

## **Joel Vargas**

### **Program Director**

Joel Vargas studies and advises on state policies to promote improved rates of high school and postsecondary success for underserved students. He focuses on new education pathways that blend high school and college, such as early college high schools and comprehensive dual enrollment programs.

Dr. Vargas has directed, initiated, and studied a variety of middle school and high school programs designed to help more underrepresented students get into and through a postsecondary education. He also has been a teacher, editor, and research assistant for the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, coeditor of *Double the Numbers: Increasing Postsecondary Credentials for Underrepresented Youth* (Harvard Education Press) and *Minding the Gap: Why Integrating High School with College Makes Sense and How to Do It* (Harvard Education Press). He was featured in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as one of "Higher Education's Next Generation of Thinkers."

Dr. Vargas received a B.S. in journalism from Boston University and an Ed.D from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

**Dual Enrollment in Texas: State Policies that Strengthen New Pathways to  
and through College for Low-Income Youth**

By Joel Vargas  
Program Director  
Jobs for the Future  
88 Broad Street  
Boston, MA 02110  
(617) 728-4446  
jvargas@jff.org

**Testimony Before the Texas State Senate:  
Joint Interim Hearing of Senate Higher Education Committee and Senate  
Education Committee on Dual Credit on May 24, 2010**  
*Written Testimony Submitted May 19, 2010*

Chairwoman Zaffirini, Chairwoman Shapiro, and honorable members of the Senate Higher Education and Education Committees, thank you for inviting me to submit this testimony. It is a privilege to assist you in your review of dual enrollment policies in Texas.

Jobs for the Future is a national policy and research organization that identifies, develops, and promotes new approaches that are helping communities, states, and the nation compete more effectively in a global economy. JFF's mission is to double the number of youth and adults who attain the credentials and skills needed to be competitive in today's labor market.

Much of my work at JFF focuses on creating improved pathways through high school and into college for low-income youth and other students with traditionally low educational attainment. Some of the most promising pathways nationally are those that policymakers are supporting in Texas: those that prepare such students to complete college courses as a part of high school in order to improve their college readiness and success.

The state's dual credit policies have helped make these efforts possible and successful. I would like to make three points today to help you understand what distinguishes Texas policies from those of most other states. I hope this perspective can inform your deliberations about how to enhance these policies.

1) The dual enrollment of high school students in college courses is increasingly recognized by researchers as a promising way to create a bridge to college for students not already college bound. But dual enrollment policies in most states were not designed with this purpose.

2) Unlike those found in many states, policies in Texas enable schools and colleges to create dual credit pathways that create a bridge to college for students who are underrepresented in college. In this regard, we see Texas as the leader nationally.

3) Texas can nurture and expand best practices from these pathways by maintaining and strengthening key state dual enrollment policies.

### **Dual Enrollment can be a Bridge to College**

Although more research is needed about the benefits of dual enrollment, research has emerged in recent years showing that the completion of college courses by high school students is positively correlated with college readiness. A 2007 study by the Community College Research Center at Columbia University, found that dual enrollees, compared to non-dual enrollees, had higher college enrollment, higher college persistence through the second year, and higher college grade point averages through the second year.<sup>i</sup> The research is also noteworthy because it found that these benefits appeared to be greatest for students typically underrepresented in college.<sup>ii</sup>

More recently, the SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro – using gold standard, random assignment research methods -- has shown how early college high schools in North Carolina have designed key support systems, in conjunction with dual enrollment, to close the college-readiness gap between typically lower achieving students and their peers. Like the Texas schools of the same name that are achieving similar success, early college schools in North Carolina are designed so that students can complete high school with up to two years of college credit or an Associate's degree.<sup>iii</sup>

*What makes school, district, and college efforts like these so successful with underrepresented students?*

They are characterized by high school and colleges working together to:

- align their expectations for students, creating a coherent sequence of high school and college courses meeting general education or career requirements

- provide academic and social supports for students to accelerate to and succeed at college-level work
- remove cost barriers for low-income students (e.g., charge no tuition, cover costs of books)

Given the positive research about how dual enrollment can raise high school and college success, state policymakers are increasingly interested in expanding participation. In fact, virtually every state already has a dual enrollment policy in statute or regulation. But few of these policies were developed with the purpose of raising the college readiness of low-income and other underrepresented students. Rather, most were designed to provide accelerated work for advanced students or to permit students to take college courses who have exhausted advanced course options at their high schools.

Thus, it is not surprising that students currently underrepresented in higher education are participating the least, according to national figures.

