



OFFICE OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION

# Dual Credit and Exam-based Credit Acceptance Policies of Minnesota Colleges and Universities

A Guide for Policymakers

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## **About the Minnesota Office of Higher Education**

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program is the largest financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education, awarding up to \$180 million in need-based grants to Minnesota residents attending accredited institutions in Minnesota. The agency oversees tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 College Savings Plan, licensing and early college awareness programs for youth.

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# Executive Summary

Dual credit and exam-based credit programs are increasingly popular options for high school students who hope to earn college credit during their high school career. These programs provide college-level content for students seeking a head-start on college and promote college-going among high school students. As their popularity grows, dual credit and exam-based credit programs face new challenges that create barriers to participation for students. Among these challenges include credit transferability, equity and access, monitoring/course rigor, and high school and college partnerships.

To address the issue of credit transferability, *Minnesota Statute §136A.87(b)* requires the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) to gather and share information related to the dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance policies for all Minnesota colleges and universities. Over the course of six months, OHE surveyed colleges and universities in Minnesota and compiled information on their dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies.

Key findings of this study include:

- Almost all Minnesota colleges and universities award college credit for dual credit (98%) and exam-based credit (95%) participation. Credit transferability issues are not caused by institutional unwillingness to accept dual credit/exam-based credit.
- Most Minnesota colleges and universities have formal, written policies that facilitate the transfer of dual credit (88%) and exam-based credit (95%). Credit transferability issues do not seem to be caused by a lack of institutional dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies.
- Knowledge of dual credit and exam-based credit policies tend to be dispersed among multiple offices within a college or university, which may lead to both institutional confusion and student confusion.
- When handling dual credit or exam-based credit decisions, there are typically multiple staff with decision-making power across two or more departments within the same institution. This creates nuanced, specialized circumstances for awarding credit which may contribute to student confusion.
- Many Minnesota colleges and universities, including the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, rely on their general transfer policy when enrolling students with dual credit or exam-based credit; these institutions do not differentiate between new freshmen students and transfer students when transferring credit earned in high school. This suggests institutions use consistent standards when accepting credits.
- Almost all (96%) Minnesota colleges and universities publicize their dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance policies on their website and are prepared to respond to student and parent questions.
- Career and Technical Education credits are not as widely accepted liberal arts/general education credits and are handled differently by colleges and universities, likely due to the specialized nature of CTE courses.

OHE will share these findings on the website in order to centralize essential information for prospective students who have participated in these programs. In order to maximize participation in dual credit/exam-based credit programs, OHE recommends the following:

- Educate students about dual credit acceptance policies (OHE),
- Bolster comprehensive institutional and system-wide dual credit acceptance policies implementation through state-wide advocacy, campus trainings, and formal coordination on campuses and across colleges (legislature/system representatives/institutional representatives),
- Invest in infrastructure changes to facilitate credit acceptance using e-transcript (OHE/MDE),

- Define common understanding and purpose of dual credit programs in order to create clear measures of success. Examples of success measures include: save students money on college tuition, challenge high-performing students, and provide college experiences to high school students. (policymakers)

# **Introduction**

*Minnesota Statutes §136A.87(b)* requires the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) to gather and share information related to institutional acceptance policies for concurrent enrollment courses, Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) courses, Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses for all colleges and universities in Minnesota.

In order to fulfill the requirements of *Minnesota Statutes §136A.87(b)*, OHE surveyed all colleges and universities and asked them to report information on their institutional policies regarding the acceptance of Postsecondary Enrollment Options, b) concurrent enrollment, c) articulated credit, d) Advanced Placement, e) International Baccalaureate, and f) the College Level Examination Program credit.

This report is divided into five sections and includes 1) introduction to dual credit and exam-based credit 2) a review of key issues in dual credit/exam-based credit 3) study overview 4) findings and discussion and 5) next steps for Minnesota. The report describes the existence and development of dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance policies on Minnesota campuses, the communication of dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance by postsecondary institutions to prospective students, and suggestions for further inquiry.

Information gathered from this study will be used to develop informational pieces for prospective students. OHE will refine and centralize this information on the Office of Higher Education website where it will be readily available to students and families.

# What are Dual Credit and Exam-Based Credit Programs?

While dual credit and exam-based credit programs are available across the United States, definitions and implementation methods vary from state to state (Higher Learning Commission, 2013). It is important, therefore, to define and describe these programs as they are applied in Minnesota for the purpose of this report.

## Defining Dual Credit

Dual credit or dual enrollment programs allow eligible high school students to take postsecondary courses for both college and high school credit while a student is enrolled in high school. Dual credit courses can be taken at the high school, online, or on the college campus. Students earn both college and high school credit by successfully completing the course with a passing grade. Dual credit programs have been available to students since 1985 in Minnesota, when legislation provided access to dual credit programs through the Postsecondary Enrollment Act (Minn. Stat. §123.3514).

**Table 1**  
**Definitions of Dual Credit**

Type	Example	Description
Dual Credit	Concurrent Enrollment	Concurrent Enrollment allows students to enroll in college/ university courses at their high schools through partnerships with local colleges and universities. These offerings are often referred to as “college in the high school” courses, but several branded program titles exist in Minnesota, such as College in the Schools or College Now. Concurrent enrollment courses are taught by qualified high school teachers who meet the appropriate credentialing requirements of the respective college/ university and are mentored by a faculty member from the partnering postsecondary. These are often governed by regional and national accreditors such as the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) and the Higher Learning Commission.
	Articulated Credit	Articulated College Credit classes allow students to earn college credit by participating in a high school course taught by their high school teacher that aligns with 80% of the college course curriculum. With a passing grade of a B or higher, students can activate their credit by enrolling in a community or technical college that honors the articulated credit. Instructors of these classes meet K-12 licensure requirements only. Historically, Articulated College Credit classes have focused primarily on Career and Technical Education (CTE), however it is currently expanding to other academic areas as high schools and colleges adopt this partnership model.
	Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO)	PSEO allows high school students to enroll in courses at a college or university and earn both high school and college credit. Students attend class with regular college students, either on a college campus or online. All courses are taught by the college or university faculty.

Adapted from Minnesota Department of Education, *Minnesota Dual Credit Options Chart* (2015)

## Defining Exam-based Credit

For the purpose of this study, exam-based credit is defined as college credit earned by a high school student through test-taking with a recognized organization that specializes in education, such as College Board and International Baccalaureate. Examples of exam-based credit programs include Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and College Level Examination Program (CLEP). In Minnesota, state laws govern AP, IB, and CLEP credit transfer for colleges and universities within the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system.

Students can take tests in a variety of subject areas within each program. In some cases, such as with AP and IB, a high school credit-earning course component is incorporated to introduce college-level content and prepare students for the exam. However, students can only earn college credit through the examination process. There are no corresponding courses for CLEP. Students register for CLEP exams through College Board and are expected to study independently.

**Table 2**  
**Definitions of Exam-based Credit**

Type	Example	Description
Exam-based Credit	Advanced Placement (AP)	AP offers more than 30 college-level courses in subject areas such as English, history, humanities, languages, math, psychology and science. Students can take AP courses that are offered in their high school. In order to be awarded college credit, students must pass an AP subject exam with a qualifying exam score determined by the college or university. Qualifying exam scores may differ by college or university with some institutions requiring a higher passing score than others. AP instructors meet K-12 licensure requirements and attend specialized training.
	International Baccalaureate (IB)	IB is a two-year pre-college program, available in both Standard Level and Higher Level (advanced). Students select IB courses in any of six subject areas: the student's primary language, a second language, mathematics, experimental sciences, the arts and humanities. In addition, diploma students must meet four core elements: extended essay, independent research, Theory of Knowledge course, and Creativity, Action, Service. In order to be eligible to take the IB exam, students must first complete an IB course in that subject area. To be awarded college credit, students must pass an IB exam with a qualifying exam score determined by the college or university. IB instructors meet K-12 licensure requirements.
	College Level Examination Program (CLEP)	College Board's CLEP allows students to earn college credit by taking subject exams for what they already know. Students can choose from over 30 subjects and set up an examination on College Board's website. Students participate in CLEP exams independently. No CLEP-specific courses exist. Scoring levels and recommended college credit awards vary according to subject area.

