

April 10, 2025

The Honorable Joseph McNamara
Chair, House Committee on Education
State House
Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

H 6058: An Act Relating to Education: Dual Enrollment Equal Opportunity Act

Chair McNamara,

The Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner supports expanding access to high-quality early college opportunities, such as Dual Enrollment, that provide Rhode Island students meaningful pathways into postsecondary education. Early College programs should connect to postsecondary credentials that have value in the Rhode Island economy, reduce postsecondary costs to the students and the state, and provide employers access to increased talent.

This is based on the following:

Dual enrollment allows high school students to enroll in a college course for transcript credit. The course may be offered at the high school taught by college-approved high school teachers (concurrent course) or on the college campus or online (dual course). States may have different criteria for determining student eligibility to participate in early college courses. However, it generally involves factors, including grade level (9–12), the postsecondary institution’s specific entrance requirements, high school approval, and course-specific prerequisites. State-level dual enrollment policies have been implemented in 48 states plus the District of Columbia.¹

Nationally, the immediate college enrollment rate, or the percentage of high school graduates who enrolled directly in a 2- or 4-year postsecondary institution, is 62 percent.² Graduation within six years for first-time, full-time bachelor’s degree-seeking students at a 4-year institution is 64 percent.³ For first-time, full-time degree-seeking students at 2-year institutions, the three-year graduation rate is 34 percent.³ Participation in early college programs can play a critical role in increasing these rates. By allowing high school students to take college-level courses, dual enrollment programs help them build academic skills, adapt to the rigors of higher education, and gain a head start on their college education. This early exposure to college academics can improve their readiness for postsecondary education, making them more likely to enroll in college and persist to graduation.

Existing national studies have consistently demonstrated a multitude of benefits for students participating in early college programs.

- Early college participants have significantly higher rates of high school graduation, college enrollment, and college degree attainment than do non-participants.^{4,5}

- Dual enrollment programs were positively linked to improvements in grade point average (GPA), total college credits earned, college enrollment, early persistence, degree completion, and full-time attendance.⁶
- There were negative associations between dual enrollment and time to graduation, as well as total semesters enrolled in college, suggesting that these programs can help students graduate more quickly.⁶
- The long-term benefits of increasing postsecondary attainment include an increase in individuals' lifetime earnings, boosts government tax revenue, and lowers public spending on federal assistance programs.⁷

In Rhode Island, there are several avenues for students to participate in early college opportunities.

- There is the state-funded dual and concurrent program through the public higher education institutions which is administered by the Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC). 100% of this funding goes to CCRI, RIC or URI programs.
- There is the All-Course Network for private providers, which is paid for by the secondary school and administered by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE).
- Private-public partnerships also exist between private providers and high schools paid for through grants or by the secondary school.
- Finally, students and their families may select to provide their own funds for their students to enroll in any institution of their choice.

The RIOPC program is the largest state program and last year there were over 10,000 enrollments and over 33,000 credits earned. Enrollment at all three public institutions is robust. Most dual enrollment students attend CCRI. RIC and URI offer primarily concurrent courses, by sponsoring high school faculty to teach their courses for credit on the high school campus. Growth in this program has outpaced funding and we are currently working on guidelines for spending and planning for continued growth to ensure all public high school students have access to early college opportunities.

RIOPC has also convened the Early College Opportunities Working Group with representatives from RIOPC, RIDE, URI, RIC and CCRI. We are working on identifying program priorities and quality indicators. We are also developing guidance for high schools for consistent advising and enrollment.

Given the strong evidence that high-quality early college programs lead to greater postsecondary completion, any legislation that seeks to change early college programs, such as dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment should first strive to collect data that address the following questions:

- How does the policy change expand or limit opportunities for Rhode Islanders to earn high-quality early college credit while in high school?
- Does the state, and the institutions that deliver them, know specifically which early college programs lead to greater earnings and wages for the students that they serve?

- Does the proposed change in early college policy impact college affordability for Rhode Island students?

On behalf of the State of Rhode Island, RIOPC is evaluating RI's investment in public postsecondary affordability mechanisms that are intended to promote and expand postsecondary attainment. The state's dual and concurrent enrollment program will be part of that study.

Furthermore, RIOPC, is more than willing to conduct further analysis on the outcomes of all 'early college programs', including their long-term employment outcomes, return on investment to the student and the state, and other quality indicators if state leadership believes this would be helpful information for determining how the state proceeds forward with this issue.

References

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