Dual Enrollment from Two Points of View: Higher Education and K–12

By Wendy Kilgore and Ellen Wagner

While dual enrollment fills a similar student success niche in both higher and K–12 education, the administrative perspectives of these two entities do not always align. This article highlights the groups' similarities and differences in perspective and proposes implications for practice.

Impetus for the Projects

Student participation in dual enrollment in the United States increased approximately 75 percent from 2002 to 2011, from approximately 1.16 to 2.04 million students (Marken, Gray and Lewis 2013; Waits, Setzer and Lewis 2005). While dual enrollment had previously been intended for gifted and advanced students, it expanded to include a wider range of students. During the last decade, policy makers and school officials have collaborated to increase access to dual enrollment, in part to extend federal and state initiatives for improving college readiness for high school students. The introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) laid the foundation for greater access to accelerated learning programs, including dual enrollment and a proliferation of articulation agreements between postsecondary institutions and local school districts (Glancy *et al.* 2014, SHEEO 2016).

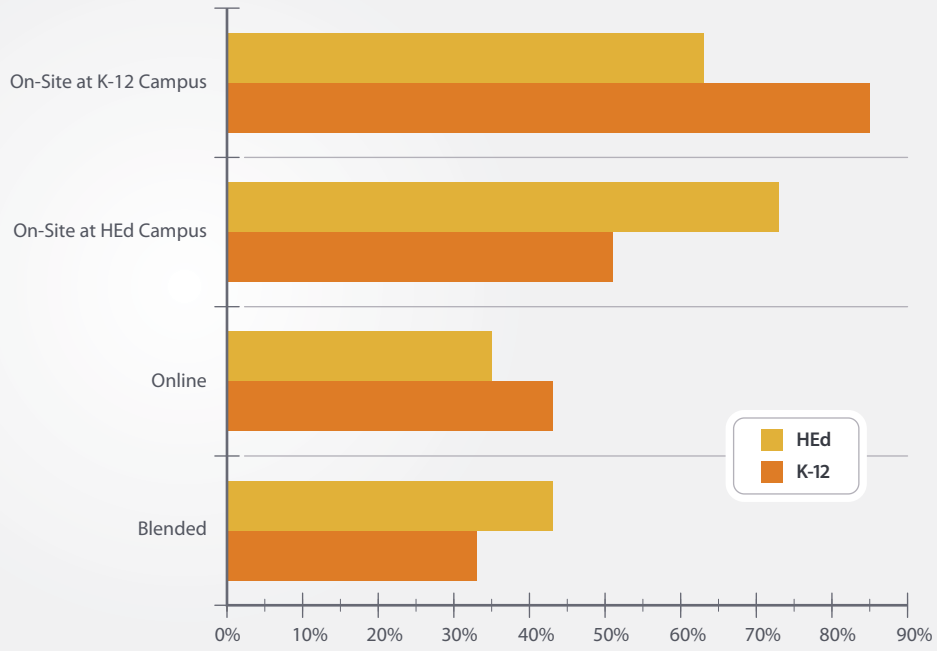
The Education Commission of the States (ECS) database on dual enrollment practices notes that 47 states plus the District of Columbia have common statewide dual enrollment (DE) policies with guidelines for access, qualifications, funding, and related issues (Zinth 2015). Of these, ten states require "all public high schools and eligible public postsecondary institutions to provide DE," and 28 states plus the District of Columbia "allow nonpublic, proprietary, or tribal colleges or approved workforce training providers to participate in dual enrollment programs." Three states—New York, New Hampshire, and Alaska—leave dual enrollment policies up to local districts and postsecondary institutions.

Further, dual enrollment has been found by many to provide students with a wide range of potential benefits (Bailey and Karp 2003; Barnett and Kim 2014; Cassidy, Keating and Young 2011; Karp 2012; Webb and Mayka 2011), including:

- Helping prepare students for the academic rigors of college;
- Providing information to students about the skills they will need to succeed in college;
- Improving students' motivation by offering interesting courses and high expectations;
- Promoting relationships between colleges and high schools;
- Providing a college course experience to populations traditionally underserved by higher education;
- Contributing to a college-going culture in the school district;
- Providing an accelerated pathway to a college degree;
- Enabling students to become accustomed to the college environment (when the DE course is offered on the college campus);

Figure 1.

Available Dual Enrollment Delivery Methods



- Increasing the likelihood that high school students will graduate from high school and enroll in college;
- Increasing the rigor of career and technical programs and thereby better preparing students for the workforce; and
- Building college awareness among students who typically would not consider enrolling in college.

