



# High-School Dual-Enrollment Credit

## An Expanding Sector of Traditional-Credit Transfer

Wendy Kilgore, Ph.D., Senior Director of Research  
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers (AACRAO)

John Fink, M.A. Senior Research Associate and Program Lead  
Community College Research Center (CCRC)  
Teachers College, Columbia University

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The Learning Evaluation and Recognition for the Next Generation (LEARN) Commission is a national effort to improve undergraduate learning recognition and mobility policies and practices. This Green Paper was drafted to inform the Commission's third area of focus: the current state of high-school dual-enrollment credit mobility. It summarizes key points from research rather than providing a full literature review.

This paper is a collaboration between the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University. It includes data from a 2024 joint institutional benchmarking survey conducted by AACRAO and the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP).

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# High-School Dual-Enrollment Credit: An Expanding Sector of Traditional-Credit Transfer

## Defining High-School Dual Enrollment

For this green paper, High-school dual enrollment (HSDE) is a program that allows high-school learners to take college courses and earn college credit while still in high school. A learner may apply earned credits toward a high-school diploma and college completion. The learner needs only to pass a class to earn college credit. No special exams are required.

HSDE programs are offered in partnership between a postsecondary school and selected high schools. Accreditation of program curricula is overseen by various agencies, such as the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment and Partnerships (NACEP) and other accrediting agencies.

## *Terminology Challenges in Dual Enrollment Programs*

The use of similar terminology to describe different types of dual enrollment programs creates challenges in policy discussions and data analysis. For example, some institutions use "concurrent enrollment" to describe when currently enrolled college learners take courses at multiple institutions simultaneously. Others use the same term to describe formal high-school dual-enrollment (HSDE) programs integrated into high-school curricula. These represent two distinct credit-earning pathways with different implications for credit mobility and evaluation.

Similarly, "dual enrollment" may refer to HSDE programs, concurrent enrollment between colleges, or other credit-earning arrangements. This inconsistent terminology makes it difficult to differentiate between programs in cross-institutional or system-level policy discussions. It also complicates efforts to analyze data and develop coherent policies around credit mobility, since the same

terms may reference fundamentally different types of enrollment patterns and credit-earning pathways.

### *At the National level*

Nationally, the term dual enrollment is commonly used to describe various types of college courses offered to high-school learners through a partnership with a postsecondary institution. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) definition includes high-school learners enrolled in college courses for credit, including “postsecondary courses, independent of course delivery mode, course location, course instructor, whether secondary credit is also offered, and whether the learner enrolls through a formal state/local program or enrolls outside a formal state/local program.” The definition excludes credit-by-exam programs, such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate [1]. The ED Civil Rights Data Collection survey of K-12 schools and districts uses a similar definition [2].

NACEP defines concurrent enrollment as a subset of dual enrollment in which courses are offered by “college-approved high school teachers in a secondary environment” [3].

### *At the State Level*

Differences in terminology often reflect local preferences and state policies. A just-released 2024 update to the 2019 College in High School Alliance report *Funding for Equity: Designing State Dual Enrollment Funding Models to Close Equity Gaps* provides a comprehensive list of terms used by states to define HSDE programs [4]. The most common terms used, and the count for each, are:

- dual enrollment– 24 occurrences
- concurrent enrollment–15 occurrences
- dual credit–12 occurrences
- early college–6 occurrences
- running start–3 occurrences

### *At the Institutional Level*

Survey data indicate variation in what institutions formally name their HSDE programs. The most common names are:

- dual enrollment (39%)
- dual credit (25%)
- concurrent enrollment (17%)
- early college (7%)

The remaining 12% use other institutional-specific terms or branded-program names, including:

- College in the High School
- Early College Experience
- College Credit Plus
- Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)
- Academic Partnership Programs
- Collegiate Academy Programs

Some institutions use terminology based on the delivery model. For example, dual credit may refer to college-credit courses taught by high-school teachers. Dual enrollment indicates courses taught to high-school learners by an institution of higher education (IHE) faculty.

