

BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL: IMPROVING TRANSITION PROGRAMS FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

By Peggie Klekotka

To meet the demands of the 21st century economy and workforce, today's high school students must be prepared to pursue one of a range of postsecondary educational opportunities. These opportunities might include working toward a technical training program certificate, an associate's degree, or a bachelor's degree. But while most high school students expect to go to college, many are not adequately prepared. Recent research studies support the following claims:

- More than 90 percent of high school seniors expect to attend some type of college (Schneider & Stevenson, 2000).
- Only 32 percent of 2001 high school graduates were prepared for postsecondary education, based on satisfactory completion of required courses for college enrollment and demonstration of basic literacy skills (Greene & Forster, 2003).

In order to ease the transition and help students succeed in their postsecondary education, many states, districts, and schools are implementing innovative as well as traditional transition programs. Perhaps they are heeding the call from the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools: "It is time for every student to graduate both proficient and prepared for the real demands of work and postsecondary learning" (National Governors Association, 2005a, p. 1). Aside from helping prepare students for the demands of life after high school, these transition programs also engage students in advanced coursework in a variety of curricular areas and often allow families to save money on college tuition.

ISSUE OVERVIEW

It is clear that K–12 school leaders, parents, community members, and policymakers must continue to work hard to ensure that more students graduate from high school with a meaningful education. A related goal, however, is to ensure that all high school graduates are aware of and prepared for a variety of postsecondary educational opportunities.

*Building on the work of the newly established Center for High School Excellence at **Learning Point Associates**, this edition of Policy Issues focuses on how practitioners and policymakers can improve transitions from high school to a variety of postsecondary educational opportunities for all students. The paper begins with a rationale for and a review of transition programs for students completing high school. It then presents a discussion of some of the challenges in ensuring a smoother transition from high school to postsecondary education and provides policy options to address those challenges.*

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Student Preparation Policy Options (see page 6)*
- *Funding Policy Options (see page 7)*
- *Governance Policy Options (see page 8)*

Florida is a leader in implementing effective transition programs. More than 10 years ago, the state established a comprehensive dual enrollment system. High school students receive high school and college credit for Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and college courses completed as part of dual enrollment programs. The state mandates the participation of all community colleges and four-year institutions in a common course-numbering system. This system facilitates credit transfer between secondary and postsecondary institutions throughout the state.

Moreover, the state reimburses school districts for costs related to the students' registration, books, and fees. Colleges must waive tuition, but they may count high school students in their full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment counts for state funding. With this system, students save on college tuition costs, high school districts do not lose average daily attendance funds, and postsecondary institutions receive FTE funds.

The dual enrollment system is demonstrating some promising outcomes, as highlighted in a 2003 Florida Department of Education report to the governor and the Florida Legislature. During the last 10 years, the number of high school students participating in the community college dual enrollment program has increased by more than 56 percent. Eighty percent of these students successfully earned postsecondary credit. Moreover, a comparison of high school students who earned accelerated credit with those who did not earn such credit revealed that students who earned college credit during high school performed better in postsecondary programs, were less likely to enroll in remedial courses, and were more likely to return for the second year of study than their peers not enrolled in the program.

Nationwide, the six most common transition programs are dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, Tech Prep, International Baccalaureate, Middle College high schools, and Early College high schools. Although these programs vary widely, they are beginning to show evidence of promising benefits. According to Hoffman and Vargas (2005), Karp, Bailey,

Hughes, and Fermin (2004), and Pennington (2004), such benefits include the following possibilities:

- Streamlining K–16 educational systems to avoid duplication of courses and to reduce remediation rates.
- Preparing students for the rigor of the postsecondary curriculum.
- Clearly communicating expectations to students about the level of preparation that is required for college-level work.
- Presenting college as a viable option for students, particularly those whose family members are not college graduates or those who may not have planned to attend college themselves.
- Expanding the curricular options beyond the traditional high school curriculum.
- Increasing student motivation to complete a college degree.
- Providing a range of appropriate supports for students in college-level courses.
- Strengthening the educational pipeline to encourage more students to complete postsecondary degrees or certificates.
- Increasing the affordability and availability of college.

Pennington (2003) and other policymakers argue that the traditional high school model needs to be transformed to create a system of multiple pathways in which students will master a common set of high standards through different types of institutions, with different levels of support, and in different amounts of time. These multiple pathways would provide students with options that both suit their needs and interests and prepare them for postsecondary educational opportunities.

