This chapter provides a national picture of innovative learning options, such as dual enrollment and early college high schools. These options prepare high school students for college-level course work by providing supported early immersion in college. The chapter also discusses how such programs can help a wide range of students and highlights the importance of state policy in encouraging these efforts to create stronger connections among high schools, post-secondary institutions, and the workforce.

New Directions for Dual Enrollment: Creating Stronger Pathways from High School Through College

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There are a number of ways to increase high school graduation rates and put more students on the path to and through college. Most states are trying to do so by increasing the academic rigor of all their high schools. A first line of attack is to boost the academic requirements for high school graduation. Fifteen states are instituting a core curriculum that ensures that the default pathway through high school is a college preparatory sequence (American Diploma Project, 2007).

Moreover, a substantial number of states are aligning high school graduation standards with the standards required to advance directly into non-remedial, college-level work. For example, thirty states are at work on such alignment through Achieve’s American Diploma Project Network (2007), and other states are engaged in aligning standards themselves. Some states use tenth- or eleventh-grade assessments to provide students with information about their readiness for college. And some states and school districts are mounting programs to recover high school dropouts and students who fall behind in earning credits: these students too need intensive academic work to meet the more rigorous standards required to complete high school and succeed in a community college.

An emerging body of research and practice suggests that providing college-level work in high school is one promising way to better prepare a wide range of young people for college success, including those who do
not envision themselves as college material. Increasing numbers of young people are taking advantage of such opportunities. In some states, such as Florida and Rhode Island, as many as 17 percent of high school students graduate with college credit (Vargas and Hoffman, 2006; Fletcher, 2006).

If designed well, this college-level work in high school can:

- Increase the pool of historically underserved students who are ready for college.
- Provide realistic information to high school students about the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in postsecondary education.
- Improve motivation through high expectations and the promise of free courses.
- Decrease the cost of postsecondary education by compressing the years of financial support needed.
- Create a feedback loop between K–12 and postsecondary systems around issues of standards, assessments, curriculum, and transitions from high school to college.

Across the country, increasing numbers and more varied students are taking part in accelerated learning options that provide college-level credit during high school. These options increase the likelihood that students currently underrepresented in higher education will enroll in postsecondary education. Data from the U.S. Department of Education (Adelman, 1999, 2006) indicate that the accumulation of twenty college credits by the end of the first calendar year of college is a strong predictor that a student will successfully earn a college credential. If the accelerated high school program is intensive—that is, if students gain twenty or more credits—it is our estimation that such credit attainment should also be highly correlated with the student’s likelihood of earning a postsecondary credential. In addition, such credit attainment is a strong indicator that the student is college ready—the goal increasingly set by states as the only sufficient outcome of high school. Some accelerated options also have the potential to better link secondary and postsecondary institutions and to point to better ways to integrate financing, data systems, and accountability mechanisms across K–16.

Community colleges lead the way in making accelerated learning options available. First, their missions include outreach to high schools and service to their immediate neighborhoods and regions. Second, in many of the forty-two states with dual-enrollment policies, public community colleges, not four-year institutions, provide such opportunities. When they are not mandated to do so, community colleges are encouraged and supported in doing so. Ninety-eight percent of public two-year institutions had high school students taking courses for college credit, compared to 77 percent of public four-year institutions, 40 percent of private four-year institutions, and 17 percent of private two-year institutions (Kleiner and Lewis, 2005).
In this chapter, we describe three such options: traditional dual enrollment, dual-enrollment pathways, and early college high schools. We then present cases of states and community colleges that have particularly interesting models for these options and review the evidence that such options can do what they claim: increase college success.

Our organization, Jobs for the Future (JFF), has worked over the past five years with several states and intermediary organizations that are implementing early college schools and strengthening their dual-enrollment policies. Based on this experience and national research, we discuss the lessons learned about practice as well as policy barriers and opportunities posed by the options. In each section, we highlight the key role played by community colleges as the leaders in facilitating these options.

One final note is that dual enrollment is also called dual credit, concurrent enrollment, college in the high school, and joint enrollment. Dual enrollment, joint enrollment, or concurrent enrollment typically refer to high school students taking postsecondary courses, no matter what credit they receive. Dual credit refers to dual-enrollment course taking that results in both high school and college credit. College in the high school usually refers to college courses that are offered on the campus of a high school. Any of these program variations can fall under the umbrella of what some states call postsecondary, or accelerated, learning options.