### *At the AACRAO and NACEP 2024 Survey Level*

In the 2024 survey, AACRAO and NACEP referred to HSDE as any program in which “high-school learners earn transcribed postsecondary credit through an institution of higher education.” Learners may also earn high-school credit for the same course. Within the definition, HSDE included programs known as:

- dual enrollment
- dual credit

- concurrent enrollment/concurrent credit
- early college
- early postsecondary-enrollment opportunities
- joint enrollment
- whole-school models, such as Early College High School and Middle College High School, that target particular learner groups based on demographics and/or credit-attainment objectives
- career-focused whole-school models like P-TECH (Pathways in Technology Early College High School)
- “fifth-year programs” that extend high school an additional year, with college courses added as a component

Programs not benchmarked in the survey included:

- credit-by-exam models, such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate
- credit-for-prior-learning models
- programs in which high-school learners enroll in postsecondary classes independent of their high-school education, outside their regular high-school schedule
- any model that has "unique" transcribing practices, such as:
  - credit upon request through local or statewide articulated credit agreements (a formal agreement between a high school and an IHE in which high-school coursework is accepted for credit at the college after high-school graduation)
  - credit only by request, retroactively or after paying an additional fee

The definition above and additional context were provided at the beginning of the survey to help set a standard understanding of the term for the survey.

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### ***Recognizing the Work of Three Organizations***

Three national organizations lead the advancement of HSDE policy, practice and research. These organizations, their partners and members contribute significantly to the growing body of research, policy development and practice guidelines for high-school dual enrollment.

CCRC is the nation's leading center for analysis on dual enrollment. It produces foundational research that informs policy and practice.

NACEP is dedicated to advancing dual and concurrent enrollment nationwide by supporting programs, practitioners and policies. NACEP sets rigorous national quality standards, accredits programs, delivers professional development and disseminates research. The organization advocates for policies that enhance programs, empower educators and improve learner outcomes.

The College in High School Alliance (CHSA) is a policy coalition of national, state and local organizations collaborating to impact national and state policies. It also seeks to build broad support for programs that enable high school learners to enroll in authentic, affordable college pathways toward postsecondary degrees and credentials.

### **Credit Mobility Often Starts with High-School Dual Enrollment**

It is increasingly common for learners to graduate from high school with a college transcript. Sixteen percent of high-school learners (nearly 2.5 million learners) took a dual-enrollment course at 2,400 postsecondary institutions during the 2022-23 academic year. Seventy percent of dual enrollment is associated with community-college partnerships [5].

The number of dual-enrollment learners has doubled since 2015 and tripled since 2005 [6]. Nationally, 82% of public-school learners attend a high school that offers dual enrollment [7]; 34% of high-school graduates have taken at least one dual-enrollment college course [8].



## *Impact on Learners*

The expansion of high-school dual-enrollment programs has been accompanied by various studies assessing the impact of dual-enrollment participation on secondary and postsecondary outcomes. For two recent reviews, see Schaller et al., 2023 and Taylor et al., 2022.

Completing a college course while in high school can be beneficial for a learner. It can:

- boost a learner’s confidence as a college learner
- expose a learner to career and academic topics not offered in high school
- help build early momentum through credit accumulation and completion of gateway courses, such as English and math

Evaluations of the Early College High School (ECHS) model have shown positive effects on the number of college admissions and the college-graduation rate, particularly among limited-income learners and learners of Color [9]. This highlights the potential of well-implemented dual-enrollment programs that emphasize college access and include outreach and support for underserved learners and their families.

Research on more common, less structured formats outside the ECHS model indicates increased postsecondary enrollment and completion outcomes of participants. These benefits extend to learners who are often underrepresented, including limited-income learners and learners of Color [10][11].

The expansion of dual enrollment and the subsequent benefits of college completion have been documented as key factors in the recent gains in national college-completion rates. The national 6-year college-completion rate for learners entering higher education with some high-school dual enrollment is 71%, compared to a 57% completion rate for learners without prior dual enrollment [12].

