

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

A State Policy Roadmap for Equity & Quality in
College in High School Programs



POLICY SNAPSHOT

Improving Eligibility Requirements for Dual Enrollment Programs

Access to college in high school programs such as dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school is not equitable. National data from the US Department of Education's [Office for Civil Rights Data Collection](#) and the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) indicates significant equity gaps in access to college in high school programs within many states. Nationwide, Black and Hispanic students participate in college in high school programs at lower rates than white students and students from high socioeconomic backgrounds.

This is problematic – particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates inequities in our education system – because without improved policy design and implementation, college in high school programs cannot realize their full potential; to increase postsecondary access and success for underrepresented students. The public benefit and greatest potential impact of these programs is to reduce equity gaps for students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college goers.

There are several factors driving these equity gaps, and one of those factors is program eligibility requirements for these programs. According to [Rethinking Dual Enrollment to Reach More Students](#), a 2018 report by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), “by and large, state-set eligibility requirements limit dual enrollment access to only the most academically advanced students, who are likely to pursue college after high school regardless.” As the report goes on to argue, research demonstrates that middle achieving students (those whose grades fall just short of typical college readiness measures) can be successful participants in college in high school programs and can derive significant benefits from it. In addition, students who have struggled in high school or even dropped out can achieve success in college in high school programs as well, when provided adequate supports.

Particularly as we look to address equity gaps in program access, finding alternative ways to gauge student readiness to begin college classes in high school is important, particularly since solely relying on GPA or a score on a standardized test can be misleading proxies for future student success.

In [Unlocking Potential: A State Policy Roadmap for Equity and Quality in College in High School Programs](#), the [College in High School Alliance](#), recommends that states adopt a system of using multiple measures to assess student readiness to begin college courses while still in high school:



The state uses multiple measures for dual enrollment eligibility other than age, grade level, or a single standardized assessment, to potentially include projects, portfolios, and performance assessments.

Multiple measures can be used to predict future student success holistically, in a way that simply looking at GPA or a standardized test score cannot. There are many students who would succeed and benefit from these programs who may not perform well on tests, or whose capabilities is not fully reflected in their GPA. Research underway at the [Community College Research Center](#) shows promising results from using multiple measures of entry to place students into college level coursework. The same approach may also apply for dual enrollment, and there have been [promising program-level studies](#) – such as in Utah – showing positive results from adopting alternate eligibility criteria.

▶ COVID-19 INCREASES THE URGENCY OF USING MULTIPLE MEASURES

The COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges for states and programs in administering their college in high school partnerships. One of those challenges includes assessing student eligibility for participating in a college in high school program when eligibility has historically been based on performance on a standardized test that most students were unable to take due to the pandemic. We encourage states and programs to adopt multiple measures as both an equity strategy and an appropriate response to the current circumstances that provide students with access to these critical postsecondary opportunities. Several states have already made moves in this direction, including [Florida](#) and [Louisiana](#), who have both issued emergency regulations to change eligibility criteria for the next academic year to include additional criteria.

Alternative criteria that could be used to predict a student's success in a dual enrollment classes include, among others:

- Grade level
- Regular high school attendance
- Near proficient writing performance in an essay assessment
- Projects, portfolios, and performance assessments
- Interviews and personal statements
- Comprehensive review of a student's academic record
- Sophomore ACT Plan score within two to three points of benchmarks
- Recent assessment results that indicate that a student is reading at or within one grade level
- GPA performance over time (demonstrating improvement)
- Teacher nomination
- Student self-recommendation

A number of states are taking a second look at their eligibility requirements for participation, and updating them to use a model that encompasses multiple measures. [Examples](#) include:

- **Delaware** — Student eligibility and participation requirements must be based on multiple indicators of readiness such as, but not limited to, a combination of tests, course grades, teacher recommendations or portfolios.
- **Illinois** — Statute directs the Illinois Community College Board and the Board of Higher Education to develop policies to permit multiple appropriate measures using differentiated assessment for granting eligibility for dual credit to students. Regulations for four-year institutions require students to have a high level of motivation, and adequate time to devote to studying a college-level course.

- **Nebraska** — Under the state’s Dual Enrollment Standards eligible students should meet a minimum GPA or assessment metric, or demonstrate through some alternative means the capacity for academic success in the desired course or courses. Alternative means can include student portfolios, letters of recommendations, and student performances/exhibitions.
- **Ohio** — The Ohio Innovative Programs for College Credit Plus provides a waiver (related to students needing to demonstrate meeting the eligibility criteria for taking college courses) for dual enrollment programs that offer programming focused on students of color, first generation families, and low-income students.

It is important to note, however, that there is often a difference between what state policy allows for and what programs are practicing. Several of the example states above may officially allow for multiple measures to be used to assess a student’s eligibility for dual enrollment, but in many cases more work is necessary to ensure that practice is adopted by the college in high school programs active in the state. In addition, states should work to ensure that students and families are made aware of these opportunities as early as possible so that they can work towards demonstrating the appropriate evidence for eligibility.

▶ ACTION STEPS

- ① Examine your state’s existing eligibility criteria for participating in college in high school programs. Does it allow for multiple measures? Does the COVID-19 pandemic make an alternative to the existing eligibility criteria necessary?
- ② If your state allows college in high school programs to use multiple measures, but programs are not adopting the practice, consider elevating it to a requirement or providing programs with technical assistance to facilitate adoption.
- ③ Adopt a uniform set of multiple measures that programs in the state should use in order to assess student eligibility for dual enrollment. These could be implemented statewide, or piloted in select sites with the intention of then applying statewide if shown to be successful.
- ④ Collect data on student participation and success in the programs to track outcomes of using those measures in promoting equitable participation and success in college in high school programs.