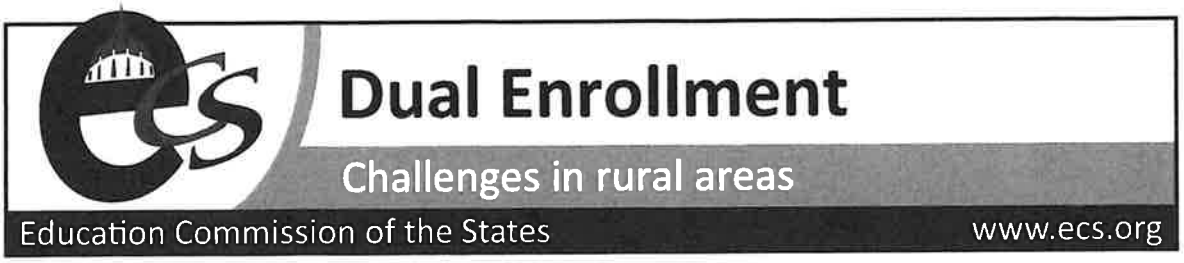

Dual enrollment: A strategy to improve college-going and college completion among rural students

By Jennifer Dounay Zinth
June 2014

Research shows that students who participate in dual enrollment are more likely than their peers to finish high school, enter college and complete a degree.[1] This means dual enrollment can greatly benefit students in rural areas, which report lower college-going and postsecondary attainment rates than other locales.[2]

However, rural areas face unique challenges in providing high-quality dual enrollment programs:

- **Securing qualified instructors**, either high school teachers who have the qualifications to lead college-level courses or postsecondary instructors.
- **Covering program costs**, as many rural districts face declines in enrollment and the funding that follows students in many states.
- **Addressing program logistics**, including the challenges of offering a course to a small number of students and offering career/technical education coursework when high schools may not have the latest technical equipment but the nearest community college is a long drive away.

This report will discuss how states are rising to these challenges, including these examples:

- A public-private partnership in **Ohio** includes funding to help eight colleges and universities create and administer an 18-month master's degree with a teacher-friendly schedule.
- **Texas** authorizes workforce investment funds to support dual enrollment programs targeted to address the needs of high-demand fields.
- Ten states authorize a course to be offered at a location other than a high school or college, easing travel burdens. This includes **Illinois** and **Wyoming**.

A final section will address the opportunities posed by **delivering dual enrollment through tribal colleges**. State policies are often silent on the inclusion of tribal colleges in dual enrollment programs. However, one state, **New Mexico**, created a tribal college dual credit program fund to address this issue.

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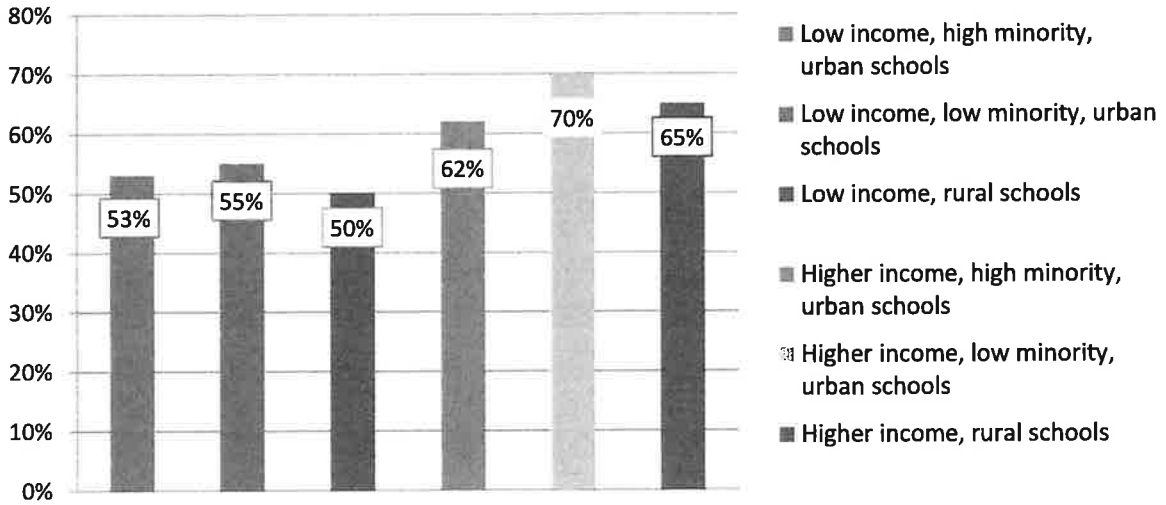
Rural students and college-going rates

