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College in high school programs, such as dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high schools

have been significant levers for college and career preparedness nationwide.

These programs are increasingly embedded in state and federal accountability systems, which serve as frameworks to measure, report on, and incentivize school and district performance. Although these systems primarily apply to public K-12 schools and districts, making sustainable progress through them relies on the investment of various cross-agency collaborators.

Since the reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 and the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins V) in 2018, a new focus has been placed on career-focused indicators within state accountability systems.

Among all possible career-focused indicators, <u>dual</u> <u>enrollment participation/success is the most frequently included</u>, with 42 states utilizing it as an indicator option across ESSA, Perkins V, and/or state accountability systems. In 2024, a total of <u>243 bills across 39 states</u> related to college-in-high-school programs were introduced during legislative sessions, with 39 signed into law across 21 states. This, however, raises the question of how — or if — these indicators may be impacting dual enrollment opportunities and outcomes across the country.

This paper, developed by Advance CTE for the College in High School Alliance, analyzes how states value dual enrollment in their accountability systems and public reporting efforts — an increasingly timely topic as states work to align the skill sets developed in schools with the needs of their workforce. With growing national momentum behind career-connected learning, understanding how these programs are measured and valued is crucial to ensuring they are implemented equitably and effectively scaled.

This brief draws on the research conducted for the broader Making Career Readiness Count: A 2025 Update, which explores how states value multiple career-focused indicators across accountability systems, offering a comprehensive look at the entire landscape of career-focused metrics. From these insights, the College in High School Alliance offers key takeaways on

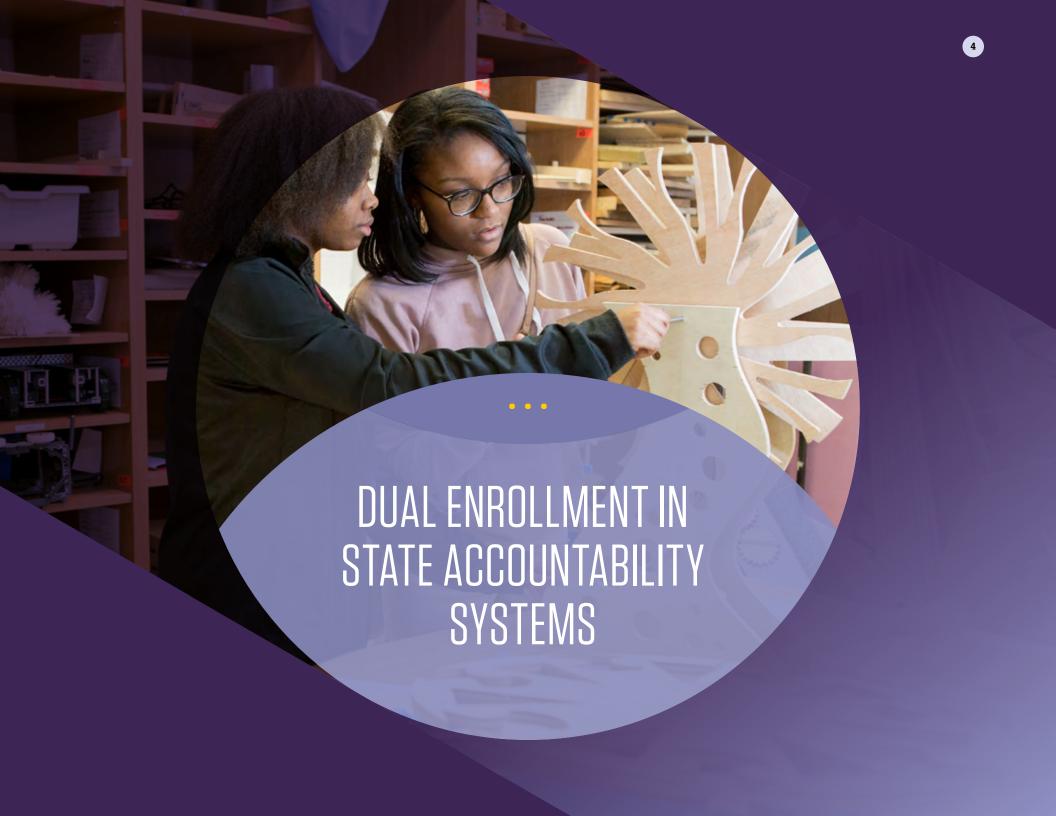
understanding the impact of accountability systems on dual enrollment outcomes, including snapshots from Alabama, Tennessee, and Utah.

