



# COVID-19 FUNDING GUIDANCE

## **College in high school programs like dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school can be effective tools in addressing the significant student challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.**

These evidence-based programs have demonstrated effectiveness at boosting college enrollment and completion rates, which have declined as a result of the pandemic, and may also be considered as a potential tool to address student instructional loss.

As states, school districts, and colleges make critical decisions about where and how to invest COVID-19 relief funding, postsecondary transition programs and college in high school programs in particular, may be effective strategies towards restoring — and improving on — student access and success to postsecondary education, particularly for those high school students who have experienced the biggest impacts of the pandemic.

This unique moment, as we exit the pandemic, also presents an opportunity to reimagine the relationship between high school and college. We have the opportunity to build more resilient postsecondary pathways that can withstand future external shocks, promote greater long-term postsecondary access, and more durable postsecondary success, particularly for low income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups in higher education including English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and students with inadequate access to technology. We would be doing future generations of students a disservice not to capitalize upon this unique moment.

The US Department of Education (USED), in Volume 2 of its [ED COVID-19 Handbook: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs](#), highlighted college in high school programs as a strategy for supporting successful student transitions between high school and college. According to USED, states and districts should consider “[s]upport[ing] dual enrollment

and early college high schools, which studies show increase postsecondary preparation and enrollment. These programs can serve as effective mechanisms at exposing high school students to college course-taking, providing a college reengagement strategy for students who are at risk of not continuing to postsecondary education upon high school graduation.”

## **What are College in High School Programs?**

College in high school programs — which are referred to by many terms in states across the country including dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school — promote partnerships between secondary school systems and institutions of higher education that provide high school students with intentionally designed, rigorous, and authentic postsecondary experiences leading to officially transcribed and transferable college credit towards a recognized postsecondary degree or credential.

This guide is designed for state agencies, school districts, and colleges to understand the ways in which COVID-19 relief funding can be used to support student success in high school, postsecondary access, and postsecondary success through expanding access to high-quality college in high school programs, particularly for those students whose onward postsecondary journey has been most impacted by COVID-19.

## **What is COVID-19 Relief Funding?**

For the purposes of this guidance, COVID-19 relief is defined as funding provided through the Education Stabilization authorized in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), which received additional funding in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and the American Rescue Plan (ARP.) Any differences in how funding can be used across the three laws are highlighted where applicable. Otherwise, funding from the three relief laws is discussed collectively.

## Using COVID-19 Relief Funds to Support College in High School Programs

**For Governors:** Governors may use any remaining funding provided through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER) that was funded under CARES and CRRSAA to support college in high school programs. Governors in [Alaska](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Montana](#) and [Tennessee](#) have already invested GEER funding to support these programs.

**For State Education Agencies (SEAs):** SEAs may use state set aside funding included in the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) to support student access to and success in college in high school programs, as these activities fall within allowable uses of funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA) and the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V.) ESSER funds reserved by states to address learning loss may also be used for this purpose.

**For School Districts:** School districts may also use their ESSER funding to support student access to and success in college in high school programs, as these activities fall within allowable uses of funds under ESSA and Perkins V. ESSER funds reserved by districts to address learning loss may also be used for this purpose.

**For Colleges and Universities:** Institutions of higher education (IHEs) may use institutional funding received through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) to support student access to and success in college in high school programs. IHEs may choose to invest institutional funds from any of the three relief laws, and using CRRSAA and ARP funds may also provide emergency student financial aid to students participating in the IHE's college in high school program, even if those students have not yet graduated high school. Emergency student financial aid funded through CARES is only available for students who are Title IV eligible, which does not include students participating in college in high school programs.

## Getting Students Back on a Pathway Towards a Postsecondary Degree or Credential

Students have suffered serious, negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, and states, school districts, and

colleges will need to look at a number of strategies in order to help accelerate student learning post-pandemic, arrest declining postsecondary enrollments, and respond to warning signs around postsecondary success.

In particular, education policymakers and providers need to focus particular attention on the needs of underserved populations in our public schools who have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when education is more important than ever for economic success and social mobility.