Some research has been done on the effectiveness of high school transition programs. Bailey and Karp (2003) reviewed 45 reports, articles, and books about transition programs that were published between 1990 and 2003. Of these, only 21 studies reported on student outcomes but most did not control for

student characteristics, student achievement, or student motivation. Because of this omission, it is difficult to know if a transition program selected the better prepared students or made the students

better prepared. Although the reported transition program results were largely positive, more rigorous research studies are needed to determine the impact of these programs on student achievement.

ACHIEVEMENT GAP SPOTLIGHT

Data consistently reveal that achievement gaps among African-American and Hispanic students persist as these young people make their way into some form of postsecondary education. The students who are least prepared for postsecondary programs often are the students reflected in K–12 achievement gap statistics:

- Of 2001 high school graduates, only 20 percent of African-American students and 16 percent of Hispanic students were adequately prepared for postsecondary education (Greene & Forster, 2003).
- Sixty-one percent of African-American students and 63.2 percent of Hispanic students who enrolled in postsecondary education between 1992 and 2000 completed at least one remedial course (Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Provasnik, Sen, & Tobin, 2004).

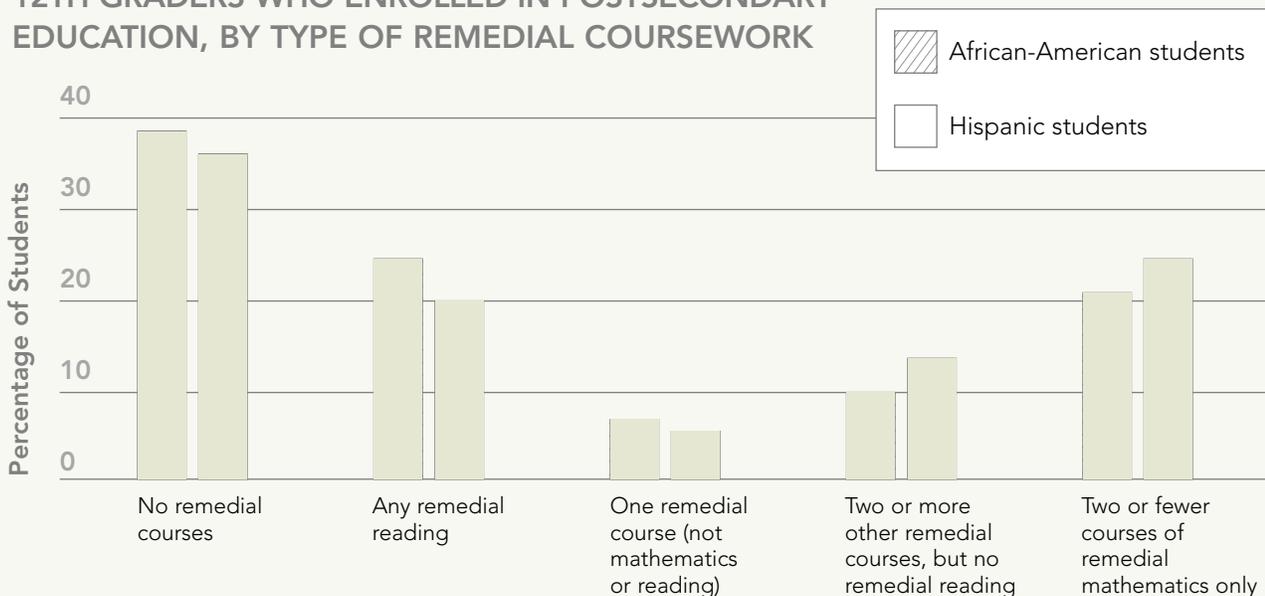
A significant percentage of students must complete remedial courses after they begin their postsecondary studies. Figure 1 shows the breakdown for remedial coursework for African-American and Hispanic students enrolled in postsecondary education. Remedial coursework in reading, for example, was completed by 24 percent of African-American students and by 20 percent of Hispanic students.

Wirt et al. (2004) discovered that the percentage of African-American and Hispanic students requiring no remedial courses is almost one third less than their white and Asian peers. The researchers also found that the rate of African-American and Hispanic student participation in remedial reading courses is more than double that of their peers.

