



MEASURING SECONDARY CTE PROGRAM QUALITY POSTSECONDARY CREDIT ATTAINMENT

When the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) was reauthorized in July 2018 as the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), it was with an intentional push toward data-driven decisionmaking at both the state and local levels. One of the major changes in Perkins V is that states can now select from among three options for the indicator to measure secondary Career Technical Education (CTE) program quality in their accountability systems:



- The percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school **having attained a recognized postsecondary credential.**¹



- The percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school having **attained postsecondary credits in the relevant CTE program or program of study** earned through a dual or concurrent enrollment program or another credit transfer agreement.



- The percentage of CTE concentrators graduating from high school **having participated in work-based learning.**

This series of briefs draws on data from a 2018 national survey of State CTE Directors to help states adopt robust methods for measuring secondary CTE program quality. It explores the pros and cons of each of the three options and examines different ways states are measuring and validating them. This brief is the third in the series and explores strategies for measuring postsecondary credit attainment.

Why Measure Postsecondary Credit Attainment?

Increasingly, learners need education and training beyond high school to enter occupations with family-sustaining wages. This is why CTE programs of study include, by definition, instruction at the

Key Considerations for Measuring Postsecondary Credit Attainment

States that select postsecondary credit attainment as their secondary CTE program quality indicator should think about:

- Setting clear parameters to encourage alignment of postsecondary credit with learners' programs of study and reliably and accurately capturing this information;
- Establishing statewide articulation agreements so learners can receive credit for postsecondary coursework no matter where they go to college; and
- Aligning this indicator with other accountability measures for related programs.

secondary and postsecondary levels. Early postsecondary opportunities such as dual and concurrent enrollment help facilitate seamless transition from secondary to postsecondary education by allowing high school students to enroll in, complete and receive postsecondary credit for college-level classes.

Participation in early postsecondary opportunities has demonstrated positive outcomes for students in both college enrollment and success. Consider:

- According to a What Works Clearinghouse summary of research studies, dual enrollment positively affects postsecondary degree attainment, college access and enrollment, credit accumulation, high school completion and academic achievement.²
- **Florida** CTE students taking dual enrollment courses were significantly more likely to attend postsecondary education and persist to their second term.³
- In **Arkansas**, students who both concentrated in a CTE program and completed dual enrollment were more likely to go on to postsecondary education than their peers.⁴

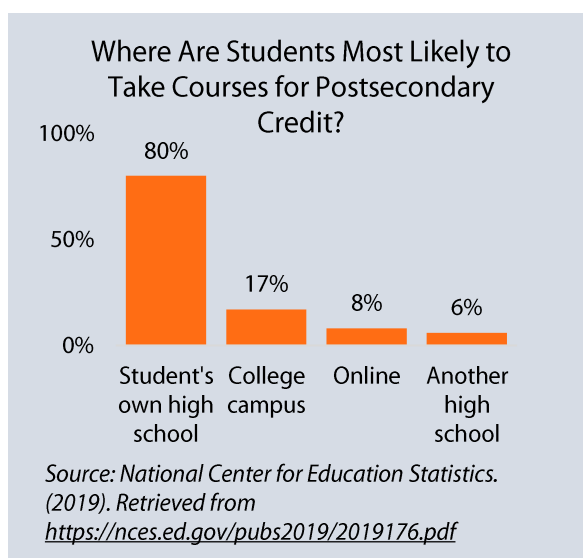
Most states already have processes in place to measure postsecondary credit attainment. According to State Directors, learner-level data on completion of dual or concurrent enrollment are available at the state level in 92 percent of states. Most state leaders can access this information by pulling transcript data directly from their statewide student information system.

Additionally, 33 states are already counting success in dual or concurrent enrollment as a measure of college and career readiness through their Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) or state accountability systems.⁵ Perkins V gives states an opportunity to reinforce these accountability measures and encourage more postsecondary credit attainment in high school.

