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# Help more students earn college credit

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The state Department of Education (DOE) must broaden the scope of college-credit courses offered to high schoolers. Here's why: Hawaii public school students who earn college credits while in high school are 1.5 times more likely to enroll in college than their peers.

The DOE has reason to pat itself on the back for its so-called dual credit programs — which is producing college enrollees at a high rate, surpassing state and national college-enrollment averages.

Lawmakers must carefully consider DOE's plan to seek \$9 million over two years to expand the Early College program to all high schools, which would pay for two college courses, or six credits, for every graduating senior. And each and every graduating senior deserves the opportunity to earn those credits.

The new statistics solidify what we've hoped all along: Taking courses that satisfy both college and high school requirements allows for a less arduous path toward higher education.

The nonprofit Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education compiled the data, which show that 10 percent of graduates in the class of 2015, or 1,058 students, participated in one of three dual-credit programs. These 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, a whopping 81 percent enrolled in college after graduation while 53 percent of their classmates who did not participate in dual credit programs enrolled in college. When those figures are compared with the state's overall college enrollment rate for public school graduates of 56 percent in 2015 and the national rate of 68 percent, it highlights the significant impact of the dual credit programs.

The dual credit programs include Running Start, which involves individual high school students taking a college-level course along with college students on a UH campus; Jump Start, in which 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; and Early College, which is taught on high school campuses by college faculty during the school day, after school or during the summer.

These programs have made strides toward leveling the playing field among high achievers — whether they come from lower-income families or not. It also can lower the cost of a college education if credits can be obtained even before leaving high school, a welcome aspect in today's expensive environment.

The 2015 data show 76 percent of economically disadvantaged students who earned college credit in high school enrolled in college while 85 percent of their non-disadvantaged peers who also took dual credit courses enrolled in college.

The college-going rate takes a significant dip — to 41 percent — among economically disadvantaged students who did not participate in dual credit programs. That gap speaks volumes, and closing it should be a high priority.

At Waipahu High School, about 600 students took at least one Early College course last school year and administrators there say it has changed the way students view a college education — that it is indeed attainable.

The challenge is to change the game for students at all high schools in the state. From Waianae to Wailuku, students need to experience a college-level course to show them a two- or four-year degree is well within reach.