DEFINING DUAL ENROLLMENT

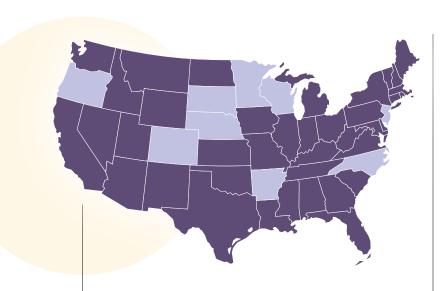
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) defines dual enrollment as a program offered through a partnership between at least one institution of higher education and at least one local educational agency through which a secondary school student who has not graduated from high school can enroll in one or more postsecondary courses and earn postsecondary credit that:

- is transferable to the institutions of higher education in the partnership and
- applies toward completion of a degree or recognized educational credential as described in the <u>Higher Education Act of 1965</u>.

States use various terms for their dual enrollment initiatives, including concurrent enrollment and dual credit. For this brief, we will use the term dual enrollment for consistency.



Currently, 42 states include dual enrollment success or participation as an accountability indicator in at least one of three accountability systems: ESSA, Perkins V, and/or state accountability systems, as depicted in Figure 1.



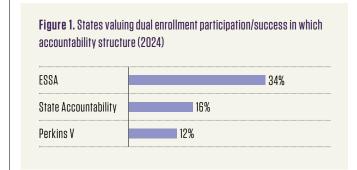
Each of these systems serves a distinct purpose. ESSA focuses on overall K–12 school performance with federally defined priorities, Perkins V, also a federal program, targets quality and access in Career Technical Education (CTE), and state systems often reflect locally defined priorities. States are required to operate under an ESSA and Perkins V plan in exchange for federal funds that contribute to sustaining their educational programs. However, career readiness indicators are not required under ESSA, and states have the agency to select their Perkins V program performance indicators. Not all states utilize a state accountability system, but those who do have the option to align with other accountability structures, as it makes sense for their state.

Dual enrollment is the most commonly included indicator within college and career readiness measures in ESSA and state accountability systems, followed by the attainment of an industry-recognized credential, which is used across 26 states. Since Perkins V introduced new core performance indicators with a chance for states to select one or more indicators for secondary program quality, 12 states (California, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, and Washington) have selected attainment of postsecondary credits for their accountability formulas.

PERKINS V: ATTAINMENT OF POSTSECONDARY CREDITS

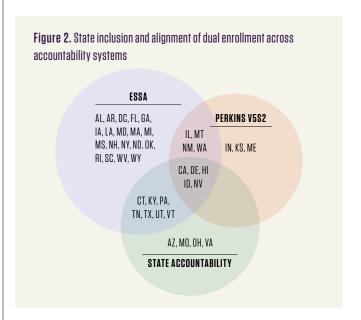
With the introduction of new core performance indicators under Perkins V, states gained the flexibility to choose the secondary program quality indicator that best aligns with their local context. The three approved indicators that states must choose from include: participation in work-based learning, attainment of industry-recognized credentials, and attainment of postsecondary credits, which measures the percentage of CTE concentrators earning postsecondary credit through dual enrollment or credit transfer agreements.

