

NDE/CCPE Joint Dual Credit Initiative: FINAL REPORT – December 4, 2019

Introduction

Dual enrollment refers to courses that high school students take for both high school and college credit. Such courses allow students to access advanced academic material and, potentially, build up college credit prior to high school graduation. If the credits transfer into the postsecondary institution a student attends after high school, they can help to make that student's college degree more affordable. In Nebraska, "dual enrollment" refers to a student enrolling in course eligible for dual credit, while "dual credit" refers to a student both enrolling in and receiving credit for a course eligible for dual credit. According to a 2017 study from the Nebraska Department of Education, both "dual enrollment" and "dual credit" students significantly increased their odds of attending college after high school, though the effect was greater for students who earned dual credit for their dual enrollment courses.¹

Nebraska has a long history of supporting dual enrollment in its high schools. The Nebraska Transfer Initiative, established in 1995, provides an [online portal](#) for students, parents, teachers, and counselors to determine the transferability of community college course credits, including dual enrollment course credits, across Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions.² Dual enrollment standards were written into Nebraska's Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education in 2005, supporting statewide consistency in how dual enrollment courses are offered, taught and credited.³ And Nebraska's [Access College Early \(ACE\) Scholarship Program](#) was established in 2007 to support dual enrollment opportunities for Nebraska's low-income high school students.

Yet barriers to dual credit have persisted in Nebraska. The Nebraska Dual Enrollment Standards serve as guidelines, but do not have force of law. Funds for the ACE Scholarship program are limited; the cost of attendance is still a barrier for some students and families. It can be difficult for educators to access and finance the coursework they need to become qualified to teach dual credit courses, particularly for those teaching in high-need schools. And too often, students, parents, teachers, and counselors are not fully aware of all the dual credit opportunities available to them in the state.

Recognizing this, the Nebraska State Board of Education (NDE) and the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) assembled a joint committee of their respective board members to identify ways to expand dual credit opportunities in Nebraska for all students. The committee participated in four meetings over a five-month period, from July to November 2019. After considering the existing Nebraska dual credit landscape, hearing from a panel of K-12 and postsecondary dual credit practitioners from across the state, and evaluating policies and practices from the dual credit programs in Ohio and Iowa, the committee put forth a set of recommendations to NDE and CCPE for policy action that would support the expansion of dual credit across the state.

Framework

In the process of developing policy recommendations, the NDE-CCPE joint dual credit committee first identified five priority areas – access, qualified instructors, credit transfer, affordability, and data collection and reporting – which, if addressed, would allow the state to make the most headway on its

overarching goal to expand dual credit for all students. The committee then defined desired outcomes for each of these five priority areas, as follows:

Priority 1: ACCESS:

- Every high school provides access to dual credit courses
- Students and parents are aware of dual credit opportunities

Priority 2: QUALIFIED INSTRUCTORS:

- Educators are aware of the requirements to become a qualified dual credit instructor
- Educators have access to multiple pathways to become a qualified dual credit instructor
- Dual credit instructor training is integrated into educator preparation programs

Priority 3: CREDIT TRANSFER:

- There is consistent, easy-to-access information about the number, type, and transferability of postsecondary credits associated with a core set of dual credit courses
- Educators, counselors, students and parents use this information to guide decision-making around dual credit opportunities

Priority 4: AFFORDABILITY:

- Student populations are equitably represented in dual credit
- There is enough funding available for dual credit statewide to ensure that no student is prevented from accessing dual credit courses because of financial barriers
- Students, parents, teachers and counselors are aware of how to access funding for dual credit courses

Priority 5: DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING:

- There is an adequate dual credit data collection and reporting system that is used to consistently evaluate progress across all action steps

These five priority areas and associated outcomes were used throughout the committee's five-month process: to guide discussions and deliberations; to select states for comparisons and guest presentations; and, finally, to develop recommendations. The committee concluded its work by providing sixteen specific recommendations for future policy action to NDE and CCPE, all of which support the achievement of the priority area outcomes listed above.

In this report, for simplicity of presentation, the committee's recommendations have been grouped into five thematic areas:

- **Improve communications** with students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators;
- **Make existing connections explicit** between high schools and dual credit service providers;
- **Increase the supply of qualified instructors** by clarifying requirements and creating new pathways;
- **Increase affordability of dual credit**, particularly for low-income students;
- **Address data and reporting** by highlighting existing assets and identifying unmet needs.

Specific recommendations in each of these areas, along with timeline, priority, and lead organization responsibility are provided below.

Recommendations

Area 1: Improve Communications

Existing dual credit programs in the state, while often robust, are not uniformly understood or accessed. By increasing the knowledge of these programs across educators, students, and families, Nebraska can leverage an existing resource to help meet its dual credit goals. The committee recommended that the state agencies take action to improve communications with students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators on dual credit standards, course options, and the latest program developments.

