DENVER – Only half the graduates of low-income, rural high schools will enroll in college the following fall, a college-going rate that federal data show is the lowest in the nation.

States are turning to dual enrollment, where high school students enroll in college courses, as one strategy to improve that rate. But they’re encountering challenges unique to rural areas, such as finding high school teachers qualified to teach college-level courses.

Today, the Education Commission of the States released a report showing how different states are addressing such issues, including one public-private partnership, the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative, which has more than tripled the dual enrollment courses offered in 21 rural districts in just two years.

Jennifer Dounay Zinth, the report’s author and ECS’ dual enrollment expert, said states are trying innovative approaches to make college classes available to more rural students.

“State leaders see the promise of dual enrollment and they’re eager to ensure their students can participate,” Zinth said. “But it’s harder in rural areas, where teachers may be far from the training they need to teach these classes and students may have to drive hours to get to college campuses.”

Zinth, who presented the report Friday at a meeting of rural state leaders hosted by the Council of Chief State School Officers, said it is intended to help states facing similar challenges learn from each other.

Among the highlights of the report:

**Challenge #1: Securing qualified instructors**, either high school teachers with the qualifications to lead college-level courses or postsecondary instructors.

- **State response**: Ohio’s Appalachian Collaborative including funding to help eight colleges and universities administer an 18-month master’s degree with a teacher-friendly schedule.

**Challenge #2: Covering program costs**, as many rural districts face declines in enrollment and the funding that follows students in many states.

- **State response**: Texas authorizes workforce investment funds to support dual enrollment programs targeted to address the needs of high-demand fields.

**Challenge #3: Addressing program logistics**, including offering a course to a very small number of students or offering career/technical education courses at schools with limited equipment.

- **State responses**: Ten states, including Illinois and Wyoming, allow courses to be offered at a location other than a high school or college, easing travel burdens.