A few states, including Utah and Tennessee, have integrated additional measures from their ESSA accountability systems into their Perkins V frameworks, beyond the standard program quality indicator, to further recognize and support dual enrollment opportunities and systems alignment. These states are included in the ESSA category, as shown in Figure 1.



The frequent inclusion of dual enrollment within accountability systems likely reflects its widespread presence in the U.S. education landscape and states' need to promote, monitor, support, and report on these programs. In the 2022–2023 academic year, 2.5 million high school learners participated in at least one dual enrollment course. That same year, high school dual enrollment learners accounted for 21% of total community college enrollment nationally. Significant to community and technical college systems, supported by evidence-based research indicating positive impacts on learner outcomes, and widely valued by learners and practitioners, dual enrollment is a policy area that shows a return on investment for states and learners alike.

As states increasingly prioritize dual enrollment, many leaders have worked to align their accountability systems to streamline data collection and focus on strategic statewide goals. Figure 2 highlights states that incorporate dual enrollment across ESSA, state accountability systems, and Perkins V, as well as those that align indicator use. Forty-one states and the District of Columbia are displayed in Figure 2; at the time of data collection, nine states did not include dual enrollment participation or success in any of these accountability systems. In total, 15 states demonstrate some level of alignment across one or more of these systems, as signified by circle intersections in Figure 2. Notably, five states (California, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, and Nevada) include dual enrollment as an accountability indicator in all three systems.



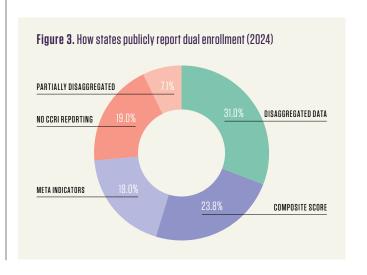
Dual enrollment in accountability in statewide data dashboards publicly reporting dual enrollment data

Though 42 states include dual enrollment in one or more of their accountability systems as part of a college and career readiness measure, the ways states publicly report their learner outcomes vary dramatically. Of these 42 states, 34 publicly report college and career readiness data through their statewide data reporting systems. This data is specific to publicly reporting enrollment and outcomes of ESSA and state accountability indicators in a central report card/accountability dashboard. Only a few states report Perkins V indicators in these dashboards; therefore, they are not included in this count. Additionally, with the help of central data collection and reporting tools like the Perkins Collaborative Research Network, anyone can access and analyze 5S2 indicator data for all the states that include it, all in one place.

Of the 34 states publicly reporting college and career readiness data, 18 report dual enrollment data within a composite score or a metaindicator. A composite score calculates a flat score of all college and career readiness indicators, and a metaindicator aggregates a cluster of indicators to generate average attainment figures. For example, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual enrollment, and other advanced coursework completion are often publicly reported within a metaindicator. When displayed this way, it is nearly impossible to determine how much each indicator contributes to the reported figures. This lack of clarity in reporting is antithetical to establishing accountability systems to highlight areas for improvement, monitor progress, and inform local decisions. Additionally, three states report partial data on their state report cards,

meaning they disaggregate another career-focused indicator within their accountability systems, but do not include dual enrollment in these breakdowns.

The remaining 13 states disaggregate dual enrollment in their state/accountability report card. Even then, when viewing some state/accountability report cards that highlight dual enrollment, it remains challenging to extrapolate learner outcomes, as some states do not break down dual enrollment participation by subgroup or special population. These states merely relay a percentage of dual enrollment participation and/or success across the state. Failing to report the full array of available data is a missed opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate wins for learners and communicate a broader data story about the value of dual enrollment. Similarly, these summative figures prohibit collaborators from understanding who needs more support and where. Figure 3 illustrates how states publicly report dual enrollment through their state/ accountability report cards.