Many school administrators have looked to dual enrollment to help bridge the gap between academic preparedness and postsecondary expectations. Dual enrollment has been shown to reduce the likelihood of students' needing to enroll in remedial courses in college, which can increase the amount of time it takes to attain a degree and thereby increase the likelihood that students will drop or stop out (Attewell *et al.* 2006). Research conducted by Berger *et al.* (2013) and Reisberg (1998) suggests that students who earn college credits while they are still in high school may earn their college degrees far sooner than typical students. Wyatt, Patterson, and Di Giacomo (2014) also found that dual credit courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses can have a positive impact on students' future success. The authors concluded that students who received higher AP and IB examination scores were more likely to earn a degree from a two- or four-year institution.

These factors—increased popularity/enrollment, improved college-bound success and access, the college completion agenda, pathways for increased student motivation and engagement, and dual enrollment as a potential tool for universities and colleges to meet enrollment goals—are the reasons that AACRAO, AASA, and Hobsons decided to pursue similar lines of research of the topic.

Convergent and Divergent Perspectives on Dual Enrollment

As stated above, similar questions about the benefits of dual enrollment were asked of higher education (HEd) and K–12 administrators. While the questions were not identical, they were similar enough in design and content to provide a basis for comparing perspectives. Most K–12 districts and HEd institutions offer at least one form of dual enrollment (95 percent and 78 percent, respectively) (*see* Figure 1). The differences in the reported percentages of where dual enrollment courses are offered, specifically on the K–12 versus the

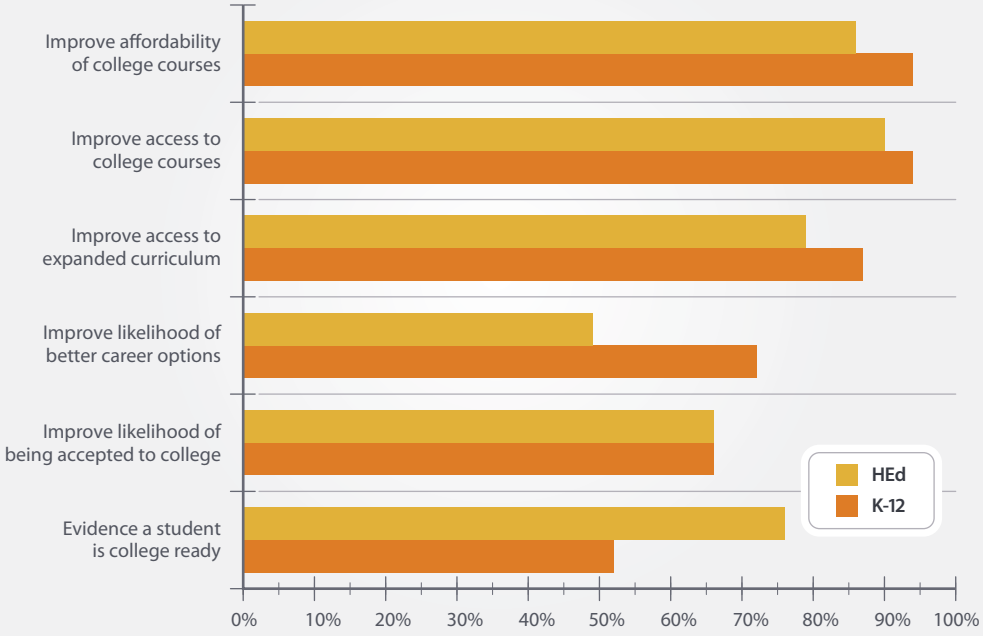


Figure 2.

Agreement with Value Statements About Dual Enrollment

HEd campus, may be attributable to the fact that often, more than one K–12 district is associated with a specific higher education institution. The differences in reported delivery method percentages decrease when online and blended course offerings are considered.

In Figure 2, the original survey HEd rating categories of "strongly agree" and "agree" are combined into one rating to compare with the singular-response K–12 survey design. The same methodology was applied to the K–12 response for the statement "Evidence a student is college ready." This made it apparent that K–12 and HEd respondents agreed that the greatest values of dual enrollment are improved access to college courses, improved affordability of college courses, and improved access to expanded curriculum (Figure 2). They had comparable opinions as to whether participation in dual enrollment leads to an increased likelihood of acceptance to college. The two groups were most divergent in their opinions about improved career options as an outcome of dual enrollment participation (49 percent HEd vs. 72 percent K–12) and that successful completion of dual enrollment is evidence that a student is college ready (76 percent HEd vs. 52 percent K–12). The latter is somewhat surprising; one would anticipate that the results would be just the opposite—that higher education institutions would be less likely to believe that participation in dual enrollment correlates with college readiness.

