

**Student Preparation and Readiness for College****Committee Report on Accelerated Learning/ College Credit Granting Programs****Presentation to the P-16 Council  
February 10, 2005**

Since the last P-16 Council meeting, the Student Preparation and Readiness for College committee has meet to review and evaluate the effectiveness of accelerated learning/ college credit granting programs. The Committee has held two meetings where the following programs were discussed in depth: Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment, and International Baccalaureate. The following paper is a result of the Committee's discussion. It is our goal that this paper will facilitate conversation at the Council meeting that will help address the following questions:

- What should be the level of accountability for these programs at the state level?
- How do we determine which core curriculum courses need to be expanded?
- What can we do to better serve the needs of our first generation and historically underrepresented students?
- What are some ways to deal with the geographical challenges that our state presents?

*Summary of Accelerated Learning/ College Credit Granting Programs in Texas*

In Texas, several options are available for students to participate in accelerated learning/college credit programs while still being enrolled in high school. Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment, Tech Prep, Concurrent Enrollment, and International Baccalaureate are examples of programs in Texas providing post-secondary opportunities for high school students who have demonstrated college readiness. These diverse programs serve to demonstrate the importance of providing high school students with options in their pursuit of advanced or accelerated learning opportunities--regardless of geographic location.

In offering these opportunities, it is critical that each program prepare students to be successful academically. To ensure this goal is attained, it is also important that minimum standards and expectations be established and met, and that assessment is ongoing.

Guided by the overarching goal of student success, the Committee took a comprehensive approach in reviewing and analyzing the merits of college credit granting programs. The basic principles are as follows.

**Underlying Principles**

- **College credit granting programs are enhancements to an already existing rigorous high school curriculum, not substitutes for a rigorous curriculum.**

It is important to recognize that the state has established the Recommended High School Program (RHSP) as the statewide minimum academic standard and the state goal that if a student successfully completes the rigor of the RHSP, they will

- be prepared academically for transitioning to post-secondary educational opportunities.
- **Because of the increasing prevalence and influence of college credit programs, minimal guidelines of standardization that exceed TEKS must be established.** Acknowledging the RHSP as a strong foundation upon which to build, curriculum opportunities that exceed this standard should be more closely scrutinized to insure that the desired expectations are being met.
  - **Identifying models of excellence for college credit programs is the key to insuring that academically challenging programs are available throughout the state.** Identifying models of excellence will insure that there is a consistent message regarding what the state finds as acceptable in terms of accelerated learning opportunities for high school students.

### ***Primary Concerns***

The Committee identified five major primary concerns: program quality, academic preparation of students, teacher quality, curriculum, and administrative support. Each of these are detailed below, and followed by preliminary recommendations.

#### Qualitative

One of the primary concerns of accelerated learning programs is the lack of uniformity in what is expected. For those involved, it is critical that minimal standards be set for all programs throughout the state. Currently, there are very few guidelines which results in uneven program quality among/between some school districts.

Teaching an accelerated learning class is very demanding on teachers. It requires considerable time and effort in terms of preparation and delivery, and in some cases teachers are provided little, if any, support. For the purposes of this paper and discussion, incentives should be defined as providing the necessary support and training to teachers in these programs to prepare them to best teach and serve their students. Securing teacher buy in and district commitment to these programs will address several issues including teacher quality and retention, academic rigor, and a more enriched academic environment for students.

Finally, the lack of adequate data assessing the effectiveness and quality of these programs makes it difficult to provide any guidelines regarding program recommendations. For example, data assessing the effectiveness of dual enrollment programs is very sparse. It is essential that the links to higher education regarding persistence and success be established. Additionally, the AP program has expanded greatly in Texas in recent years. However, there is limited data on how this expansion has impacted Texas in terms of student ethnicity, core curriculum course offerings, and qualitative safeguards.

#### Academically Prepared Students

Currently, the potential of inadvertent academic barriers, which can impact negatively the participation of underrepresented populations, exists. These can include standardized test score requirements, program admission interviews, and recommendations from previous teachers. In order to improve the recruitment of historically underrepresented and first generation college students, it is critical to review

the viability of all rules and regulations that may be considered barriers and no longer necessary.

### Teacher Quality

The Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs both offer teachers the opportunities to attend professional development and training sessions throughout the year. Content wise, these sessions are normally the same year after year, and teachers are not required to attend. Because the instructor of the dual enrollment programs may or may not be an employee of the school district, currently formal training programs are not being offered. Content objectives and instructional guidelines need to be established for program consistency. It is important that teachers engage in effective, ongoing professional development and quality course offerings are available. These programs should not only prepare teachers on the content of the material, but also in instructional delivery of this material to their students.

### Curriculum

Although there are curriculum guidelines established by the various programs, there are questions as to how comprehensive those guidelines are and whether there exists consistent measures for assuring that the breadth and depth of the curriculum is covered adequately. For example, AP and IB provide a suggested curriculum, but they do not evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction to make sure the curricular guidelines are being met. It is important that a standard of rigor is established and maintained in all accelerated learning/ college credit granting programs.

### Administrative Support

Administrative support at all levels is essential for program success and is an issue that arises frequently in discussions. Some schools or districts appoint an administrative liaison to monitor the success of accelerated learning/college credit granting programs. These liaisons monitor the curriculum and the rigor of these programs as well to provide the administrative support that is needed. There is currently no formal training for these administrators. Additionally, there are issues of support and resources in the areas of program funding, incentives, and professional development opportunities.

### **Preliminary Recommendations**

Listed below are the preliminary recommendations that the Committee believes will help to improve the quality of all accelerated learning/college credit granting programs.

### Academically Prepared Students

- Improve student access to each of the programs by eliminating any unnecessary enrollment restrictions that exist for college credit granting programs
- Develop minimum standards that ensure classrooms provide an environment that promotes academic excellence and prepares students for college level coursework
- Improve student recruitment by creating vertical teams of teachers and administrators within districts and schools, and by encouraging historically underrepresented high school students to participate in accelerated learning programs

Quality Teachers

- Provide incentive and support to encourage participation of highly qualified teachers in the programs
- Establish standards for professional development training
- Offer professional development course delivery alternatives for teachers participating in accelerated learning/college credit granting programs
- Develop summer teaching institutes for dual enrollment professors that are similar to those that AP teachers attend

Rigorous Curriculum

- Establish minimal standards for a rigorous curriculum for all programs
- Improve the quality of instruction through avenues addressed in other recommendations
- Improve data collection in all areas, particularly in dual enrollment courses

Administrative Support and Resources

- Develop administrator training to insure that district administration is fully informed in program regulations and resource availability
- Provide each service center area block training funds for training seminars to be held throughout the year for teachers and administrators
- Develop a mentoring network with universities across the state
- Create a Center for Professional Development at a college or university to serve as a resource hub for accelerated learning/ college credit granting programs