The National Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis (2002) found that fewer than 20 percent of African-American students are completing two- or four-year degree requirements. The center also analyzed national educational pipeline data from 2000 that clearly show African-American and Hispanic students are completing high school, enrolling in college, and graduating from two- or four-year programs at significantly lower rates than those of their white peers.

The National Governors Association (2005b) and other national policymakers are urging states and districts to open transition programs to all levels of students, not just the academically proficient. The goal of this approach is to challenge and motivate all students to achieve at high levels (Bailey, 2005).

FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGE OF 1992 AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND HISPANIC 12TH GRADERS WHO ENROLLED IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, BY TYPE OF REMEDIAL COURSEWORK



Remedial Courses Taken in Postsecondary Setting

Source: Wirt, Choy, Rooney, Provasnik, Sen, and Tobin (2004), p.24.

TRANSITION PROGRAMS

Each of the six most prevalent transition programs—dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, Tech Prep, International Baccalaureate, Middle College high schools, and Early College high schools—offers high school students a glimpse of the educational possibilities available after graduation. Table 1 indicates details about these programs. Because the programs vary greatly, states and districts should focus their efforts on only those programs that fit their students' needs and not attempt to implement all types.

TABLE 1. TRANSITION PROGRAM POPULARITY NATIONWIDE

PROGRAM TYPE	NUMBER OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS OFFERING PROGRAM	NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN PROGRAM	YEAR REPORTED
Dual Enrollment	11,700	1,162,000	2002-03
Advanced Placement	11,000	1,795,000	2002-03
Tech Prep	7,400	Not Available	—
International Baccalaureate	390	165,000	2002-03
Middle College	76	Not Available	—
Early College	46	8,030	2004

Sources: Early College High School Initiative (2004), Middle College Foundation (2005), U.S. Department of Education (2005), Waits, Setzer, and Lewis (2005)

Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to enroll in college courses at postsecondary institutions in order to earn both high school and college credits. Unlike Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, these courses are not designed specifically for high school students. Instead, high school students attend college courses that have been developed for college students. Through dual enrollment programs, high schools and institutions of higher education work closely together to support student success. These programs expand the types of courses available for high school students, provide an academic challenge, and help families save money on college tuition costs. Typically, high school students are taught by college faculty either

at the college, the high school, or through distance education. Partnerships between colleges and high schools also may allow high school teachers to teach college-credit courses at the high school. Several states pay the tuition and fees for the high school students. In states where fees are not waived, the cost of college courses may discourage students from participating in dual enrollment programs. According to Waits, Setzer, and Lewis (2005), 71 percent of public high schools offered courses for dual credit in both high school and college during the 2002–03 school year.

- *Accelerating Student Success Through Credit-Based Transition Programs* (www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cclo/cbtrans/products.html)

Advanced Placement

The College Board oversees the Advanced Placement program, which offers high school students college-level courses in a wide range of subjects. High school teachers utilize a highly structured standards-based curriculum. Students may earn college credit by scoring well on a rigorous standardized exam administered

at the end of the course. According to Waits, Setzer, and Lewis (2005), 67 percent of public high schools offered Advanced Placement courses during the 2002–03 school year.

- College Board Advanced Placement Central (apcentral.collegeboard.com)

Tech Prep

The U.S. Department of Education funds Tech Prep programs. These programs combine at least two years of high school coursework with two years of postsecondary education in a seamless course of study. Tech Prep programs integrate academic and technical skills with work-based learning experiences. Tech Prep programs are designed to lead to an associate's degree or a certificate in a specific career area. Tech Prep prepares students for high-wage, high-skill jobs or advanced postsecondary education.

Krile and Parmer (2002) compared students who attended a Tech Prep program in Ohio between 1997 and 2001 with a comparable group of non-Tech Prep peers. The Tech Prep students scored significantly higher on the college entrance exams, earned higher grade-point averages, and were more likely to return for a second year of study. In 2002–03, 7,600 federal Tech Prep grants were awarded to high schools.

- Tech Prep Program (www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/cte/tpreptopic2.html)

International Baccalaureate

The International Baccalaureate Organization oversees the implementation of the International Baccalaureate program. The program is an internationally recognized, rigorous, and comprehensive two-year course of study for high school juniors and seniors. There are six core academic subject areas within the program: English, second languages, experimental sciences, arts, mathematics and computer science, and individuals

and societies. College credit may be available for students who successfully complete this course of study and earn an International Baccalaureate diploma. According to Waits, Setzer, and Lewis (2005), 2 percent of public high schools offered International Baccalaureate courses during the 2002–03 school year.