Specifically, the committee recommended that the agencies:

- **Update state dual credit standards.** Nebraska’s dual credit standards were set in 2005 and revised in 2016. Since then, the state has moved forward in its thinking about dual credit, as well as created a Statement of Principles and Standards that could enhance the dual credit standards if incorporated within. Having a single, clear set of state standards on dual credit would support consistent communications statewide about dual credit programs. Within the next 6 months, state agency staff will examine dual credit standards for necessary revisions, update the standards to include the Statement of Principles and Standards, and enhance the standards with information about goals, faculty development, affordability and data collection. By statute, the revised standards will need to be presented to the legislature by March 15, 2021. **Lead Agency: CCPE**
- **Inform students and parents of course options and associated credit transferability.** Students and parents are not always aware of the dual credit course options available at their high school, or what that credit will look like when transferred to a postsecondary institution. Students who are clear about their options are more likely to take dual credit courses that transfer to postsecondary institutions and apply to college degrees. Within the next 6 months, state agency staff will create a common template to provide dual credit course information to all high schools. Using the template and information from the Transfer Nebraska Initiative, a matrix will be created for every high school listing every dual credit course offered in the school, the postsecondary institutions that accept that course, and the type of college credit that will be offered. **Lead Agencies: NDE and CCPE**
- **Inform teachers, counselors, and administrators about dual credit:** High school teachers, counselors, and support staff are not always well-informed about the latest developments in Nebraska’s dual credit programs and policies. When educators and administrators are better informed, they are better positioned to advise students on their dual credit choices. Over the next 12-18 months, state agency staff will connect with organizers of existing annual conferences for counselors, school leaders and principals ([Administrators’ Days](#)), and teachers by subject area (math, literacy) to identify opportunities to get on the agenda to present information on dual credit. In addition, state agency staff will put dual credit on the agenda of the annual State Board of Education conference, as well as connect with partner organizations to push out information on current dual credit programs and policies. **Lead Agency: NDE**

Area 2: Make Existing Connections Explicit

Nebraska has a vast network of high schools and postsecondary institutions engaged in dual credit. Yet the state lacks a clear picture of which courses are being offered by which postsecondary institutions for

dual credit, or which high schools have access to those courses. The committee recommended that the state agencies take action to make existing connections between high schools and postsecondary dual credit service providers explicit in order to reduce confusion and increase access for all students.

Specifically, the committee recommended that the agencies:

- **Collect and distribute course distribution information from postsecondary institutions.** Developing a statewide directory of dual credit courses by provider institution, including information about which high schools have access to those courses, will create clarity in the dual credit marketplace. Most institutions offering dual credit courses use CCPE's [Access College Early \(ACE\) Scholarship Program](#) funds; since data reporting is already required for the ACE Scholarship Program, course offering data can be added to existing reporting requirements. Starting in fall 2020, as a condition of ACE Scholarship Program participation, each postsecondary institution will be required to report which dual credit courses they are offering in each high school where they are offering courses. CCPE will collate and distribute this information statewide. **Lead Agency: CCPE**
- **Collect and distribute service provider information from high schools.** Developing a statewide directory of preferred service providers associated with each high school in the state will help schools and districts to more effectively find available dual credit options for their students. Within the next 6-8 months, secondary schools will be required to provide information to the [Education Service Unit Coordinating Council \(ESUCC\)](#) about their existing agreements with dual credit service providers. The ESUCC will collate and distribute this information statewide. **Lead Agency: NDE**
- **Collect and distribute distance education provider information from ESUs.** Historically, [Education Service Units \(ESUs\)](#) have maintained a directory of distance education courses offered in the state. A subset of these courses are dual credit courses; such courses offer options to high schools when their preferred service provider is unable to offer a specific dual credit course to their students. Within the next 6-8 months, state agency staff will work with the state's ESUs and the ESUCC to create an inventory of distance education dual credit courses. Once compiled, this information will be shared with all secondary schools in the state. **Lead Agency: NDE**

Area 3: Increase Supply of Qualified Instructors

Nebraska is one of 19 states whose postsecondary institutions are accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). In 2016, HLC set [more stringent minimum qualifications](#) for dual credit instructors.⁴ By 2022, all dual credit instructors in institutions accredited by HLC must have both a master's degree and 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline they wish to teach. As a result, some of Nebraska's high school teachers who were previously qualified to teach dual credit will become disqualified unless they can gain the necessary additional credentials. This is particularly an issue for rural schools, who may only have one dual credit instructor on staff. To avoid an impending crisis in access, the committee recommended that the state agencies take action to increase the supply of qualified instructors by clarifying minimum requirements and creating new pathways to gain those credentials.