**Accelerated Learning Options: Definitions and Prevalence**

The term accelerated learning options covers a continuum of designs and approaches. Another common name for these options is credit-based transition programs (Bailey and Karp, 2003). The most intensive of these, early college schools, move students through at least the critical first year of postsecondary education and often through the second year. Dual-enrollment programs, although not as intensive, also provide exposure and access to college-level work to a large number of high school students.

The most familiar of these accelerated learning options is dual or concurrent enrollment. These programs allow high school students to enroll in college-level course work and earn credit for it while they are still in high school. Students typically enroll in college courses in their junior and senior years. In most programs, courses result in dual credit: the college course replaces a required high school course, and the student earns credit for both. In some programs, however, students must choose between high school or college credit. Most dual-enrollment programs offer free or discounted tuition, providing some savings for families who otherwise might not afford to send their children to college.

In 2006, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published the first national study to attempt to capture the number of students participating in exam- and course-based college-level learning in high school.
According to key NCES findings (Kleiner and Lewis, 2005) for the 2002–2003 school year, there were an estimated 1.2 million enrollments in courses for dual credit. If a student took multiple courses, schools counted the student for each course in which he or she was enrolled. Thus, enrollments may include duplicated counts of students. Overall, approximately 813,000 high school students took college-level courses through postsecondary institutions, either within or outside dual-enrollment programs. Using Kleiner and Lewis’s figures (2005), over 15 million students were enrolled in public and private high schools in the United States in fall 2001 (the last year for which data are available). Thus, dual enrollees represent about 5 percent of all high school students. If we assume most course takers are juniors or seniors, the percentage of dual enrollees among these students rises to approximately 13 percent.

The NCES data are not state specific and therefore do not capture growth in dual enrollment in states that have a history of providing such opportunities and keeping dual enrollment data. In Florida, for example, participation has increased 100 percent between 1995 and 2003 (Florida Board of Education, n.d.). Although participation in community college dual-enrollment programs has existed for several decades, some states and community colleges have made changes in their purpose, structure, and visibility—previously they had existed as an escape from high school for advanced students—and reconceiving them as a path to college and technical education for a wide range of students. In this new configuration, dual enrollment becomes a central strategy for increasing college-going rates of local high school students. The expectation is that students will receive help in course selection and academic support as needed. In some community colleges, dual enrollees do not have to reapply once they finish their high school requirements. This sends a strong signal to students that if they succeed in their first course, they can go right on in the host community college.

Dual enrollment has another advantage in making college access more equitable. In rural and low-income areas where advanced courses may not be available to high school students, accelerated learning options may be provided virtually or by high school teachers or adjuncts certified by a community college. For these reasons, a number of states are making the opportunity to earn college credit in high school available to every high school student in the state. A second structure for dual enrollment, and one for which there is not yet settled terminology, is what we call here dual-enrollment pathways. Within a traditional high school, students participate in a preselected sequence of two to four college courses, sometimes preceded by a “college 101” introduction to study skills. The pathway includes opportunities for those not likely to qualify for college courses before graduation—students who are at risk of graduating with weak preparation for college. In addition, such enhanced programs often reach out to middle school students, offer-
ing them programs that familiarize them with the demands of postsecondary education and the adventure of visiting a college campus.

In dual-enrollment pathways, courses are carefully chosen to meet post-secondary career certificate or general education requirements in two-year institutions and to be transferable. For example, high school students might be required to enroll in foundation or gatekeeper courses, such as the first college-level math or English courses, which when successfully completed are highly predictive of earning a credential. The expectation is that students will require and receive substantial academic support and that taxpayers will receive a return on this investment as more young people enter the labor market with a credential, contribute to the state's economy, and pay taxes.

In terms of scale, dual-enrollment pathways are not as prevalent as traditional dual enrollment. To qualify as a true dual-enrollment pathway, students would graduate from high school with anywhere from one to four semesters worth of college credit. These programs are in very early stages of development and thus not yet widely known. Nonetheless, visible models exist. With over twenty thousand enrollments in college courses by high school students in 2004–2005, the City University of New York's College Now program is the largest and most developed example of which we are aware (Meade and Hofmann, 2007). Middle colleges similarly build pathways, as do some tech prep programs.

