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Concurrent Enrollment Programs

Charmaine Mercer
Analyst in Social Legislation
Domestic Social Policy Division

Summary

Initiated in part as a proposal to reform U.S. high schools, concurrent enrollment programs enable high school aged students to take college level course work and receive college credit often while enrolled in high school. The number of institutions supporting these programs and the number of students participating in them have grown over the last decade. Concurrent enrollment programs can be best described as a secondary/postsecondary school hybrid. This unique status presents federal funding and compliance issues. This report provides a brief history of these programs and a description of the different types of programs, including participation data. It also includes a discussion of selected federal issues. This report will be updated as warranted by major legislative or other relevant developments.

Introduction

The 1980s ushered in many high school reform efforts in the United States. Most reform efforts were aimed at increasing graduation rates and preparing more students to enroll in postsecondary education. Statistics show that 30% of freshmen students require at least one remedial course.¹ In response to these factors and others, many policymakers and researchers began contemplating approaches to reform the existing structure of American high schools. One such alternative that arose was the concept of concurrent enrollment in high school and college. The early programs were known as *middle college high schools*. The first middle college high school opened on the campus of LaGuardia Community College in New York City in 1973. The students who attended the school were enrolled in high school and concurrently taking college level courses for which they received college level credit. The students who originally participated in LaGuardia's middle college high school program were identified as having a history of absenteeism, failing core subjects, possessing little to no motivation or self-esteem, but, also possessing

¹ Data retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, [<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/peqis/publications/97584/3.asp>].

potential to pursue a college education. The focus on *at-risk* students remains an integral aspect of today's middle college programs.

LaGuardia's program is viewed by many as the grandfather of concurrent enrollment programs. Since the inception of the program at LaGuardia, programs with comparable structure, but different foci have evolved. There are two general types of concurrent enrollment programs²: dual enrollment programs, whereby the student is a high school student taking college courses at their high school or at a local college; and early entrance programs which allow high school aged students to pursue a college degree or at least receive two years of college level credit. Within the latter group, there are programs for academically gifted students and programs for students who are at-risk of failing or dropping out of high school. For the purposes of this report, concurrent enrollment does not include the following: students who take college level courses as substitutes for their high school curriculum and receive high school credit; students who participate in Advanced Placement courses or who take the accompanying exam for exemption from certain college courses; or students who take the General Educational Development (GED) exam instead of receiving a high school diploma.

This report describes concurrent enrollment programs, their presences, and how they are funded. The report also discusses federal policy issues related to concurrent enrollment programs.

Description

Concurrent enrollment programs share some key similarities; they also can differ in significant ways. The most notable differences pertain to who instructs the course, where the course is taught, the costs for participating in the program, if the student receives a college degree, and the duration of the program. For example, in the case of the high school based dual enrollment program, students receive instruction in college level courses from a high school teacher on their campus. These programs are often located in rural areas where students are unable to take or experience difficulties in taking college courses on a college campus. In contrast, in the college dual enrollment model, students take high school courses at their high school campus and take regular, college-level courses at the college. In many instances, the student can take college-level courses on the college campus, during the regular school day. The high school and college dual enrollment models are very similar except that in the high school model an articulation agreement exists between the two participating schools, whereas this is not required in the college model. Moreover, the college model is not necessarily a formalized program, as individual students can elect to take college courses while enrolled in high school without prior permission from the high school.

² Concurrent enrollment programs are also frequently referred to as dual enrollment and/or dual credit programs. The phrase "concurrent enrollment" is used in this report to describe education programs that enable high school aged students, who have not received a high school diploma, to take college level courses and receive college credit. In many of these programs the students are also enrolled in high school and seeking a high school diploma, thus the phrase "concurrent enrollment."

The early entrance programs — both the at-risk and highly gifted models — are also very similar to each other and to the dual enrollment programs. In both concurrent enrollment models, the students are high school aged students, many participants are taking high school courses, and all of the participants are taking college level courses. The most consequential difference is that the participants in the early entrance model earn a college degree, or at least two years of college credit, at the completion of the program. While this can also be accomplished in the dual enrollment programs, the early entrance programs are structured to produce this outcome. The courses are also instructed by college faculty, unlike the high school based dual enrollment model. **Table 1** highlights the differences and similarities among the programs.

