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ECS 50-State Analysis: What States Can Do to Support Student Access and Success in Dual Enrollment Programs

DENVER – States relying on dual enrollment programs to boost college completion rates may want to consider policies ensuring all eligible students can participate and requiring families be notified of the programs, according to a [50-state analysis](#) released today.

As state leaders increasingly invest in dual enrollment programs, allowing high school students to take college classes, research by the [Education Commission of the States](#) has identified more than a dozen “model” elements of state policy that can lead to improved student access and success.

“What we found were policy components that repeatedly led to increased participation by students and by high schools and colleges,” said Jennifer Dounay Zinth, a senior policy analyst for ECS.

In 2014, all 50 states and the District of Columbia offer dual enrollment opportunities. State-level policy governs the programs in 47 states and D.C., and state leaders typically tout the strategy as a means of improving college matriculation and graduation rates.

But even as research shows minority and low-income students are most likely to benefit from dual enrollment classes, statistics show these students tend not to be the ones participating in the programs.

Zinth, who created a [50-state online database](#) of dual enrollment policies, said requiring families to pay tuition for the classes and wait for reimbursement can preclude some students from participating. [Eight states](#) cover tuition for students in all dual enrollment programs; in 10 more states, the entity primarily responsible for covering tuition varies by dual enrollment program.

Similarly, Zinth said requiring all students be provided information about dual enrollment programs – embedded in law in only 18 states – can ensure more families are aware of the opportunities.

Examples of states using some of the “model” dual enrollment policy elements include:

- New Mexico requires information about dual enrollment be given when eighth-graders create high school academic plans and then repeated annually for the next four years.
- Ohio law requires high schools to offer dual enrollment opportunities while Oklahoma prohibits districts and colleges from denying dual enrollment courses to qualified high school students.
- Washington state colleges must make fee waivers available for low-income students and they’re required to publicize the waivers via websites, marketing and social media.

The analysis also looks at states striving to ensure dual enrollment courses maintain college rigor, with 37 states embedding instructor or course quality components in policy. For example, Minnesota will reimburse districts for dual enrollment programs only if the courses are accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships or meet other stringent criteria.

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