Some states, such as **California**, **Florida**, **Illinois**, **Iowa**, **Kentucky**, **Michigan**, and **Kansas**, disaggregate their dual enrollment data by subgroup and special populations. For example, Florida and Illinois display disaggregated dual enrollment data across subgroups, including gender and select special populations, which are navigable in the state's annual report cards. Check out Florida's publicfacing data dashboard to view its breakdown of dual enrollment by subgroup, as well as <u>Illinois' public-facing</u> dual enrollment data.

To support transparency and drive continuous improvement, states should publish comprehensive, disaggregated data for all accountability indicators. These data should be made publicly available through state report cards or accountability dashboards that function as centralized, accessible tools for understanding program participation and outcomes at the school, district, and state levels.

For more information on dual enrollment data reporting, please see the College in High School Alliance's paper, College in High School Programs And Data: Reporting and Using Dual Enrollment Data to Improve Equity and the spreadsheet tracking 50 states' data collection and reporting for dual enrollment.



Given the number of practitioners in colleges and high schools, partners at the system level, businesses, parents, and students, it is essential that clear communications are prioritized that are informed by the vision and strategic direction.

Although including dual enrollment in accountability systems is a positive step, these systems alone are not enough to drive meaningful improvements in learner participation and outcomes. States with lasting growth in dual enrollment participation pair accountability indicators with other enabling conditions, including strategic funding, strong political support, and coordinated implementation. The following snapshots of Alabama, Tennessee, and Utah illustrate how states use multiple influence levers to build sustainable, scalable systems. Each state demonstrates a unique approach to leveraging accountability to guide local implementation, with dual enrollment embedded across multiple state and federal accountability systems. These examples also highlight how durable funding and leadership buy-in can create the conditions necessary for dual enrollment to flourish as a strategy for career readiness.

Snapshot 1 ALABAMA

In 2015, the same academic year that dual enrollment was introduced as a career-focused indicator in Alabama's ESSA plan, the Alabama legislature appropriated funds to remove a cost barrier for learners enrolled in statewide dual enrollment programs through scholarship opportunities that may cover tuition, fees, and textbooks. Each college has the autonomy to determine the best way to utilize these funds for its community. These appropriations have grown yearly since, and in 2023, the

legislature allocated \$30 million for dual enrollment, an increase of \$4.5 million from the previous year. Since funds and accountability for dual enrollment were initiated in 2015, Alabama has seen a 230% increase in participation, growing from 12,131 learners in 2015 to more than 40,000 earning dual credit in 2024. Figure 5 displays Alabama's dual enrollment and legislative appropriations from 2018 to 2024.

Figure 4. Alabama dual enrollment and legislative appropriations over time (2018–2024) 50,000 \$50,000,000 \$40,682,385 40.000 30.000 \$26,200,000 \$30,000.000 \$17,982,385, \$18,182, 20.000 \$20,000,000 17,146 \$10,000,000 2018 2020 2022 2024

Analyzing State Accountability Systems for Dual Enrollment

Expanding dual enrollment is a core component of Alabama's broader strategy to strengthen workforce development beginning in the classroom. The state's workforce development plan prioritizes access to meaningful career opportunities, such as dual enrollment Career Technical Education (CTE), at the secondary level to address labor shortages by equipping learners with short-term credentials or two-year degrees aligned with in-demand occupations. This goal is fortified by Alabama's selection of the Perkins V 5S1 indicator, which measures the rate of learners attaining a recognized postsecondary credential. This focus has been reinforced since 2018 through the Governor's Success Plus initiative, which set a statewide goal of adding 500,000 highly skilled Alabamians to the workforce by 2025. While the state did not reach this target by its established timeline, it made significant progress, from 57,804 credential earners in 2018 to 223,562 individuals aged 16-64 earning a postsecondary credential by 2025. Of these credential earners, 80% were age 24 or younger. Legislative appropriations and strong consensus among state leaders have positioned dual enrollment and other career readiness opportunities as strategic investments, enabling these programs to thrive through coordinated alignment between education and workforce systems.