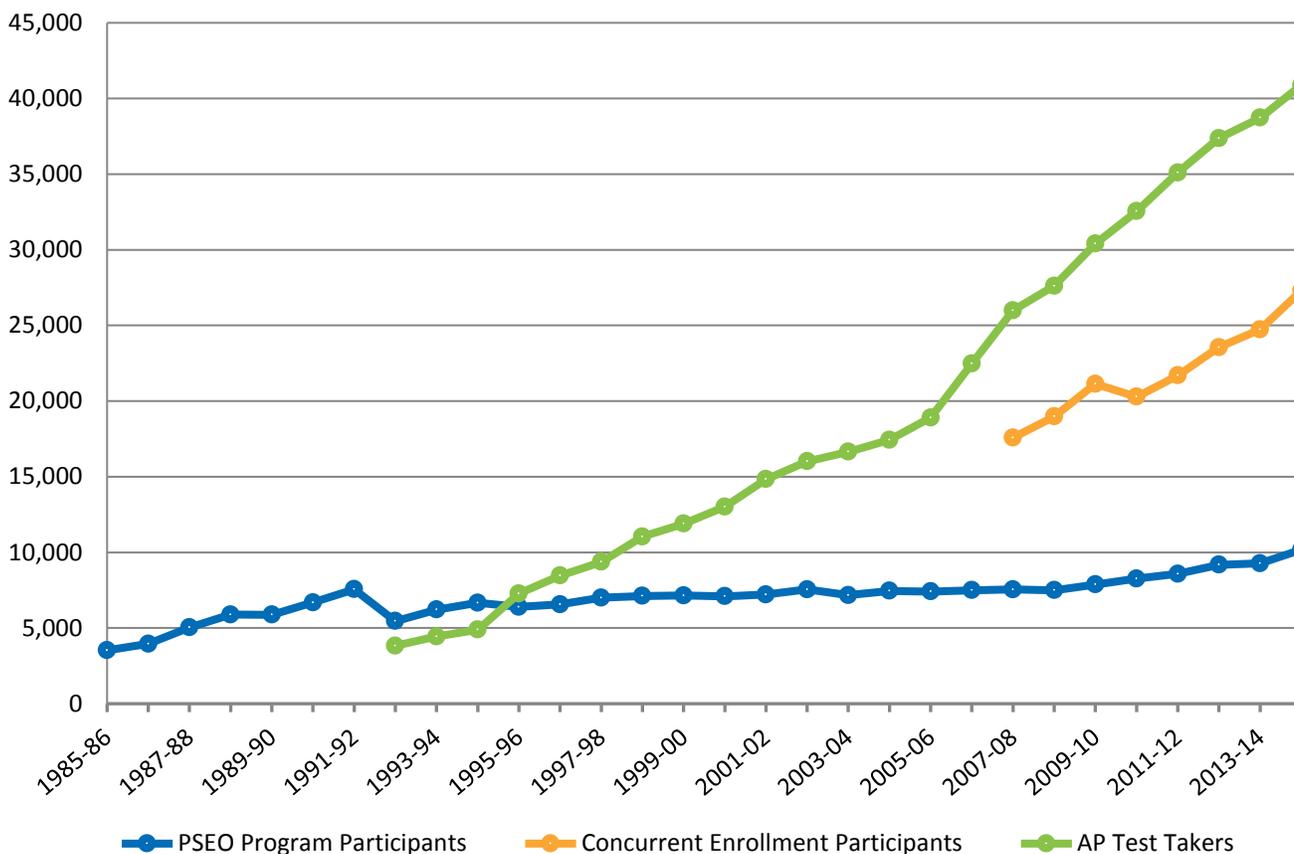
Adapted from Minnesota Department of Education, *Minnesota Dual Credit Options Chart* (2015)

## Why are Dual Credit and Exam-based Credit Important?

Dual credit and exam-based credit programs have been linked to positive outcomes including: creating a college-going culture in high schools, increasing rates of college attainment (An, 2012), enhancing self-efficacy among students (Ozmun, 2013), and shortening the time to college completion (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Research shows student participation in dual credit programs positively affects first-year college grade point averages, showing a correlation between participation in dual credit programs and academic performance in college (An, 2015). In addition, dual credit and exam-based credit programs strive to enhance and diversify high school curricula, increase access to higher education, and improve high school and college relationships (Higher Learning Commission, 2013).

Because of the benefits of dual credit and exam-based credit programs, there has been a rapid increase in popularity and participation in recent years by school districts and students (Krueger, 2006). For example, the University of Minnesota’s College in the Schools (a concurrent enrollment program) expanded to offer thirty-six courses from seventeen academic departments in four colleges and has worked with over 118 high schools in Minnesota since 1986 (Henderson & Hodne, 2016). Also within this timeframe, the number of students enrolling in PSEO increased by nearly 188% in Minnesota (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2016). Meanwhile, the number of students taking AP exams has risen by nearly 1000% since 1986 (Accomando, Fitzpatrick & Nathan, 2005), with over 43,000 AP students in 2015. Students increasingly take advantage of the opportunity to participate in college-level courses or exams for college credit during their high school career.

**Figure 1. PSEO, Concurrent Enrollment, and AP Program Participants in Minnesota, 1985-2015**



Source: Minnesota Office of Higher Education (2016)

# **Key Issues with Dual Credit and Exam-based Credit**

With the increase in popularity of dual programs comes a new set of challenges and opportunities for state lawmakers. Key issues include credit transferability, equity and access, and monitoring course rigor. Dual credit programs also rely on partnerships between high school districts and postsecondary institutions, bridging the gap between historically separate education systems (Karp, 2015). This creates new opportunities for statewide education coalitions and proponents of education reform.

## **Credit Transferability**

Dual credit and exam-based credit programs are often advertised to students and families as a means of shortening the time to degree attainment, a potential cost savings opportunity. Anecdotal evidence shows, however, that students can have difficulty in transferring the college credits earned in high school to their college of choice. Education Week's September 2016 article "Are Dual-Enrollment Programs Overpromising?" tells the story of Sabrina Villanueva, a college freshman who took four college classes her senior year of high school but none of these credits were accepted by her choice college, the University of Rochester (NY) (Gewertz, 2016). While Sabrina's story is alarming, very little national research identifies how many students find themselves in similar positions, with few or none of their credits accepted by colleges.

Minnesota is one of the first states to have undergone a state-wide examination of credit transferability for dual credit students. The 2017 report titled, "Characteristics and Postsecondary Pathways of Students who Participate in Acceleration Programs in Minnesota" (Davis, Smither, Zhu, & Stephan, 2017) highlighted discrepancies in successful credit acceptance for dual credit students. Minnesota Statewide Longitudinal Educational Data System (SLEDS) data was used to determine that 51% of students who participated in advanced coursework in 2011 were awarded college credit upon enrolling in a Minnesota college or university. The study found that very selective and selective colleges and universities awarded credit at higher rates than less selective institutions. Furthermore, the characteristics of students who successfully transferred their credits were identified: female, affluent, high-achieving, and white students were awarded college credit at higher rates than male, low-income, middle-achieving, and minority students. The study did not shed light as to why credits were not accepted by colleges and universities.

Based on Davis, Smither, Zhu & Stephan's (2017) finding, notable misalignment exists between dual credit participation and successful credit transfer in Minnesota colleges and universities. Minnesota postsecondary institutions set their own dual credit transfer policies. This means that there is variation in acceptance across colleges and universities, and the credits that are accepted may not count toward the student's program of study.

## **Equity and Access**

Dual credit programs offer pathways for under-represented, low-income or middle-achieving students to earn college credit in high school. Dual credit programs have been proven to have a greater positive effect on low-income students than their affluent peers (An, 2012). These programs can be used more broadly to increase access to degree attainment for under-represented populations in higher education. Persistent access and equity issues, however, create roadblocks for transformational change. Student eligibility standards, transportation for PSEO programs, and access to college-level content in poor and working class schools create barriers for under-represented and low-income students (Zinth, 2014). In 2016, 38% of students in Minnesota

were considered low-income<sup>1</sup> and 32% were students of color, yet these students were under-represented in dual credit and exam-based credit programs. For example, just 12% of AP students were low-income and only 17% were students of color in the 2015-2016 school year (Minnesota Department of Education, 2016). Students of color and low-income students on average represent 5% - 36% of the classroom demographic across all programs. Affluent white students participate and benefit from dual credit and exam-based credit offerings at a much higher rate than students of color and low-income students.

## Monitoring Course Rigor

Concerns over course rigor and monitoring success in dual credit programs have risen in recent years. Researchers and advocates for dual credit programs discuss recommendations for controlling, standardizing, or improving course quality (ACT, 2014; Krueger, 2006; Lowe, 2010, Taylor, Borden & Park, 2015). The simulation of an authentic college experience for high school students is brought to question when students are not required to leave their high schools in order to participate in college-level courses (Higher Learning Commission, 2013). The National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) was founded to assure that concurrent enrollment courses are as rigorous as those taught on a college campus through a meticulous accreditation process. NACEP sets clear standards for concurrent enrollment programs and the instruction of these courses. Additionally, NACEP encourages institutional accountability through impact studies, student surveys, and program evaluations. Minnesota's statewide coalition, the Minnesota Concurrent Enrollment Partnership (MnCEP), offers additional support for enhancing and monitoring quality through partnerships.

In contrast to concurrent enrollment courses, the quality standards of PSEO programs are rarely questioned in literature. PSEO courses are often taught by the partnering college or university either on the college/university campus or online, therefore content is directly monitored by the postsecondary institution and not distinguished from the institution's overall academic curriculum standards. Furthermore, PSEO can offer an on-campus experience that encourages academic and social-emotional development for high school students.

Monitoring for student success requires collaboration and data-sharing between the partnering postsecondary institution and the students' high school. For this reason, it may be challenging for partnering postsecondary institutions to ensure maximum support and success for high school students when compared to the support systems already in place at high schools for students taking concurrent enrollment courses. Monitoring course rigor may not consider other measures of student success.