Table 1. Concurrent Enrollment Programs

Program	Who instructs the course?	Where is the course offered?	Is a college degree awarded?	How long does the program generally last?	Who pays for the college courses?
Dual Enrollment-H.S.	High school faculty/ College faculty	High school	No	four years of high school	School system
Dual Enrollment-College	College faculty	College	No	four years of high school	Student pays regular tuition/fees
Early Entrance-Highly Gifted	College faculty	College	Yes	five years or more	Student pays regular tuition/fees in most instances ^a
Early Entrance-At Risk	College faculty	College	Yes	five years or more	School system and private foundations

a. For additional information regarding tuition costs for specific early entrance programs see [<http://www.earlyentrance.org/Chart.shtml>].

Concurrent enrollment programs are best described as a secondary/postsecondary education hybrid. The programs attempt to make the transition from high school to college seamless. Many of the programs are designed to enhance the high school experience, especially during the final two years, and prepare students to enter college and graduate. Concurrent enrollment programs are straddling two very separate and distinct systems: secondary education and postsecondary education. Traditionally, institutions in each sector cater to an inherently different population of students. The institutions have different cultures, faculty, missions and governing bodies. In addition, within high school and college, the pedagogical philosophy and techniques are significantly different. In an article discussing early college high schools, Nancy Hoffman states, "... these schools

have challenged the divided structures of our current secondary/postsecondary education systems by raising important issues about funding across levels and jurisdictions, how credits should be awarded, faculty credentials, and the compatibility or lack thereof of accountability systems that span high school and postsecondary education.”³

Size

Obtaining data pertaining to the number of concurrent enrollment programs as well as the number of enrolled students is hampered by the lack of a consistent definition. Researchers and policymakers are not in agreement about what constitutes a concurrent enrollment program. In spite of the absence of a clear definition, available data suggest that the number of concurrent enrollment programs, as defined in this paper, has increased over the years, with a significant amount of the growth occurring in the last 10 years. The first middle college high school opened in 1973, and since then they have grown to approximately 30 schools, enrolling 4,500 students in 1999-2000⁴ (latest data available). In 2001, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and several other philanthropic groups committed more than \$40 million to Jobs for the Future to coordinate the creation of 70 new early college high schools.⁵ Jobs for the Future is a non-profit organization that advocates for policies for the advancement of youth and young adults. It is estimated that once all 70 schools are operational, they will enroll approximately 28,000 students. In addition, many of the middle college high school programs have applied for funding from BMGF to convert to an early college high school. Based on projections received from Jobs for the Future, it is estimated that at least 150 early college high schools will open by 2007.

In addition to the formal programs discussed above, the number of students who take college level courses while enrolled in high school — either at their high school or on a college campus — has also increased. Some researchers believe that the growth is in part attributable to increased state support and administrative assistance. Available data on student participation is limited to a select group of states that have witnessed significant growth in the past few years. For example, in Virginia, in 1991 approximately 2,000 students participated in dual enrollment programs, whereas this number had jumped to 6,700 in 1997.⁶

³ Nancy Hoffman, “College Credit in High School: Increasing College Attainment Rates for Underrepresented Students,” *Change*, July/Aug. 2003, p.48.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Early college high schools are categorized as a type of early entrance program. The early college high school initiative extends the concept of the middle college high school by requiring students to complete a minimum of two years of college level course work. This option is available to middle college high school participants, but is not mandated.

⁶ Thomas Bailey and Melinda Karp, *Promoting College Access and Success: A Review of Credit Based Transition Programs*, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, Washington D.C., Nov. 2003.