Despite research indicating the benefits of dual-enrollment participation, national data consistently show gaps in dual-enrollment access and participation among groups already underrepresented in higher education, including Black, Hispanic and Indigenous learners, English language learners and learners with disabilities [13].

While those who take dual-enrollment courses tend to have stronger postsecondary outcomes nationally, there are substantial differences across states [14]. Some states and local dual-enrollment partnerships have achieved stronger outcomes for dual-enrollment learners while closing gaps in access for underrepresented groups. About 20% of school districts nationally have closed the racial-equity gap in access to dual-enrollment coursework [15].

As profiled in The Dual Enrollment Playbook and CCRC's research on Dual Enrollment Equity Pathways, these exemplars highlight the importance of state and local policy and practice implementation in fully realizing the potential of dual enrollment as a strategy for college acceleration and a way to increase equity in college access and attainment.

### *Benefits to Institutions and Communities*

Community colleges enroll the majority of current high-school dual-enrollment learners. However, 4-year institutions are enrolling increasing numbers of learners with prior dual-enrollment coursework. Twenty-two percent of learners entering a private nonprofit 4-year postsecondary institution have some high-school dual-enrollment credits. Twenty-eight percent of learners entering a public 4-year postsecondary institution enter with some high-school dual-enrollment credits [16].

As a result of the expansion of high-school dual-enrollment in the community-college sector, many dual-enrollment learners are considered community-college transfers even if they enroll immediately at a four-year institution after high school. This has been referred to as stealth transfer since

these learners enroll at four-year institutions right after high school like non-transfers but bring with them prior community college credits [17].

How are postsecondary institutions adjusting to increasing learner and credit mobility as a result of expansion in high-school dual enrollment? What opportunities do these changes offer to:

- institutions recovering from pandemic-era enrollment declines?
- learners seeking a jumpstart on an affordable college education?
- communities looking to meet regional talent-development goals?

CRC's research on dual-enrollment equity pathways (DEEP) describes a framework for implementing dual-enrollment programs as an on-ramp to college and career opportunities for learners who might not otherwise go to college [18].

The DEEP framework is a research-based approach designed to transform traditional dual-enrollment programs into more equitable pathways that lead to college degrees and higher-opportunity careers. This may be particularly true for learners historically underserved in higher education. The DEEP framework emphasizes four key practice areas.

1. Outreach to underserved learners and schools encourages participation in dual-enrollment programs.
2. Alignment to college degrees and careers in fields of interest ensures dual-enrollment courses are connected to associate and bachelor's degree programs in high-opportunity fields. This includes major-specific transfer pathways ensuring credit applicability, which may facilitate a clear path from high school to meaningful careers.
3. Early career/academic exploration, advising and planning provides learners with opportunities to explore various career options and academic interests when coupled with advising and planning to support educational and career goals.

4. High-quality college instruction and academic support delivers rigorous college-level instruction with academic support services to build a person's confidence and competence as a college learner.

When implemented with a focus on broadening college access, dual enrollment can benefit postsecondary institutions and their local communities. There is room for improvement and growth in many communities across the country. For example, about 4 in 5 school districts nationally have gaps in access to dual enrollment courses by race/ethnicity [15]. And nationally two-thirds of high-school graduates did not take any dual-enrollment courses, including about a third of graduates who developed a career-technical focus in high school but did not take a related postsecondary dual-enrollment course [18].

Dual enrollment can serve as a bridge from high school to college, helping to grow the supply of future college-attending learners. Nationally, about 33% of dual-enrollment learners re-enroll after high school at the college where they took their HSDE courses [14]. Well-implemented dual-enrollment programs can drive enrollments after high school.

For 4-year institutions that rely on sizable transfer enrollments, strengthening dual enrollment as an onramp to the transfer pathway with local community-college partners is promising. Upward transfer rates for community-college learners with prior dual enrollment are nearly twice that of learners without previous dual enrollment.

Most dual enrollment occurs through community colleges. However, many dual-enrollment learners must transfer their credits to 4-year institutions after high school. These learners may encounter the same challenges with credit transfer and applicability as regular community-college attendees. However, the topic of dual-enrollment-credit transfer, including a national view of institutional policies and practices, has yet to be examined systematically.