## K-12/Postsecondary Partnerships

The expansion of dual credit and exam-based credit programs have made partnerships essential for creating successful pipelines for student achievement (Karp, 2015). Partnerships between school districts and postsecondary institutions remain foundational to the success of dual credit and exam-based credit programs. School districts, postsecondary institutions, policymakers and community leaders actively work together to create educational opportunities from early childhood education to career with advanced course-taking opportunities paramount in their work. The 2003 creation of the Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership is an example of organized, strategic efforts by the state of Minnesota to collaborate across systems in order to advance P-20 agendas that include dual credit and exam-based credit program development. Representatives

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<sup>1</sup> Based on federal free and reduced-price lunch participation

from various institutions that specialize in education (elementary, secondary and postsecondary), policy, business, and/or community outreach collaborate on creating a “seamless system of education that maximizes achievements of all students, from early childhood through elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education” (Minn. Stat. §127A.70). Formalized common goals of the Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership include: 1) increasing postsecondary attainment for Minnesota residents and 2) concurrent enrollment standard enforcement.

When making recommendations for state or federal dual credit reforms, dual credit analysts often include strengthening high school and college partnerships as a key part of those reforms (Henderson & Hodne, 2016; Karp, 2015; Lowe, 2010; Taylor, Borden & Park, 2015). In addition to formal councils, Minnesota districts and postsecondary institutions are establishing partnership-based P-20/P-16 positions to catalyze cooperative organization between systems.

## How do students currently submit dual credit/exam-based credit to institutions for acceptance?

### **Step 1: Understand the process**

When a student enrolls in a concurrent enrollment, PSEO, or articulated college credit course, the college or university that partners with their high school starts a college transcript for the student that includes a course identifier and their grade in the course. Students who enroll in these types of courses must be aware of which postsecondary institution is partnering with their high school, as they will need to request their transcript from that college or university. For example, if a student is taking a concurrent enrollment class with St. Paul College and a PSEO class from Normandale Community College, both institutions create college transcripts for them. It is important that the student knows where they are taking courses from so that they can later request their transcripts from these institutions.

When a student takes an AP, CLEP, or IB exam, they must be aware of the parent organization that files their test score. For AP and CLEP, this organization is CollegeBoard. For IB, this organization is International Baccalaureate. Students should register on the organization’s website and get comfortable browsing the website, so they can later request their test scores online.

### **Step 2: Complete your Course or Exam**

The student completes a dual credit course or takes an exam with CollegeBoard/IB.

### **Step 3: Request your Transcript or Score**

The student must request that their transcript (dual credit) be sent from the credit-earning institution, or that their score (exam-based credit) be sent from the parent organization to their destination college.

Dual Credit example: If a student took a PSEO class with Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) their senior year of high school and is now enrolling at the University of Minnesota as a freshman, they must request that their transcript be sent from MCTC to the University of Minnesota in order to receive credit for the class that they took their senior year.

*Note: If a student took a course from the college or university that they later enroll in as a freshman, no action needs to be taken in order for their credit to transfer. In the example above, if the student took a course at MCTC their senior year and then enroll at MCTC as a freshman, they do not need to submit transcripts. The course is already on their MCTC college transcript.*

Exam-based Credit Example: If a student took an AP exam and is enrolling at St. Catherine University, they must log onto the CollegeBoard website and request that their AP score be sent to St. Catherine University. If they already know that they will attend St. Catherine University at the time that they take their AP exam, they can request that their score be sent to St. Catherine University at the time that they take the exam.

*Continued on next page.*

#### **Step 4: How to Send Transcripts and Scores**

Dual Credit: Requesting and sending transcripts can differ from college to college. Typically, students can request their official transcript from the Office of the Registrar. Many postsecondary institutions allow students to request their official transcript online. Some colleges and universities require students to download and sign a release form and send it to the Registrar before they can access their official transcript. If a physical official transcript is requested, it must be signed and sealed by the Registrar and cannot be opened before reaching the destination college. Some institutions charge students a small fee for requesting their official transcript. Official transcripts are sent to the records /Registrar's office at their destination college. Students can find the address online, or call the office for more information.

*Note: If a student is transferring their credit from one Minnesota State college or university to another (i.e. from Rainy River Community College to Pine Technical and Community College), the Registrar can electronically send official transcripts to the destination college. In any other case (i.e. the student took a PSEO course at Metropolitan State University and is transferring the credit to Augsburg College), the official transcripts will need to be physically mailed or securely transferred from one college to the other. Minnesota lacks a statewide electronic transcript system.*

Exam-based Credit: Students can log in to CollegeBoard or IB's website and send exam scores (physically or electronically) to their destination college. These scores would again be sent to the records/Registrar's office. In the case of IB, college Registrars have the option to create an account with IB and check students' scores online. Detailed instructions on how to send exam scores can be found on the CollegeBoard and International Baccalaureate's websites.

#### **Step 5: Follow-up on Credit Acceptance**

The student follows up with the college or university that they enroll in as a freshman to make sure all of the credit they submitted is applied to their college transcript (and to see *how* their credit is applied). The student can speak with the college or university's Registrar, or check their unofficial college transcript online.

*Note: Students may have to go through this process multiple times in order to submit all of the credit they earned in high school. For example, a student might take a concurrent enrollment course with the University of Minnesota, a PSEO course from Lake Superior College, and take multiple AP exams in high school. This student is then admitted to Gustavus Adolphus College. They would need to request official transcripts be mailed from the University of Minnesota and Lake Superior College to Gustavus Adolphus College, and log into CollegeBoard to request scores from each exam be sent to Gustavus Adolphus College.*

# **Study Overview**

This legislatively mandated study required Minnesota Office of Higher Education to “...gather and share information related to the acceptance policies for concurrent enrollment courses, postsecondary enrollment options courses, advanced placement courses, and international baccalaureate courses” (Minn. Laws 2016 Chapter 189 Article 1 Section 20). In order to accommodate this mandate, OHE launched an online survey in November 2016 to inventory dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance policies at all public and private colleges in Minnesota. A total of 80 postsecondary institutions were identified, with 80 responses recorded, for a 100% response rate. The Office of Higher Education is creating a centralized inventory of policies in order to document credit transferability for students who are currently engaging in or are considering engaging in dual credit/exam-based credit coursework in their high school.

## **Prior Studies**

Similar studies around institutional dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies have been conducted in Washington and Illinois.

The Washington study focused on exam-based credit, specifically examining acceptance policies at public colleges and universities around AP, IB, and Cambridge International (CI). The policy review identified a broad range of differences in the programs institutions recognize, how they evaluate credit, the courses they award credit for, and how they communicate this information to students and families (Burke & Martin, 2014).

Significant findings include:

- Washington’s postsecondary institutions show dramatic differences in how each recognizes exam-based credit programs
- Exam-based credit acceptance policies for each institution can be difficult for prospective students to find
- A lack of clarity exists around how many credits students will be awarded for each exam, and
- Exam-based credit programs are less certain to earn college credit than dual credit programs in Washington State.

In Illinois, the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign conducted a survey that captured the current practices and policies on dual credit admissions in four-year colleges and universities. Twenty-nine four-year institutions participated in the survey. Twenty-five of the 29 institutions were found to have awarded college credit for dual credit courses, all of which required that 1) students earn a minimum grade in the dual credit course and 2) the dual credit course was taken at an accredited institution. The survey also found that data-tracking strategies for dual credit acceptance were not well implemented in many four-year institutions. Over half of the institutions defaulted to their general transfer credit policy when making admissions decisions for students who have completed dual credit coursework (Makela, 2005).

Since the OCCRL survey also examined state-wide dual credit acceptance policies, Minnesota’s survey was heavily influenced by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s work. The survey questions were modified to be applicable to Minnesota, and expanded to include 2-year institutions. The Office of Higher Education also opted to include specific questions around the amount of credit awarded for each dual credit and exam-based credit program, which is not included in the 2005 OCCRL survey.

## This Study

The Dual Credit Acceptance Policy survey was created by OHE to inventory the dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies of Minnesota colleges and universities. By surveying the colleges and universities on their dual credit acceptance/transfer policies, OHE took a snapshot of dual credit policies in Minnesota. The survey results allow OHE to disseminate relevant information for public knowledge and use. This information could inform students' selection of college courses in high school, and/or help them make more educated choices during the college application process.

Comparable studies from Washington and Illinois were used to develop Minnesota's study. A draft of the Dual Credit Acceptance Policy Survey, created using the OCCRL survey as a model, allowed a small group of key stakeholders to provide feedback on the pilot survey. From the feedback provided, the survey was further modified and refined. A list of these stakeholders can be found in Appendix A, Section 1.

Testing the pilot survey highlighted areas where more communication and understanding about the entirety of dual credit policies may be needed. The pilot group challenged the original structure of the survey based on the distinct role divide in practicing/administering these policies on college campuses. In some institutions, responsibility for concurrent enrollment credit acceptance may be housed in a different department than that of AP and IB or PSEO. If not in distinct departments, there still may be different decision-making authorities (e.g. college dean, faculty committee) for each type of credit-earning program, or even academic subject. The final survey grouped questions on like programs together in order to accommodate these departmental divides. Overall, what this feedback suggests is that more communication and universal understanding of these policies across departments and roles could reduce confusion within institutions, and assist in creating a more systematic process for making dual credit/exam-based credit decisions. This could potentially impact students who seek information on dual credit and exam-based credit policies from the institutions.

Between November and December 2016, OHE administered the final survey to staff members of all public, private, for-profit, two-year and four-year higher education institutions located or headquartered in Minnesota. The results of the survey are included in this report. Response rates for the survey can be found in Appendix A, Section 2.

