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Hawaii News

Dual credit programs found to boost college-going rates

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Honolulu Community College professor Coty Gonzales, left, teaches a college-level Psychology 100 course at Farrington High as part of the Early College program.

Hawaii public school students who earn college credits while still in high school are 1.5 times more likely to enroll in college than their peers, far surpassing state and national college-enrollment averages, a new report on the state's so-called dual credit programs shows.

Ten percent of graduates in the class of 2015, or 1,058 students, participated in one of

three dual credit programs that allow students to earn college credit toward a future degree through various University of Hawaii campuses while satisfying high school diploma requirements.

Among those students, 81 percent enrolled in college after graduation while 53 percent of their classmates who did not participate in dual credit programs enrolled in college. By comparison, the state's overall college enrollment rate for public school graduates was 56 percent in 2015; the national rate is 68 percent.

Karen Lee, executive director of the nonprofit Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education, which compiled the data, said the results show dual credit programs are effective at increasing college-going rates.

"We suspected this from the national data around momentum and self-confidence in going to college, and we're actually seeing this realized here in Hawaii," Lee said at a recent state Board of Education meeting, where the results were shared.

The three dual credit programs offered in some high schools are:

>> Running Start, which began in 2001, involves individual high school students taking a college-level course along with college students on a UH campus.

>> Jump Start, which began in 2011, also is offered on UH campuses. High school seniors spend their senior year taking all of their classes full-time at a community college campus for credit toward a career-focused associate degree.

>> Early College, which began in 2012, differs from the other two programs in that it's taught on high school campuses by college faculty. Students take college-level courses that are offered during the school day, after school or during the summer.

Narrowing the gap

The Hawaii P-20 data also show that participation in dual credit programs can boost college enrollment among low-income students, helping close the achievement gap with their noneconomically disadvantaged peers.

Based on the data from the 2015 graduates, 76 percent of economically disadvantaged students who earned college credit in high school enrolled in college while 85 percent of their nondisadvantaged peers who also took dual credit courses enrolled in college — a gap of 9 percentage points.

Meanwhile, economically disadvantaged students who did not participate in dual credit programs had a 41 percent college-going rate compared with a 61 percent college-going rate among their nondisadvantaged peers who also didn't earn college credit in high school. That represents a 20-point gap.

University of Hawaii President David Lassner said he was most struck by those results.

"Not only is it proving the success of dual credit and early college programs, but it's

particularly compelling in showing the way it reduces the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and others who are not economically disadvantaged," Lassner said in an interview. "I'm not aware of another intervention or program that is that impactful in terms of closing that gap."

Education officials hope the data will be helpful in seeking funding in the upcoming legislative session. The Department of Education plans to seek \$9 million over two years to expand the Early College program to all high schools. The funding would pay for two college courses, or six credits, for every graduating senior.

"I think one of the issues right now is that we're really cobbling together any grant funds, federal funding that we run, to make this happen," Lee said.

Participation in all three programs has gone up by 75 percent over the last five years. Last school year, all DOE high schools sent students via the Running Start program to UH college campuses, according to Lee, whose organization provides scholarships to help cover tuition. Meanwhile, seven high schools participated in Jump Start in partnership with four UH community colleges, and at least 25 high schools offered Early College programs.

School leaders say the Early College program in particular is helping motivate more students to pursue higher education, especially those who are economically disadvantaged and whose parents aren't college-educated.

Farrington High School Principal Al Carganilla called the program a "game changer." The state's fourth-largest high school, Farrington has 2,370 students, with 60 percent qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, a key indicator of poverty.

"The shift that we wanted to see years ago in the kids' thinking is happening now," Carganilla told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser. "They have moved from 'If I go to college, I will take up ...' to 'When I go to college, I will take up ...'"

The school is one of 12 statewide that received three-year grants in 2014 from Hawaii P-20 and the Harold K.L. Castle Foundation to establish Early College programs on campus. The funding covers tuition, fees and books for the students.

Farrington, which coordinates with Honolulu Community College for instructors, initially offered two college courses per semester. It has doubled that to four courses per semester this year, including English 100, Psychology 100, Speech 151 and Hawaiian Studies 107, according to college counselor Regan Honda, who said courses have reached capacity with 30 students each. He shared records showing the majority of students earned an A in the college courses.

"Many of our students come from low-income households, are first-generation college students, and come from under-represented populations and would never have considered taking college classes while in high school," Honda said. "Since the Early College program has commenced at Farrington High School, students are not only taking college classes, but finding success, which in turn builds their confidence."

Real experience

Coty Gonzales, a Honolulu Community College psychology professor, has taught Early College courses at Farrington and Kalani high schools. He said he's been impressed by the high school students who often perform better than his traditional college students.

"I don't dumb down the material. I don't hold back or anything. I teach them the exact same material, the exact same way. They get the same quizzes, the same exams that my university students would get, so they're getting the same experience," said Gonzales, a 1999 Farrington alumnus who earned his bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees at UH-Manoa.

"For me, when I was a high school graduate going into college, that first semester was like, 'Whoa, this is so different,'" he said. "With Early College, the advantage I think they have is sort of a nice transition from high school into college."

Farrington senior April Joy Yap said taking college courses required some adjusting.

"It really shows you what college is going to be like. You have to be more responsible for yourself, so you have to be more independent when you're taking these classes," said Yap, who plans to study criminology or forensics after high school.

Fellow senior and varsity football player Joseph Pagan said taking an Early College course has showed him he's capable of doing well in college. He wants to study aerospace engineering.

"As an athlete, our biggest want is to play at the next level, so I saw this class as an opportunity to get a taste of college and I believe I can handle it," he said.

Waipahu High School Principal Keith Hayashi pioneered the Early College program in 2012 and now runs the largest program in the state with funding from the McInerney Foundation.

Participation has skyrocketed at Waipahu: Some 600 students took at least one Early College course last school year. Course offerings have grown from one class in summer 2012 to 15 courses next spring ranging from English 204 and History 151 to Math 205 and Music 107.

"I cannot emphasize enough how early college has changed the lives of our students," Hayashi said. "From not knowing what college is about and college being (thought of as) something that's for someone else, to now being able to access these courses and having their brothers and sisters access these courses — it's changed the thinking of our students and our families."