- Schools with the highest minority enrollment are least likely to offer dual enrollment courses. According to research by the National Center for Education Statistics, 20 percent of these schools indicated that they did not offer any dual credit or exam-based (i.e., Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate) courses, compared with only 6 to 12 percent of schools with lower minority enrollment.<sup>iv</sup>
- In states with some of the oldest dual enrollment policies, we have observed few colleges and schools working in partnership to design programs targeting underrepresented students.
- And similarly in these states, we have observed low rates of participation statewide in dual enrollment by low-income students. For example, in one state in 2008 about 10 percent of low-income seniors had completed a college course during high school in districts serving a largely minority population versus a 35 percent completion rate statewide (including dual enrollment, AP, and IB courses). In another state, low-income students typically compose only 5-10 percent of total participation in a dual enrollment program that serves only about 2 percent of high school students overall.

### **Texas Policies Promote Dual Enrollment as a Bridge to College**

The picture is different in Texas. In 2007-08, 17.2% of low-income students statewide had completed a college course by senior year (including dual enrollment, AP, or IB courses).<sup>v</sup> While it is difficult to make precise comparisons

with other states – because all states report dual enrollment data differently, if at all – that rate is among the highest JFF has observed by any method of measurement.

The state also has 41 early college high schools. These are emblematic of the high school-college partnerships and practices that ensure underrepresented students succeed in college courses by graduation. Texas also has an early college *district* in Hidalgo ISD -- where virtually all students are Latino and low-income and where virtually all are completing the Recommended High School Program or Distinguished Achievement Program. Moreover, Hidalgo's low-income students complete college courses at about twice the rate as low-income students statewide.

This success has had much to do with the state's forward-thinking dual enrollment policies and with local and state leadership. For example:

- In states with little dual enrollment participation by low-income students, there is a zero-sum funding mechanism; state funding is deducted from K-12 systems to pay for the college tuition and fees of dual enrollees. This has placed districts and colleges in competition for advanced students and made them loath to partner and share costs for the academic, social, and financial supports needed by underrepresented students. By contrast in Texas, both high schools and their partner colleges receive state per-pupil funding for dually enrolled students. This has meant that schools like early college schools can integrate significant college coursework into their curricula without financial penalty to the institutions or their students.
- State policymakers have invested in the support systems needed to raise the college readiness of low-income students. For example, through passage of House Bill 1 in 2006 -- a major bill designed to raise college readiness rates -- the state granted a \$275 per student allotment for high schools to support individual achievement of college-ready standards. Innovative K-12 superintendents and college presidents have leveraged these funds to provide the accelerated academic catch up strategies and supports that help underrepresented students graduate college ready, including by completing college courses in high school.
- Through state agencies and key alliances, the state has provided important leadership and guidance to local leaders who are trying to raise college readiness and success through dual enrollment strategies. These include the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas High School Project. Their work has nurtured best practices and promoted high quality implementation and replication of successful approaches.

### **Where can Texas go from here with its Dual Enrollment Policies?**

As the Senate considers how to strengthen its dual enrollment policies so that they effectively and efficiently meet state education goals, I would respectfully submit the following general suggestions:

*Keep doing what is working, and invest in state priorities:* State policies are promoting pathways that are using dual credit combined with key supports to raise the college readiness of underrepresented students. These strategies are positioned to play an important role in helping the state to close gaps in achievement and college completion for groups of students whose share of the workforce is growing.

The investments the state has made in these efforts are paying dividends, and success pays for itself. In tight economic times, paring back investments can help balance today's budget. But from longer-term cost-benefit perspective, those same investments would more than pay for themselves as students graduate better prepared for college and save state budgets the costs of college remediation and the social and economic costs of students who drop out. To illustrate, with the help of school finance experts (Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates), JFF has developed a financial model that projects the cost-benefit to states of graduating more students college ready. The model suggests that in Texas a \$275 per student investment in schools that increases the college readiness rate of low-income students by just 10 percent could result in the state ultimately saving as much as \$5,000 per Bachelor's degree for low-income students.

*Elevate existing quality assurances and use data to verify the quality of dual enrollment:* As more high school students take and pass college courses, questions are likely to increase about the integrity and authenticity of those courses. This may particularly be the case for courses taught in a high school setting by a teacher designated as an adjunct faculty member by the partnering college. It is important that the courses are not left vulnerable to perceptions that they are somehow "college-lite" work.

Colleges already take many measures to enforce the college standards of these courses. They have good reason to do so, not least among them reputation and accreditation. Accreditors, such as SACS, examine the qualifications of full-time and adjunct faculty, among other factors, as standard practice; this is an important quality assurance that is already in place for dual enrollment courses.