While also relatively small in scale, the third accelerated option, early college high schools, is proliferating quickly and garnering considerable attention nationally. Early college high schools currently serve over fifteen thousand underrepresented students in integrated pathways and will eventually reach over ninety-five thousand students. Like dual-enrollment pathways, they align and integrate course sequences across the sectors with the goal of promoting postsecondary completion. But unlike dual-enrollment pathways, early colleges are small, autonomous schools. They are designed so that students underrepresented in postsecondary education (low-income students, student of color, and first-generation college students) can simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an associate degree or one to two years of credit toward a bachelor’s degree tuition free. Each school is developed in partnership with a postsecondary institution whose courses make up the college portion of the student’s education. Students begin college-level work as early as ninth grade.

Beginning in 2001, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, in cooperation with state and local education departments, philanthropies, and non-profit partners (including JFF, which coordinates the national initiative), have supported the growth of a national network of over 160 early college high schools in twenty-four states. Sixty-four percent of these schools are partnered with a community college and are on or near a community college campus; another 7 percent have both community college and four-year partners (Jobs for the Future, 2009). In addition, a number of states are creating additional early colleges without external funding, largely in partnership with
their community colleges; several states are using the early college model to reinvent career and technical education.

Early colleges have three designs: grade 6 to 12 schools that incorporate two years of college within the same time as a student would complete a high school diploma; four-year programs that incorporate up to thirty college credits by the end of twelfth grade; and five-year programs that start in ninth grade and incorporate up to sixty college credits by the end of the fifth year, which takes place entirely on a community college campus.

Community Colleges and Accelerated Learning Options: Cases

To demonstrate the variety of ways that community colleges are leaders in enabling the growth of accelerated learning options, we describe how two states and one system have implemented accelerated learning options. For dual enrollment, we turn to one of the most extensive statewide programs: Florida’s comprehensive articulated acceleration array of choices for high school students. For dual-enrollment pathways, we turn to CUNY’s College Now program with an emphasis on its implementation in the six community colleges among the twenty-three CUNY institutions. For the most extensive network of early college high schools within a state and one encompassing both transfer and career preparation, we look at the forty-two currently open Learn and Earn schools in North Carolina, thirty-seven of which are partnered with a North Carolina community college.

Traditional Dual Enrollment: Florida. Florida has one of the most highly articulated and centralized public education systems in the country. In terms of accelerated learning options, Florida provides multiple means for secondary school students to accumulate college credit—Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and dual enrollment. However, dual enrollment is perceived as a path to a postsecondary degree or credential not just for gifted students, but for those considered middle achievers or on a career or technical track. Dual enrollment grew from 27,689 students in 1988–1989 to 34,273 in 2002–2003. The growth in participation for African American and Latino students was especially high during this period (Florida Board of Education, n.d.).

Florida legislation mandates that all twenty-eight community colleges and specific four-year institutions offer dual-credit courses (Florida Statutes, Chapter 1007.27, 2002). Approximately 80 percent of all dual-credit courses take place at the community college (P. Cisek to Janet Santos, pers. communication, November 2007). Students may attend courses during the school day, before or after school, or during the summer, thereby relieving overcrowding in high schools and maximizing flexibility to participate. Students can access Web-based information that provides guidance in choosing college courses. In some community colleges, dual enrollees do not have to
reapply once they finish their high school requirements, a strong signal to students that if they succeed in their first course, they can go directly on in the host community college.

The state provides incentives for postsecondary degree completion through its lottery-funded Bright Futures Scholarship Program (Florida Department of Education, n.d.). The Bright Scholars Program is a merit-based academic scholarship awarded to students based on high school transcript and standardized test scores (SAT or ACT). The program consists of three scholarship awards: the Academic Top Scholars Award, the Florida Medallion Scholars Award, and the Florida Gold Seal Vocational Scholars Award. Participation in dual enrollment receives the same weight as participation in AP and IB for the purposes of evaluating a candidate’s scholarship application.

Dual enrollment is open to all public, private, and home-schooled students. The state has established eligibility guidelines recommending that general education students have a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) and that students pursuing a career certificate have a 2.0 GPA in order to qualify for dual enrollment. Florida also provides dual-enrollment funding for high school students enrolling in college-level English or math if they have passed the College Entry Level Placement Test (CPT), the math and English admissions exam for the state’s college system (Florida Statutes, Chapter 1011, 2002). Additional admission criteria are included in the articulation agreement between the community college and the local school district.