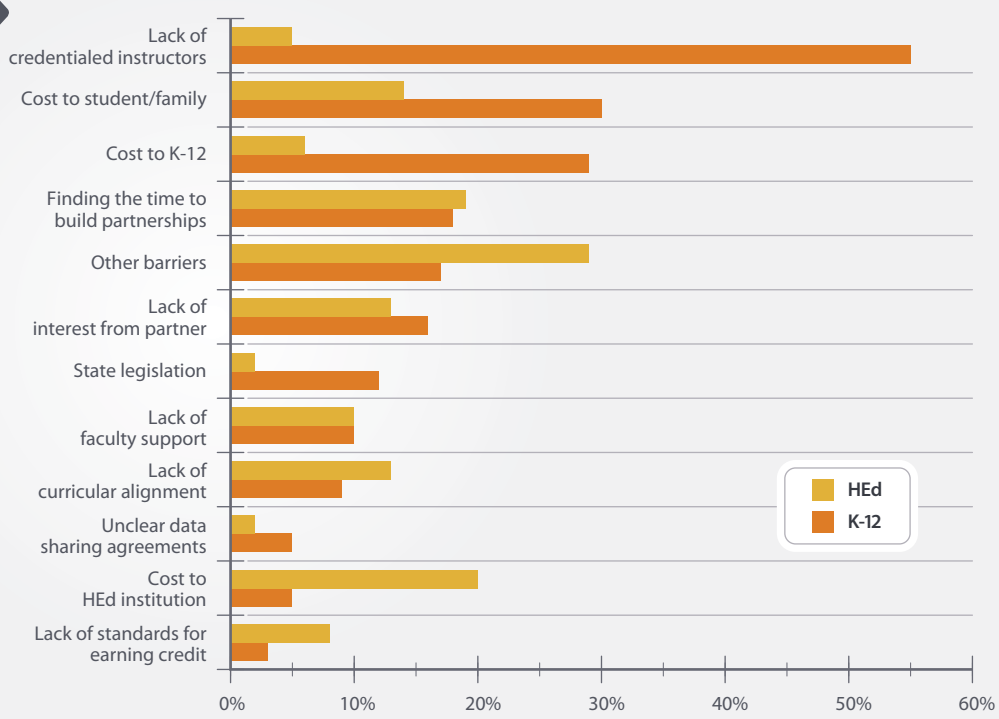
K–12 respondents were also able to select "other" as a choice and to provide further comment about other benefits of dual enrollment. Comments included:

- "They demonstrate that college is achievable."
- "It's great for first-generation students."
- "[It] helps underrepresented groups see they are capable of doing college work."
- "It's a confidence builder, knowing that a student can pass a college class."
- "They can get their associate's degree in high school."
- "Pique interest of 'at-risk' students, enhance experience of advanced students."

There is considerably less convergence between the K–12 and HEd perspectives on the obstacles to offering dual enrollment than there is regarding the benefits of dual enrollment (*see* Figure 3, on page 60). Most striking is the perceived barrier of a lack of credentialed instructors. More than half of K–12 respondents noted that this was a significant barrier whereas only 5 percent of HEd respondents were of that opinion. The HEd sur-

Figure 3.

Barriers to Offering Dual Enrollment



vey included "our institutional culture" as a potential barrier to offering dual enrollment and in fact was the most commonly selected barrier by HEd respondents. The K–12 survey did not list this barrier, so it is not included in Figure 3. Nevertheless, it is included in the list of the top three barriers for each sector (*see* Table 1). "Cost of books/course resources to the student/family" was an obstacle specified in the K–12 but not the HEd survey and was rated the number four barrier to offering dual enrollment.

Slightly fewer than one in five K–12 respondents and almost three in ten HEd respondents selected "other" barriers. Comments by K–12 respondents defining "other" barriers include:

- "Difficulty of transferring credit."
- "Difficulties in sharing information between schools and colleges."
- "Lack of interest from higher education institutions."
- "Lack of scheduling alignment between schools and colleges."
- "Lack of interest from students and parents."
- "Lack of transportation for students."
- "Paperwork nightmare."

"Other" barriers described by HEd respondents included a perceived lack of preparation by high school students for courses that might be offered, lack of staff to administer the program, not fitting into the institution's mission, believing that community colleges were already filling the niche, and, finally, constraints imposed by the institution's current accreditation.

