
DUAL ENROLLMENT FOR COLLEGE COMPLETION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TENNESSEE

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IN 2010, TENNESSEE EMBARKED UPON AN AMBITIOUS COMPLETION AGENDA

To meet its college completion goals Tennessee enacted a [ground-breaking array of postsecondary education reforms](#). These include revising the funding system for state colleges and universities; implementing coherent transfer curricula, course numbers, and pathways; and reforming the structure and delivery of developmental education. These reforms have garnered national attention and are likely to improve completion rates among students entering Tennessee’s postsecondary institutions. But alone, they may not be enough.

COLLEGE COMPLETION IS A PIPELINE ISSUE

The seeds of college completion begin well before students ever arrive at the college door. In order to achieve its completion goals, Tennessee must ensure that larger numbers of students *enter* college—for if students do not enroll, they cannot finish. Developing a robust postsecondary pipeline requires that students be *academically ready* and *financially able* to enter college.

Currently, too many Tennessee high school students are not ready for college—decreasing the total number of potential college graduates in the state. Notably, according to Tennessee Higher Education Commission ([THEC](#)) statistics, fewer than 60 percent of the state’s high school graduates enroll in college the following fall. Moreover, according to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), students in Tennessee’s public two- and four-year colleges [rely on grants and loans](#) to a greater degree than the national average. Ensuring that Tennessee students enter college and can afford to remain enrolled until they graduate are essential steps toward improving the college completion pipeline. Without a robust pool of students *entering* and *staying in* college, it is not possible to meet the state’s goals.

DUAL ENROLLMENT IS A RESEARCH-BASED, PRE-EXISTING PIPELINE STRATEGY WITH BROAD STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT

Dual enrollment, in which high school students take college courses and earn transcribed college credits, has existed in Tennessee for many years. In 2012, a multi-organizational group of Tennessee stakeholders asked the [Community College Research Center](#) (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, to examine dual enrollment in the state and nationally. They sought to understand:

1. how dual enrollment can contribute to the state’s completion agenda;
2. the extent to which other southern states support dual enrollment; and,
3. stakeholders’ perceptions of Tennessee’s current dual enrollment program, as it is implemented on the ground.

The goal was to develop a series of policy recommendations for strengthening dual enrollment in Tennessee, in order to ensure that the program was a meaningful driver of Tennessee’s completion goals.

Full findings from the literature review and peer state policy review can be found in the project’s Phase I Report, *Dual enrollment for college completion: Findings from Tennessee and peer states*, released in June 2012. Findings from 39 stakeholder interviews were shared with state policymakers in December 2012. Both reports are available from lead author [Melinda Mechur Karp](#) of CCRC. Key take-aways from this work include:

Dual enrollment: High school students simultaneously enroll in a high school and college course and *generate a college transcript*. Supported by Hope Scholarship funds (TCA-49-4-930).

Dual credit: High school students take a high school course and an aligned or articulated end-of-course exam that *may generate credit toward a college degree upon matriculation*. Supported by PC 967 (2012).

Dual enrollment encourages college completion.	Dual enrollment participation is related to increased high school graduation rates .
	Dual enrollment participation is related to higher college grades , increased persistence rates , and greater credit accrual .
	Many types of students, including those from low-income families and those in career and technical education , can benefit from dual enrollment participation.
Peer states support dual enrollment.	The five southern states included in this study—Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Florida—support dual enrollment via state policy and funding.
	Peer states’ policies seek to enroll a wide range of students in dual enrollment courses.
	Peer states use state dollars to make dual enrollment cost-free, or at least low-cost, for students and families. They also ensure that colleges and high schools do not lose funding when they offer dual enrollment courses.
Tennessee stakeholders support dual enrollment as a completion strategy.	Dual enrollment participation has grown rapidly; over 13,000 Tennessee students received a lottery-funded dual enrollment grant during the 2010-2011 school year.
	Stakeholders want additional guidance on program implementation and believe that state policy should be refined to further strengthen the program.
	Stakeholders believe that current dual enrollment funding is not sufficient and creates barriers to a strong pipeline into postsecondary education.

Tennessee stakeholders are supportive of dual enrollment. Yet, while research shows that this program can be a key driver of a college completion pipeline, Tennessee’s current dual enrollment policies are not optimal. Stakeholders identified areas for improvement; importantly, peer states address these areas in their own policies. In order to maximize the potential for dual enrollment to help reach Tennessee’s completion goals, a series of four interrelated policy reforms must occur.

TENNESSEE SHOULD DEVELOP A DUAL ENROLMENT PROGRAM THAT IS COHERENT, INCLUSIVE, ALIGNED WITH OTHER STATE INITIATIVES, AND COST-FREE TO STUDENTS AND FAMILIES.

COHERENCE: DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS SHOULD BE PROVIDED WITH CLEAR STATE-LEVEL LEADERSHIP TO ENSURE QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY.

ACTIONS:

- *Grant administrative authority and oversight responsibility for dual enrollment to the Tennessee Board of Regents.*
- *Provide resources to the Tennessee Board of Regents for dedicated staff to perform these functions.*

WHY?