Florida’s only restriction on course taking is that courses count simultaneously for college and high school graduation. The state’s Articulation Coordinating Committee (ACC), whose members are appointed by and report to the commissioner of education, is responsible for ensuring a smooth transfer of credit from high school to college. The ACC comprises representatives from all levels of public and private education: the state university system, the community college system, independent postsecondary institutions, public schools, and applied technology education. It also includes a student member and a member at large. It meets regularly to coordinate the movement of students from institution to institution and from one level of education to the next by evaluating high school courses, including AP, and assigns them equivalency prefixes and numbers that match comparable college courses. Standing committees are charged with such issues as postsecondary transitions and course numbering.

Despite the prescriptiveness of Florida’s legislation, the implementation of dual enrollment varies by institution: some provide college in the high school, and others bring large numbers of high school students onto college campuses. Dual-enrollment students are exempted from paying tuition, matriculation, and laboratory fees (Florida Statutes, Chapter 1009, 2002). Each district and its community college partner negotiate how they will share the cost of dual enrollment (transportation, faculty salary, advising, and student support) through their articulation agreement. The state subsidizes the
purchase of textbooks and other instructional materials only for public high school students, not for private or home-schooled students.

Florida's comprehensive K–20 education data warehouse is the nation's leader in the linking of student-level data across K–12 and postsecondary institutions. The gathering of such information allows the state to generate reports analyzing the effectiveness of its dual-enrollment policy (and its implementation) in helping students meet set educational goals. For example, a 2004 descriptive analysis conducted by the Florida Department of Education found that high school students who participate in dual enrollment were enrolling in colleges and universities at rates significantly higher than students who did not participate. In addition, Hispanic and African American students who took dual-enrollment courses were enrolling in higher education at higher rates than whites or any other ethnic group (Florida Department of Education, 2004a, 2004b). The news is encouraging considering previous findings reporting that only 32 percent of this population of students go on to college within four years of ninth grade (Ewell, Jones, and Kelly, 2003). Such encouraging results led to a much more extensive study published in 2007 (Karp and others, 2007).

**Dual-Enrollment Pathways: College Now.** New York State has no dual-enrollment legislation. But the City University of New York, the largest urban postsecondary system in the country, and the New York Department of Education, the largest urban school district in the country, have established a high school–postsecondary partnership that rivals in size those of entire states. CUNY's College Now, widely recognized as a national model for an integrated K–16 system, is the country's most extensive dual-enrollment partnership (College Now, n.d.). Between the 2001–2002 and 2006–2007 academic years, enrollment for high school students seeking college credit at City University of New York's College Now program increased by 109 percent, from 7,084 to 14,380 students. In 2006–2007, high school students completed 20,650 credit courses, and 68 percent of total college credit enrollments took place at the community colleges (T. Meade to Nancy Hoffman, pers. communication, January 2005; S. Cochron to Nancy Hoffman, various communications between October 2004 and March 2005).

The CUNY colleges have long opened their doors to students prior to their completion of high school diplomas—sometimes to help them complete the diploma or GED program. CUNY's Collaborative Programs comprise a continuum of college preparation approaches serving students at different developmental stages and with different needs: early college high schools, university-affiliated high schools (there are fifteen on or near CUNY campuses), and Gear Up serving cohorts in single schools. College Now is another example and offers a range of programs: summer arts and theater activities that acquaint students with college faculty, college culture, and college campuses, and, of course, dual enrollment.

College Now's mission is to help students meet high school graduation and college entrance requirements without remediation and to be retained
through a degree. Begun in 1984 at Kingsborough Community College, College Now expanded in 1999 when the CUNY board voted to end remediation at CUNY’s senior colleges. The program was designed specifically to serve students who might not otherwise be able to attend postsecondary institutions and who receive inadequate college preparation in the city’s high schools. Most CUNY students are poor (average family income is $28,000), and retention and graduation rates are low even at six years from college entry.

The centerpiece of College Now is its free, credit-bearing college courses. College Now differs from most other dual-enrollment options in that courses are not offered at random but are provided in a structured sequence with academic supports as needed. All credits are transferable within the CUNY system, but college courses do not necessarily replace high school courses.