The survey was administered online and consisted of 59 questions in 11 sections. Each institution was given a unique link to the survey and was able to complete it in multiple sessions. The institutions were also given the option to complete the survey on the phone with a research intern at OHE. Due to the level of detail and variety of questions in the survey, it was anticipated that the survey would require some level of collaboration between various positions and/or departments within each college or university. A copy of the survey instrument can be found in Appendix A, Section 3.

## Data Analysis

Once survey results were collected, the data was summarized by grouping responses to key questions regarding dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance. In some cases, the grouped responses were then analyzed by institution type in order to determine trends. Open-ended responses were coded and summarized to capture major themes. The data analysis was intended to create a broad snapshot of dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance policies and practices in Minnesota.

# **Findings**

Minnesota colleges and universities generally have written policies for awarding credit for dual credit and/or exam-based credit programs. In almost all cases, these policies are publicly displayed on the institution's website. In addition to general system-wide guidelines for the Minnesota State and the University of Minnesota systems, individual colleges have specific institutional policies regarding the acceptance and use of dual credit and exam-based credit. However, multiple departments/offices generally oversee the acceptance of dual credit and exam-based credit. Knowledge of specific dual credit and/or exam-based credit programs is dispersed among multiple positions on each campus, which can complicate the communication of policies to potential students and families.

Institutions that do not accept dual credit or exam-based credit tend to serve a non-traditional student population, mainly comprised of students 25 years-old and over who went directly into the workforce or military after high school. The dual credit and exam-based credit types listed in this survey are not relevant to these institutions, as their students generally do not enroll immediately after high school graduation or attempt to transfer credit earned in high school.

## **Dual Credit Acceptance Policies and Practices**

With respect to dual credit, 78 (98%) institutions in this study award college credit for dual credit program participation. Most colleges (88%) noted that they have a written, approved campus policy regarding dual credit acceptance. The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities rely on their general transfer policy when making decisions about credit transfer and do not differentiate between dual credit and general transfer credit. The vast majority of institutions have had an explicit dual credit acceptance policy for more than 10 years (70%) and post the policy on their university website (96%). OHE collected the URLs of these policies in the survey and intends to centralize this information for prospective students on the Minnesota Office of Higher Education website.

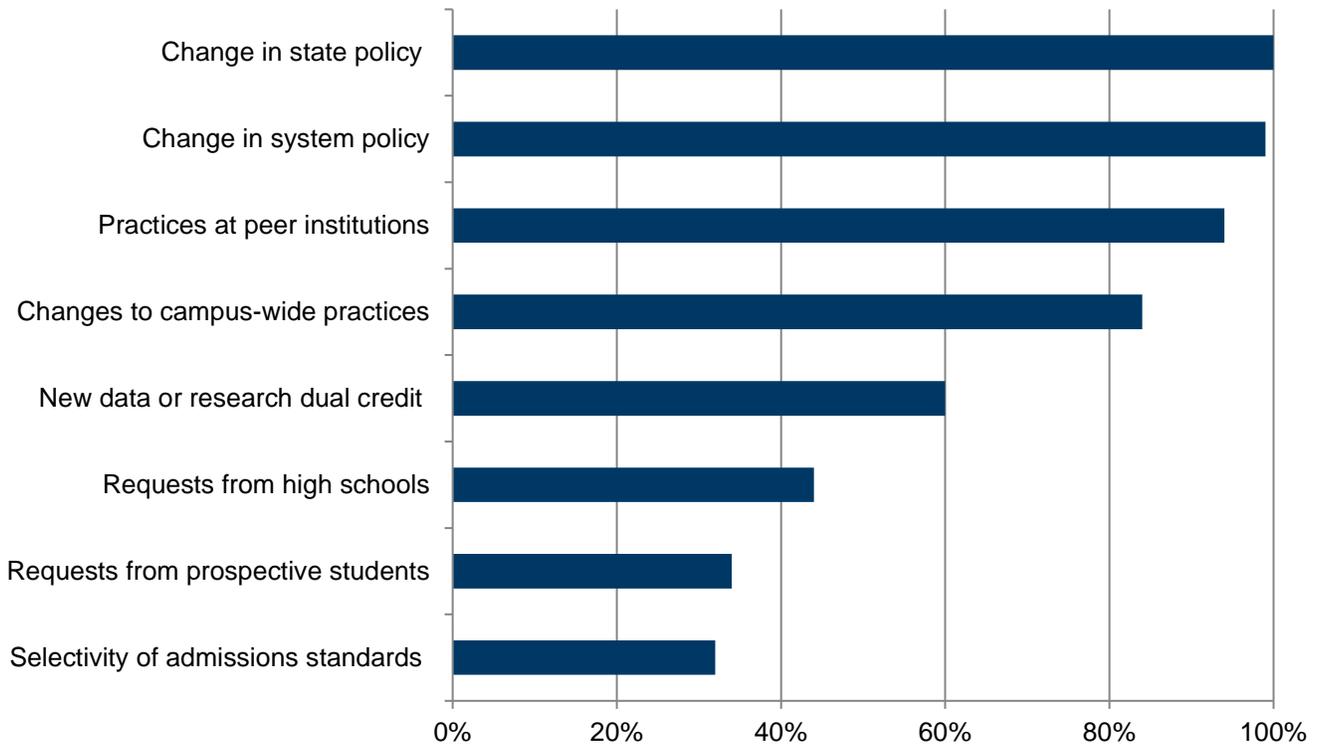
Two institutions do not accept dual credit: Walden University and Argosy University. Both schools are private for-profit institutions. These schools serve non-traditional students who do not typically enroll immediately after high school and/or attempt to transfer dual credit courses. Walden University and Argosy University both accept other types of credit, such as credit for prior learning, military credit and industry credentials, which are more relevant to their student-body. For example, these institutions consider military credit, industry credentials (such as NOCTI for manufacturing) and/or credit for prior learning when making decisions on credit transfer.

Takoda Institute of Higher Education would award credit for dual credit participation but have not enrolled students who have attempted to transfer any of the credit types mentioned in this survey. Therefore, Takoda Institute of Higher Education is listed as accepting all credit types examined in this survey.

## **Policy Development**

In order to understand if policies are continuously adapted to changing circumstances, OHE asked institutions under what conditions they revise or change their institutional dual credit acceptance policies. The institutions most often reference state level policy change, system level policy change, and practices at peer institutions when developing or making changes to their dual credit acceptance policy. All factors are listed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Influential Factors in Dual Credit Acceptance Policy Adaptation, by Percentage of Respondents**



Other influential factors include Higher Learning Commission’s accreditation standards and academic standards set by faculty councils.

Dual credit policy decisions are typically shared among multiple offices on campuses, with the Transfer Specialist, College Dean, and academic department listed most commonly as responsible for final decisions and changes.

### Credit Acceptance

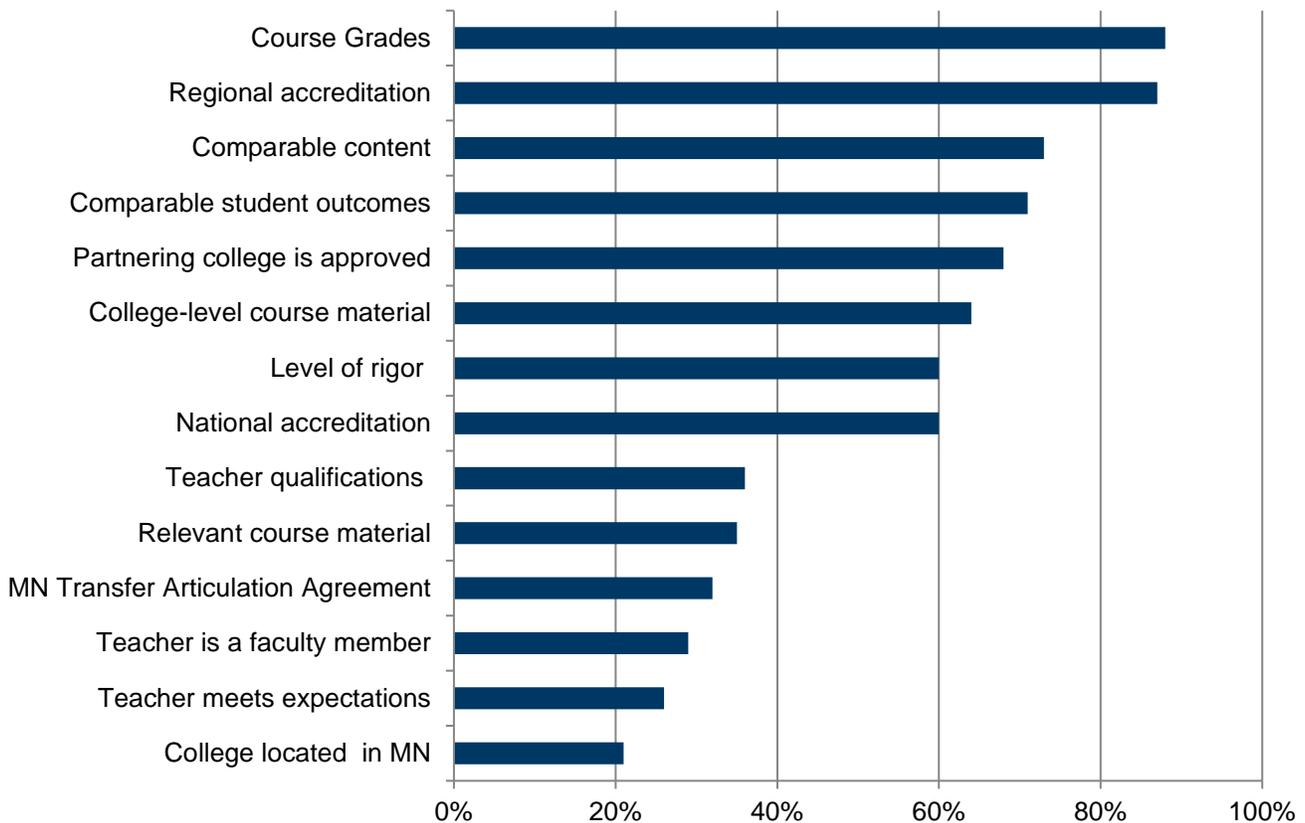
Regardless of whether a formal, written dual credit acceptance policy exists within an institution, each institution utilizes a set of criteria for granting college credit to new freshmen students. Respondents were given a list of 14 criteria associated with acceptance of dual credits and asked if they are used by their institution. A full list is provided below:

- Student's grade is above minimum cut-off set by college or university
- Institution that partnered with high school is regionally accredited
- Dual credit course has comparable course content to that of the aligned course within credit-granting institution
- Dual credit course has comparable student outcomes to that of the aligned course within credit-granting institution
- Institution that partnered with high school is recognized by credit-granting institution
- Material taught in dual credit course has been deemed college-level by credit-granting institution
- Dual credit course has a comparable level of rigor to that of the aligned course within the credit-granting institution
- Institution that partnered with high school is nationally accredited
- The teacher of dual credit course meets or exceeds the state qualifications and guidelines

- Material taught in dual credit course has been deemed up to date and relevant by credit-granting institution
- The dual credit course syllabus includes MN Transfer Articulation Agreement objectives
- The teacher of dual credit course is a current representative of a postsecondary institution (faculty member or adjunct professor)
- The teacher of dual credit course meets or exceeds the qualifications set by the credit-granting institution
- Institution that partnered with high school is located in the state of Minnesota

The top three criteria are 1) the student’s grade was above the minimum cut-off (88%), 2) the postsecondary institution that partnered with the student’s high school is regionally accredited (87%), and 3) the content taught in the dual credit course is comparable to the content taught in the aligned course at the credit-granting institution (73%).

**Figure 3. Criterion Used for Awarding Credit to Students, by Percentage of Colleges**



Many colleges and universities noted that many of the criteria listed above are only vetted when the dual credit course is developed, and do not take these factors (such as level of rigor, relevant course material, and comparable student outcomes) into account when awarding credit to students. On occasion, the credit-granting institution may make a specific inquiry into the dual credit course and ask the partnering institution for a syllabus, which is then reviewed by the corresponding academic department within their college.

## Distinctions between CTE and Liberal Arts Courses

In the Dual Credit Acceptance Policy survey, Articulated College Credit focused on articulated Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. In recent years, the definition of Articulated College Credit has expanded to include other academic areas, particularly in the STEM fields. Because the majority of courses that rely on articulated agreements are still primarily in CTE subjects, and because of the historic relationship between articulated agreements and CTE courses, OHE prompted colleges and universities to answer questions around Articulated College Credit in the context of CTE courses.

When awarding college credit for dual credit courses, colleges differentiate between courses in the liberal arts/sciences and CTE courses. About half (56%) of the surveyed institutions differentiate between CTE and liberal arts courses when granting college credit. Highly technical CTE courses are typically not offered at liberal arts colleges, so there would be no college course equivalent. Some liberal arts colleges may accept general CTE courses in areas like law enforcement or nursing, as long as they offer a college course equivalent on their campus. There also may be further distinctions made between CTE courses that are designated as part of a certificate program versus a full degree program.

CTE courses are not covered by the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum, so there are no statewide guidelines for awarding credit for these courses. Schools that do grant credit for CTE courses often have the syllabi approved by faculty members within their aligned department. Furthermore, at many colleges and universities there is a five-year time window for acceptance on CTE courses taken in high school, while liberal arts courses have no time window.

## Credit Use

Beyond awarding college credit for a student's involvement in PSEO, concurrent enrollment or articulated credit programs, dual credit acceptance policies may guide how these credits are applied once the student is enrolled.

### *Application of Credits towards College Transcript*

Almost all institutions allow these credits to be applied to the student's college transcript in a way that can accelerate time to graduation. Almost all colleges and universities (97%) allow credit earned through successful participation in a dual credit course to count toward a student's core requirements. Other popular methods of applying dual credits include counting the credits towards elective classes (89%) and counting the credits towards major requirements (83%). Even so, many final decisions that are made at the institutional level are situational depending on the student's intended major and if/how the courses fit into the student's requirements for degree completion. While many of the final decisions made are situational, all of these options have potential for shortening a student's time toward graduation and reducing the overall cost of postsecondary education for the student.

### *Credit Limits and Caps*

Most colleges (85%) do not place a limit on how many credits a new freshman can be granted for dual credit participation. Institutions that do have a maximum cap largely follow their general transfer policy and do not differentiate between new freshmen and transfer student limits. Three schools (two private non-profit and one within the University of Minnesota system) limit the number of credits new freshmen can bring with them and have a lower cap for new freshmen versus transfer students.

In addition, two private non-profit institutions and one public Minnesota State institution name specific stipulations regarding dual credit or exam-based credit acceptance. For example, Hamline University awards a

maximum of 64 credits across both dual credit and exam-based credit. South Central College limits the number of technical credits students can apply to an Associates of Arts degree to 16 credits.

Even if colleges and universities do not limit students on the number of credits they transfer in, policy limitations might affect student participation. Due to eligibility standards and limits on participation under Minn. §124.09D, students are effectively limited in the number of credits they can possibly transfer into college as new freshmen. For example, eleventh-grade students are limited to no more than two academic years of PSEO participation, therefore it may be rare for those students to attempt to transfer in more than 60 credits due to time limitations. However, high schools are starting to encourage students to enroll in multiple types of dual credit courses, such as concurrent enrollment and PSEO, and/or take exams for credit in order to boost the number of credits students can accrue.

### *Requirements for New Freshmen vs. Transfer Students*

Only one college, the University of Minnesota Morris, noted that they have additional requirements for their new freshmen students. They stated the following distinction, “New [freshmen] students must take a Morris writing course even if they have completed college-level composition courses during high school. Transfer students are not given this requirement.”

Even schools without formal credit limits tend to have residency requirements which mandate that students complete a pre-determined amount of their coursework within that institution in order to graduate. These residency requirements can vary by institution, but it was determined that most colleges require that 1/3 of the student’s coursework take place on their campus. For example, Alexandria Community and Technical College, a Minnesota State institution, requires that a minimum of 1/3 of the student’s total program credits must be taught by faculty conferring the award. National American University, a private for-profit college, requires students to complete 25% of their coursework at their institution in order to graduate. Therefore, for a Bachelor of Science degree of 180 credits, National American University will accept up to 135 credits from another institution.

## **Exam-based Credit Acceptance Policies and Practices**

Almost all institutions (95%) award credit to students with passing scores in AP, IB and CLEP. Four institutions do not award credit for any of these exams: Duluth Business University (private non-profit), Minneapolis Business College (private for-profit), Leech Lake Tribal College (non-profit), and Summit Academy OIC (non-profit). These schools do not serve a traditional student population and have not historically enrolled students who take these tests. Summit Academy OIC is a vocational school specializing in skills-based trades, so AP, IB and CLEP subjects do not align closely with the courses that they offer.

Of the three exams listed in this survey, AP was the most widely accepted. All of the colleges that accept exam-based credit award credit for passing AP exams.

There are two options for students taking IB courses: Standard Level (SL) and Higher Level (HL). While IB notes that the content and level of rigor are comparable, HL courses require students to engage in at least 240 instructed hours of coursework, while SL requires 150 hours of instruction (International Baccalaureate, 2015). Almost all institutions award credit for passing IB exams (95%), however there is a clear distinction between SL and HL IB in terms of credit acceptance. Most colleges and universities use HL exam scores as the standard and may not accept or award the same number of credits for SL exams.

While the acceptance rate is very high overall, CLEP exams are the least accepted among these exam-types (91%). Out of the seven institutions that do not accept CLEP, five are private non-profit institutions. Even colleges and universities that claim accept CLEP overall may only actually accept a few specific subject exams.