States and LEAs should consider using ESSER funds, including those reserved to address learning loss, to support college in high school programs, especially if recent data reveals gaps in student access to advanced coursework in high school and/or declines in postsecondary enrollment for all students or among particular groups of students.

College in high school programs can serve as effective mechanisms at strengthening the connection between high school, postsecondary, and workforce experiences. They expose high school students to college course-taking while still in high school, providing a college re-engagement strategy for students who are at risk of not continuing to postsecondary education upon high school graduation. In addition, the programs serve as critical pathways into workforce-oriented education programs, including career and technical education (CTE), apprenticeships, and work-based learning that put students on a pathway towards a successful career. Policymakers and providers should ensure that students are exposed to intentional coursetaking experiences to maximize postsecondary access and success.

Given the success of these programs in improving student access to rigorous coursework, policymakers and providers may also want to invest in these programs as a strategy for addressing learning loss among high school students, who might respond positively to the college learning environment.

College in high school programs are effective strategies for policymakers looking to:

- INCREASE COLLEGE ACCESS
- ENHANCE COLLEGE COMPLETION
- IMPROVE WORKFORCE READINESS
- REDUCE COLLEGE COSTS

## The Equity Imperative

States, school districts, and colleges should consider focusing COVID-19 relief funding to support college in high school program access and success on supporting programs that serve students who are underrepresented in the programs, including low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, English learners, and students experiencing homelessness. For many of these underrepresented student populations, the gaps in access are significant. For example, White students are currently more than twice as likely to participate in dual enrollment compared to Black students, and nearly twice as likely to participate in dual enrollment compared to Hispanic students.

In order to ensure that college in high school programs are being leveraged to advance access and success for all, particular attention should be paid to creating opportunities for more underrepresented students to enroll in, and succeed in college course-taking opportunities in high school. Only with an intentional equity strategy can college in high school programs realize their full potential for the students who could benefit the most from access.

## Proven Models for Student Success

College in high school programs are proven mechanisms for increasing postsecondary preparation and enrollment as shown in a number of research studies, including a [What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report](#) from the Institute of Education Sciences on dual or concurrent enrollment and a long-running [American Institutes for Research](#) study on early college high school.

With the [right supports](#) (a critical component of any successful college in high school program), both academically and in concert with the student's college and career interests, these approaches effectively improve both student access and success in college, particularly for low income students and students who are underrepresented in higher education.

In addition to the national studies, recent state-specific studies in [Colorado](#), [Illinois](#), [Kentucky](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Texas](#), and [North Carolina](#) also demonstrate the significant positive impacts of college in high school programs for students in those states. [Research](#) suggests

these dual or concurrent enrollment experiences must be well-designed with scaffolded supports to ensure equitable experiences and outcomes for all students.

Though we are beginning a difficult recovery from the serious student impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also a moment of opportunity. COVID-19 recovery offers an opportunity to rethink our traditional grade system and extend access to high-quality college courses for many more high school students. Doing so will allow students to accelerate rather than fall behind and will result in significant academic and workforce preparation gains as well as financial benefits for students and taxpayers as more prepared students enter the workforce and will enjoy greater lifetime earnings.

## Examples of Potential Funding Uses

The following recommendations for ways in which states, school districts, and colleges can use COVID-19 relief funds to expand student access to and success in college in high school programs uses the framework for developing equitable access to high quality college in high school programs detailed in [Unlocking Potential: A State Policy Roadmap for Equity and Quality in College in High School Programs](#).

In order to leverage the potential of college in high school programs to address the significant student impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to continue the critical mission of advancing equitable access and success to high quality programs, states, school districts and colleges should consider the following investments using COVID-19 relief funds:

### EQUITY GOAL & PUBLIC REPORTING

***From Unlocking Potential:** States set an equitable, statewide public goal for increasing the participation and success of traditionally underserved student groups in college in high school programs, with clear, disaggregated public reporting and accountability for progress toward the goal.*

**States** should ensure that their data collection and reporting system for college in high school programs is robust, to help understand disparities in access and success created by the pandemic.

**School Districts and Colleges** should analyze participation and success in their existing college in high school program offerings, with a focus on understanding equity gaps to develop targeted strategies to expand access and success for underrepresented populations of students.

