Early college program expands dramatically

By Susan Essoyan

Encouraging Hawaii’s public school students to chart their career and college paths as early as freshman year appears to be bearing fruit, according to a report released today.

The number of graduates completing Career and Technical Education
pathways has climbed substantially since 2014, and the number of students who take college courses in high school has more than doubled.

The data are in the latest College and Career Readiness Indicators report, issued by Hawaii P-20 Partnerships for Education. P-20 works with the Department of Education and the University of Hawaii to help students move smoothly through the pipeline from preschool to postsecondary education.

“The data sharing allows us to track our kids in a way that other systems have not,” said Stephen Schatz, P-20 executive director. “I think we are continuing to see solid progress.”

Statewide, 42 percent of students in the class of 2017 completed a Career and Technical Education Pathway, up from 31 percent three years earlier. Those broad pathways give students a chance to explore career options and gain workplace skills in a wide variety of fields, from engineering to entrepreneurship and nursing to natural resources.

CAREER OPTIONS

High school students can explore many different careers within the six broad categories of Career and Technical Education.

- Arts and Communication
- Business
- Health Services
- Industrial and Engineering Technology
- Natural Resources
- Public and Human Services

The programs of study often include courses that count for both high school and college credit, known as dual credit or “Early College.” Enrollment in dual-credit courses on high school campuses statewide has
taken off, with 17 percent of the class of 2017 having taken them, up from 8 percent for the class of 2014.

At Kapaa High School on Kauai, Principal Daniel Hamada and his team have tailored the high school experience to the interests of their students, working with community partners to link learning to careers.

“We redesigned the school from freshman year to when they graduate,” said Hamada, a veteran educator who took the helm at Kapaa High in the fall of 2010. “I truly believe that if we are going to prepare them for careers and college, we’ve got to know what their interests are. It doesn’t mean that they’ve got to end up in the field, but that’s our starting point.”

The kids seem to be lapping it up, with a large majority — 73 percent — of Kapaa High’s class of 2017 completing a CTE pathway, up from 45 percent just three years ago. That’s the highest rate in the state.

Math and science classes for each pathway, for example, are geared toward career goals, so the coursework suits the students’ fields, whether it’s business or engineering, agriculture or health.

“The kids can really see the benefits and the relevance,” Hamada said. “We line it up with their careers, what they are interested in.”

The on-time graduation rate at Kapaa has climbed to 91 percent for the class of 2017, up from 80 percent five years earlier.

Statewide, on-time graduation rates have risen only slightly, to 83 percent from 81 percent in 2012. But Schatz said they had been expected to fall when the Board of Education raised the requirements for graduation, effective with the class of 2016.

“What was considered the rigorous diploma became the default,” Schatz said. “People thought the sky would fall. They thought that graduation rates would go down. Instead they crept up one point that year.”

The College and Career Readiness Indicators Report shows that the fraction of public school graduates going to college has remained fairly static in recent years, at 55 percent statewide. But more of them are attending four-year colleges than two-year programs.

That’s a reversal of past practice when more public school graduates chose community colleges, which have open enrollment. For example, 27 percent of Hawaii’s class of 2009 enrolled in two-year colleges, while 23 percent chose four-year institutions.

The trend lines crossed with the class of 2013 as more students headed to four-year colleges and universities, and the gap has widened ever since. For
the class of 2017, 32 percent enrolled in four-year programs while 23 percent went to two-year colleges.

The report also shows that public school students attending the University of Hawaii are better prepared to handle college-level work, rather than having to take remedial classes.

At King Kekaulike High School in Upcountry Maui, Principal Mark Elliott and his staff have shifted gears and are seeing good results.

“Traditionally at Kekaulike the experienced teachers taught the upper grades, and I kind of flipped that,” said Elliott, who redeployed his strongest, veteran teachers to the early years.

“It took a little bit of work, but they embraced the idea that everybody benefits from having students leave ninth grade much stronger,” he said. “We really focused on building that ninth-grade and 10th-grade team to where they are kind of the A team.”

Kekaulike's on-time graduation rate rose to 82 percent in 2017, up from 73 percent five years earlier.

To read the College and Career Readiness Indicator report online, including individual high school data, visit p2ohawaii.org.

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### CHARTING A FUTURE

*Public school students in Hawaii are tackling career and college courses at higher rates each year.*

| Percentage of students who finished a Career and Technical Education Pathway |
| Percentage of students who took an Advanced Placement exam |
| Percentage of students who took dual credit college courses |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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