Students from low-income, rural high schools have the lowest college-going rate – and are less likely to enroll in college than students from low-income, high-minority urban schools:

College enrollment rates the first fall after high school graduation, class of 2012



Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center – High School Benchmarks Report Fall 2013

Securing qualified instructors

According to the most recent national data on dual enrollment offerings at public high schools, dual enrollment courses are more likely to be offered at a secondary school than at a postsecondary campus or online.[3] While some urban and suburban high schools offer dual enrollment courses led by postsecondary faculty who travel to the high school campus, longer travel distances in rural areas can render these arrangements unfeasible.

To help ensure that high school staff teaching dual enrollment are equipped to teach college content, many state policies require high school instructors to meet the same qualifications as postsecondary faculty at the partnering institution (i.e., for academically-oriented courses, have completed a master's degree and a minimum of 18 credit hours master's-level content in the subject of the course). Yet rural districts may have greater difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers with these advanced qualifications.

States can consider a variety of approaches to overcome these challenges, including:

- **Offering financial aid for high school instructors** to complete master's credits
- **Applying creative course delivery methods** to facilitate completion of master's credits
- **Offering courses through a blended model**

Offering financial aid for high school instructors

Reallocation of district professional development funds

Minnesota requires each district to reserve at least two percent of its basic revenue for staff development. However, districts may use this reserved revenue for grants to allow teachers to pay for courses leading to certification as a "college in the schools" or concurrent enrollment teacher. An eligible teacher must be enrolled in a program that includes coursework and training focused on teaching a core subject.[4]

Loan repayment programs

Wyoming is one state that has created a loan repayment program to help high school teachers complete the credits they need to be approved to teach postsecondary-level courses. Legislation enacted in 2013 creates the Wyoming adjunct professor loan repayment program, administered by the Wyoming community college commission to provide funds to public school teachers who require additional coursework to qualify as adjunct instructors for a concurrent enrollment course. Applicants must be Wyoming residents who are certified and currently-employed public school teachers in good standing with the professional teaching standards board, and be nominated by their district for consideration by the commission. The nomination must include an agreement between the teacher, the district, and the state postsecondary entity that will be a party to the agreement upon program completion (a community college or the University of Wyoming).

The agreement must specify:

- The concurrent course(s) the instructor will teach upon completing the program
- The appropriate accredited college-level educational program, including the specific classes that will allow the teacher to provide instruction in the agreed-upon course(s) upon completion
- An estimate of the tuition and fees required to complete the program
- The terms of repayment of the loan, including successful completion of the program and teaching the agreed-upon classes for two years in a Wyoming district.

A recipient may repay the loan by teaching at least one concurrent enrollment class in a Wyoming public school for a minimum of two years, starting the fall of the academic year after the instructor completes the educational program. (Loan repayment can be deferred for up to five years for an applicant serving full time active duty with any branch of the U.S. military.) Any participant who fails to complete the agreed-upon academic program or fulfill the teaching requirement must begin cash repayment of the loan within 45 days.[5]

The program comes at a relatively small price tag, considering the program's potential to greatly expand dual enrollment course availability in a predominantly rural state. The enabling legislation appropriates $100,000 to the community college commission during 2013-14 to implement the provisions, while the 2014 legislature has appropriated another $165,000 to support the program over the 2014-16 biennium, of which only $15,000 may be expended for program administration.[6]

Scholarships

States may consider replicating or scaling up local initiatives offering scholarships to secondary teachers seeking the master's credits they need for approval as a dual enrollment instructor. Jaclyn Dumond, Manager of School Partnerships at the University of Southern Indiana, has identified at least seven institution- or system-specific programs that cover graduate tuition for prospective dual enrollment

teachers, or for dual enrollment teachers wishing to expand their eligibility to teach additional subjects. Scholarships vary considerably in key components:

- Amount provided: Ranges from one three-hour graduate course to no specified limit. Obviously scholarships that can be applied to a larger number of courses may expand dual enrollment access to teachers who need them most.
- Course location: At a specific campus or anywhere within a postsecondary system
- Course modality: Face-to-face only or online also permitted? Extending scholarship eligibility is likely to be of greatest benefit to rural teachers.
- Timing for reimbursement: Some programs reimburse teachers upon successful course completion; others when the institution receives the teacher's receipt of course payment. Reimbursing teachers up front may particularly benefit teachers in rural areas, where lower teacher salaries generally mirror the lower cost of living.
- Other: Programs should consider other components that may unintentionally diminish teacher participation. For example, one program identified requires teachers earning course grades below B+ to reimburse the scholarship program for the course cost.[7]

Applying creative course delivery methods

Paying for master's credits is just one hurdle for rural teachers. The reality is that the number of four-year institutions offering a specific master's program (biology, for example) in a region may be limited. The distance between a rural teacher's home and the offering institution may be great. And the availability of online or blended master's courses may be limited (or nonexistent). These all pose additional barriers to rural teachers' completion of master's credits. And the fact that some master's programs may require more than three years to complete may put master's completion all but out of reach of rural teachers. One regional public-private partnership in **Ohio** with potential for replication in other states has led to the creation of master's programs teachers can complete in a blended environment in 18 months or less.

Through the Ohio Appalachian Collaborative (OAC) – a joint effort between Battelle for Kids and 21 rural Ohio districts serving over 34,000 students – the OAC and eight higher education institutions are working together to deliver dual enrollment courses and expand the number of rural high school instructors credentialed to teach dual enrollment courses.[8] (In Ohio, teachers must hold a master's in – not simply have 18 master's-level credits in – the subject of the dual enrollment course.) These institutions have signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to clarify the responsibilities of Battelle for Kids and the university in delivering master's courses to rural teachers.

For example, under the MOU between Battelle for Kids and the University of Toledo:

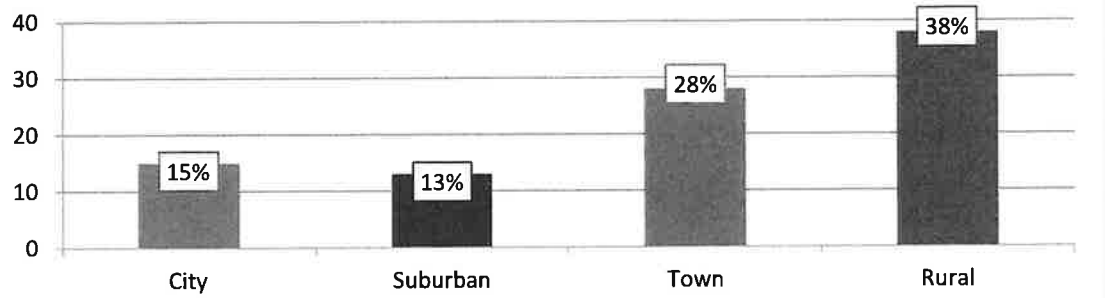
- Battelle for Kids will assist the university in teacher recruitment efforts and provide $60,000 to support the university's commitments
- The University of Toledo will design a science dual enrollment credentialing program that leads to an 18-month master's degree in a blended online/in-person delivery method that is "teacher-friendly" in regards to course scheduling. The university also will offer admission and scheduling preferences to teachers in OAC districts by methods determined most feasible (i.e., "graduated application/registration deadlines").[9]

The approach is enhancing access to dual enrollment coursework in the region. From 2011 to 2013, the number of dual enrollment courses available in OAC districts jumped 246 percent, from 41 to 142. From 2010 to 2013, the number of students participating in dual enrollment classes has grown by 186 percent, from 457 to 1,308.[10]

Why not just offer online courses?

Some observers may wonder, "Why don't rural districts just rely on online dual enrollment courses?" And in fact, national data suggest that rural students are significantly more likely than their peers in city and suburban high schools to access dual enrollment primarily through distance learning:

Percentage of all public high schools with students enrolled in dual credit courses taught through distance education: School year 2010–11



Source: National Center for Education Statistics – Dual Credit and Exam-Based Courses in U.S. Public High Schools 2010-11

However, critics raise concerns over heavy reliance on online dual enrollment:

- ***Implications of reduced "structure" of online learning environment***. Some dually enrolled students in face-to-face courses may struggle with the elevated expectations and faster pace of a postsecondary course. Eliminating the day-to-day face time and teacher-student and student-peer interactions that can mitigate those challenges may mean dually enrolled students – particularly those taking their first dual enrollment course – experience greater challenges than their peers in a traditional classroom environment.
- ***Lack of data on student outcomes in online vs. in-person course delivery***. States generally do not report dual enrollment completion rates or other measures of dual enrollment student success disaggregated by whether students took a course online vs. in a classroom. If in fact students in online dual enrollment courses do not achieve the success of students in brick-and-mortar environments, time and money are not well-invested and the promise of dual enrollment to increase college-readiness, and college-going and –completion are not realized.
- ***Broadband limitations***. Broadband access in rural high schools may mean that not all students capable of succeeding in an online dual enrollment course have the opportunity to do so – or that students access only a portion of the dual enrollment courses they could successfully complete. Technet's 2012 State Broadband Index ranked the 50 states in an index that considered "adoption, network quality and economic structure." Many states with substantial rural populations were ranked lower in the index – with Maine, Idaho, Mississippi, Montana, Wyoming, Kentucky, New Mexico, Louisiana, Hawaii, Alaska and Arkansas as the bottom 10 states.[11]
- ***Not having the full "college experience***." Similarly to concerns raised about courses offered at high schools by high school instructors, some critics point out that online dual enrollment courses may limit access to needed student and academic support (i.e., counseling/advising, tutoring, etc.). Observers also propose that by taking dual enrollment courses online, students may miss out on the benefits of building relationships with faculty and collaborating on projects outside of class.

Given these concerns, policymakers may wish to consider balancing access to online dual enrollment courses with access to face-to-face courses.

Offering courses through a blended model

Online courses may seem like the logical solution to the challenge of locating qualified dual enrollment instructors. Yet online courses may not be a practicable solution, particularly for students taking their first dual enrollment course. Supplementing in-classroom instruction from a high school teacher with online or video-conferenced delivery from a postsecondary faculty member is one approach to ensuring courses maintain college-level content and expectations while avoiding expecting high school students to succeed in fully-online college courses.

While blended dual enrollment delivery in many cases hinges on local agreements, **Utah**'s Technology-Intensive Concurrent Enrollment (TICE) courses offer a statewide blended delivery approach other states may consider. Statute specifies that TICE courses may be either hybrid online/classroom courses, or delivered entirely online. The courses must facilitate articulation, transfer of credit, and when possible, use open source materials available to all state institutions of higher education in order to reduce costs.[12] High school teachers who lead TICE courses must be approved as adjunct faculty by the partnering postsecondary institution.[13]

Admittedly, TICE enrollments are a small proportion of concurrent enrollment registrations – fall 2013 saw 1,200 TICE enrollments, in comparison with 41,000 total concurrent enrollment registrations in the same term.[14] And the requirement that TICE high school instructors be recognized as adjuncts may limit program participation in districts already struggling to find qualified concurrent enrollment instructors. Nevertheless, TICE offers a promising and innovative statewide approach to enhancing dual enrollment access by sharing the delivery workload between K-12 and postsecondary instructors.

Covering program costs

In many rural communities, schools are losing enrollment – and by extension, losing funding. Offering dual enrollment programs may be cost-prohibitive if the responsibility for covering tuition, textbooks and fees costs lies entirely with a cash-strapped district. Or rural districts with limited funds may find themselves forced to focus course offerings on transferable core courses, and provide limited access to CTE courses in which fewer students are interested. Yet transferring these costs to the student/parent will lock out low-income, and even some middle-income students, from program participation.

This issue was raised in Wisconsin by the May 2014 recommendations released by the Speaker's Task Force on Rural Schools, established in September 2013 to "study issues pertaining to financial stability, declining enrollment, transportation needs and other rural school issues."[15] The task force's final report notes on the state's Youth Options program, "The school district must pay the tuition, course fees, and book costs for a high school student to attend any postsecondary course, provided that the district does not already offer a comparable course. ... No state funding currently exists for youth options and a school district must absorb the costs within its existing budget. ... The Task Force heard testimony requesting that state aid be provided to fund youth options-related expenses incurred by a school district. Testimony asserted that youth options can create considerable expense for school districts, particularly those that do not have robust high school course offering but are within driving distance of a college or technical school." The task force chair suggests that the "legislature consider creating a state categorical aid for school districts whose students participate in the youth options program."[16]

States can enhance rural districts' financial capacity to offer dual enrollment coursework through various mechanisms:

- **Establish a state agency as the responsible party for covering dual enrollment tuition and fees.** For example, **Louisiana**'s TOPS-Tech Early Start Award program provides a payment of as much as $300 for six credit hours each semester for 11th and 12th graders pursuing an industry-based occupational credential in a top-demand occupation. The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOFSA) reimburses institutions for each eligible student participating in the program.[17]
- **Reimburse postsecondary institutions through legislative appropriation.** In **New Mexico** and **North Carolina**, the legislature reimburses postsecondary institutions the following legislative session based on participation reports.[18] Admittedly, the downside to this arrangement is colleges may feel constrained to expand dual enrollment participation if they will not receive reimbursement until the following year.
- **Designate a single state agency to distribute a legislative appropriation to postsecondary institutions.** Knowing up front the dollar amount a postsecondary institution has to support dual enrollment in the coming academic year can incentivize institutions to collaborate with districts to reduce the participation costs that go on to students and their families. **Alabama**'s appropriations bill annually provides a line item to distribute funds for dual enrollment programs that may lessen costs to students and parents. The 2014 appropriations bill, S.B. 184, allocates $5 million for the Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System to expend to further develop CTE dual enrollment programs. The bill directs the chancellor to "work with business and industry partners to allocate the funds in a manner consistent with addressing identified needs in the state[.]"
- **Authorize workforce investment funds to support programs. Texas** 2013 H.B. 3028 permits the Texas Workforce Commission to use up to five percent of the biennial appropriation to the skills development fund to support dual enrollment programs. Funds may be awarded to a public junior college, public state college or public technical institute for a CTE program that leads to an industry-recognized license, credential, or certificate. A course or program supported by these funds must have the endorsement of, or a letter of support from, at least one employer in the state, and be targeted to address the needs of high-demand fields or occupations, as identified by the applicable local workforce development board.
- **Authorize regional education service providers to support programs.** Regional districts go by many names in the states, including boards of cooperative education services (BOCES) or boards of cooperative higher education services (BOCHES), etc. States may want to consider the opportunities created when regional districts fund and/or assist in delivering dual enrollment programs. For example, a report from the Wyoming Community College Commission on dual/concurrent enrollment in the 2012-13 school year notes, "Three BOCES or BOCHES provided $717,851 to community colleges and $180,925 to school districts to support concurrent enrollment. Nine BOCES or BOCHES reported that they provided $414,722 to community colleges and $22,442 to school districts to support dual enrollment."[19]

Addressing program logistics

Various program logistics can also pose unique challenges to rural dual enrollment programs. Having a small pool of interested and qualified students means some courses may consist of combined AP/dual enrollment courses or dual enrollment/non-dual enrollment courses, an arrangement posing a variety of scheduling and funding issues. A small pool of students – or limited instructor capacity at the high school – may mean students must travel to and from the postsecondary campus, which can be time-consuming. Logistics may be particularly challenging for CTE courses requiring costly specialized equipment, which postsecondary campuses are more likely to have. And school counselor constraints in

rural districts may limit counselors' capacity to advise prospective or current dual enrollment students on the impact of course-taking on postsecondary or career aspirations.

Statewide videoconference provider

In an approach that addresses these logistical challenges as well as the issues previously addressed – securing qualified instructors and covering program costs – **Utah**'s 2014 S.B. 38 creates the Snow College Concurrent Enrollment Program. This program is specifically designed to offer concurrent enrollment courses statewide via interactive video conferencing. The bill makes a $1.3 million ongoing appropriation from the Education Fund to support the program, which will deliver a consistent two-year schedule of concurrent enrollment courses, as well as advisory support to participating students and their counselors to ensure that students' concurrent enrollment courses align with the students' academic and career goals.

Being able to provide courses to a broader pool of students across the state eliminates the difficulties posed by a small number of students in individual districts, and delivering via two-way, real-time interactive media may provide the structure that high school students may need but that online courses may not afford. The structure of a two-year schedule suggests the possibility that a student may be able to complete a succession of courses within a CTE pathway or academic discipline, rather than a single course that the high school instructor is qualified to deliver.

Offering courses at third-party locations

If a dual enrollment course is offered at a brick-and-mortar location, who says you need to offer it at the high school or postsecondary campus? Offering a course at a "halfway" point between a high school and a postsecondary campus may allow postsecondary faculty to lead courses while reducing travel time by students *and* postsecondary faculty. For CTE courses in particular, third-party locations such as workforce training centers can be especially useful, offering access to more up-to-date course equipment than many rural school districts can afford to maintain.