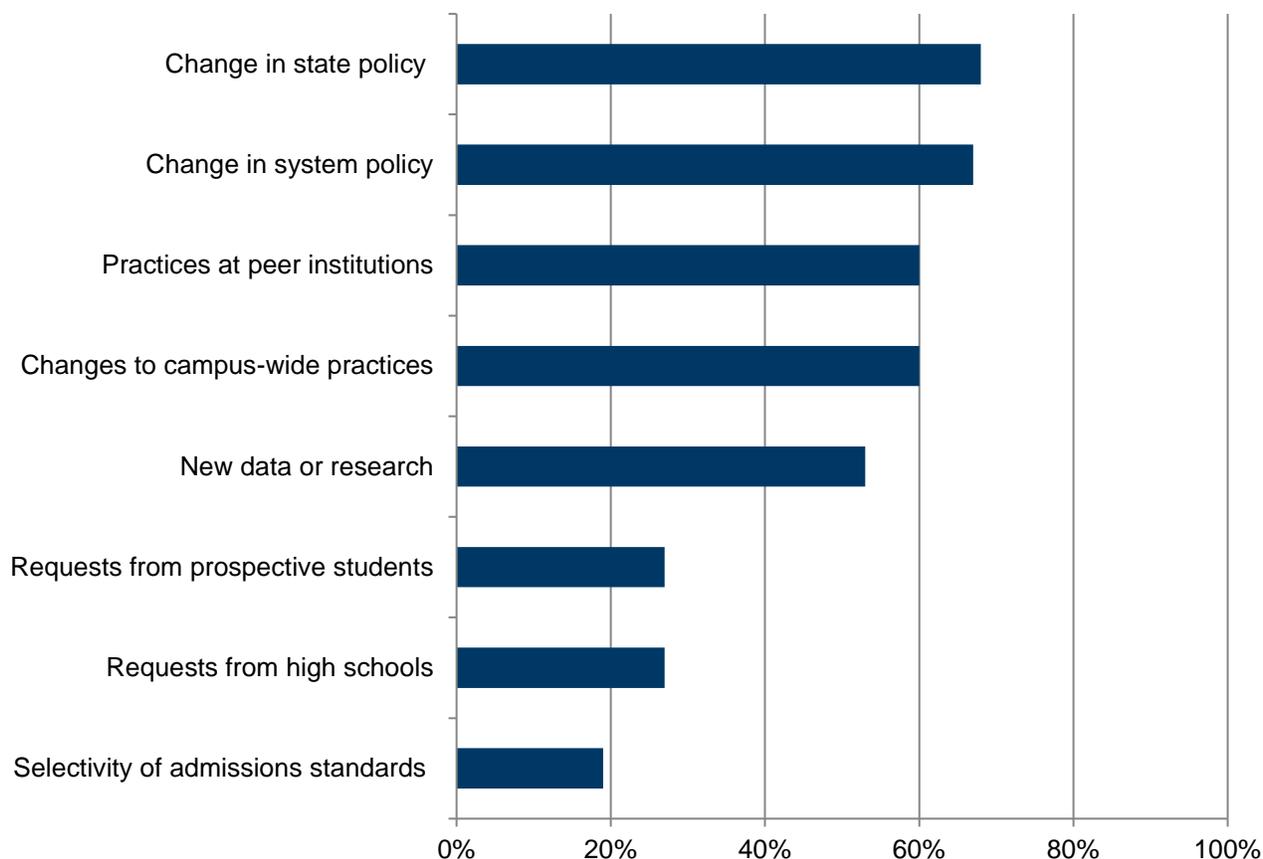
## Policy Development

Most colleges (95%) noted that they have a written, approved campus policy regarding exam-based credit acceptance. The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities rely on their system-wide policies for AP, IB, and CLEP. Each exam type has its own dedicated policy which states that Minnesota State institutions will award credit for all passing exams. Passing grades are listed in each policy and are used as the standard system-wide.

Many institutions have had an explicit exam-based credit acceptance policy for more than 10 years (61%) and post the policy on their university website (93%). OHE collected the URLs of these policies in the survey and intend to centralize this information for prospective students on the Minnesota Office of Higher Education website.

In order to understand if policies are continuously adapted to changing circumstances, OHE asked institutions under what conditions they revise or change their institutional exam-based credit acceptance policies. The institutions most often reference state level policy change, system level policy change, and practices at peer institutions when developing or making changes to their exam-based credit acceptance policy. All factors are listed in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Influential Factors in Exam-based Credit Acceptance Policy Development, by Percentage of Respondents**



Another influential factor is the American Council on Education guidelines. The American Council on Education currently produces the National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training, which contains credit recommendations for courses and examinations offered by businesses, unions, the government, and the

military (“ACE CREDIT...”, 2017). AP and CLEP are currently included in their National Guide. Additional influential factors include AP, IB and CLEP standards, and academic department standards.

Exam-based credit acceptance policy decisions are typically shared among multiple offices on campuses, with the Registrar, College Dean, and academic department listed most commonly as responsible for final decisions and changes. Typically, colleges and universities consult with faculty to when subject exams are added to College Board or IB.

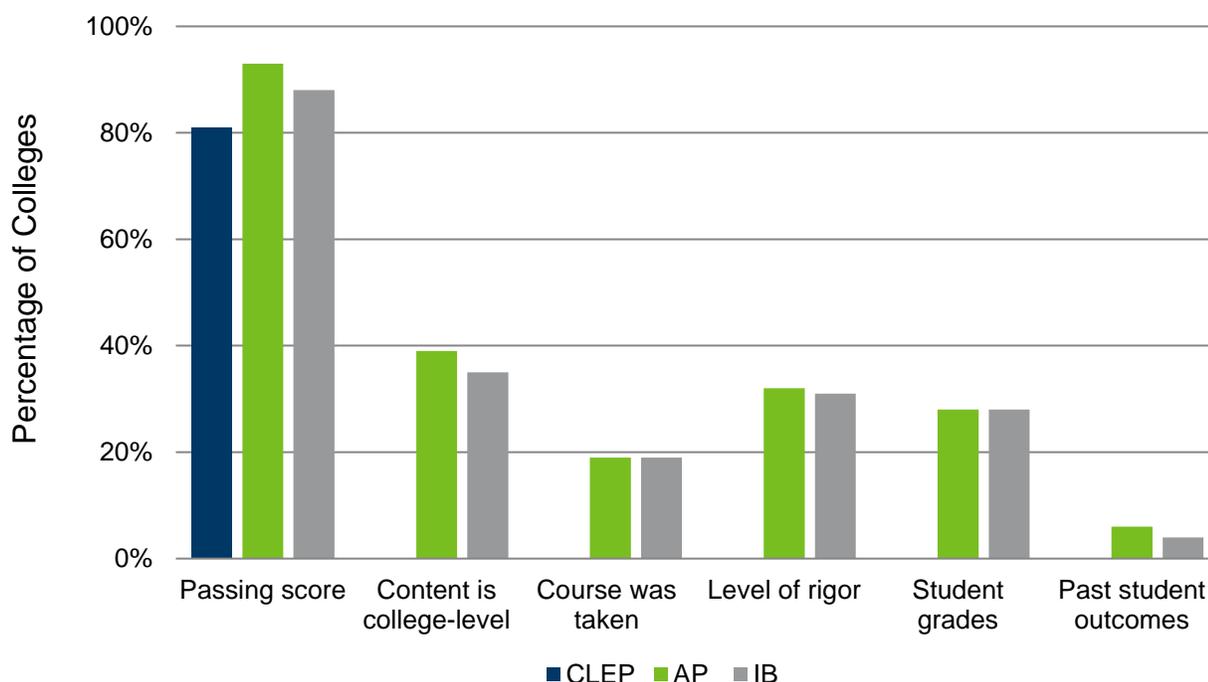
## Credit Acceptance

Regardless of whether there is a formal, written exam-based credit acceptance policy within an institution, colleges use a set of criteria when granting college credit to new freshmen students. Respondents were given a list of 6 criteria associated with acceptance of dual credits and asked if they are used by their institution. A full list is provided below:

- Student received a score that is considered “passing” by credit-granting institution (applies to AP, IB and CLEP)
- Content on exam and in accompanying course is considered college-level by credit-granting institution (applies to AP and IB)
- Accompanying course was taken by student prior to taking the exam (applies to AP and IB)
- The level of rigor in the accompanying course is comparable to the aligned college course at credit-granting institution (applies to AP and IB)
- Student’s grade in the accompanying course is considered when awarding credit for their exam (applies to AP and IB)
- Past student outcomes are considered when awarding credit for the exam (applies to AP and IB)

Almost all institutions award credit solely on the student’s exam score; the vast majority of colleges do not use any other factor when granting credit for exams. Most colleges noted that criteria on quality and rigor are vetted by College Board/International Baccalaureate and do not take these factors into account when awarding credit to students. Special circumstances, such as the student passing an exam for which there is no corresponding course, are handled on a case-by-case basis.

**Figure 5. Criterion Used for Awarding Credit to Students**



## Credit Use

Beyond awarding college credit for a student’s passing score on AP, IB, or CLEP exams, exam-based credit acceptance policies may guide how these credits are applied once the student is enrolled. For example, college credit awarded for passing exams could count towards a student’s core requirements, effectively replacing the equivalent course taught at the college. Or, in rare cases, the credit awarded for exams may only count as elective credits. The way that credit is applied to a student’s transcript matters when creating smooth high school-to-college transitions for students and keeping them on track to graduation.

### *Application of Credits towards College Transcript*

A very high percentage of institutions allow these credits to be applied to the student’s college transcript in a way that can speed up time to graduation. Almost all colleges and universities (93%) apply exam-based credit toward core requirements. Most colleges and universities (89%) permit these credits to be counted towards the student’s major. Both can potentially save students money and time to degree completion.

Almost all respondents allow these credits to count toward graduation. Only one private for-profit institution, Capella University, noted that they do not allow exam-based credits to count toward graduation.