With sustained funding for dual enrollment over the last decade, Alabama has been able to invest time into its strategies for expanding learners' access to dual enrollment and beyond. Dual enrollment in Alabama is available to learners as early as 10th grade and, depending on the local education agency (LEA), can be leveraged to earn an associate's degree before a high school diploma. Some local institutions offer GPA waivers to remove

barriers to participation, and the <u>Alabama Transfer Guide</u>, an agreement between four-year universities and the community college systems, guarantees statewide course equivalency. <u>Alabama's community colleges</u> offer dual enrollment in 22 science courses, 18 computer science courses, 17 math courses, and over 450 career pathway classes. In 2024, dual-enrolled learners comprised 10.46% of all two-year institution enrollments and 2.86% of all four-year institution enrollments.

Alabama's journey toward expanding dual enrollment began in 2015 when the state included dual enrollment as a career-focused indicator in its ESSA plan, but it did not stop there. This decision raised the visibility of dual enrollment and aligned it with broader workforce and education priorities. Over the past decade, the state has coordinated sustainable financial investments and strategic leadership decisions to turn dual enrollment from a promising idea to a statewide asset.

Snapshot 2 TENNESSEE

Dual enrollment is at the center of <u>Tennessee's Ready</u>
<u>Graduate</u>, the state's federal accountability model, and its
<u>state accountability</u> college and career readiness metrics.

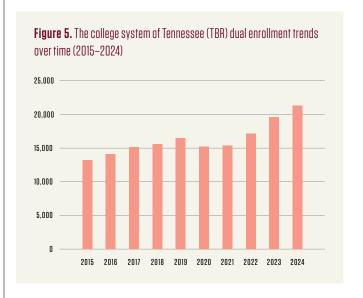
This career readiness component encourages
participation in early postsecondary opportunities
(EPSOs), including dual enrollment participation, and
monetarily incentivizes districts to expand offerings.

Beyond federal and state accountability, Tennessee has
layered in financial incentives through its state funding
formula, the <u>Tennessee Investment in Student</u>
<u>Achievement (TISA)</u>. TISA further prioritizes dual
enrollment success and learner outcomes, providing

additional incentives for districts to expand and encourage dual enrollment opportunities. Under TISA, districts can receive additional funding when learners meet specific college and career readiness outcomes, including those tied directly to EPSOs. Learners who earn at least two EPSO credits, such as through dual enrollment, alongside key performance benchmarks (e.g., ACT improvement or ASVAB scores), generate a 10% bonus on top of the TISA base. That bonus doubles to 20% for learners with special population status.

Importantly, these incentives do not operate in silos. Tennessee's approach is strengthened by sustained cross-agency collaboration. The Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR), and Department of Labor rely on strong communication with one another and have aligned priorities, leading to more consistent messaging to districts about the value and purpose of dual enrollment. Partnerships with the Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs), the state's network of technical colleges overseen by TBR, have created course articulation agreements that allow dual enrollment coursework to count toward advanced training or certification, creating seamless transitions for learners. Recent policy changes, including expanded Dual Enrollment Grant funding and eligibility for 9th and 10th grade students to access this funding for TCAT dual enrollment, have also contributed to increased participation. Over the past 7 years, dual enrollment at TCATs has more than tripled, growing from 2,554 learners in 2015 to 9,298 in 2022. In Fall 2022, secondary dual enrollment learners made up approximately 57% of the total TCAT enrollment. Meanwhile, dual enrollment at community and technical colleges rose from 13,236

<u>learners in 2015 to 21,310 in 2024</u>, with secondary learners representing 15% of total enrollment in 2015 and 27% in 2024. Additionally, 74% of these learners have high school GPAs of <u>3.5 or higher</u>. Figure 5 shows the growth of TCAT enrollment over time.



Further, a research study conducted by higher education researchers in Tennessee found that learners who completed at least one dual enrollment course in high school were significantly more likely to earn an associate degree than their non-dual enrollment peers. This relationship was consistent across subgroups based on ACT score, gender, race, and socioeconomic status.