In 2006–2007, 29,040 students participated in the program, with 46,888 course and activity enrollments. (Activities include noncredit prerequisites to specific college courses and content-rich workshops, such as an English language learners history course, to aid in the statewide Regents exam preparation.) College Now models vary, but the largest, at Kingsborough Community College with 7,699 college credit enrollments in 2006–2007, teaches almost all its courses in high schools. Other College Now programs taught courses on college campuses.

Student eligibility for credit courses is based on Regents exam scores, high school records, and other measures, including substantial personal advising. While the College Now philosophy is to be stringent about admission to credit courses, the rigor of courses, and the standards of exit assessments, the program provides multiple and widespread opportunities for students to prepare for these courses. Some College Now programs also help prepare students for English and mathematics Regents exams and offer non-credit developmental college preparatory courses.

**Early College High Schools: North Carolina Learn and Earn.** North Carolina’s leaders are making dramatic changes to the state’s education system. A major thrust of these efforts is to prepare more young people for high-skills jobs by encouraging them to complete some college before high school graduation. This is a response to the decline of the state’s long-time economic engines—tobacco, textile, and manufacturing jobs—that used to provide family-sustaining wages for workers without postsecondary training or education. As the state tries to reinvent its economy and attract innovative, knowledge-intensive industries, it must strengthen the educational attainment of its workforce.

To meet the challenge, the state has invested in early education, raised high school graduation standards, and increased K–12 accountability. It is also aggressively starting new high schools, creating or redesigning 150 schools designed to produce more graduates—and graduates who are on a path to complete college. Early colleges, most of them on community colleges campuses, are central to this effort.
Since 2004, North Carolina has opened forty-two early college schools, known in the state as Learn and Earn schools. These currently serve about fifty-one hundred students, and the state plans to open thirty-three more (G. Coltrane to Joel Vargas, pers. communication, January 2008). Learn and Earn schools enable students to earn up to two years of college credit or an associate degree (A.A. or A.A.S. in some cases), along with a high school diploma, within five years. Students are reflective of local school district populations, and Learn and Earn targets students not normally found on a college path.

In 2007–2008, the state invested $15.2 million in Learn and Earn. Starting in 2007, it also made college courses available at no cost to any North Carolina high school student using the Internet through Learn and Earn On-Line. Thirty-seven Learn and Earn schools are partnerships between community colleges and local K–12 districts; four work with four-year institutions (G. Coltrane to Joel Vargas, pers. communication, January 2008). Given Learn and Earn’s extensive reach into the public college system, it represents both a large-scale high school redesign initiative and a significant investment by the higher education sector in preparing a world-class workforce in North Carolina.

North Carolina has long permitted dual enrollment through community college courses offered exclusively to high school students, and through a concurrent enrollment policy allowing juniors and seniors to take college courses with other college students. (These dual-enrollment courses are known as Huskins classes, named after the North Carolina Huskins bill that provided the enabling legislation.) These programs were designed to provide supplemental educational opportunities, particularly for students from rural communities.

Without altering those programs, the state took steps that allowed Learn and Earn to design dual enrollment as an improved pathway from grades 9 to 14. For example, the state created the Innovative Education Initiatives Act in 2003, which authorized state support of cooperative education programming between high schools and colleges, including for accelerated programs such as early college and dual enrollment. This laid the groundwork for state approval of several policy exemptions for Learn and Earn schools. Thus, Learn and Earn schools have avoided policy barriers confronted by early colleges in other states that stem from uncoordinated secondary and postsecondary education policies. For example, Learn and Earn schools have received a waiver from a state restriction, sometimes found in other states, on dual-crediting college courses toward nonelective high school course requirements.

North Carolina is also supporting the capacity of its early college schools to build and sustain strong partnerships vital to their design. Learn and Earn schools must use some state funds to support a liaison between the high school and college partners. The New Schools Project, funded with private and public funds, supports Learn and Earn school implementation
and sustainability through leadership trainings, instructional coaches, cross-site peer learning, and other services. The project also facilitates data collection, advises on research efforts, and reports to policymakers about the progress of the initiative. Given the size of North Carolina's effort, Learn and Earn will hold instructive lessons for other accelerated learning options nationally.