Specifically, the committee recommended that the agencies:

- **Make teacher eligibility consistent across state.** Currently, a Nebraska high school teacher's eligibility to teach a dual credit course is determined by the postsecondary institution offering the

course. Since all dual credit instructors must meet HLC requirements, it makes sense to create a consistent, state-level endorsement that would allow a qualified instructor to teach dual credit courses in the specified discipline at any postsecondary provider institution in the state. Within the next three months, state agency staff will discuss the possibility of developing dual credit endorsements by subject area with the [Nebraska Council on Teacher Education \(NCTE\)](#). Over the next two years, in partnership with NCTE and the deans of the state's colleges of education, state agency staff will institute a formal rule change to [Rule 24 \(Endorsement\)](#) to create Dual Credit Endorsements aligned with HLC requirements.⁵ **Lead Agency: NDE**

- **Formally document teacher eligibility.** If high school teachers eligible to teach dual credit courses in a specific discipline had a notation to that effect on their teaching license and/or postsecondary transcript, it would simplify proof of eligibility and increase consistency in hiring. Postsecondary faculty already need a dual credit permit to teach dual credit courses; the proposed action would provide the same consistency to dual credit instructors who are high school teachers. Within the next three months, state agency staff will work with NCTE and the deans of the state's colleges of education to determine whether a note could be added to the teacher license or transcript that indicates dual credit teaching eligibility. In the next 8-12 months, state agency staff will institute a formal rule change to [Rule 21 \(Certificates and Permits\)](#) to create a common certification for high school teachers qualified to teach dual credit courses.⁶ **Lead Agency: NDE**
- **Create more stand-alone dual credit certification programs.** Many secondary teachers who have master's degrees are missing the 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline necessary to teach a dual credit course. To help such individuals become qualified dual credit instructors, the University of Nebraska-Omaha currently offers 18-credit-hour dual credit certification programs in three subject areas ([economics](#), [government](#) and [computer science](#)) and are developing a fourth (English). Within 6 months, state agency staff will examine these existing dual credit certification programs to see if they can be replicated for other subject areas and/or at other institutions. Over the next year, state agency staff will connect with state colleges about creating certification programs for dual credit, aimed at high school teachers who already have a master's degree. **Lead Agencies: NDE and CCPE**
- **Integrate dual credit certification in common college of education master's degree programs.** Master of Education degrees often do not include the 18 discipline-specific graduate credit hours required to become a dual credit instructor. To increase the pool of dual credit instructors, it makes sense to explicitly allow teachers pursuing a master's degree to incorporate a disciplinary focus that will allow them to become dual credit eligible. Within 6-8 months, state agency staff will show proof of concept from institutions that are already incorporating dual credit eligibility requirements in existing Master of Education programs. Over the next year, state agency staff will connect with NCTE and the deans of the state's colleges of education to get input on how this might be most effectively implemented across multiple institutions. **Lead Agencies: NDE and CCPE**

Area 4: Increase Affordability

A significant factor in expanding access to dual credit is ensuring that students and families can afford the courses. In Nebraska, the postsecondary provider institution determines the student cost of dual credit courses; those costs, and the level of subsidy, vary by institution. Nebraska's [Access College Early \(ACE\) Scholarship Program](#), administered by CCPE, utilizes state funds to fully subsidize the cost of dual credit courses for high school students who qualify for low-income federal benefit programs. While the

ACE scholarship program is laudable, the current level of funding meets less than half of the eligible student need. In addition, many students who do not qualify for low-income federal benefit programs also have unmet financial need. The committee recommended that the state agencies take action to expand access by increasing the affordability of dual credit, particularly for low-income students.

Specifically, the committee recommended that the agencies:

- **Increase ACE Scholarship funding to cover all low-income students.** Without the financial support provided through the receipt of an ACE scholarship, many low-income students are shut out of dual credit opportunities. At current funding levels, less than half the students who could benefit from this program are able to be supported. In order to fully meet eligible student need, the ACE scholarship will need to be funded at 3 million dollars annually, nearly three times the current level. State agency staff will make a budget request to the Nebraska Legislature for the 2021-2023 biennium that includes an increased level of funding for the ACE scholarship. **Lead Agency: CCPE**
- **Investigate business partnerships to support dual credit costs.** Funds garnered via partnerships with local businesses looking to support future workforce development in the state can supplement budget allocations in subsidizing dual credit. Within 6-12 months, state agency staff will connect with the Nebraska Community Foundation and the Nebraska Community College Association to investigate whether local business support for the ACE scholarship could be turned into a cash fund to support dual credit across the state. **Lead Agencies: NDE and CCPE**
- **Research dual credit financing in other states.** States such as Iowa and Ohio have developed statewide funding models to offer fully subsidized dual credit courses to all students. Within 6-12 months, state agency staff will establish a research group to investigate how other states are subsidizing dual credit, particularly as a way to enhance college affordability, and whether such models would work for Nebraska. **Lead Agencies: NDE and CCPE**

Area 5: Address Data and Reporting

There is little information currently available at the state level about Nebraska's dual credit programs, which makes it difficult to know how these programs are serving participating students. Without this information, it becomes difficult to justify subsidizing the cost of the programs or to communicate the value of the programs to students, parents, teachers, and counselors. The committee recommended that the state agencies take action to address data collection and reporting related to the state's dual credit programs by highlighting existing data assets and identifying unmet data needs.