However, as states put more incentives in place to encourage dual or concurrent enrollment, the risk of superfluous credit inflation is greater. More is not always better. State leaders should set parameters to ensure that students are encouraged to earn postsecondary credit that is aligned to their program of study and likely to articulate as core course credit in their major rather than elective credit.

Defining Postsecondary Credit Attainment

In some states, credit is awarded only retroactively once learners enroll in a postsecondary institution or after they complete an end-of-course exam. In other cases, the credit is immediately applied to a learner's transcript prior to enrolling in college. The requirements for earning credit also vary among states and institutions. Some require students to enroll in and complete a postsecondary course at their high school or a nearby college while others award credit to students who complete an end-of-course assessment or earn an industry-recognized credential. Defining the difference between types of early postsecondary opportunities is important.



- **Articulated Credit:** Articulated credit is college credit provided by an individual college retroactively upon matriculation for successful completion of college-level, high school coursework.
- **Transcripted Credit:** Transcripted credit refers to college-level credits that students receive on their transcript prior to entering college after completing courses while in high school.
- **Dual Enrollment/Dual Credit:** Dual credit is the term given to courses in which high school students have the opportunity to earn both high school and college credits simultaneously. Dual credit courses are taught by high school faculty, adjunct college faculty or college faculty at the high school, at the college or university, or sometimes through online courses or distance education. Dual credit is offered by both state and independent (private, regionally accredited) colleges and universities.
- **Concurrent Enrollment/Credit:** Concurrent enrollment is the subset of dual enrollment courses taught by college-approved high school teachers. Through concurrent enrollment, students gain exposure to the academic challenges of college while in their supportive high school environment, earning transcripted college credit when they successfully pass the course.

States should clearly communicate what types of early postsecondary credit opportunities are available and what the standards and expectations are for earning credit. Eighty-four percent of State Directors say their state has a statewide definition of dual or concurrent enrollment.⁶ But even among these states, which institutions will accept what types of credit is not always clear. Establishing statewide articulation agreements is one way states can define and clarify the criteria for earning postsecondary credit.

In 2013, **Idaho** started a program alignment initiative to better connect learning expectations at the secondary and postsecondary levels and establish statewide articulation agreements. Through the initiative, high school teachers and postsecondary faculty come together to review and align course standards. One outcome of this work is that Idaho has established common technical skill assessments for each career pathway and put in place statewide articulation agreements that allow high school students to earn transcripted postsecondary credit for completing aligned CTE courses in high school.

Critical Resource

Establishing data linkages between secondary and postsecondary education can help improve data quality. The Data Quality Campaign's [Roadmap for K-12 and Postsecondary Data Linkages](#) recommends focusing on six key areas to strengthen data linkages:⁷

1. Coverage of K-12 and postsecondary linkages;
2. Data shared in K-12 and postsecondary linkages;
3. Match quality;
4. Governance;
5. Transparency; and
6. Use.



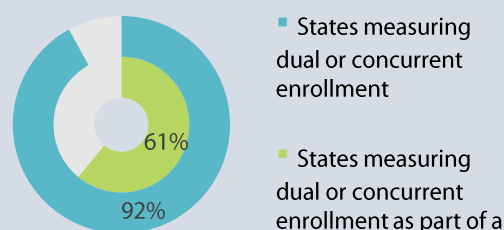
Collecting and Validating Postsecondary Credit Attainment Data

Measuring dual or concurrent enrollment is, quite often, easier than measuring other indicators of career readiness, as state leaders can usually access learner-level transcript data through their student information system. Much more challenging, however, is capturing information about whether credit is articulated or transcribed at postsecondary institutions.

Most states validate dual or concurrent enrollment information through state-led audits of a local education agency's course-taking records. Far fewer validate their data with the institution or system of higher education awarding the credit. In **South Dakota**, for example, information on postsecondary credit attainment is received directly from the institution awarding the credit. This approach is possible because high school students primarily earn dual credit by attending classes at Board of Regents schools and public technical institutes at a reduced tuition rate. This information may be harder to capture for states in which dual or concurrent enrollment courses are delivered primarily at the high school.

