerships Between Employers, School Districts, and Institutions of Higher Education

Build upon state and local efforts to develop career pathways in K-12 schools that integrate rigorous academics with sequenced, high-quality career and technical education courses that provide students with college credits that lead to postsecondary credentials and career opportunities in high-demand industries. A comprehensive strategy should leverage career and technical education legislation by giving dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school models a robust role, incorporating them into core elements of the program, increasing the allowable use of funding for these programs, and supporting states to transition from articulated credit to dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high schools. A strategy should also incentivize full engagement of employers in the design and implementation of career pathways models that incorporate college credit in high school, including changes to tax policy that reward employer participation.

4. Continue and Evaluate Pell Experimental Sites for Dual Enrollment to Determine Effective Uses of Pell Funding

Continue the U.S. Department of Education’s dual enrollment experimental sites initiative, which allows students in 43 participating institutions to access their Pell Grants to take college courses while still enrolled in high school. In addition, the Department should collect data to enable researchers to evaluate the impact of this three year program allowing high school students to access their Pell Grants for college courses. Under current Pell statutes, low-income students who would be Pell eligible if they had completed high school find themselves penalized for embarking on their college education early. A high-quality independent evaluation should assess the government’s return-on-investment, and how best to target limited government funding to create more efficient and faster pathways for students through postsecondary education.

5. Increase the Pool of Instructors Able to Teach College Courses to High School Students

The Administration should direct federal investment to provide opportunities and incentives to expand the pool of teachers who can teach college courses in early college and dual and concurrent enrollment settings. Two of the chief barriers to expanding options for students are the lack of high school instructors with the advanced degrees necessary to teach college courses, and the bureaucratic hurdles that can prevent college instructors from securing the certification necessary to teach high school students. Priorities might be included in existing federal funding streams such as the TEACH grant service payback program or Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need, or through a new teacher incentive fund.
6. Enable States and Local Educational Agencies to Leverage ESSA Opportunities for Dual and Concurrent Enrollment and Early College High Schools

Continue to reduce barriers for states and LEAs that wish to invest their federal allocations in establishing or expanding dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school programs. The ESSA statute creates many opportunities for them to strengthen these programs; the department should publicize these opportunities for states and LEAs, create favorable policy conditions, and ensure that rules for state and local report cards fully implement the statute's intent to create meaningful information on dual and concurrent enrollment so that parents are aware of options provided at different high schools. In particular, fully fund the new ESSA block grants (Title IV, Part A Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants) at the levels authorized by Congress to provide local school districts with meaningful funding that can be used to support and scale programs like dual enrollment and early college.

Conclusion

Dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high schools are proven models for improving college readiness, access, affordability, and completion and career readiness and success. The Trump Administration can help develop a more effective and efficient grade 9-16 education system and a more prepared and competitive workforce by implementing policies that break down barriers to scaling these models and allow them to reach their full potential.

Signatories

Bard College
Jobs for the Future
KnowledgeWorks
Middle College National Consortium
National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships

Appendix

  • Texas students participating in dual enrollment/dual credit in high school were more likely to complete a bachelor’s degree in a more timely manner than those students who had not participated.

  • Study finds that early college students were significantly more likely to graduate high school, enroll in college, and earn their college degree than comparison students.

  • Study finds significant benefits in boosting college degree attainment, particularly for low-income students.

  • Participation in concurrent enrollment in Colorado for high school students graduating in 2010-2012 resulted in a 22 percent increase in likelihood of enrolling in college immediately following high school graduation, and a 9 percent decrease in a student’s need for remedial education once enrolled in college.

  • The study, which looked at a large, multi-year sample of Iowa high school students, dual enrollment students consistently outperformed traditional students in community college courses, and dual enrollment had a positive impact on grade point average for students enrolled in four-year institutions.

  • According to data collected by Jobs for the Future, early college students had a 93 percent high school graduation rate (compared to a national average of 78 percent), and earned an average of 36 college credits. Nearly one quarter of students earn a degree along with their high school diploma.