- International Baccalaureate Organization (www.ibo.org/ibo/index.cfm)

Middle College

Middle College high schools are small high schools located on college campuses. These are often alternative high schools for students who have academic potential but are at risk of dropping out of traditional high schools. The schools structure a program of study that includes both high school and college courses and provide a range of personalized student supports. The location offers students additional opportunities and exposes them to a more diverse and more mature

student population. Students are given more freedom, but they are expected to take additional personal responsibility for their education. Middle Colleges combine the benefits of small schools with access to facilities and opportunities that are more typical of large schools (Cavalluzzo, Jordan, & Corallo, 2002). There are 76 colleges nationwide offering Middle College programs.

- Middle College Foundation (www.middlecollegefoundation.org/mc.htm)

Early College

Early College high schools are small schools in which students earn both a high school diploma and two years of college credit in four or five years. Typically, these schools are located on or near college campuses. The campus location facilitates student access to the range of opportunities on campus, increases student motivation, and allows students to accelerate their education. The college schedule allows teachers to utilize innovative instructional approaches. The

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has supported the Early College High School Initiative with more than \$120 million in grants. Currently, there are 46 Gates-funded Early College high schools in 19 states and the District of Columbia, and more than 170 schools are scheduled to be up and running by 2008 (Early College High School Initiative, 2004).

- The Early College High School Initiative (www.earlycolleges.org)

CHALLENGES AND POLICY OPTIONS

Although states and districts vary widely in their development and implementation of plans to ease the transition from high school to postsecondary education, a number of obstacles continue to exist in the areas of student preparation, funding, and governance (Hoffman, 2005; Hoffman & Vargas, 2005; Karp, Bailey, Hughes, & Fermin, 2004). However, each of these challenges can be addressed at the state level through a variety of policy options.

Student Preparation Challenges

Transition programs often are developed for students who have achieved at high levels. Of the estimated 2,050 institutions of higher education that provide dual enrollment programs for high school students, only 5 percent of the institutions implement dual enrollment programs specifically geared toward at-risk high school students. During the 2002–03 school year, approximately 6,400 students enrolled in these targeted dual enrollment programs (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005). Schools and districts should begin to prepare all students for postsecondary education before high school and continue that preparation in high school with programs that provide an accelerated and rigorous curriculum with appropriate supports to allow all students to benefit from dual enrollment programs.

Increasing the level of rigor for all high school students pays off. For example, Adelman's 1999 study clearly demonstrated that students who complete a challenging high school curriculum are better prepared for college. In fact, he found that students who completed a mathematics course beyond Algebra II were more than twice as likely to complete a bachelor's degree.

Examples. The Indiana Department of Education has developed the Core 40, a statewide rigorous

college-preparatory curriculum. State, district, and school leaders strongly encourage all students to complete this curriculum. Students who complete the Core 40 receive a special diploma and are eligible for additional financial-aid opportunities. The Core 40 will be a requirement for all Indiana high school students beginning with the 2011 graduating class. Completion of the Core 40 also will be an admissions requirement for Indiana's four-year public universities (Indiana Department of Education, 2005).

University Park Campus School is a small public school for Grades 7–12 located near the Clark University campus in Worcester, Massachusetts. Most of the students are from low-income families and are members of minority groups. All students complete a college-preparatory curriculum and, in their junior year, are eligible to take courses at Clark. Students receive free tuition if they are accepted to Clark through the traditional admissions process. During their first two years of high school, students are engaged in a rigorous accelerated curriculum and provided with a range of supports to improve their academic skills. Although more than half of the students at University Park were reading at the third-grade level when they entered seventh grade, all 10th-grade students passed the rigorous state exam with scores significantly higher than state averages.

