Dual Enrollment with Career and Technical Education Focus Seen as Strategy for College Completion and Workforce Investment

DENVER – An increasing number of students are participating in dual enrollment courses with a career and technical education focus, a trend that research shows should serve states interested in improving college completion and workforce investment.

The Education Commission of the States today released a report highlighting research that links CTE dual enrollment courses with improved outcomes for traditionally underserved students. In some cases, students in CTE dual enrollment courses outperformed those in traditional academic dual enrollment courses.

The report also outlined four policy components that state leaders should consider to ensure access to CTE dual enrollment programs and to assure the quality and transferability of the courses.

Among the highlights of the research findings:

- More than 80 percent of high schools have students in dual enrollment programs, according to the most recent federal data, and nearly half the schools have students in CTE dual enrollment classes.
- That translates into more than 600,000 students in CTE dual enrollment, or an annual growth rate of more than 5 percent between 2002-03 and 2010-11.
- Studies show CTE dual enrollment students are more likely to graduate high school, enroll in a four-year college or university full-time and persist in higher education. Researchers in one study noted, “In many cases, male and low-income students benefitted more from dual enrollment participation than their more advantaged peers.”

Key policy components for states to consider:

- Responsibility for course fees should not fall to parents. For example, Florida makes clear any dual enrollment student is exempt from paying course fees.
- Course content and instructor credentials must mirror those of traditional postsecondary instructors. Texas requires CTE dual enrollment courses to be college-level technical education courses listed in the state’s Workforce Education Course Manual.
- Courses should incorporate industry curriculum and standards, and lead to certification.
- State should ensure course transferability.

Jennifer Dounay Zinth, the report’s author and ECS senior policy analyst, said workforce investment has been a frequent subject in recent state-of-the-state addresses by the nation’s governors.

“With CTE dual enrollment, states are getting students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education on a pathway to college and career,” Zinth said. “Students, local economies and states win.”

The Education Commission of the States was created by states, for states, in 1965. We track policy, translate research, provide unbiased advice and create opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another.