

Agency Request Legislation – Streamline and Expand Dual Credit Options

Statement of Need and How This Bill is Tied to Governor’s Priorities

This proposed legislation aligns with the Governor’s number one priority that all students should have access to a world class education. Data shows that students who earn college credits in high school complete college sooner and are more likely to earn a college degree than those who do not.

In Washington, a range of dual-credit or dual-enrollment programs are available to students and provide students with an opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school. However, a number of barriers to participation in these programs persist.

In 2014, the Washington Student Achievement Council convened a workgroup to identify ways to remove barriers and streamline and expand dual credit programs. The workgroup prioritized improvements to dual credit courses through college course completion that would allow high school students the opportunity to earn both high school and college credit by completing college-level courses while enrolled in high school.

A particular issue identified by the group is an inequity that occurs in College in the High School courses. Because the programs generally rely on tuition revenue for support, students who are not able to pay tuition may be excluded from earning credit –despite the student’s academic ability and completion of work at college level. The workgroup recommended removing this barrier by providing an enhancement to Basic Education that could be used to replace the tuition that would have been charged to students. The expected result would be more students, particularly low income students, earning college credit while in high school. The workgroup also recognized that a minority of students are ready to earn college credit prior to the 11th grade and recommended that students be allowed to enroll in dual-credit coursework based on their readiness to succeed in the courses rather than grade level.

Brief Summary of Bill

Dual Credit through College Course Completion allows high school students the opportunity to earn both high school and college credit by completing college-level courses with a passing grade. Running Start, College in the High School and Tech Prep are examples of current Dual Credit through College Course Completion programs. This bill:

- Provides for an enhancement to Basic Education to fund college courses offered in high school to encourage districts to offer courses for college credit and eliminate financial barriers, including tuition and fees, to student participation in the program.

- Expands College in the High School to all academically qualified high school students, grades 9-12, through all public institutions of higher education which participate in College in the High School, including academic, career and technical coursework.
- Clarifies that Running Start is a program for dual credit courses where the student attends on a college campus, teaching center and/or online.

Additional Background

Washington's high school students have a variety of options for earning postsecondary credit while enrolled in high school. The differences between the options, however, are unclear, and not all options are available to all high school students statewide. These programs, collectively referred to as dual-enrollment or dual-credit programs, are comparable in rigor to regular college-level courses and allow students the opportunity to earn and apply credits toward postsecondary degree requirements. One of the primary benefits of these programs is that they can significantly reduce the time and money required to complete a postsecondary degree.

Six major programs are available to Washington's high school students. They are separated into two overarching categories: 1) dual credit through course completion, and 2) dual credit through course exam. Three programs –Running Start, College in the High School, and Tech Prep – are taught by either postsecondary or K-12 faculty, with curriculum approved by a postsecondary institution. Students generally earn credit based on successful completion of course assignments and curriculum. The remaining three programs are national or international models – Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge – and are taught by high school teachers. College credit is awarded based upon completion of a fee-based standardized assessment.

These programs have different application processes, fee structures, assessments and approaches to applying credit toward postsecondary degree requirements. Additionally, despite recent increases in the number of programs and participating schools, these programs are not equally available to all students across the state.

In 2014, the Washington Student Achievement Council convened a statewide workgroup to review existing programs and develop a coordinated and streamlined dual-enrollment/dual-credit system. The Council charged the workgroup with making recommendations for a system that would meet the following criteria:

- Provide clear information about each option in ways that empower high school students to choose the option best suited to their goals and schedules.
- Provide low-cost options for high school students and their families.
- Ensure adequate funding for high schools and postsecondary institutions to maintain high-quality options.

- Increase the availability of all options to more high school students.
- Streamline processes for obtaining postsecondary credit.

Under current law no state funding is provided to assist with the postsecondary institution costs for the College in the High School program and students enrolled in these programs are not counted to meet institutional enrollment targets. The College in the High School program is limited to students in the 11th and 12th grade.