Specifically, the committee recommended that the agencies:

- **Identify a short list of highly valuable dual credit courses.** Not all dual credit courses are of equal value. Courses that transfer across institutions, provide credit towards a degree, and help students tackle general education requirements early have greater value to students for the time and money invested. Creating a short list of the most valuable courses in the dual credit space will help students and families make better choices for their investment. Nebraska produces an annual report on dual credit that tracks courses by frequency of enrollment. Using this report, within 6-8 months, state agency staff will identify which general education and associate degree courses are most frequently transferred in to postsecondary institutions as dual credit. Over the following year, state agency

staff will use this information to mount a public awareness campaign about these core courses, aligned with existing Nebraska college attendance and completion campaign efforts such as [Commit to Complete](#) and the [FAFSA Completion Initiative](#). **Lead Agencies: NDE and CCPE**

- **Assess dual credit data assets and data needs.** Nebraska would benefit from a dual credit “data audit” to determine what data already exists in the state, where that data can be supplemented, and where entirely new data requests may be necessary to answer pending questions about dual credit outcomes. Within 6 months, state agency staff will establish a research group to investigate Nebraska’s existing dual credit data and unmet data needs. In the short term, the group will pose a set of questions about dual credit to the existing [Nebraska P-20 data system](#) to determine what can and cannot be answered with current data assets. (For instance, is it possible to determine the average number of dual credit hours students are bringing with them to postsecondary, and whether it’s expediting their time to degree?) The group will also examine the existing [Tuition, Fees, and College Affordability Report](#) to determine if a short section on dual credit can be added to the report before the next publication (September 2020). **Lead Agencies: NE and CCPE**
- **Research dual credit data collection efforts in other states.** In addition to assessing the state’s own data capacity, it will be helpful to understand what is already known about the impact of dual credit on student outcomes, as well as what data other states are gathering. Within 6 months, state agency staff will establish a research group to investigate the literature on the positive outcomes of dual enrollment for students generally, as well as the types of dual credit outcome data other states are currently collecting and reporting. **Lead Agencies: NDE and CCPE**

Conclusion

Dual credit can help students access advanced academic material, build up college credit prior to high school graduation, and make their college degrees more affordable. Nebraska has a long history of supporting dual enrollment in its high schools, yet some barriers to dual credit have persisted. A joint committee of board members from the Nebraska State Board of Education (NDE) and the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education (CCPE) assembled this fall to identify ways to overcome these barriers to dual credit programs. As detailed above, the committee put forth sixteen recommendations for policy action to NDE and CCPE. Over the next two years, NDE and CCPE have committed to making those recommendations a reality, supporting the expansion of dual credit opportunities for all students across the state.

ENDNOTES

¹ Nebraska Department of Education, 2017. *An Evaluation of the Impact of dual Credit and Dual Enrollment on College-Going in Nebraska*. NDE, Lincoln, NE. Retrieved from: https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Dual_Enrollment_and-Credit_Study.pdf

² *Nebraska Transfer Initiative*. Retrieved from: <http://www.thenicc.edu/images/pdfs/NebraskaTransferInitiativeDocument.pdf>

³ Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2016. *Nebraska's Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education*. CCPE, Lincoln, NE. Retrieved from: <https://ccpe.nebraska.gov/sites/ccpe.nebraska.gov/files/COMP%20PLAN-updated%20October%202018.pdf>

⁴ Higher Learning Commission, 2016. *Determining Qualified Faculty Through HLC's Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices: Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviewers*. Retrieved from: http://download.hlcommission.org/FacultyGuidelines_2016_OPB.pdf

⁵ Nebraska Department of Education, 2018. *Rule 24: Regulations for Certificate Endorsements*. Title 92, Nebraska Administrative Code, Chapter 24. Retrieved from: https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Clean_Rule24_2018wlinks.pdf

⁶ Nebraska Department of Education, 2018. *Rule 21: Regulations for the Issuance of Certificates and Permits to Teach, Provide Special Services, and Administer in Nebraska Schools*. Title 92, Nebraska Administrative Code, Chapter 21. Retrieved from: https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Clean_Rule21_20182.pdf