Funding

Concurrent enrollment programs pose challenges to federal, state and local funding sources for secondary and postsecondary education. Federal funding for secondary education is generally provided to state and local education agencies via the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended. Whereas federal funding for postsecondary education is predominantly authorized by the Higher Education Act (HEA), as amended. Students who are concurrently enrolled in secondary and postsecondary programs are presented with a unique and challenging situation for obtaining federal funding for participating in these programs. Title IV of the HEA, which authorizes the major federal student aid programs, states that a student is not eligible for any grant, loan, or work assistance under Title IV if he/she is enrolled in an elementary or secondary school (Section 484 (a)(1)). As a result, students who participate in concurrent enrollment programs, who would otherwise qualify for federal student aid, are not eligible for Title IV funds to support the expenses of taking college courses while in high school. They are required to seek alternate sources of funding such as state, local or private scholarships. A few states have established separate funding sources for these programs to receive funding.⁷ Many early entrance programs rely upon funding from private donors such as the BMGF to help offset the costs of these programs.

Federal Issues

Federal legislation and funding sources do not appear to accommodate these hybrid programs. A student who desires to participate in one of these programs either must pay the full-time tuition and fees to participate (early entrance, highly gifted) or pay for the individual courses she takes (dual enrollment, college). The school that chooses to offer this type of program may risk running afoul of the adequate yearly progress (AYP) and highly qualified teacher provisions of the ESEA (early entrance, at risk). The following section discusses selected compliance issues with the ESEA as amended by No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) and current legislative proposals to amend the HEA.

Compliance

Concurrent enrollment programs, as designed, are at risk of failing to comply with federal statutes and regulations under ESEA as amended by the NCLBA. States that receive ESEA Title I, Part A assistance must have plans to ensure that teachers teaching core academic subjects are *highly qualified* by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.⁸ To be deemed highly qualified, a teacher must have full state certification, must not have had any certification requirements waived on an emergency, temporary or provisional basis, must have at least a B.A., and must demonstrate competence in all academic subjects taught. Many early entrance programs, such as the middle college high school programs,

⁷ For additional information regarding state funding policies see *State Dual Enrollment Policies: Addressing Access and Quality*, at [http://www.teacherscollege.edu/ccrc/PAPERS/CBT_State_Dual_04.pdf].

⁸ For additional information about highly qualified teachers and NCLBA see CRS Report RL30834, *K-12 Teacher Quality: Issues and Legislative Action*, by James B. Stedman.

often have college faculty instructing many of the core courses. Under the current provisions of ESEA, these instructors are not likely to be considered highly qualified mainly because they have not met K-12 certification requirements.

Another provision of the ESEA requires schools to demonstrate that students are making adequate yearly progress.⁹ For secondary schools, this requires, among other things, that students receive a high school diploma in the *standard number of years*. The standard amount of time allotted for high school completion is generally four years. Compliance with this standard may be adversely affected by concurrent enrollment participants. Students who participate in concurrent enrollment programs generally complete the program in five years or more — although they receive a high school diploma and at least two years of college level credit or an Associates degree. If a school fails to make AYP for two continuous years the school is then subject to various corrective actions. Schools that operate concurrent enrollment programs may be particularly at risk for failing to make AYP because of the number of years that it takes for a student to graduate from high school.

Prior Legislation

During the 108th Congress H.R. 4283, *College Access and Opportunity Act of 2004* was introduced in the House. Among the many proposed amendments to the HEA included in the bill, H.R. 4283 sought to amend the eligibility requirements for the Pell Grant program to direct student aid to individuals participating in early entrance programs for highly gifted students. Specifically, the proposal would extend eligibility for Pell grants to those students who are in their junior or senior year of high school; are eligible for a Pell grant (except for being a secondary school student); are academically gifted and talented (as defined by Section 9101 of the ESEA); and have been accepted and are enrolled full-time in a residential, early entrance program for gifted students. In addition the student would be prohibited from taking any additional secondary school course work during or after her participation in the early entrance program, and she must agree to repay the amount of funds received if she fails to complete the early entrance program in its entirety or participates in any secondary school course work. Because the proposal prohibits a recipient of the grant from taking any additional secondary school courses, the student apparently is also unable to receive a high school diploma.

⁹ For additional information about adequate yearly progress see CRS Report RL32495, *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act*, by Wayne Riddle.