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### ***Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Exams***

While Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams provide a pathway for high-school learners to earn postsecondary credit, they differ from HSDE. In HSDE programs, learners earn credit by completing postsecondary courses administered and transcribed directly by institutions of higher education. AP and IB are external programs in which learners may receive postsecondary credit based on exam performance, but the courses and assessments are developed and administered independently of IHEs.

Many institutions award course-equivalent credit for qualifying AP and IB exam scores. However, the credit-recognition and mobility processes differ from credit earned through HSDE programs. Given these differences, this Green Paper does not address AP and IB credit mobility.

### **Learner Perceptions and Experiences with HSDE-Credit Mobility**

There is limited research about HSDE learners' experiences with, and perceptions of, credit mobility tied to credits earned through HSDE programs. In studies examining credit accumulation and mobility patterns, HSDE-credit mobility is discussed in individual learner experiences rather than through a central research focus.

In a 2019 study examining excess credit accumulation, some learners indicated their HSDE credits did not transfer as expected. Several noted they would have chosen different dual-enrollment courses in high school if they had better understood how credit earned would be applied to their intended major when they transferred to a university [19].

Other research has examined the guidance gap in HSDE-credit planning. A qualitative study of six HSDE learners in Oregon found participants focused primarily on earning college credit without fully understanding how those credits would apply to specific degree paths. One learner noted, "Honestly, when I went in,

I wasn't really thinking about the dual enrollment. It was more about the teachers that were teaching the classes and the classes that they had . . . So, just learning, I really didn't think that much about college credit at the time" [20, p. 60]. The disconnect between credit accumulation and strategic academic planning emerged as a recurring theme across studies.

A 2024 study examined 10 engineering transfer learners with HSDE credits at one institution. Some learners experienced credit loss during transfer. Unused credits were primarily in humanities, fine arts and social sciences that did not align with engineering-degree requirements [21]. Early guidance on course selection could significantly affect credit applicability in specialized programs.

The source of academic guidance may influence HSDE-credit-mobility outcomes. A 2023 study of community-college learners who participated in HSDE found that high-school staff, rather than college personnel, were often the primary advisors about courses to take. Some learners expressed wanting more information about their HSDE choices, particularly regarding credit transfer and applicability. As one learner reflected, "Make sure that your classes transfer. If you are dual enrolling, make sure you're aware of where you want to go and what those programs would be because you don't want to put the work in and find out you can't transfer credits" [22, p. 23]. The study found many HSDE learners did not attend the college where they earned their credits (Adkins & García 2023).

These small-scale studies point to several areas that warrant further research:

- advising practices around credit applicability
- communication about transfer policies between institutions
- guidance connecting course selection to academic pathways

## Current Institutional Landscape Policies and Practices

Data from a forthcoming report is based on a 2024 joint institutional benchmarking survey conducted by AACRAO and NACEP, with additional expertise from the CCRC. The report provides insights into the current state of high-school dual-enrollment (HSDE) practices across undergraduate-serving institutions in the United States [23]. There were 298 survey responses from the Title IV degree-granting institutions. Responses reveal widespread adoption of HSDE programs and acceptance of HSDE-based credits in transfer.

### **Perceptions versus Reality in HSDE-Credit Mobility**

Thirty-six percent of survey respondents from the forthcoming report believe there are difficulties with other institutions accepting HSDE credit. However, survey responses demonstrate a different reality. Only six institutions (2%) report not accepting HSDE credit in transfer. This apparent disconnect between perception and practice suggests historical concerns about HSDE-credit acceptance may persist, despite evolving practices.

### *Transfer-Credit Acceptance and Evaluation*

Data demonstrate HSDE-credit mobility is more widely accepted than other forms of credit recognition. For example, while 98% of responding institutions accept HSDE credit awarded by other institutions when standard transfer conditions are met, credit for prior learning (CPL) is accepted by 49% of institutions in this sample and 46% of institutions in the AACRAO 2024 CPL benchmarking report [24].