### *Credit Limits and Caps*

Most colleges and universities (72%) do not place a limit on how many credits a new freshman can be granted for test-taking. Institutions that do have a maximum cap largely follow their general transfer policy and do not differentiate between new freshmen and transfer student limits. Two institutions, College of St. Benedicts/St. John’s University and Gustavus Adolphus College, limit the number of credits new freshmen can bring with them and have a lower cap for new freshmen versus transfer students. Bethel University specifically limits the number of credits students can earn by taking exams to 30, however they do not have a limit on credits students can transfer through dual credit course-taking.

### *Requirements for New Freshmen vs. Transfer Students*

Besides these caps, no college differentiates between credit acceptance policies for new freshmen and transfer students in regard to AP, IB and CLEP.

### *Individual Subject Exams for AP, IB, and CLEP*

There are currently 39 AP subject exams, 26 IB subject exams, and 38 CLEP subject exams that span the liberal arts and sciences. OHE asked all colleges that award credit for passing AP, IB and CLEP exams to indicate whether or not each subject exam is accepted in their institution, the score required for each subject exam in order for students to be awarded college credit, and the number of credits that are awarded for each passing subject exam. The specific results will be posted on OHE's website and made public for prospective students. See Appendices B for full results by test-type.

### *Advanced Placement*

AP is the most widely accepted exam in Minnesota, with the least level of variation between acceptance of individual subject exams. Most institutions require students to score 3 points or more out of 5 on an AP subject exam to be awarded college credit. Some private non-profit colleges require a score of 4 points or more in order to be awarded college credit. Required scores vary per subject exam and institution, with some subject exams not accepted. In particular, AP Research and AP Seminar are rarely accepted by any institution. Most colleges (91%) inform students of the AP scores that they require and make this information public. Many colleges (82%) also inform students of how many credits they will be awarded for passing exams and make this information public.

### *International Baccalaureate*

Most institutions require students to score 4 points or more out of 7 on an IB subject exam to be awarded college credit. Many colleges indicated that their required scores vary. Some private non-profit colleges require scores of 5 points or more in order to qualify for college credit. Again, most colleges indicated that the number of credits they award for passing exams vary. One institution, Concordia University – St. Paul, noted that their faculty finds it difficult to evaluate IB exams for credit, and that it would be helpful if the American Council on Education (ACE) had a recommendation they could use. Most colleges (88%) inform students of the IB scores that they require and make this information public. Many colleges (87%) also inform students of how many credits they will be awarded for passing exams and make this information public.

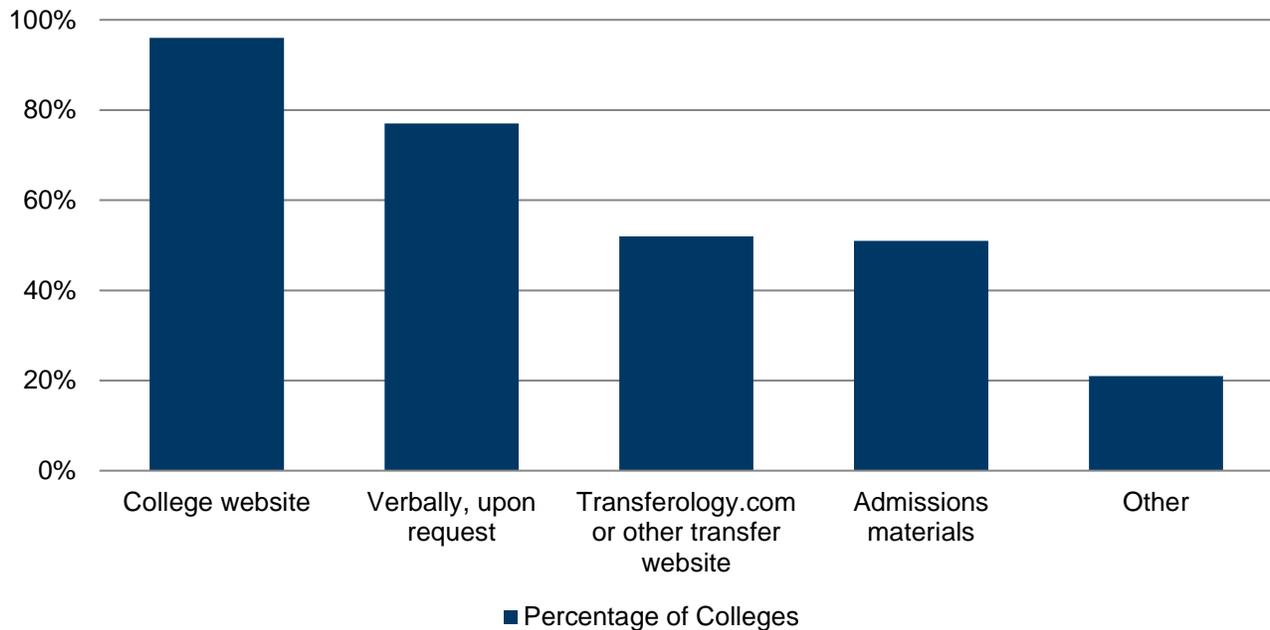
### *College Level Examination Program*

CLEP exams are the least accepted exam in Minnesota. Almost all institutions that accept CLEP exams require students to score 50 points or more to be awarded college credit, with advanced exams (e.g. French level 2) requiring higher scores of 59 points or more. There is not a common grading scale used for CLEP exams due to variations in difficulty by subject, however College Board considers scores of 50 passing (equated to approximately a C). ACE also recommends that postsecondary institutions consider scores of 50 or more passing, despite variation in grading scale. The survey results showed a high level of variation in how many credits (from 1 credit to 16 credits per exam) colleges awarded to students for passing CLEP exams. Almost all colleges that accept CLEP exams (91%) inform students of the scores that they require and make this information public. Most colleges (87%) also inform students of how many credits they will be awarded for passing exams and make this information public. Because of the high variability seen with CLEP credit acceptance, it is recommended that prospective students consult with the colleges individually.

## Communication of Dual Credit/Exam-based Credit Acceptance Policies

Communication of dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies and practices to prospective students is key to successful credit transfer. Most colleges (96%) post their dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies on their college website, with 77% frequently communicating these policies verbally, upon request, at open houses and via telephone calls.

**Figure 6. Credit Acceptance Policy Communication Method**



Other methods of communication include: college catalogue, open houses and other events, the student handbook, and communication with high schools.

Many colleges indicate that they “sometimes” receive questions regarding their credit acceptance policies, with eight colleges noting that they receive questions “very often.” These questions include:

- How do classes fit into the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum?
- What exam scores are considered “passing”?
- What is the likelihood that my credits will transfer?
- Will my credits count towards my degree?
- Which of my dual credit courses or subject exams will transfer?
- Are official transcripts necessary to transfer my credits?

OHE intends to use these questions to inform the dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policy webpage and will centralize this information for prospective students.

## Discussion

The language of *Minnesota Statute §136A.87(b)* tasked OHE to gather and share dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance policies for Minnesota colleges and universities. Based on the findings of the survey, OHE concludes that issues of credit transferability are not related to institutional policy. The survey conducted by OHE identifies that, overall, Minnesota’s colleges and universities have formal, written dual credit and exam-based credit policies that guide decisions when enrolling new freshmen students with prior college credit.

These policies are posted on the college website and sometimes also included on printed materials, discussed at college events, and communicated to prospective students through partnering high schools. Furthermore, the vast majority of institutions accept dual credit/exam-based credit, or would be open to accepting this credit if students attempted to transfer them. Based on this study, private non-profit institutions seem to hold their credit acceptance to a higher level of scrutiny than the other institution-types, but there is a level of variability among them as well. With some notable exceptions, private for-profit institutions, tribal colleges, and private 2-year institutions are less prone to have policies in place to handle dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance, but do not encounter the situation often, if at all.

While it seems that almost all colleges and universities are prepared to handle dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance, contrasting the results of this survey with the finding that only 51% of Minnesota dual credit students transfer their credits into college (Davis, Smither, Zhu & Stephan, 2017) suggests that there is a problem around dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance. Based on the results of OHE's study, the root cause is not related to institutional policies or communication of their policies. Why, then, are almost half of students not transferring their credits into college? OHE's study cannot answer this question with the data collected from the institutions. Logical speculation leads to two other possible causes: a) students do not try to transfer the credits into college or b) there is significant misalignment between institutional policy and institutional practice.

## Student Knowledge

In order to best determine why students do not attempt to transfer dual credit/exam-based credit once in college, further research would need to be conducted that centers on students and student choice. However, there are speculative reasons as to why students do not attempt to transfer these credits. Examples include: 1) students are not aware that they are responsible for the credit transfer, 2) students do not know how to initiate credit transfer, or believe it to be too much work, 3) students decide to take dual credit/exam-based credit courses for the experience and are not concerned with earning credit, 4) students do not earn credit in their dual credit/exam-based credit course due to poor grades or exam scores, 5) students do not understand that passing the dual credit course or exam results in college credit, or do not know what college credit means/how it could benefit them, 6) students perceive that the college or university would not accept their credit, and 7) students consciously decide not to transfer their credit due to mediocre grades (i.e. a C in a PSEO or concurrent enrollment course) or because they'd rather take the course at the college they are enrolled in.

