

Concurrent Enrollment

Overview

In 2009, Colorado passed [The Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act](#), which authorized concurrent enrollment programs in the state. Concurrent enrollment programs provide high school students postsecondary credit, at no tuition cost to the student, for taking college-level academic or career and technical education (CTE) courses at their high school or an institution of higher education campus.

Concurrent enrollment (CE) programs foster and cultivate partnerships between local education providers and institutions of higher education to ensure that all secondary students have equitable access to high-quality postsecondary courses. Supported by the [National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships](#) (NACEP), the sole accrediting body for concurrent enrollment partnerships, concurrent enrollment programs have a proven positive effect on academic achievement in high school, non-remedial placement upon college entry, postsecondary GPAs, credit accumulation, and degree attainment. According to a [recent study](#) done by the Community College Research Center, 88% of concurrent enrollment students went on to postsecondary education after high school and completed degrees at higher rates and in less time than their non-participating peers.



**88% OF
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In Colorado, concurrent enrollment programs are funded by a school's per-pupil revenue (PPR), the [College Opportunity Fund](#) (COF), and the [Concurrent Enrollment Expansion and Innovation Grant](#) (CEEI), for districts who receive the grant through a competitive process. The CEEI grant can be used to assist educators with the cost of obtaining a graduate degree in a specific subject that requires certification to teach at the postsecondary level, offset or remove barriers to concurrent enrollment for qualified students (e.g., cost of books, supplies, fees, or transportation), data sharing between the partnering school district and institution of higher education, and to provide support and coordination of resources for members of the concurrent enrollment partnership.

When concurrent enrollment programs are well implemented, there are many associated benefits. However, when the concurrent enrollment programs are not well structured from a student-centered perspective, then 'undermatch' (students enrolling in postsecondary courses that do not align to a postsecondary degree/certificate) is likely to occur. This undermatch can [lead to](#) students abstaining from postsecondary enrollment and increasing length of time it takes to finish the postsecondary credentials.



**ACCORDING TO
THE COLORADO
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION,
98% OF SCHOOL
DISTRICTS AND 91%
OF HIGH SCHOOLS
OFFER CONCURRENT
ENROLLMENT
PROGRAMS**

Learnings & Best Practices

Expanding and investing in CE decreases costs and increases postsecondary credential attainment for learners and fosters a robust talent pipeline with greater earning potential for the future workforce. In terms of best practices, school districts should consider the following elements:

- ▶ **Ensure concurrent enrollment coursework aligns to the student's intended postsecondary degree.** Concurrent enrollment courses and credits are not always guaranteed to meet degree requirements. It is important to confirm students' concurrent enrollment credits will transfer to their desired institution. [This checklist](#) and [these guidelines](#) can help high school students plan their AP, IB and CE courses.
- ▶ **Help students understand the long-term impacts of concurrent enrollment grades.** Low grades can impact a student's chances of qualifying for some scholarships that have GPA requirements. Earning a low grade in concurrent enrollment can also impact the student's ability to receive and remain eligible for federal financial aid like Pell grants.
- ▶ **Consider impacts to Colorado-financial aid.** Concurrent enrollment course performance can also effect eligibility for [Colorado-specific financial aid](#). If students take too many concurrent enrollment courses, especially ones that don't meet degree requirements and delay their college graduation it could impact their access to financial aid later. All Colorado students get [145 COF credits](#) to subsidize the cost of their postsecondary education. Students who experience academic challenges, change majors often, or stack multiple undergraduate certificates or degrees are more likely to meet this 145-credit limit.



IN THE 2019-2020 SCHOOL YEAR, **38.3% OF COLORADO STUDENTS** PARTICIPATING IN CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS WERE BIPOC



PARTICIPATING CE STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS ARE NEARLY **10% MORE LIKELY TO ENTER COLLEGE** AFTER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION THAN THEIR NON-PARTICIPATING PEERS

Student Experience

Colorado allows local education providers to establish cooperative agreements with institutions of higher education, so long as the courses offered fall under the "Guarantee Transfer" guidelines [outlined](#) by the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE). While some school districts have achieved success, consistent barriers to expanding concurrent enrollment include: lack of credentialed teachers, not enough student advising, a lack of dedicated concurrent enrollment funds, and a lack of course offerings aligned to students' postsecondary credential aspirations.

Jefferson County School District (Jeffco)

According to [CDHE's annual report](#) on concurrent enrollment programs, Jefferson County is one of ten leading school districts in the state when it comes to high school students' participation in concurrent enrollment programs.

Ashton (name has been changed) is pursuing her passion for photography and has been able to earn 12 credits through Arapahoe Community College, taking classes in graphic design, photography, and Adobe Photoshop. Her Photoshop class ended with an Adobe certificate, so she earned college credit and an industry-aligned certificate through Jeffco's CE program.

The success of CE programs is due, in part, to increased teacher buy-in, additional student advising on postsecondary courses, and maintaining quality assurance in course programming. With these concerted efforts, CDHE's 2021 annual report found that the district has been able to enroll 14.3% of its students into concurrent enrollment. Barriers that still get in the way include: the costs of course materials, difficulties with transportation, and a need for even stronger advising.

National Context

States across the country find it difficult to establish quality assurances for concurrent enrollment courses. Some states have found success using different approaches to concurrent enrollment management and approval.

Texas is a leading state in clearly defining and incentivizing concurrent enrollment programs. Historically, the local taxing district model that the state uses to fund institutions of higher education has made funding these programs inconsistent across the state. State policy specifies which courses can be offered, but the state was still experiencing difficulties with ensuring quality assurance for postsecondary readiness. In an effort to increase workforce readiness, [House Bill 3](#) in 2019 sought to provide financial incentives, including outcome bonuses for students who demonstrate postsecondary readiness when graduating high school.

In another example of strong CE programs, North Carolina has clearly defined criteria that cooperative agreements between school districts and institutions must meet in order for a concurrent enrollment program to be deemed as a “[Cooperative Innovative High School Program](#)”. Upon receiving the designation, the district may access specific funding for the concurrent enrollment program.



Policy Recommendations

- ▶ **Explore ways credentialing standards could be standardized across institutions.** Currently, a high school teacher may be approved to teach concurrent enrollment for one Colorado community college, but not approved to teach the very same course at a different Colorado community college. Credentialing standards and review processes could be standardized across the Colorado Community College System.
- ▶ **Establish state guidance on quality guardrails to ensure concurrent enrollment programs align with postsecondary degree requirements and marketplace needs.** Students are sometimes taking concurrent enrollment courses that are only connected to non-transferable degrees such as an Associate of General Studies (AGS). Instead, CE students should be required to follow the Associate of Science, Associate of Arts, and the Associate of Applied Science degree pathways to ensure transferability and a credential that is more aligned with industry demand.
- ▶ **Provide increased access to college advising for high school students.** By connecting more students and families to high quality college and career counseling through the [Individual Career and Academic Plan](#) (ICAP) process, students are more likely to enroll and complete concurrent enrollment options leading to their degree of study. CE students should avoid taking classes that are irrelevant to their degree pathway or that don't apply to their graduation requirements at a postsecondary institution.



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