

## **2008-2009 Early College Survey of Maine High Schools** **May 2009**

The Mitchell Institute surveyed Maine's 130 public high schools in February and March 2009. High school principals and guidance counselors were invited via e-mail to participate in the online survey, and 111 schools (85%) responded.

### **Dual Credit Policies**

95% of respondents (106 schools) indicate that their school allows students to take college courses for both high school and college credit ("dual credit").<sup>1</sup> This proportion has markedly increased from 73% (77 schools) in 2006, the last time we conducted this survey.

### Course Location

Most responding schools report that dual credit courses are offered at more than one location.

- ◆ At 82% of high schools that offer dual credit opportunities, students can take courses on one or more college campuses.
- ◆ 65% of responding schools offer dual credit courses online or via distance learning.
- ◆ 47% of respondents offer dual credit courses taught at the high school.
- ◆ Students at 3% of responding schools can take courses at the local higher education center.
- ◆ At 3% of schools, dual credit courses are offered at the affiliated career and technical high school.

### Student Criteria

42 schools—40% of those that allow dual credit courses—do not require students to meet any criteria to take a college course. The majority (60%) do have criteria for which students may take dual credit courses:

- ◆ 50% of responding schools limit dual credit courses to juniors and seniors.
- ◆ 25% limit dual credit courses to students who have earned passing grades in core courses.
- ◆ 18% have a GPA cut-off students must meet to take dual credit courses.
- ◆ 17% use the criteria of the postsecondary institution (e.g., any of the above plus Accuplacer score thresholds).
- ◆ 4% require a teacher, guidance counselor, or principal recommendation.
- ◆ 3% decide student eligibility for dual credit courses on a case-by-case basis.
- ◆ One school limits dual credit opportunities to first-generation college students.

### Eligible Courses

Nearly two in three responding schools (64%) allow students to take any college course for dual credit.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, 23% of schools offer a limited menu of courses for dual credit. 6% of respondents indicate that their school awards elective credit only for dual credit courses.

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<sup>1</sup> Four of the five schools that do not allow dual credit courses indicated that students can take college courses for enrichment, but not for high school credit, with various restrictions. One simply stated that their School Board policy does not allow dual credit.

## Funding

Respondents indicate that they use multiple sources of funds to cover the costs of dual credit courses, and the funding schemes vary considerably. About two in three schools report that the costs of dual credit courses are funded in part by students (typically for books and sometimes for fees), and nearly as many rely on discounts or waivers from the colleges. State funding, school budget funds, and grant funds are each used by more than two in five responding schools to help cover dual credit course costs. The respective proportions of respondents reporting that they use each source of funding for dual credit are as follows:

- ◆ 67% students
- ◆ 63% college discount or waiver
- ◆ 43% state funding
- ◆ 42% school budget and
- ◆ 42% grant funds.

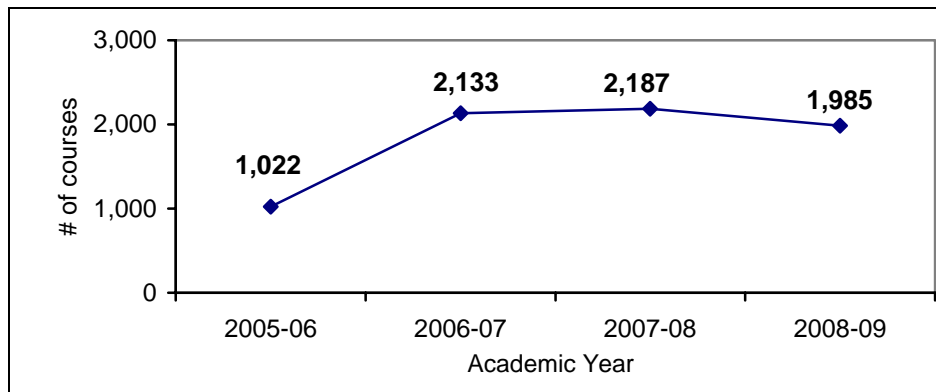
Several respondents described how their schools pay for dual credit courses:

- ◆ “Early College for Maine program [Maine Community College System] pays for everything.”
- ◆ “State and college pay for tuition; [high school] pays for fees; student pays for books.”
- ◆ “We ask that students cover the cost of their textbooks when they can. If they cannot because of legitimate financial reasons, the school will cover the cost of required textbooks. [Fees] ranging from \$50-70 per student are paid by the high school. If we did not cover fees, we would have a much smaller group of kids taking college classes.”

## Student Participation

Survey respondents estimate that their students will take a total of **1,985 dual credit courses in 2008-2009**. Combined with earlier estimates, these figures indicate that dual enrollment participation has decreased only slightly, despite the fact that a major grant for early college from the National Governors Association ended last year.

**Maine High School Students' Dual Credit Course-Taking**



Source: Maine Compact for Higher Education, *Indicators of Higher Education Attainment in Maine*, 2008

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<sup>2</sup> Several respondents added caveats such as “as long as student received prior approval” and “except developmental courses.”