Student Preparation Policy Options

- *Develop a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum that serves as the default curriculum for all students.*
- *Align high school graduation requirements with college-admissions requirements.*
- *Develop a range of appropriate supports for students to increase their success in college-level courses.*

Funding Challenges

There are three important funding challenges for transition programs:

- Students from low-income families may have difficulty paying the exam fees for exam-based college credit courses such as Advanced Placement. Each Advanced Placement exam, for example, costs \$82. In order to receive college credit, students must take the exam and receive an appropriate score that is accepted by the college. If a student is enrolled in multiple Advanced Placement courses, the cost of the exam fees may prohibit the student from obtaining college credit.
- With dual enrollment programs, the tuition costs for college courses may be prohibitive for high school students. Yet in some states, students who have not graduated from high school may not be eligible to apply for federal or state financial aid to defray the cost of college tuition.
- In most states, average daily attendance totals are used to calculate high school funding. If high school students are participating in a dual

enrollment program at a local community college, the high school may lose average daily attendance funds because students are not present at the high school for the entire day. In contrast, colleges and universities typically receive state funds based on FTE student enrollment. However, four-year colleges may not be able to claim FTE student enrollment reimbursement for high school students in dual enrollment programs.

To meet these challenges, states can provide funds to help high school students pay for college courses or enable students to receive financial aid. In addition, state funding policies can be adjusted to allow colleges to receive reimbursement for high school students enrolled in college courses.

Example. Florida reimburses school districts for costs related to the students' registration, books, and fees in dual enrollment programs. Colleges must waive tuition, but they may count high school students in their FTE student enrollment counts for state funding.

Funding Policy Options

- *States or districts pay all or part of the student exam fee, particularly for low-income students, to encourage students to complete Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses.*
- *State policymakers find opportunities to coordinate K–12 and postsecondary funding streams to allow high school students to participate in college-level courses without penalizing the high school or the institution of higher education.*

Governance Challenges

Education at the high school level and the postsecondary level traditionally has been governed and funded differently. As a result, number of governance challenges currently exist in states throughout the nation:

- High schools may not allow students to count college-level course credit toward high school seat time or Carnegie unit requirements. (Carnegie units are used to measure high school credit. For example, two semesters of Freshman English earns 1 unit of school credit. Colleges, in contrast, do not use Carnegie units.)
- Some institutions of higher education may not allow students to earn credit for Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses that were completed in high school.
- College and university policies may prohibit the enrollment of students who have not yet graduated from high school.
- College-level credits that students earn in dual enrollment programs with two-year colleges may not transfer to four-year colleges or universities.

- State and union regulations may prohibit college instructors from teaching high school students. Moreover, college instructors may not be “highly qualified” according to the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

As states and districts begin to develop programs that blend secondary and postsecondary education, policymakers from K–12 and higher education will need to work closely together to ensure that students can benefit from these blended opportunities.

Example. Florida mandates the participation of all community colleges and four-year institutions in a common course-numbering system. This system facilitates credit transfer between secondary and postsecondary institutions for students in dual enrollment programs.

Governance Policy Options

- *Coordinate K–16 governance structures to ensure that postsecondary options are widely available for high school students.*
- *Develop formal statewide articulation agreements to ensure that credits earned in transition programs will be recognized by high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges throughout the state.*
- *Stimulate the creation of new pathways to increase the variety of educational options available for high school students.*
- *Adjust state definitions of “highly qualified” teachers to include college instructors explicitly.*

CONCLUSION

Implementing transition programs is one strategy to aid high school students when they decide to pursue postsecondary education. Furthermore, creating opportunities for students to begin their postsecondary education while in high school will engage students by allowing them to complete advanced coursework in a variety of curricular areas, increase student motivation to complete a college degree, allow families to save money on college tuition, and allow high schools to provide students with a range of supports that will allow them to be successful in postsecondary coursework. Ensuring that all students, regardless of their academic performance in high school, have access to information about the range of postsecondary options available to them, as well as the types of transition programs that will help them achieve their goals, will go a long way toward helping today's students meet the demands of the 21st century.

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CENTER FOR HIGH SCHOOL EXCELLENCE

Learning Point Associates has created the **Center for High School Excellence**, whose goal is to join with educators and policymakers across the nation to address the challenges associated with ensuring that all high schools enable their students to achieve the highest levels of academic excellence.

Growing numbers of American high school graduates are not prepared for the demands of the 21st century—whether these demands come from postsecondary education or the workforce. To address this challenge, **Learning Point Associates** provides research-based information that identifies critical challenges facing American high schools and aligns this research with strategies that can be implemented for measurable results.

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- Build research- and technology-based products, tools, and resources.
- Deliver capacity-building professional services and technical assistance.
- Conduct high-integrity evaluation and policy research.

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