Most institutions evaluate HSDE credits using the same criteria applied to traditional transfer credit. However, a small percentage apply additional conditions specifically for accepting HSDE transfer credit. These institutions only accept HSDE credits that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- taught by college or university faculty
- awarded by a college or university but not used to meet high-school requirements

- awarded by NACEP-accredited colleges and universities
- taught on a college or university campus

### **Transcript-Credit-Recording Practices**

Ninety-six percent (96%) report using identical transcript practices for recording HSDE and traditional transfer credit. This suggests HSDE credit is well-integrated into standard transfer processes. However, it may also mean HSDE credit faces the same challenges identified in traditional transfer processes, including:

- variations in credit applicability versus transferability
- institutional differences in grade requirements
- course-equivalency determination processes
- technology limitations in credit evaluation
- communication gaps in transfer processes

HSDE transfer credit recording methods include:

- 57% record a specific course with letter grades as transfer credit
- 27% record a specific course with a pass-fail grade as transfer credit
- 6% record as credit for prior learning with the number of credit hours earned; no specific course information
- 3% record a specific course with a pass-fail grade as institutional credit
- 2% report that the practice varies based on several factors
- 13% employ other methods not listed in the survey

The 13% of institutions that report other transcript-credit-recording practices typically use standardized transfer notations and focus on credit recognition without GPA impact. Practices range from displaying only credit earned to including detailed course equivalencies. Most shared practices still maintain consistency between HSDE and other transfer-credit recording methods.



## Institutional Implementation

Postsecondary institutional responses indicate extensive integration of HSDE programs within higher education in the United States. Implementation approaches encompass various program types and delivery models that reflect institutional priorities and educational pathways.

### Program Structure and Implementation

Ninety-three percent of surveyed institutions offer HSDE courses and/or programs. Among the 93% of institutions that offer HSDE:

- 97% provide individual HSDE courses
- 41% offer Early College High School programs
- 20% offer Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH)

### Course and Program Integration

Institutions integrate HSDE opportunities across multiple academic areas and pathways to support diverse learner needs and interests:

- 99% offer general-education courses
- 66% provide career and technical-education courses
- 45% offer course series tied to specific majors
- 55% incorporate HSDE coursework into default 9th-12th-grade course plans
- 69% offer HSDE courses tied directly to degree plans

### *Learner and Community Impact*

Institutions recognize HSDE's role in high-school-learner development and community advancement. From a list of response choices, survey respondents

identified several learner and community-impact purposes and benefits their HSDE courses and programs serve<sup>1</sup>. These purposes and benefits include:

- introduce learners to college-level expectations to help them develop self-confidence and self-perception as a college learner
- help learners demonstrate the capability to complete college-level courses
- help learners develop self-perception as a college learner
- reduce time and costs for learners to earn, and families to pay for, a degree that leads to high-demand, career-path jobs
- increase academic rigor in high school to prepare a learner for college, increasing their chances of attaining a degree, especially for underrepresented learners
- advance a learner's sense of purpose through exposure to postsecondary fields
- promote upward mobility for historically underrepresented learners
- grow the local talent pipeline, helping more learners access well-paying, in-demand jobs

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<sup>1</sup> The survey responses choices were adapted from The Dual Enrollment Playbook, pages 13-14. Mehl, G., Wyner, J., Barnett, E. A., Fink, J., & Jenkins, D. (2020). *The dual enrollment playbook: A guide to equitable acceleration for students*. Aspen Institute and Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center.

Institutions report multiple strategic purposes for offering HSDE programs. The most commonly reported purposes include:

- recruiting new learners
- helping an institution fulfill its mission
- supporting strategic-enrollment initiatives
- expanding awareness of institutional-program offerings among high-school populations
- serving the community
- increasing revenue/enrollment

### *Credentials Available to HSDE Learners*

More than half (59%) of postsecondary institutions offer certificates and/or associate degrees, demonstrating an institutional commitment to providing multiple-credential pathways for HSDE learners. Various credentials may be awarded to high-school learners upon graduation. Among institutions that offer postsecondary credentials through HSDE:

- 91% of institutions indicated they offer pathways to an associate's degree that can be completed before or upon high school graduation
- 85% offer certificate pathways
- 2.5% reported offering bachelor's degree pathways

### *Learner Population and Earned-Credit Volume*

Data provide insight into the prevalence of HSDE credit among enrolled learners. The percentage of institutions and the percentage of learners who earned HSDE transfer credits include the following:

- 37% of institutions report less than 10% of learners earned HSDE transfer credit

- 22% report 10% to 24% of learners earned HSDE transfer credit
- 26% report 25 to 49% of learners earned HSDE transfer credit
- 11% report 50% to 74% of learners earned HSDE transfer credit
- 4% report 75% or more of their learners earned HSDE transfer credit

The number of HSDE semester credit hours recorded on an incoming learner's transcript varies. Sixty-six percent of institutions report incoming learners have 11 or fewer semester credit hours. Thirty percent report learners have 12 to 17 semester credit hours. Four percent report learners have 18 or more semester credit hours. These data demonstrate HSDE programs are widely available and accepted. However, the number of credits earned varies significantly across institutions and learners.

### *Affordability and Access*

HSDE programs involve several noninstructional costs, including tuition, fees, books and transportation. When a learner needs to take the HSDE course or program at a location other than their high school, the financial structure of the program varies significantly across institutions.

Twenty-three percent of institutions require payment from all participants for HSDE courses. Seventy-seven percent of institutions offer free HSDE to some high-school learners. Among those institutions:

- 47% offer HSDE at no cost to 80% or more of their HSDE learners
- 12% offer HSDE at no cost to at least 50%, but not more than 80%, of their HSDE learners
- 18% offer HSDE at no cost for less than 50% of their HSDE learners

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of institutions discount HSDE tuition from normal rates; among those, 74% offer discounts of 50% or more. Fifty-one percent of

respondents agree institutional fees remain a barrier for some high-school learners, highlighting ongoing affordability challenges, despite widespread tuition discounting.

For additional context on HSDE funding structures and affordability at the state level, readers are encouraged to consult the College in High School Alliance report *Funding for Equity: Designing State Dual Enrollment Funding Models to Close Equity Gaps* [25] and its 2024 update.

### *What May Be Concluded from the Survey Data*

Several important contextual factors should be considered when interpreting the AACRAO and NACEP survey findings.

- Data represent responses from 298 Title IV degree-granting institutions that participated in the survey out of 1,912 who were invited. This is a 16% response rate. Responding institutions may not be representative of all U.S. higher-education institutions.
- The sample includes varying proportions of public and private, 2-year and 4-year institutions.
- Institutions with established HSDE programs may have been more inclined to respond to the survey. This may have skewed results toward institutions with more developed HSDE practices and policies.

The potential self-selection bias is relevant when examining credit-mobility findings. The 98% acceptance rate of HSDE credits among survey respondents may reflect multiple phenomena, such as evolving institutional practices around credit mobility or self-selection of respondents with more progressive credit-acceptance policies. Challenges with credit acceptance may be more prevalent among nonresponding institutions.

Data presented in the section above offer insight into current approaches to HSDE implementation, including program structures, credential pathways and affordability models. However, institutional characteristics and potential responses should be considered when examining these findings.

## **Historical Growth and Evolution**

The growth in HSDE offerings and acceptance illustrates its evolution from a peripheral to a mainstream educational practice. NCES data from the 2010-2011 academic year showed 46% of postsecondary institutions offered HSDE courses or programs [26]. By 2016, AACRAO research found this practice had increased to 78%, reaching 93% in 2024 [27][24]. At the same time, institutional acceptance of HSDE transfer credit rose from 86% in 2016 to 98% in 2024.