## Barriers to Offering Dual Credit

Respondents were asked to choose the main barriers to offering dual credit courses from a list of options.

- ◆ 59% indicated that *distance/transportation* issues are a barrier to offering dual credit courses.
- ◆ 55% selected *scheduling*.
- ◆ 49% selected *funding*.
- ◆ 15% selected *policies at postsecondary schools*.
- ◆ 13% of respondents indicated that *policies at the secondary school* are a barrier to offering dual credit courses.
- ◆ 4% of respondents added that lack of counselor time (e.g., to research, promote, and implement dual credit options) is a barrier.
- ◆ 2% of respondents mentioned lack of student interest/motivation as a barrier to dual credit.

Respondents' comments regarding barriers to offering dual credit courses include:

- ◆ "Competition with AP offerings within the school"
- ◆ "Lack of parental support"
- ◆ "Obtaining faculty buy-in has been an arduous process. There is very little communication between faculty at secondary and postsecondary institutions, and I think there is some skepticism about what 'counts as credit.' There are also competing philosophies about the value of dual enrollment opportunities for kids, and we have encountered some (unnecessary) gate-keeping issues that have shaped policy in this regard....We are trying hard to open access to students who do not automatically fit the 'traditional' college student profile."
- ◆ "Understanding the programs, promoting the programs and making sure the student is right for the course."

## Benefits of Dual Credit

Respondents were asked an open-ended question about the primary benefits of offering dual credit opportunities. Most of the responses fell into three main categories:

- ◆ 65 respondents (59%) mentioned the academic benefits, such as academic rigor, exposure to college-level work before leaving high school, and expanded course offerings, that dual credit courses provide for students.
- ◆ 49 respondents (44%) cited the personal benefits to students of participating in dual credit courses. Examples include building self-confidence and the opportunity for students to prove college readiness, both to themselves and to college admissions officers.
- ◆ 42 respondents (38%) mentioned the financial benefits of participating in dual credit programs, namely the opportunity to earn college credits at low or no cost.

Other benefits respondents mentioned include:

- ◆ Career preparation and opportunities to pursue special interests (11%)
- ◆ Particularly effective for disadvantaged or "non-college-bound" students (8%)
- ◆ Improving the transition to college and retention in college (7%)
- ◆ Special incentive/reward for motivated, high-achieving students (5%)

Verbatim comments about the benefits of dual credit programs include:

- ◆ "1. Offers a less expensive start to college 2. Proves to the students that they are able to be successful in college, taking away the fear of attending college 3. Improves the college going atmosphere at the high school."

- ◆ “Aids disadvantaged students in acquiring college credit and understanding of rigor at the college level. Encourages students to think of this as a possibility and they choose to attend when they would normally just attain a high school diploma.”
- ◆ “Financial benefits of taking courses at free or reduced rates; self-confidence gained through success in course; meaningful transition between secondary and post-secondary experience”
- ◆ “In a rural area...the fact that [courses are] online has made it easy. Students get a sense of what a college course entails and know they can do the work. They also go to college with credits on a transcript.”
- ◆ “It is a wonderful opportunity for students to experience the college setting, within the security of still being in high school. It has allowed greater flexibility in student planning, and given them more options of courses to choose from.”
- ◆ “Students who have participated in college classes see themselves as being successful at the college level. This tends to raise aspirations and increases the number of students who remain in college after the first semester.”
- ◆ “There are a number of students who do not see themselves as ‘college material’ but find they can be successful if provided the opportunity...A few DO fail. Nevertheless, it helps them understand what they will need to cover and how they will need to prepare/study to be successful.”

Several respondents made suggestions for increasing participation or otherwise improving dual credit opportunities, including:

- ◆ **Postsecondary institutions’ requirements and resources:** “Trying to keep track of the individual college’s early study requirements and application processes has been hard, especially when they might change from year to year. It would be nice to have a state database of those to access. With some programs students are totally on their own to figure it out; I prefer the ones that give some support and guidance along the way.”
- ◆ **Funding:** “The Early College for ME program is a resounding success. We need more money to continue/expand the program...Students who might never have gone to college are doing so in tremendous numbers.”
- ◆ **Changing some educators’ perceptions:** “If a student has been channeled toward a less-rigorous curriculum throughout high school based on teacher recommendations or a perceived lack of interest by the student, many teachers do not see dual enrollment as an appropriate ‘placement’ for the student. This is probably where most dual enrollment efforts should be focused--on changing educators’ perceptions.”
- ◆ **Blending of dual enrollment with adult education:** “...I would encourage pilot projects of integrated high school dual enrolled and non-traditional postsecondary students in college courses at local high school sites...expanding access to post secondary at virtually no additional state cost. I would be happy to work on development of such a project.”
- ◆ **Standards-based graduation requirements:** “It will be interesting to see how the State’s new standards-based graduation requirements will mesh with dual enrollment classes...If a kid needs to meet a standard, it would be good to know if they could meet that standard through a dual enrollment course...This would be a good policy area for lawmakers who are interested in opening up postsecondary access as much as possible for those kids who are capable of college-level work to address.”