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# Blueprint Brief



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## Remove the bureaucratic barriers to programs that help high school students earn postsecondary certificates or degrees

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Colorado's education pipeline leaks. For every 100 students who enter ninth grade, only 20 will finish high school and graduate from college within 150 percent of the time it takes to complete degree requirements. The numbers are even lower for minority and low-income students.<sup>1</sup>

This is a serious problem for an economy competing in the global marketplace. The Colorado Commission for High School Improvement recommends "new arrangements between high schools and colleges that help make the transition from high school to college faster and easier."<sup>2</sup> One approach is dual enrollment, through which high school students can also take college classes. In some innovative programs, such as "early college," "middle college" and "fifth year" programs, students can earn a postsecondary degree or certificate while completing their high school diplomas.

A 2005 report to the U.S. Department of Education says it's a new idea to extend dual enrollment programs beyond the top academic performers to reach middle and low-level achievers. A growing number of policymakers, education reform groups and researchers endorse the concept.<sup>3</sup> Many states are marking success as they extend dual enrollment opportunities to a broader range of students, including Florida, Minnesota, New York, Utah, and Washington, according to the Education Commission of the States (ECS).<sup>4</sup>

For example, ECS reports that 90 percent of the at-risk students at LaGuardia Middle College High School, a dual enrollment program in New York City, graduated and went on to college. In Florida, 70 percent of African-American students in dual enrollment programs went on to college, compared to 45 percent of their peers who did not participate.<sup>5</sup> The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which sponsors a national initiative on the "early college" approach to dual enrollment, reports an average grade-to-grade promotion rate of more than 90 percent for participating students.<sup>6</sup>

Research suggests dual enrollment programs can lower dropout rates, improve high school performance and encourage more low-income and minority

*Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to also take college classes. "Early college," "middle college" and "fifth year" programs, help students earn a postsecondary degree or certificate while completing their high school diplomas.*

*It's a new idea to extend dual enrollment programs beyond the top academic performers to reach middle and low-level achievers.*

*Research suggests dual enrollment programs have the potential to lower dropout rates, improve high school performance and encourage more low-income and minority students to go to college.*

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students to go to college. They reduce the costs for a college education and underscore the preschool through college (P-16) education system concept.

Colorado has an established postsecondary enrollment options program, which offers many high school students the chance to take college courses. But a Board of Education rule bars school districts from launching programs for at-risk students to complete their diplomas and earn a postsecondary degree or certificate at the same time.<sup>7</sup> The rule was passed following a state audit in 2000, and appears to misinterpret the audit findings and recommendations.

During the audit, CCHE staff said they believed dual enrollment programs were illegal, and claimed some school districts were using the revenue received for fifth-year students to generate additional income. But the state auditor cited opinions from the state attorney general and Legislative Legal Services staff suggesting the programs are not illegal. The audit report noted “disagreement exists regarding the need for specific statutory authority related to fifth year programs,” and called on CCHE and the state Department of Education to bring the public policy question to the General Assembly.<sup>8</sup>

In an effort to supercede the State Board of Education’s rule, legislators introduced House Bill 06-1358 to allow dual enrollment programs and finance them with a new a state trust fund, while limiting statewide enrollment to 500 students.<sup>9</sup> The bill passed the House but died in a Senate committee, in part over funding concerns. In its final form, the bill would have required the General Assembly to spend at least \$1 million in 2006-07, and would have permitted spending at least \$2 million a year from 2007-08 through 2010-11.

**✓ Remove the bureaucratic barriers to programs that allow high school students to earn postsecondary certificates or degrees.**

**We must encourage the development and expansion of dual enrollment programs throughout the state. If the Colorado departments of Education and Higher Education and their governing boards cannot agree on how to do this, the Legislature should bypass them and make it happen.**

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**End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Bell Policy Center 2005 reports: *Colorado: The State of Opportunity 2005 Report* and *Exploring Colorado’s Educational Pipeline*; and Hilary Pennington, *Fast Track to College: Increasing Postsecondary Success for All Students*, prepared for the Center for American Progress, December 2004.

<sup>2</sup> *High School Reform in Colorado: Meeting the Expectations of a New Era*, Final Report of the Colorado Commission for High School Improvement, December 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Katherine L. Hughes, et.al., *Pathways to College Access and Success*, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, September 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Krueger, *Dual Enrollment: Policy Issues Confronting State Policymakers*,

Education Commission of the States, Policy Brief, March 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Jacobson, *The Early-College Experiment*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 11, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Colorado State Board of Education, 1 CCR 301-39, “Amended Rules for the Administration of the Public School Finance Act of 1994,” section 2254-R-5.18, *Fifth-year Programs*.

<sup>8</sup> Report of the State Auditor, *Postsecondary Programs for High School Students*, Performance Audit, June 2001, State of Colorado.

<sup>9</sup> Colorado *House Bill 06-1358*, Concerning Students Who Enroll in Higher Education Courses While Still Enrolled in High School.



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*A 2001 state Board of Education rule bars school districts from launching dual enrollment programs for at-risk students through which they can concurrently complete their diplomas and earn a postsecondary degree or certificate.*

*Citing disagreeing opinions, the state auditor has called on CCHE and the state Department of Education to bring the public policy question to the General Assembly.*

*Legislators attempted to pass a dual enrollment bill in the 2006 session. It passed the House but died in a Senate committee due to concerns over funding.*