Notwithstanding these potential barriers, administrators, foundations, and legislators continue to develop initiatives to improve the access, funding, and quality of dual enrollment programs. For example, to help address the lack of credentialed instructors, states

Table 1. **Top Three Barriers to Dual Enrollment by Respondent Type**

HEd	K–12
Institutional culture	Lack of credentialed instructors
Other barriers	Cost to the family
Cost to higher education institution	Cost to the school district

and organizations are developing grants in order to save instructors money while they earn their qualifications (Horn *et al.* 2016). Such programs include credit voucher systems, professional development funds, and loan forgiveness in order to qualify instructors for dual enrollment instruction. Additional initiatives focus on developing funding mechanisms and incentives for schools. In 2016, several states—including Tennessee, Maryland, Illinois, and Florida—enacted such legislation (Education Commission of the States 2016).

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

An article in *Education Week* asked "are dual-enrollment programs overpromising?" The author articulates the concern that students who earn credits through these programs face challenges in transferring those credits (Gerwertz 2016). She further notes that "very little research has been done on the proportion of students' dual enrollment credits that are accepted by the colleges they attend." While the latter statement is true for research based on student-level data, the present study on institutional practices and policies does not support the idea that a large percentage—or even a fair percentage—of students who earn credits through dual enrollment have difficulty transferring them to another institution. Although the AACRAO study found that private institutions are less likely than public institutions to accept dual enrollment credit for transfer, 86 percent of institutions in the sample overall accept this credit with few restrictions. These results, paired with the fact that in 2014 more than three-quarters of the more than 17 million college-going students in the United States attended a public institution, make it even less likely that dual enrollment credit transfer is an issue affecting a large percentage of students. Nevertheless, implications for practice for both K–12 and HEd can be gleaned from each study individually and through the collective lens presented in this article.

- It is the responsibility of HEd administrators to clearly communicate to participating students and their K–12 partners how dual enrollment credits may or may not transfer and how to determine this in advance of the student spending time, and in some instances money, on a course that will not serve the purposes they intend.
- K–12 advisors should also be able to articulate directly to students the advantages and limitations of dual enrollment, particularly with regard to certain courses. The importance of college and career counseling was underscored in discussions about course planning, colleges likely to accept dual credits, articulation agreements, and the like.
- The AACRAO study noted that a small percentage of HEd institutions are reluctant to accept credit earned through dual enrollment because they do not accept credits that also count toward a high school equivalency. This can be true even when the learning outcomes of the course are equivalent and the credentials of the faculty teaching the high school course meet or exceed the minimum credential requirements for an instructor teaching the same course on the HEd campus. This situation is most likely to occur when the dual enrollment credits were earned at a lower-division-only institution and the student is attempting to transfer the credit to a comprehensive institution. A comparable standard of perceived double dipping does not appear to apply when lower-division-only courses are earned in the process of completing an associate's degree. Perhaps this double standard could be a point of discussion when articulation agreements between lower-division-only institutions and their comprehensive institution partners are reviewed.
- Given the difference between K–12 and HEd's perceived barrier of access to credentialed instructors, there may be an opportunity for HEd to offer more instructor credentialing program options to its K–12 partners.
- Costs to both institutional parties and the student/family were among the most commonly noted barriers to dual enrollment. There may be an opportunity for both entities to become more creative (within the bounds of existing legislation) to reduce costs to institutions and students/families.

Notwithstanding the existence of some barriers to dual enrollment for both HEd and K–12, there is agreement that students who participate in dual enrollment derive many benefits. Consequently, dual enrollment is and likely will continue to be an important strategy for K–12 and HEd institutions to expand opportunities for student success.

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Author's Note: In summer 2016, AACRAO, in partnership with Hobsons, completed a research project on dual enrollment in the context of strategic enrollment management at U.S. institutions. This project made it clear that dual enrollment plays a significant role in strategic enrollment management at more than half of the higher education (HEd) institutions that responded to the survey. Hobsons and the American Association of School Administrators (K–12) (AASA) completed a similar study in early 2016 that looked at the current state of dual enrollment in the United States from the perspective of school district leaders. In this group, the majority also agreed that dual enrollment is "reflected in my district's strategic plan." AACRAO and AASA respondents were asked similar questions on the respective survey instruments. This content overlap provided an opportunity to consider dual enrollment from the perspectives of the two principal stakeholders. This article includes data and background information from these two reports in order to make comparisons and provide implications for practice.