**Research About the Benefits of Accelerated Learning Options**

What is the evidence that accelerated learning options are a means of improving college success? It is promising but still nascent. Many states and programs do not track or report dual-enrollment outcomes. Fewer have unit-record longitudinal data systems that are capable of telling whether dual enrollees have better education outcomes compared to nonparticipants who are otherwise similar in social and academic background. However, some studies that use longitudinal data are available, including recent research on each of the three accelerated options discussed here. The research strongly suggests that dual enrollment can prepare high school students for college and give them momentum in completing a degree or credential. Moreover, it shows that these benefits extend to groups who are typically underrepresented in college.

**Traditional Dual Enrollment.** Researchers from the Community College Research Center studied Florida's large statewide program (Karp and others, 2007). The state's P-20 data system allowed the researchers to examine the postsecondary outcomes of 36,214 dual-enrollment participants from the high school graduating classes of 2000–2001 and 2001–2002 and compare them to similar students who did not participate.

Dual enrollees who entered college were more likely to continue for a second semester and be enrolled two years after high school. At both milestones, former dual enrollees had higher GPAs than classmates with no dual-enrollment experience. Dual enrollees also had earned 15.1 more college credits on average than nonparticipants three years after high school. Although it stands to reason that some of these credits were earned through dual enrollment, the researchers deduced that “it is also likely that some were earned after matriculation into postsecondary education” (Karp and others, 2007, p. 7).

The Florida data shed light on the benefits of dual enrollment for underrepresented students because the program serves a wide range of students. Although participants must meet some academic requirements, they vary in their academic and social backgrounds. This variation enabled researchers to look at dual-enrollment outcomes for subgroups such as low-socioeconomic-status (SES) students, African American and Latino students, and students with lower academic achievement.

In terms of positive effects on first-year and cumulative college GPA, low-income students and those with the lowest high school GPAs benefited
to a “greater extent than their dual enrollment peers who enter[ed] college courses with more social, economic, and educational advantages” (Karp and others 2007, p. 63). Low-income students also seemed to benefit more in terms of greater college credit accumulation.

**Dual-Enrollment Pathways.** There are similarly positive outcomes from CUNY’s College Now. CUNY cooperates closely with the New York City Department of Education, including sharing data across the two systems. Using these data, CUNY’s office of Collaborative Programs Research and Evaluation has studied the postsecondary outcomes of College Now students who became first-time freshmen at a CUNY college during the fall of 2002 or 2003. The research compares participants to nonparticipants who otherwise had similar academic achievements when starting college (Michalowski, 2006).

The evidence suggests that College Now puts students on a path toward college completion. Among first-time freshmen, participants were more likely on average to enroll for a third semester and had higher GPAs on average than their classmates with no College Now experience. They also earned more credit on average than nonparticipants by the end of their first year. First-time freshmen in 2002 and 2003 with College Now experience earned an average of 1.08 credits more at the end of their first year versus nonparticipants. These figures do not include credits acquired through pre-college dual enrollment or AP programs, which conceivably would have increased the number of college credits reported for the participants of College Now. Most of these positive effects held for College Now students across achievement levels among those admitted to a CUNY campus.

Other findings are notable from the Community College Research Center’s study, which included both data from Florida and CUNY. In addition to positive effects on retention and GPA, dual enrollment was positively related to enrollment in college for Florida students and was positively related to enrollment in a four-year institution for CTE students in CUNY College Now.

**Early College High Schools.** JFF and the intermediary organizations supporting early colleges have been collecting data about early college students, but as the newest of the accelerated options, early college schools still have limited longitudinal data. These efforts include JFF’s development of a Student Information System for the Early College High School Initiative and the national evaluation of the initiative being conducted by AIR (American Institutes for Research) and SRI International. The oldest schools have just graduated their first classes of students (about nine hundred in all), permitting a glimpse at early outcomes.

The data suggest that the schools reach underrepresented student populations and graduate them with considerable momentum toward a post-secondary degree. Early college schools overall serve students who are representative in race and SES of their local communities. National figures show that low-income students comprise at least 60 percent of all early college students, based on free and reduced-price lunch eligibility—a conser-
ervative estimate of the number of students from low-income families since they rely on self-reporting by students and their families.