Another challenge for states is capturing information about whether the postsecondary credit a learner completes is aligned with his or her CTE program of study. More than one out of three State Directors say they cannot access data on completion of postsecondary credit within a student's CTE program of study, which is a statutory requirement for the secondary CTE program quality indicator in Perkins V. Ensuring that dual or concurrent enrollment is counted only if it is aligned to the learner's

States Are Not Focusing on Program of Study When Measuring Postsecondary Credit Attainment

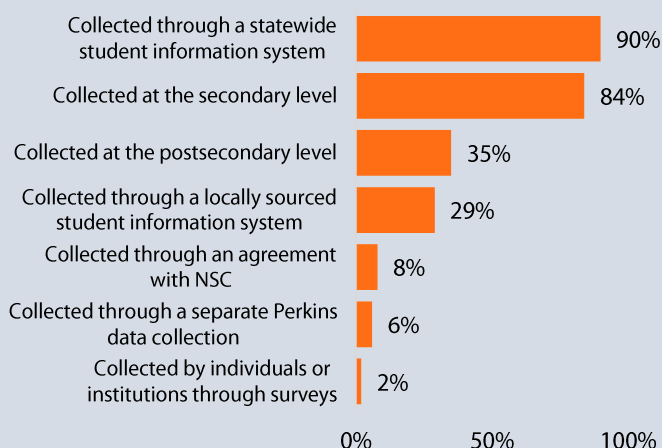


program of study is one way to cut back on “random acts of dual enrollment.”

Parting Thoughts

Choosing a secondary CTE program quality indicator is a decision state leaders should not take lightly. This choice will send a clear signal to the field about state priorities for CTE and create an incentive structure that will be in place for years to come. While information on dual or concurrent enrollment is readily available in many states, work remains to ensure that credit brings real value to the learner, including ensuring that course taking is aligned to a CTE program of study and that the transfer of credits is verified with the higher education system.

How States Collect Learner-Level Data on Postsecondary Credit Attainment



NSC = The National Student Clearinghouse

Responses are duplicated and do not add to 100%. Data are from *The State of CTE: Improving Data Quality and Effectiveness*.

¹ Perkins V defines a CTE concentrator as:

- At the secondary school level, a student served by an eligible recipient who has completed at least two courses in a single CTE program or program of study; and
- At the postsecondary level, a student enrolled in an eligible recipient who has earned at least 12 credits within a career and technical education program or program of study or has completed such a program if the program encompasses fewer than 12 credits or the equivalent in total (Sec 3[12]).

² Institute of Education Sciences. (2017). *WWC intervention report: A summary of findings from a systematic review of the evidence: Dual enrollment programs*. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_dual_enrollment_022817.pdf

³ Community College Research Center. (2012). *What we know about dual enrollment*. Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/dual-enrollment-research-overview.pdf>

⁴ Dougherty, S. M. (2016). *High school career and technical education participation and initial college enrollment: Evidence from Arkansas*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED567419.pdf>

⁵ Advance CTE, Education Strategy Group, Achieve & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2019). *Making career readiness count 3.0*. Retrieved from <https://careertech.org/resource/making-career-readiness-count-2019>

⁶ Advance CTE, Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Strategy Group, Data Quality Campaign & Workforce Data Quality Campaign. (2019). *The state of Career Technical Education: Improving data quality and effectiveness*. Retrieved from <https://careertech.org/resource/state-cte-improving-data-quality-effectiveness>

⁷ Data Quality Campaign. (2014). *Roadmap for K-12 and postsecondary linkages*. Retrieved from <https://dataqualitycampaign.org/resource/roadmap-k-12-postsecondary-data-linkages/>