However, some states have reinforced these standards, codifying many of the measures that colleges already take to ensure the integrity of college courses. In general, those policies have included the following:

- *That college courses taught in high schools should match the comparable course taught on campus.* For example, the course must use the same syllabus, assignments, and end-of-course exams as that on campus.
- *That the institution conferring credit should set the qualifications for faculty.* Most colleges require instructors, *including adjunct faculty*, to hold a Master's degree in the content area in which they teach.
- *That the college establishes expectations and provides support for high school-college faculty collaboration and training.* For example, some states require or strongly suggest that there be an orientation for faculty teaching dual enrollment courses.

Data can also shed light on the quality of the college courses taken by dual enrollees. For example, because the state of Florida has data for college courses taken by individual dual enrollees, they have been able to deduce the quality of those courses. A recent study by the Florida Department of Education showed that the grades received by dual enrollees in introductory college courses in English and math did not vary significantly from the grades that they received in the next course in the sequence as full-time college students. This provided important evidence that the college courses taken by dual enrollees were not being watered down for high school students.<sup>vi</sup>

*Keep building on the state's strong foundation:* State policy and leadership has already created an enabling environment for innovative K-12 superintendents and college presidents to develop dual credit pathways and early college schools that are having great success with typically underserved students. If these key conditions are kept in place, the state has the opportunity to build greatly on this success by actively encouraging more such partnerships.

Just as the state's accountability system increasingly rewards high schools and districts for improving the college readiness of its students, it could take a bold step by determining how to reward both high schools and colleges for the first-year college performance of low-income students and other underrepresented groups. Because well designed dual enrollment pathways promote first-year college success, the state's school-college dual enrollment partnerships can provide an important model for promoting shared responsibility by the K-12 and

postsecondary systems for the college readiness and success of students who are often lost in the transition between the two. By the same token, rewarding both systems would incent more of these pathways.

Thank you again, Senators, for the opportunity to share this information with you. I hope that you find it useful as you continue to deliberate about this important topic.

---

### Endnotes:

<sup>i</sup> Karp, Melinda Mechur, Juan Carlos Calcagno, Katherine L. Hughes, Dong Wook Jeong & Thomas R. Bailey (2007). *The Postsecondary Achievement of Participants in Dual Enrollment: An Analysis of Student Outcomes in Two States*. St. Paul, MN: National Research Center for Career and Technical Education, University of Minnesota.

<sup>ii</sup> The researchers were able to examine these effects because the two programs studied, the state of Florida's dual enrollment program and the City University of New York's *College Now*, collect longitudinal data. This enabled researchers to control for the social and academic backgrounds of participants versus non-participants and to examine variations in effect sizes based on selected student characteristics.


<sup>iii</sup> Edmunds, J.A., Bernstein, L. Unlu, F., Glennie, E., Willse, J., Arshavsky, N., Yamaguchi, R. and Dallas, A. (2010). *Expanding the College Pipeline: Early Results from an Experimental Study of the Impact of the Early College High School Model*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting in Denver, CO.

<sup>iv</sup> Waits, Tiffany, J. Carl Setzer, & Laurie Lewis. 2005. Dual Credit and Exam-Based Courses in U.S. Public High Schools: 2002-03 (NCES 2005-009). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>v</sup> Source, Texas AEIS State Report, 2008-09

<sup>vi</sup> Florida Department of Education (2010). *A Review of the Florida College Dual Enrollment Program*. Zoom, Edition 2010-01.






CREATING STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

## Dual Enrollment in Texas: State Policies that Strengthen New Pathways to and through College for Low-Income Youth


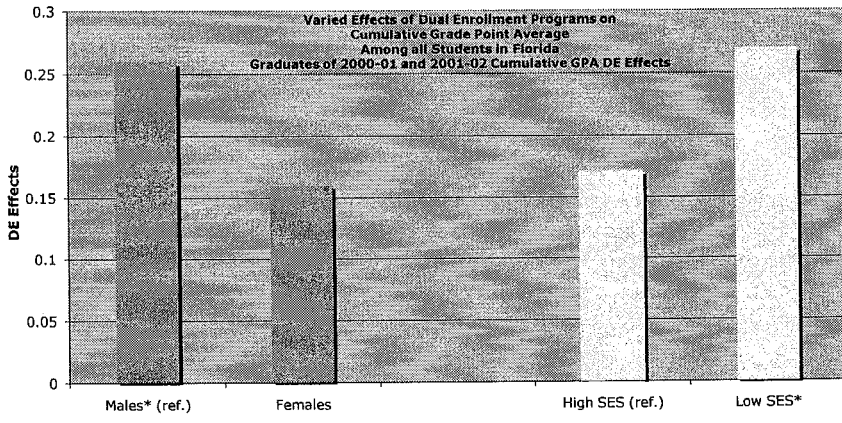
Joel Vargas  
 Program Director  
 Jobs for the Future  
 88 Broad Street  
 Boston, MA 02110  
 (617) 728-4446  
 jvargas@jff.org