#### PROGRAM INTEGRITY & CREDIT TRANSFER

***From Unlocking Potential:** States support and promote high-quality college in high school programs through effective oversight and cross-sector collaboration between the K-12 and postsecondary sectors, as well as ensuring credit articulation.*

**States** should undertake statewide planning to establish greater connectivity between K-12 and higher education. This can include leveraging existing forums for cross-sector collaboration (such as P-20 councils) or creating new ones to support greater collaboration and alignment. In addition, states should establish timelines for creating new policy frameworks and tools or identifying existing ones that promote the equitable scale up of college in high school programs.

**School Districts and Colleges** should collaborate to ensure the most effective investments across K-12 and higher education to promote student access and success in college in high school programs.

**States** should work with program providers in the state to develop a set of best practices for continuing to offer online college in high school program opportunities to interested students, particularly those in rural areas, to ensure high quality.

**States** should work to require or encourage the development of transfer agreements between institutions of higher education in the state to promote transferability of credit earned in high school, and be thoughtful about the sequence of courses that should be included in transfer agreements to encourage students to engage in intentional, articulated pathway sequences that propel those students towards a degree or credential.

#### FINANCE

***From Unlocking Potential:** States design funding mechanisms that remove financial barriers for low-income and moderate-income students to participate and excel in college level work in high school.*

*For more information on state financing mechanisms for dual enrollment, see [Funding for Equity: Designing State Dual Enrollment Funding Models to Close Equity Gaps](#).*

**School Districts and Colleges** should eliminate costs for participating in college in high school programs for students — particularly low-income students — including tuition, fees, instructional materials, transportation, technology, and connectivity. These are all eligible uses of funds for COVID-19 relief by states, school districts, and colleges.

States, school districts, and colleges planning to use COVID-19 relief funding to eliminate costs for students should remain aware that this funding is limited in nature and must be spent down completely by September 30, 2024.

#### COURSE ACCESS & AVAILABILITY

***From Unlocking Potential:** States ensure that students are able to access college in high school courses, regardless of geography, with pathways that maximize opportunities for students to earn multiple college credits, and facilitate students exploring academic and career areas of interest while ensuring that those courses count toward high school graduation requirements.*

**States, School Districts and Colleges** should develop and deploy equity-minded eligibility and admissions criteria for college in high school programs, such as using multiple measures of entry to promote more equitable student access. For more information, see [Improving Eligibility Requirements for Dual Enrollment](#).



**States, School Districts and Colleges** should work together to determine, and then provide incentives to promote uptake of, a set of strategic courses for students based on the courses' applicability to a wide range of degree or credential opportunities and inclusion in career pathways.

**States, School Districts and Colleges** should examine how to expand successful innovations implemented during the pandemic, including the opportunity to offer hybrid or online dual enrollment instruction to more students, particularly those who are not located near an institution of higher education.

**School Districts and Colleges** should develop proactive programming designed to prepare and recruit students of color and low-income students for college in high school opportunities, including culturally specific programs, outreach materials in languages spoken by families of students from non-English speaking households, and college readiness courses for first-generation college students.

#### INSTRUCTOR CAPACITY

*From Unlocking Potential: States develop strategies to recruit, support, and diversify the pool of instructors with the qualifications to teach college in high school while encouraging collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary partners as college in high school programs are scaled.*

**States and School Districts** should expand incentives to recruit teachers into the profession or re-engage teachers who have left the profession — particularly teachers from underrepresented backgrounds. In addition, states and school districts should provide funding to help teachers complete the necessary coursework and credentials to teach in a college in high school program, with an emphasis on expanding the number of credentialed teachers in high-need fields.

#### NAVIGATIONAL SUPPORTS

*From Unlocking Potential: States prioritize the student navigational supports and advising needed to ensure student success in college in high school courses, particularly for those students historically underserved by these programs.*

**School Districts and Colleges** should support college in high school programs in providing student support services at the secondary and postsecondary level (or developing shared resources) such as academic counseling, college and career counseling, onboarding support, and socio-emotional supports.