Although the data from the 2016 and 2024 surveys cannot be directly compared due to differences in the wording of the survey questions, the availability of credential pathways for HSDE learners appears to be on the increase (see Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of HSDE Practices at U.S. Postsecondary Institutions (2010, 2016, 2024)

	2010 (Marken, Gray, Lewis & Ralph, 2013)	2016 (Kilgore & Taylor, 2016)	2024 (Kilgore & Williams, 2025)
Number of institutions surveyed	1,536	388	298
Offer at least one HSDE course and/or program	46%	78%	93%
Accept HSDE credit earned at another institution in transfer	N/A	86%	98%
HSDE pathway to simultaneous high-school diploma and bachelor's degree	N/A	2%**	1%*
HSDE pathway to simultaneous high-school diploma and associate degree	N/A	25%**	53%*
HSDE pathway to simultaneous high-school diploma and certificate	N/A	19%**	49%*

(Sources: Marken, Gray, Lewis & Ralph, 2013; Kilgore & Taylor, 2016; Kilgore & Williams, 2025)

\*In this sample, 59% of respondents offer one or more credentials, and 41% of respondents provide none. The values in this column reflect a percentage of the total responses, not a percentage of those that offer one or more credential. The survey question was "Which of the following credentials may be awarded to high school learners before or upon graduation from high school? (all that apply). "None of the above" was an exclusive response choice.

\*\* Of the institutions that reported awarding this credential to at least one HSDE learner during the 2015-2016 academic year. The survey question was, "Did your institution award the following to any high school students in your dual enrollment program?" "None" was not a response choice.

Today, HSDE is a well-established, increasingly integrated component of traditional credit mobility. Survey data demonstrate widespread institutional adoption of HSDE programs, standardized credit-recording practices and high acceptance rates of

HSDE transfer credit. Most postsecondary institutions view HSDE as a strategic initiative and a mechanism for expanding educational access and opportunity. The growth in HSDE offerings and apparent growth in credential pathways from 2010 through 2024 reflects a shift to a mainstream educational practice. However, challenges remain.

Credit mobility processes for HSDE have largely aligned with traditional transfer practices. However, HSDE faces similar obstacles in credit applicability, technology limitations and communication gaps. Despite widespread tuition discounting, affordability remains a barrier for some learners. Addressing HSDE-specific challenges and broader systemic issues in traditional credit mobility may be necessary for HSDE-credit mobility.

### **Accreditation's Role in HSDE-Credit Mobility**

Widespread acceptance of HSDE credits by institutions may reflect confidence in the quality of courses offered, due in part to the oversight role of accrediting bodies. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) and other accrediting bodies have historically played important roles in establishing and maintaining quality standards for instruction. Survey data from 2016 and 2024 indicate high levels of HSDE-credit acceptance among responding institutions, in part due to the role of accreditors in maintaining quality standards.

Recent changes in HLC policy illustrate the potential connection between accreditation policy of HSDE instructor qualifications and confidence in the transferability of HSDE coursework. In 2015, the HLC implemented requirements for HSDE instructor qualifications, mandating a master's degree in the area being taught or a master's degree in another field with at least 18 graduate credit hours in the relevant content area [28]. The HLC emphasized that a Master's of Education degree alone would not qualify an instructor to teach HSDE courses unless 18 credits of the degree content clearly related to the course discipline [29].



In November 2023, the HLC modified their guidelines to allow institutions more flexibility in determining faculty qualifications [30]. The new policy states, "The institution establishes and maintains reasonable policies and procedures to determine that faculty are qualified." Institutions should use the same qualification standards for HSDE faculty as for other higher-education courses [31].

This shift toward more flexible standards by HLC raises questions about potential impacts on credit mobility across higher education. Further research is needed to determine if accreditor policies impact institutional trust in credit quality and credit-acceptance practices. Accreditation requirements could have far-reaching effects on credit recognition and transfer across institutions.