Dual enrollment in Tennessee is very flexible; programs can be designed and delivered in a variety of ways. Stakeholders appreciate the flexibility granted under this system. And in a state as diverse as Tennessee, allowing institutions to design programs that meet their needs is essential. Some traditional course delivery formats are just not feasible in rural districts, for example.

However, too much flexibility has drawbacks—especially when trying to ensure that the program meets college completion goals. Research indicates that [program design matters](#) a great deal and that dual enrollment’s influence on college completion may only occur when dual enrollment courses are [rigorous](#) and [authentic](#). Stakeholders report feeling confused about how best to design and administer their programs, and they want more resources in order to make sure their programs are of high quality.

Notably, excessive flexibility in eligibility requirements may inhibit dual enrollment’s ability to increase Tennessee’s college completion pipeline. Stakeholders report that the type of student, in terms of academic preparation, permitted to participate in dual enrollment varies widely across the state. Not only does this inconsistency lead to frustration and confusion, but it also means that, in many places, students who might benefit from dual enrollment are prevented from taking part.

Locating authority and oversight in a single office will enable program personnel to have a clear place to go for advice on program development. It also ensures that someone is responsible for quality, and that programs are designed in ways that are consistent with each other and the state’s completion goals. It is essential that this office be funded and staffed with dedicated personnel so that dual enrollment remains a priority rather than one of a long list of responsibilities.

CAN IT BE DONE?

Tennessee’s [PC 967](#), passed in 2012, locates authority for dual credit within the Department of Education’s Office of Postsecondary Coordination and Alignment. The office, with two staff members, is responsible for coordinating early postsecondary credit opportunities throughout the state, developing statewide dual credit courses and assessments, and disseminating information on dual credit and other opportunities to stakeholders.

New York City’s City University of New York has a centralized office for their dual enrollment program, [College Now](#). The office works with colleges and high schools throughout the city to provide a flexible and high-quality dual enrollment program and pre-dual enrollment preparation activities. The office engages in program coordination, quality assurance, curriculum development, and professional development. The office also engages in data collection and analysis activities.

INCLUSIVENESS: POLICIES AND PROGRAMS MUST INCLUDE A RANGE OF STUDENTS, NOT JUST THOSE ALREADY LIKELY TO SUCCEED IN COLLEGE.

ACTIONS:

- *Refine and enforce multi-tiered eligibility requirements.*
- *Support high-school based models of dual enrollment.*

WHY?

Tennessee’s completion goals can only be achieved if *all* students are part of the postsecondary pipeline. Ensuring that students who might not have gone to college in the past—low-income students, first generation college goers, students who are interested in career and technical education—enter and succeed in postsecondary education is essential to increasing the overall percentage of college completers within the state. This means that dual enrollment programs cannot be limited to only the most academically proficient students, most economically advantaged families, or the largest schools.

Tennessee stakeholders were clear in their belief that a wide variety of students can benefit from and should be included in the program. They argued in favor of including students with a range of academic backgrounds and interests. As already noted, research studies have found that [career and technical](#), [lower-income](#), and otherwise [disadvantaged](#) students can benefit from dual enrollment—often to a greater extent than their more advantaged peers.

Streamlined multi-tiered eligibility requirements allow students to take college courses in the areas in which they are ready, even if they are not prepared for college coursework in other disciplines. Tennessee’s current policies have multi-tiered eligibility, but institutions are permitted to add additional requirements, and many opt to implement more restrictive requirements. Requiring multi-tiered eligibility throughout the state would make dual enrollment more accessible to a range of students.

Making dual enrollment inclusive also means ensuring that students in all types of high schools, including small rural high schools, have access to college courses. High school-based dual enrollment is well-suited to delivering college coursework to large numbers of high school students. Stakeholders expressed concern that, particularly in smaller schools, there are not enough teachers with the academic credentials to teach college courses. State support for teachers pursuing master’s degrees in their discipline would make high school-based dual enrollment more sustainable—while upgrading the state’s teaching force.

Interactive Television (ITV) is a promising mechanism for delivering high quality delivery to students in small schools. Tennessee has ITV infrastructure already, but stakeholders report that it is under-utilized. Incentivizing ITV-based courses, in which students encounter actual college instructors on a regular basis, could enable high quality dual enrollment experiences in small schools.

CAN IT BE DONE?

Florida [requires](#) a 3.0 grade point average and college-ready placement test scores for students in college credit courses, and a 2.0 grade point average for students in certificate dual enrollment courses.

North Carolina dual enrollment students [must have a 3.0 grade point average](#) to participate. Students in a transfer pathway must also demonstrate college readiness, based on assessment test scores, in reading, writing, and math. Technical pathway students, however, must only meet pathways prerequisites; they may also be admitted with a grade point average below 3.0 with a principal’s recommendation.

ALIGNMENT: PROGRAMS MUST LEVERAGE AND WORK IN CONCERT WITH OTHER STATE EDUCATION INITIATIVES.

ACTIONS:

- *Require dual enrollment course taking to occur within the state's general education core, transfer pathways, or key labor market areas.*

WHY?