Ten states authorize a course to be offered at a location other than a high school or college. Some dual credit courses in **Illinois** are offered at career centers.[20] **Wyoming** specifies that a course may be offered at "an off-campus center or at a site meeting safety and accessibility requirements under the instruction of a faculty member[,] a higher education center which is part of a college outreach cooperative education services agreement entered into by one or more community college districts and one or more school districts."[21]

Delivering dual enrollment through tribal colleges

According to the National Center on Education Statistics, just 29 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native 9th-graders in 2009 had "high school guidance counselors who reported that the counseling program's primary goal was to help students plan and prepare for postsecondary education", compared to 48 percent of all public school students. American Indian/Alaska Native males were least likely among all male students (33 percent vs. 53 percent) to report that they expected to earn a bachelor's degree or graduate/professional degree. And of those American Indian/Alaska Native students who started a bachelor's degree in 2004, 37 percent of males and 40 percent of females had finished a degree at that same college within six years, compared to 58 percent of all students.[22]

State-specific studies echo these findings. Washington State data suggest that from 2004-05 to 2009-10, American Indian/Alaska Native high school graduates were the racial subgroup least likely to enroll in

college – 42.7 percent vs. 62.4 percent in 2009-10.[23] Colorado data reflect an even lower college-going rate among American Indian/Alaska Native high school graduates in 2012 - 40.3 percent (compared to 57 percent for all students, and 62.8 percent for white students).[24]

Currently, 32 fully accredited tribal colleges and universities operate in 12 states: Alaska, Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin, with candidates for accreditation operating in Oklahoma and Wyoming.[25] Tribal colleges "are often the only postsecondary institutions within some of our nation's poorest rural areas."[26] Given the data on low college-going among American Indian/Alaska Native students and the research on the positive impact of dual enrollment on college entrance and success, states may consider policies to help tribal colleges deliver dual enrollment programs, particularly to rural American Indian/Alaska Native students:

- **Explicitly authorizing federal Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) high schools to participate**: State policies determining eligibility for participation typically extend access to students in public schools, and in some instances students in private or home schools. In other words, state policy is silent on whether students in BIE high schools may participate in dual enrollment programs. **New Mexico** legislation, however, makes clear that students in BIE high schools adhere to the same eligibility requirements as their peers in other public/state-supported schools.[27]
- **Explicitly authorizing tribal colleges to participate**: Policies in **Michigan**, **New Mexico**, and **Washington** explicitly allow tribal colleges to serve as postsecondary partners in dual enrollment programs. Among states with multiple dual enrollment program options, **Montana** allows tribal colleges to participate in the Running Start program, and **Wisconsin** permits tribal colleges to participate in the Youth Options and Course Options programs.[28]
- **Expanding course location**: A 2009 Washington report noted that, "While the number of Running Start students who are Native American has grown much faster than the growth of Running Start, the rate of participation in Running Start for Native Americans is lower than the participation rates in college in general ... Since Running Start students attend classes on a college campus, proximity is important and these efforts are not readily available to many students in rural areas."[29] Washington has since introduced the College in the High School model, in which tribal colleges and other postsecondary institutions may assist in delivering courses at high schools. Other states that limit certain dual enrollment programs to courses delivered exclusively on a college campus may consider revising policies to allow tribal colleges to partner with high schools for delivery of dual enrollment courses, either at the high school or through online/videoconference/blended models.
- **Providing state financial support**: As mentioned, rural districts may be challenged to cover tuition and other expenses for dually enrolled students. State programs that reimburse public institutions for dual enrollment FTEs would typically not reimburse tribal colleges, creating an additional financial barrier for these colleges in participating in dual enrollment programs. **New Mexico** legislation enacted in 2012 establishes the tribal college dual credit program fund within the state treasury. The fund, administered by the higher education department (which is also responsible for reimbursing public institutions for waived dual enrollment tuition costs), is to be used exclusively to compensate tribal colleges for the tuition and fees waived to allow high school students to attend classes on the college campus or electronically. The legislation also makes a $500,000 appropriation to the fund for fiscal year 2013 to cover waived tuition and fees for participating students in the previous school year.

About the author

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Additional resources

ECS reports

CTE dual enrollment: A strategy for college completion and workforce investment, March 2014

Increasing student access and success in dual enrollment programs: 13 model policy components, February 2014

ECS databases

50-state database on dual enrollment policy

50-state state policy tracking database, dual/concurrent enrollment

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