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### ***Early Regional Response to HLC's Faculty-Qualification Policy Change***

"Conversations in early 2024 with state, system, and institutional representatives engaged in HSDE work in the 12 Midwestern states revealed the potential for a wide range of responses to the 2023 change in HLC's assumed practices relating to instructor qualifications. The Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) convened this group during spring 2024. During the six months in which the group met some states and systems had already enacted regulatory and policy changes that would affect all HSDE instructors. Other states took a slower approach, either wholly deferring to their institutions to develop the processes described by HLC's new policy language or waiting for a period of time to gather feedback from their IHEs and K-12 communities before issuing guidance or changing official policies. Even at this preliminary stage, it was clear that variations in faculty qualification practices among institutions and states were beginning to introduce concerns about credit mobility. MHEC is reconvening this group in spring 2025 to study and discuss the range of institutional and state responses to the change in HLC's policy language and the potential implications of those responses, particularly as they relate to credit mobility." (Parks, J., personal communication, December 12, 2024)

## Conclusions

The current landscape of high-school dual-enrollment credit mobility suggests several key insights for policymakers and practitioners. Various survey results suggest there are still many issues to address. While HSDE participation has grown substantially over the past decade, survey findings indicate that the amount of HSDE credits the typical learner transfers is relatively low among responding institutions. Sixty-six percent report incoming learners have 11 or fewer semester credit hours.

There appears to be a gap between perceptions and reported practices regarding HSDE-credit acceptance. Thirty-six percent of respondents expressed concern about other institutions accepting HSDE credit. However, nearly all responding institutions reported accepting HSDE credit in transfer when standard conditions are met. This disconnect suggests there may be many opportunities for improved communication about credit-mobility policies and practices across institutions. Further research with a broader institutional sample could help confirm the extent of this pattern.

Responding institutions indicate HSDE-credit-transfer processes have largely been integrated into standard transfer-evaluation frameworks operating similarly to traditional community college-to-university transfer. While integration may streamline credit mobility in many ways, HSDE credit may face similar challenges around credit applicability, technology limitations and communication gaps that affect all transfer-credit evaluations.

Terminology used to describe HSDE programs is used inconsistently and creates barriers to developing national strategies to address credit-mobility challenges. The use of various terms, such as dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment and dual credit, may describe similar programs but not in all instances. The confusing use of terms complicates efforts to analyze trends, develop policies and communicate clearly with learners about credit-mobility opportunities.

There are ways to improve HSDE-credit mobility. It requires a multifaceted approach. These approaches include:

- standardizing terminology to enable clearer communication and policy development
- addressing misconceptions about credit acceptance through better information sharing
- leveraging existing transfer infrastructure while accounting for HSDE-specific considerations

As HSDE continues to expand pathways to postsecondary education, establishing consistent frameworks for understanding and evaluating HSDE is important to support learner success.

### **Implications for the LEARN Commission**

The LEARN Commission's goal is to identify key areas for recommendations to enhance transparency, maximize credit applicability and promote equity in high-school dual-enrollment-credit evaluation and mobility. The Commission should consider the needs and challenges of HSDE learners as it strives to develop recommendations that balance institutional autonomy with more learner-centered, equitable, efficient credit-mobility systems. The Commission will be guided through a discussion centered on the following questions.

### *1. HSDE-Credit Mobility and the Learner Experience*

What is necessary to improve the learner experience? Would you propose strategies for:

- improving early guidance about credit applicability in different degree pathways?
- enhancing communication about transfer policies between institutions?
- developing clear frameworks connecting HSDE-course selection to academic pathways?
- addressing affordability barriers?
- creating transparent information about credit mobility options for learners and families?
- building stronger connections between HSDE advising and college advising?

### *2. HSDE-Credit Evaluation and the Institutional Experience*

What is important for the institutional experience? Would you propose strategies for:

- standardizing terminology to enable clear communication about programs and policies?
- addressing misconceptions about HSDE-credit acceptance through better information sharing?
- improving data collection and analysis capabilities about the HSDE-credit-mobility experiences of learners?
- developing comprehensive, representative data-collection approaches to understand HSDE-credit-mobility patterns across institutional types?

### *3. Policy Considerations Across Educational Sectors*

What roles do you envision for institutional policymakers, institutional-system policymakers, state policymakers, federal policymakers, accreditors? Would you propose strategies for:

- advocating the establishment and consistent use of HSDE-program terminology?
- establishing guidelines for early academic planning and pathway development?
- examining how changes in accreditation standards might affect credit-mobility practices?
- building sustainable quality-assurance frameworks to support credit mobility while maintaining academic standards?

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