Stakeholders noted that dual enrollment can, and often does, enhance other educational initiatives. Helping high school teachers earn credentials to teach college courses can enhance efforts to upgrade the state's teaching force. Helping students become eligible to participate in dual enrollment simultaneously decreases their need for developmental education and increases the number of college-ready students in the state. Stakeholders also noted that, occasionally, state priorities can conflict, as when accountability measures disincentivize schools from offering dual enrollment classes.

The most obvious area of synergy is between dual enrollment and the [higher education reforms aimed at college completion](#). Tennessee officials have spent an impressive amount of energy identifying the courses and pathways that will help students progress toward postsecondary degrees quickly and with minimal numbers of additional credits. This includes identifying core general education courses that now transfer as a block across educational institutions, the [Core 41](#). The state also developed the [Tennessee Transfer Pathways](#), guaranteeing transfer of credit for associate degree holders in certain majors, and identified [key areas for economic development](#).

Focusing dual enrollment students' course taking on courses likely to lead to a credential is a reasonable way to use the program to increase the likelihood of college completion. Given that the state has already identified mechanisms to promote smooth credit transfer across institutions, it is logical to combine these efforts. Requiring dual enrollment students to take courses that are part of the Core 41 or a transfer pathway can help ensure that they are taking credits that will encourage *degree completion*, not just college access. It also sends a clear message to stakeholders that dual enrollment is an important strategy for achieving the college completion agenda, not an add-on initiative.

CAN IT BE DONE?

North Carolina implemented new dual enrollment policies in 2012. The [College and Career Promise Act](#) requires dual enrollment students to take courses that are within the state's transferrable general education curriculum (Core 44), a career and technical education (CTE) pathway, or an early college (cooperative innovative high school). All courses under this Act are transcribed, offered by community colleges, and fully transferrable to a four-year degree. The motivation for this reform was data showing that many students were taking elective credits via dual enrollment and not using the program to speed their progression toward a degree.

Texas also seeks to ensure that dual enrollment courses [count toward a degree](#). Dual enrollment courses (called "dual credit" in Texas) must be part of the state's Lower Division Academic Course Guide Manual (for general education courses) or the Workforce Education Course Manual (for CTE courses).

Florida includes dual enrollment participation and performance in its [high school accountability grades](#).

FUNDING: TO BE A MEANINGFUL PART OF THE COLLEGE COMPLETION PIPELINE, DUAL ENROLLMENT MUST BE COST-FREE TO STUDENTS AND FAMILIES.

ACTIONS:

- *Use lottery funds to cover 100% of dual enrollment tuition costs.*
- *Waive dual enrollment students' college fees.*
- *Provide free textbooks to dual enrollment students.*

WHY?

In all likelihood, some students in Tennessee want to go to college and can be successful once there, but they cannot afford postsecondary education. Focusing on getting these students into college will drive increased completion rates. Dual enrollment is a key strategy for including lower income students in college completion efforts, because it potentially decreases the overall cost of a college degree.

Currently, Tennessee funds [\\$300 of tuition](#) per dual enrollment course out of the state's lottery scholarship funds—but tuition is \$405 for a three-credit course at community colleges. This figure does not include books, fees, additional tuition for four-credit courses, or lab costs.

Obviously, a \$300 discount is better than nothing, but stakeholders were clear that it is not enough to entice many low-income students to take a dual enrollment course. The gap between lottery funds and total costs is substantial enough that each year, some students are unable to participate. One educator told us that for many families, "\$160 is a lot of groceries." [National research](#) and experiences in peer states confirm that when students or schools are asked to bear the cost of dual enrollment, participation rates decrease.

Tuition must be fully covered by state funds if lower income students are to have genuine access to dual enrollment opportunities. This does not mean that the state necessarily needs to fund any and all dual enrollment at full cost; some limits may be appropriate. This might include funding 100% of community college tuition (rather than more expensive four-year tuition); limiting fully funded dual enrollment to courses in the general education core or transfer pathways; or implementing needs-based criteria for full funding, while continuing to require more economically advantaged students to pay some of their dual enrollment tuition costs.

Ideally, the state should also cover books and fees. This might be accomplished by requiring high schools to pay for dual enrollment students' books, and in turn, requiring colleges to permit high schools to use books for dual enrollment courses for multiple semesters or years. If tuition, fees, and books cannot currently be funded, increasing funding for some of these expenses should begin to increase the numbers of low-income students who are able to afford to take advantage of the state's dual enrollment opportunities.

CAN IT BE DONE?

North Carolina students [do not pay tuition](#) for their dual enrollment courses. State funds are not available for books or fees, though colleges and high schools may opt to pay these expenses.

Florida dual enrollment is completely [cost-free](#) to students. Dually enrolled students are exempt from registration, tuition, and lab fees, per state statute. Florida statute also requires that instructional materials, including textbooks, be free for dual enrollment students. These materials are the property of the college or high school providing the materials, thereby allowing them to be re-used.

Georgia's Student Finance Commission pays for 100% of tuition costs, at the standard rate for public institutions in the state, for academic dual enrollment courses. CTE course tuition is paid at 90% by the HOPE Grant program.