Tennessee's comprehensive strategy to support dual enrollment through aligned accountability systems, cross-agency collaboration, and targeted funding incentives underscores the importance of a robust infrastructure for positive learner outcomes. Rather than relying on a single policy lever, the state reinforces progress across multiple systems, intending to ensure that dual enrollment is not just a point of access but a meaningful experience for learners.

Snapshot 3 UTAH

Dual enrollment initiatives in Utah have been formalized in state policy since 1988, with nearly 20 years of data used for continuous improvement efforts. Utah allows learners to graduate high school with 60 postsecondary credits, equivalent to an associate's degree, costing learners approximately \$5 per credit. In the 2022-2023 school year, the average learner earned 7.7 college credits through dual enrollment, with learners saving, on average, \$1,586 in college tuition. Each year, more than 50,000 students accumulate over 350,000 credit hours through the dual enrollment program, with most students completing between one and three courses throughout their time in high school. Credits earned through Utah's concurrent enrollment program can be transferred between institutions within the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE); however, the application of those credits, whether as direct course equivalents or as elective credit, can vary by institution. This robust participation is supported by substantial state investment, with total appropriations for dual enrollment reaching \$16.2 million in 2022.

Utah has seen <u>various investments</u> in dual enrollment as a result of CTE and postsecondary readiness opportunities as a gubernatorial priority for the first time since 2010. Legislative-driven programs such as <u>Utah Prime</u>, a grant program that creates opportunities for learners to earn dual enrollment credit or CTE certification while pursuing their high school diploma, ran its first pilot in the 2021–2022 school year. These funds enable LEAs with limited dual enrollment and/or CTE courses to develop new pathways and support learner enrollment by covering expenses such as recruitment, educator salaries, transportation, and other related costs. Additionally, learners receive different tiers of credentials — Launch, Discover, and Transform — through the program, with dual enrollment courses embedded in each pathway to certification.

At the Launch level, learners earn six dual enrollment credits plus a CTE industry certification. In the Discover level, learners earn 15 dual enrollment credits or complete a CTE pathway. The Transform level awards either a General Education Certificate or a CTE Institutional Credential, which can be earned through 30 dual enrollment credits or 900 CTE course hours at a Utah technical college. Utah's progress in expanding dual enrollment access is the result of more than a decade of sustained collaboration between state agencies, such as the Utah System of Higher Education and the legislature. with USHE playing a key leadership role in shaping the state's dual enrollment architecture well before 2015. Most recently, USHE issued strategic goals for 2024-2027 that include increasing access to dual enrollment opportunities for all learners. Figure 6 displays Utah's dual enrollment participation (2017-2024) alongside legislative appropriations across institutions during the corresponding academic year.





Utah's state and federal accountability structures include dual enrollment and CTE concentrator rates as career-focused indicators. Heavily aligned with the state's strategic goal to increase dual enrollment and CTE enrollment, these accountability structures are well-situated to report results on the statewide work to increase access and enrollment to these opportunities. While Utah's accountability systems reinforce the importance of dual enrollment, the state has also invested in direct incentives to institutions and LEAs and prioritized a broader culture of data-informed decision-making to expand dual enrollment access.

In 2022, the Utah State Board of Education facilitated data trainings across the state that engaged secondary and postsecondary CTE leaders and educators to understand indicator data. Using Advance CTE's opportunity gap analysis process, USBE provided LEA- and institution-level

data to help leaders identify gaps, discuss findings, and plan targeted actions. These trainings also addressed challenges such as data accuracy concerns and ensuring decision-makers were present for key discussions, often leading to follow-up meetings at the local level. Over the past two years, Utah has continued this effort, providing updated data and facilitating further dialogue with the ultimate goal of closing identified gaps by 2030. As a result, data reporting quality has improved, and leaders are now asking more focused questions about the data and how it can drive better-informed decisions. By recognizing that accountability indicators are only meaningful when they lead to action, the state has prioritized bringing the right people to the table and equipping them with the training needed to make timely, informed adjustments.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

For accountability to create its greatest impact on learner success in career-focused indicators like dual enrollment, policy and program areas need to be addressed to develop and maintain meaningful and accessible programs.