Testimony Before the Texas State Senate:  
 Joint Interim Hearing of Senate Higher Education  
 Committee and  
 Senate Education Committee on Dual Credit  
 May 24, 2010



**JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

### Completing some college while in high school may particularly help underrepresented students in college





**Varied Effects of Dual Enrollment Programs on Cumulative Grade Point Average Among all Students in Florida**  
 Graduates of 2000-01 and 2001-02 Cumulative GPA DE Effects

Student Characteristics	DE Effects
Males* (ref.)	0.25
Females	0.15
High SES (ref.)	0.17
Low SES*	0.27

**Student Characteristics**

Karp, M.M., Calcagno, J.C., Hughes, K.L., Jeong, D.W., and Bailey, T.R. (2007). The Postsecondary Achievement of Participants in Dual Enrollment: An Analysis of Student Outcomes in Two States. Community College Research Center, Teacher College, Columbia University, New York. (October).



**JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

What characterizes dual enrollment approaches that are successful with low-income and other underrepresented students?



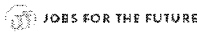
High Schools and Colleges work in partnership to:

Create coherent sequence of high school and college courses meeting general education or career requirements

Provide academic and social supports for students to accelerate to and succeed at college-level work

Remove cost barriers for low-income students (e.g., charge no tuition, cover costs of books)

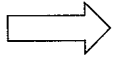
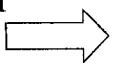
Empty rectangular box



Texas policies enable dual enrollment approaches that are successful with underrepresented students



- Hold harmless funding
- \$275 per high school student college-ready allotment (HB1 2006)
- State leadership and guidance to local partnerships



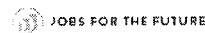
High Schools and Colleges work in partnership to:

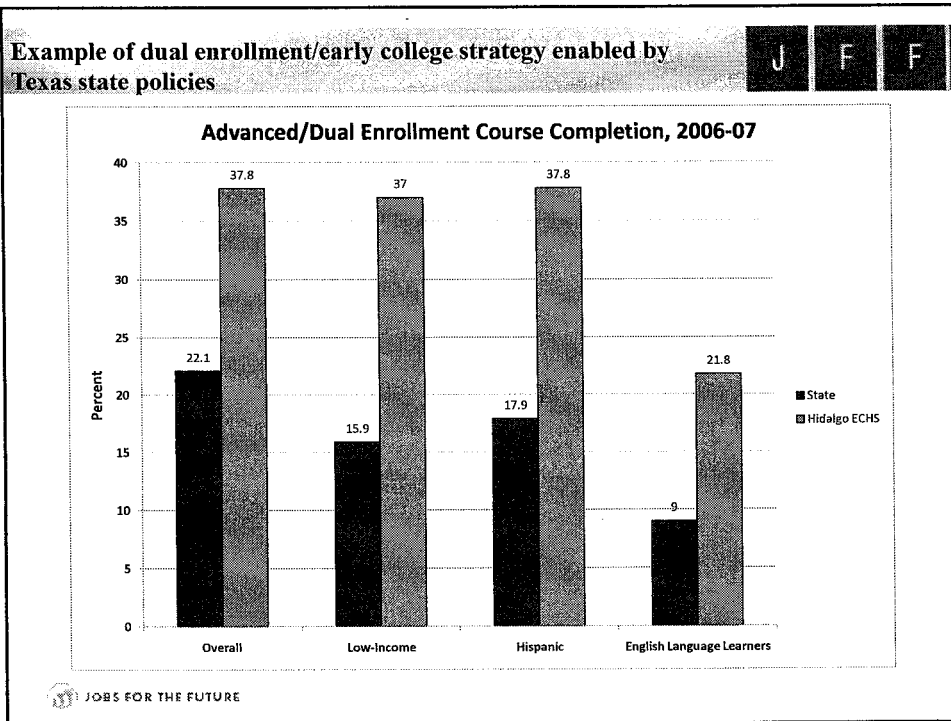
Create coherent sequence of high school and college courses meeting general education or career requirements

Provide academic and social supports for students to accelerate to and succeed at college-level work

Remove cost barriers for low-income students (e.g., charge no tuition, cover costs of books)

Empty rectangular box





**JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

TEL 617.728.4446 FAX 617.728.4857 info@jff.org  
88 Broad Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Boston, MA 02110  
85 Prescott Street, Suite 405, Worcester, MA 01605  
2000 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 5300, Washington, DC 20006

WWW.JFF.ORG