

College Readiness Courses and Work-Force Development

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A monumental shift is steadily occurring in America’s workforce, as an ever-increasing percentage of jobs require some form of postsecondary education and training. In the *Recovery 2020* report, Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce projects that by 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary education. However, this may be a conservative estimate, according to the center, considering that of the 11.6 million jobs created in the 2010 to 2016 recovery, 11.5 million of them, or 99 percent, were filled by workers with postsecondary training.

While higher education has seen a plethora of initiatives designed to increase educational attainment and alternative delivery methods intended to expand educational opportunities, large numbers of students still do not have access to higher education while still in high school. In particular, offering academically advanced high school students the chance to take college courses (dual enrollment) is widely seen as a way to help them make better use of their senior year. And even less advanced students can participate in dual enrollment courses with support, through approaches such as the Early College model.

On the flip side, considerable numbers of underprepared students still lag behind, representing a critical challenge to the nation’s economic and social well-being. Given that the majority of the nation’s high school graduates still lack the basic literacy and mathematical skills needed

for postsecondary success, it is essential to do a better job of preparing students before they leave high school. “Readiness courses,” developed by partnerships of high schools and colleges, can help ensure students graduate with the knowledge and skills required for success in college.

Ideally, dual enrollment and readiness courses are part of an integrated approach. Students who are tested in eleventh grade (or sooner) can take dual enrollment courses if they score at college-ready levels. Those who are not prepared can enroll in readiness courses that will help them be ready for college-level coursework when they graduate.

Emergence of Readiness Courses

Readiness or transition courses are designed to help high school students graduate with the core knowledge and skills needed for college, allowing them to bypass the remedial math and English courses that slow down many students. These courses are designed to reflect the expectations that colleges have for college-ready students and are typically offered during the high school senior year.

According to a [2017 national scan](#) of these courses conducted by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University’s Teachers College, 39 states are offering readiness/transition courses -- statewide or in varied locales -- up from 29 in 2012 to 2013. All 39 states offer them in math, while 35 offer them in English. In a number of cases, the development of these courses is impelled by legislation inspired by concerns about the high numbers of students who are not college ready upon graduation from high school. In other cases, the courses have resulted from teamwork between K-12 and higher education that has been brought to scale.

Many different approaches are used to teach these courses, including a mix of direct teaching and computer-mediated instruction. Courses are sometimes patterned on developmental education courses taught at local colleges (e.g. in New Hampshire and Texas) or they may be developed to use new and engaging teaching approaches (e.g. California and Illinois). Students who take these courses may be deemed college ready upon successful completion of the program, as done in 22 states; however, this is not always the case. Ideally, as recommended in the Southern Regional Education Board’s [senior year redesign](#), students who complete readiness courses can enter dual enrollment courses in the same year!

While these initiatives are in varying stages of implementation, they have tremendous potential. First, there is little argument with the notion that high school graduates should be ready for either college or careers, which are widely seen to require similar levels of math, reading and writing. Second, evidence is gradually emerging that readiness courses can improve outcomes for students. Tennessee has seen a [16 percent decrease](#) since 2012 in the need for math remediation, a trend largely attributed to the implementation of the [SAILS math](#) course. Evaluations of California’s Expository Reading and Writing Course ([ERWC](#)), and New York’s At Home in College ([AHC](#)) program (now called Lessons in Navigating College Transitions [[LINCT](#)]) have also shown small, positive gains for participating students.

Expansion of Dual Enrollment

A growing body of research notes a positive correlation between dual enrollment participation and students' subsequent postsecondary matriculation and success -- with even greater positive outcomes for students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. States are increasingly retooling dual enrollment policies to open access to college coursework to a broader array of students, including low-income and first-generation students, and students of color.

The Education Commission of the States has identified 13 model state policy components that can greatly reduce -- if not eliminate -- dual enrollment participation barriers while ensuring coursework is high-quality and transferable statewide. Colorado, which has implemented nearly all 13 model policy components, notes in its April 2018 dual enrollment report that nearly one in three public high school eleventh and twelfth graders participated in a dual enrollment program in 2016 to 2017, and that student representation by race/ethnicity in dual enrollment closely mirrors the composition of public high school students in the state.

While progress is being made toward widespread adoption of these policy components, data still suggest that students of color and low-income students in most states lag behind their peers in dual enrollment participation. One state, for example, reports that in 2015 to 2016, black students made up 36 percent of the state's high school enrollment, but 24 percent of the dual enrollment population. This disparity is not uncommon; many states report substantial underrepresentation of students of color and free-/reduced lunch-eligible students.

Dual enrollment opportunities are key to making full use of the senior year and starting students on the path to college. Readiness programs can play an integral role in expanding dual enrollment opportunities and leveling the playing field in terms of access to higher education. Students who are not ready for college coursework should be placed into transition courses. If successful, they then become eligible for dual enrollment courses. Given that underprepared students are disproportionately from minority populations and lower socioeconomic status, readiness programs should be used as a valuable instrument to close opportunity gaps for dual enrollment programs.

While much work has been done, even more remains. Higher education benefits from students who are better prepared and should partner with K-12 institutions to increase the number of students who graduate college- and career-ready. The range of options for underprepared students should be expanded to better equip high school graduates for college and careers. If higher education becomes a more active participant in readiness programs and dual enrollment, working with K-12 to meet the needs of underprepared students, the nation will benefit and become better equipped to meet its educational and work-force training challenges.