If credit accumulation is indicative of eventual degree attainment, then early college schools have put many graduates on a promising path toward a degree. The vast majority (85 percent) accumulated between a semester and two years of college credit by graduation. The Middle College National Consortium, which supports some of the longest-running early colleges in the nation, reports that its students accumulate an average of thirty-one credits by twelfth grade and pass their college courses at rates of 92 percent with an average GPA of 2.78 (Middle College National Consortium, 2008).

Lessons Learned and Looking Ahead: Policy and Practice

Beyond the benefits to the students themselves, accelerated learning options point the way to practices and state policies that can improve the alignment of the secondary and postsecondary sectors. The options are most likely to be supported and spread in states with certain policies and by the same token exemplify practices for improving college readiness and success that states may choose to expand through policy changes.

Policies that are supportive of all accelerated learning options—early college schools, dual-enrollment pathways, and traditional dual enrollment—are guided by the recommendations of a state-level P–16 council, roundtable, or other body representative of secondary and postsecondary education. An essential starting point for policymaking is agreement on the purpose of these programs: ideally, to serve as a bridge to college for underrepresented students as well as a head start on college for those already on their way. A clearer purpose gives guidance to local partnerships and lends coherence to other policy decisions. Other policies that support local accelerated learning options include:

- Encouraging dual crediting and the smooth transfer of college credits to other institutions of higher education
- Ensuring tuition is not an obstacle for dual enrollees
- Holding colleges and high schools harmless in financing dual enrollment so that they can provide joint support of dual enrollees, including through special efforts that recruit and prepare academically underprepared students for dual enrollment
- Setting eligibility criteria that are agreed on by the secondary and postsecondary sectors and allow students to take college courses in subject areas for which they have demonstrated readiness based on a variety of measures
- Promoting quality through policies that set minimum instructor qualifications and support teacher training
Collecting and reporting data on dual-enrollment participation and outcomes—best done with longitudinal, student-level data across high school and college

At the level of practice, strong accelerated learning programs require several key elements to create feedback mechanisms and structures for collaboration across K–12 and higher education:

- Formal structures that link a high school and a partner college such as a renewable partnership agreement; a person serving as liaison between high school and college; and a decision-making body to design, monitor, and collect data about the program
- A feedback loop to high schools from postsecondary on student success: high school and college transcripts include college course grades and call attention to how well courses are sequenced between high school and college and how well high schools are preparing students for college work
- Shared responsibility (financial and otherwise) by leaders in secondary and postsecondary education institutions for the continued collaboration

From a narrow perspective, these practices and policies support promising accelerated programs that use dual enrollment. To be more speculative, if research continues to show that these programs have positive effects, they might be seen as indicative of broad-scale changes needed in practice and policy to build a more seamless P–16 education system for all students.

Would not all local high schools and colleges benefit from regular collaboration to review and improve the efficacy of course sequences in preparing students for postsecondary? How could state finance and accountability systems be more integrated and engender joint responsibility for the successful transition of all students, especially underrepresented youth, through high school and college?

That said, dual enrollment is no panacea and is not necessarily easy to implement. Dual-enrollment pathways and early college schools require that high schools and colleges work in close partnership, negotiating financing across the two systems and using dual enrollment as a laboratory for aligning standards across secondary and postsecondary education. These partnerships are challenging to build and sustain precisely because the country’s secondary and postsecondary systems are, by design, disconnected and uncoordinated. Their differing academic calendars, course schedules, crediting systems, and organizational norms can make partnership difficult. Accelerated learning programs have the potential to reconcile these divisions but are also constrained by them.

These strategies also entail unique costs. Districts, colleges, or states must cover tuition and fees for college courses if dual enrollment is to be made accessible to lower-income students. There are also costs associated
with maintaining the high school–college partnership such as employing a liaison who coordinates the alignment of curriculum, supports, and professional development across grades 9 to 14.

Another challenge is that college courses offered through dual enrollment are only as good as regular courses offered by the college. Because there are no common content or learning standards across postsecondary institutions nationally or statewide, course quality takes special effort to monitor in accelerated programs.

Despite these challenges, accelerated learning options are an important strategy for increasing the nation’s high school and college success rates because of their potential for bridging the secondary-postsecondary divide. Given their support of such programs, community colleges are well positioned to remain at the forefront of these efforts.

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