Strategic and sustainable funding is necessary to drive dual enrollment access

It is crucial to be strategic with indicator selection to ensure that all indicators promoted within accountability systems are systemically funded in state or federal funding streams for long-term sustainability and high-quality experiences. If an indicator is important enough to be included in an accountability system, it should be important enough to receive dedicated funding. To ensure adequate funding, states should consider selecting indicators that align with other statewide priorities and

avoid diluting career-focused offerings within accountability that could result in multiple undersupported experiences.

However, not all states that include dual enrollment in their accountability systems have stable funding or receive increased funding for these experiences. This can lead to insufficient funding to support local implementation and sustain programs focused on meaningful dual enrollment opportunities, especially in lower-income communities. Without fully funding dual enrollment, there can often be tensions between local districts and institutions of higher education around the financial burden. In addition, without sufficient funding, an administrative burden may be placed on state agencies to do more with less. To address this, states should prioritize systemic, sustained investments such as dedicated budget line items and incentive structures to scale and strengthen dual enrollment.

States like Alabama, Tennessee, and Utah offer examples of how aligning funding with accountability can lead to lasting results. In Alabama, legislative appropriations have increased steadily since dual enrollment was introduced as an ESSA indicator, supporting significant growth in participation and aligning with broader workforce goals. Tennessee complements its accountability model with financial incentives through its state funding formula, rewarding districts for expanding ESPO access and learner outcomes. Utah, with decades of policy history in dual enrollment, has prioritized affordability and equity through state appropriations, grant programs, and embedded accountability measures that reflect the state's postsecondary readiness agenda.

Accountability can be a critical tool to monitor progress and provide support for local implementation

Currently framed, accountability structures are understood to move public education systems forward and incentivize local districts and schools to achieve statewide educational goals.

However, it is critical to recognize that accountability and public reporting systems also play a key role in shining a light on key outcomes. Accountability can and should be a powerful tool for continuous improvement, monitoring progress, and using data to inform policy and/or programmatic shifts, including where access needs to be expanded, as described above in Utah. Using accountability to reflect the results of state work to improve dual enrollment can provide a roadmap for the challenges and solutions ahead as program offerings evolve. States can work to align their career-focused indicators across accountability structures to support processes for data collection and validity.

Political support and a clear vision drive strategic impact

For dual enrollment to impact learners and their career trajectories, offerings must be relevant, high-quality, and widely accessible. Although accountability structures promote career-focused indicators, meaningful dual enrollment experiences require coordinated leadership and investment across all levels, from state agencies and college systems that shape priorities and funding, to local districts that design and implement programs aligned to learner needs. To do this, states must establish a clear vision as dual enrollment expands to ensure its growth aligns with statewide educational goals and the outcomes

sought through accountability systems, similar to Alabama. Defining this vision will help states prioritize the benefits they seek to maximize and guide policy decisions that support learners while maintaining an intentional integration of dual enrollment in public education systems.

This work benefits from the support of all partners, including the state legislature, the governor's office, and various state agencies, to generate statewide strategic support that bolsters progress and expands on existing offerings. Having political support to invest in CTE and dual enrollment is an opportunity to create strategic goals that combine workforce development and career-ready outcomes for learners. Sustained legislative commitment can be difficult to maintain, and communicating with new legislative officials over time is difficult, so creating sustainable partner buy-in is key to program success.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Interested in how states value career readiness in accountability systems beyond dual enrollment? Check out <u>Making Career Readiness Count: A 2025 Update</u> by Advance CTE for a deeper exploration of how states include career-focused indicators such as industry-recognized credentials, work-based learning, and more.

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