For students who attempt to transfer their credits, OHE's study reveals that there is not a universal acceptance policy that all colleges rely on. Students need to put in time and effort to seek out which postsecondary institution will best accommodate their credit transfer. Because of the nuance involved in dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance, these programs should not be advertised to students as guaranteed college credit, even when the students are successful these programs. Instead, high schools should put an emphasis on how dual credit/exam-based credit programs provide enhanced course-rigor and academic momentum for students.

## Policy and Practice Misalignment

While it would take further research to determine student choice around dual credit/exam-based credit transfer, OHE's dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policy study determines that there may be barriers to successful policy implementation within institutions.

Knowledge and execution of dual credit acceptance policies tends to be scattered among many different roles and departments, and differ from institution to institution. Within college systems with system-wide policies, variation is seen in responses based on practice and understanding of the institutional and system-wide

policies. Fragmented knowledge and decision-making power can potentially lead to inconsistencies and confusion when students attempt to transfer these credits. A focus on universal implementation of institutional and system-wide policy could benefit all institutions and make the process of transferring dual credit/exam-based credit easier for students. The recommendations listed in the following section outline next steps for moving forward with dual credit acceptance policy implementation for the state.

# **Next Steps**

This survey provides evidence that most institutional staff are aware of policies regarding dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance and are facilitating the transfer of these credits on their campuses. Based on the results of this survey, OHE identified four recommendations to facilitate ease of credit acceptance for students who have participated in these programs.

## **1. Educate Students about Dual Credit and Exam-based Credit Acceptance Policies**

Students' lack of awareness of dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies can create potential barriers to successful credit transfer for those participating in dual credit coursework or taking college-level examinations. The details of institutional and system-wide policies can not only be difficult to understand but also tend to vary greatly, even between colleges within the same system. Furthermore, a lack of centralized knowledge around dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies at the institutional level can create confusion for students who have specific questions about how their credits will transfer.

In an effort to share the information gathered by the Dual Credit Acceptance Policy survey to the general public, OHE will create a comprehensive webpage that will host the key results listed in this report. The webpage will be directed towards a student-audience, especially those currently applying to college or considering participation in a dual credit or exam-based credit program. Staff at OHE will create a communication plan around the webpage to best ensure that the webpage reaches its intended audience and is used as a resource for students and families.

Aside from this webpage, OHE recommends supporting P-20/cradle-to-career initiatives across the state (i.e. Generation Next, Minnesota Education Equity Partnership, SPARK, Austin Aspires, Northfield Promise, and Every Hand Joined) in addition to P-20 activities within individual postsecondary institutions and systems. Open communication between high schools and colleges is crucial to creating pathway programs that benefit students. These partnerships should be encouraged to create direct communication plans to inform students families on the realities of dual credit/exam-based credit participation.

## **2. Establish Comprehensive Institutional and System-wide Policy Implementation**

While the results of the Dual Credit Acceptance Policy Survey suggest that dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies are established within postsecondary institutions, respondents did indicate that these policies may not be fully implemented at their college or university. One of the main limitations of surveying institutional staff in this study is that the respondents self-report their level of knowledge of these policies, as well as the frequency of successful credit transfer. Without conducting an audit of credit transfer for new freshmen students, there is no reliable way to guarantee that the practices of these colleges reflect their institutional policies, or that the experiences of students reflect the results of this survey.

Due to this uncertainty, OHE suggests that institutions create ways to facilitate comprehensive implementation of these policies on their campus. In the cases of both dual credit and exam-based credit, institutions often handle credit acceptance and transfer situationally, based on the student's intended area of study and the subject area that they pursued for college credit in high school. The space that is created for situational occurrences can create inconsistent experiences for students that may be contrary to the institution's policy both logistically and in intention. Institutions should formalize the implementation of their dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance policies, and standardize to the greatest extent possible these policies and practices within systems.

The formalization of policy implementation would not be complete without outreach and advocacy across departments on college campuses and within college systems. Shared governance makes it difficult for colleges to centralize knowledge and decision-making around dual credit/exam-based credit on their campuses, however training on policies and how to implement them would benefit staff and faculty across departments. This could take the form of a campus-wide workshop or webinar. System-wide, coordination efforts need to take place in order to ensure that the colleges are communicating and learning from each other.

OHE also suggests that the few institutions that do not have formal policies around dual credit/exam-based credit acceptance actively work to create policies for their schools. Student participation in these programs continues to rise, while simultaneous efforts to increase access to these programs for underrepresented students are expanding. Students who may not have traditionally engaged with dual credit/exam-based credit programs are being encouraged to participate due to the benefits these programs can offer. Re-thinking the need for these policies on a consistent, continuous basis is encouraged for schools without them.

### **3. Invest in Infrastructure Changes to Facilitate Credit Acceptance**

Infrastructure changes can have a large impact on students, especially during the credit acceptance process. Currently, credit acceptance is facilitated through a process of requesting and sending written transcripts from high schools to colleges. This process, while very well established, seems outdated for both students and administrators in the digital age. Moving away from written transcripts to e-transcripts would create a simple and secure process for sending student transcripts between high schools and colleges. States that have implemented a universal e-transcript system include California, Michigan and Indiana.

Naviance and Parchment, two services already contracted with Minnesota high schools, offer e-transcript programs as add-ons to their current services. These programs allow students or counselors to securely send high school transcripts and other application-related forms electronically, with a click of a button, to over 2,000 colleges across the United States. This process is not only a cost savings to the schools, but also frees up counselor time and provides proof of submission for both counselors and students to reference. This reduces the likelihood of missing application items and creates a seamless connection between students, high schools and colleges. The lack of a common high school transcript in Minnesota limits their usability in college admission state-wide. Setting up a state-wide process would allow for easy, uniform transfer auditing. By switching to an e-transcript system, transfer audits could become a routine process with minimal effort.

### **4. Define Success and Clarify Objectives**

On paper, dual credit and exam-based credit acceptance policies are established, functional, and can save students time to degree completion. If well-implemented in Minnesota, dual credit and exam-based credit programs are seamless educational opportunities in which students, particularly under-represented students, can see great returns on their investment. Moving forward, a focus on *who* dual credit and exam-based credit programs are intended for can provide insight into how to invest in these programs successfully. A clear understanding of goals for the state in utilizing these programs would be helpful for future policy-making.

If high schools and postsecondary institutions believe that these programs are for all students, then dual credit/exam-based credit programs are in effect tools for college and career preparation and ought to be treated as such. In this case, increasing access to under-represented and middle-achieving students should be not only encouraged but expected, as studies show that these groups see the greatest advantages from participation (An, 2012).

## Revisit Eligibility Requirements

One way to increase access to middle-achieving students is to re-visit eligibility standards for participation and minimize bias in the selection process. For example, the current policy for concurrent enrollment and PSEO eligibility<sup>2</sup> states 1) juniors rank in the upper one-third of their class or score at or above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on a nationally accredited test 2) seniors rank in the upper one-half of their class or score at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on a nationally accredited test or 3) for juniors or seniors, provide other documentation that shows student's readiness and ability to perform college level work (Minn. Stat. §124D.09). The Legislature should take a critical lens to if and how these criteria impact access for under-represented student participation.

More selective eligibility requirements utilized by selective/very selective colleges and universities could also be reviewed. For example, the University of Minnesota requires a minimum grade point average of 3.3 and two writing samples, and takes other advanced coursework into consideration when enrolling high school students in PSEO courses (University of Minnesota, n.d.). This method eliminates the relative variable that is implicit in class standing and instead uses a fixed variable to determine eligibility. Examining which model is more effecting in recruiting and retaining under-represented students in dual credit programs can identify barriers to achievement for these communities. Understanding where barriers exist in eligibility for under-represented groups can better inform decision-making in the future.

## Invest in Academic Preparation for Under-represented Students

Investments in the academic preparation of under-represented students prior to high school would create equitable opportunities for participation. Research shows that educational disparities exist between under-represented students and students of the dominant demographic in Minnesota. For example, the four-year high school graduation rate was 87% for White students and averaged 66% for students of color in 2015. Among 2013 high school graduates, 53% of Black students, 44% of Hispanic students, 35% of American Indian students, and 37% of Asian students enrolled in developmental education compared to 21% of their White peers (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2016). While many innovations across the state have made headway in addressing historic educational disparities, these disparities still exist today and manifest in the current opportunity gap. Consideration should be taken as to how current and persistent educational disparities impact the lack of racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity in dual credit classrooms. Educational inequities, starting in early childhood/elementary school, can greatly impact the academic trajectory of students and impede them from advanced course-taking opportunities in high school.

## Clarify Target Population

If dual credit/exam-based credit programs exclusively provide access to postsecondary opportunities to already high-achievers the function of these programs is challenged. As it stands, the students who overwhelmingly take advantage of dual credit/exam-based credit courses may also be the students who experience the fewest barriers to college attainment. If the purpose of these programs is to get high-achieving students through college faster, then investment in dual credit/exam-based credit programs should be evaluated against that goal. Given the state's focus on decreasing educational disparities by race, it seems more appropriate to evaluate dual credit policies against metrics of access and success for under-represented students, which highlights the innate conflict between access and current eligibility standards. Engaging in these larger questions, eliminating assumptions, and maintaining a universal understanding of the purpose of dual credit/exam-based credit programs can create clarity around the policy implications that support these programs.

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<sup>2</sup> Alternate eligibility options exist for students with disabilities who wish to participate in CTE programs.

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