



Office of the
Washington
State Auditor
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PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Report Highlights

Running Start and College in the High School: Assessing dual credit transferability

Dual credit programs allow high school students to earn credits that can count toward both high school graduation and college-level coursework. Additionally, these programs offer several potential benefits to high school students and their families, such as reducing the time spent in college after high school and the possibility of saving money.

Washington offers six main dual credit programs for students to earn dual credit by either achieving a specific score on an exam or a qualifying grade on a course with the option of earning college credit. Students in course-based dual credit programs can transfer earned credit when they submit their college transcripts to their enrolled institution; student privacy protections mean institutions cannot send transcripts directly to one another unless the student initiates the transfer. Postsecondary schools evaluate dual credit in accordance with state and institution policies. To ease the transferring of credit, Washington colleges and universities are legally required to follow the Policy on Intercollege Transfer and Articulation. However some stakeholders have concerns about the extent to which institutions accept dual credit. Dual credit programs would offer much less benefit to students if other institutions do not consistently accept credits for transfer.

This audit examined transfer of dual credit earned in two programs – Running Start and College in the High School. This audit also examined how postsecondary schools communicate with students around credit transfers. We selected eight institutions of higher education – four colleges and four universities – with varying student enrollment sizes and locations in different regions of the state.

Eight institutions in this audit

Bellevue College
Big Bend Community College
Columbia Basin College
Olympic College
Eastern Washington University
University of Washington
Washington State University
Western Washington University

Audited institutions accepted the vast majority of courses with earned credits, provided students submitted their transcripts

The main reason students did not receive credit was because they did not submit transcripts, so institutions could not evaluate their dual credits. Most unsubmitted transcripts were for students who had enrolled in

College in the High School, and students enrolling at colleges were less likely to submit transcripts than those enrolling at universities. Audited institutions suggested various reasons why students may not submit their transcripts; for example, students may forget to transfer credits or not know how to do so.

However, when students did submit transcripts, audited institutions accepted an average of 95 percent of courses. Bellevue College had the lowest acceptance rate, 85 percent, due to two policy requirements it applied during the credit evaluation process. Additionally, all audited institutions accepted or rejected dual credits in accordance with state and institution policies; the few incorrectly rejected credits were corrected during the audit.

All audited institutions used many required and leading practices to communicate with students about transferring dual credit courses

Institutions use many required and leading practices to help students understand how to transfer their dual credits. Most audited institutions followed requirements and leading practices relating to transfer policies and online resources. However, three instances in which they did not follow requirements or leading practices could affect students' successful dual credit transfers. More specifically, some audited institutions did not: advise students that earned credit may not transfer, inform students about their transfer rights and responsibilities, or publish equivalency tables or databases online. Finally, all audited institutions followed all leading practices related to student support and communicating the transcription process, such as student advising around the transfer of credits.

State Auditor's Conclusions

Many young Washingtonians opt to earn college-level credits while in high school because doing so allows them to expedite their journey to a college degree and to save tuition costs. High schools across the state offer these dual credit courses and programs, but some students find the credits they earned have not transferred to the colleges or universities in which they later enroll. By reviewing several universities' and colleges' processes to accept credits from other institutions, this performance audit aimed to find out why some credits earned in dual credit programs are not transferred. We came to a very insightful conclusion.

Although some stakeholders were concerned colleges or universities may not consistently accept credits earned in dual credit programs, the higher education institutions we reviewed did so appropriately. Instead, the main reason credits failed to transfer was because the high school students did not submit their college transcripts to the institutions in which they enrolled. Identifying this gap in the credit transfer process is beneficial for all parties involved, including high schools, colleges, universities, students and their parents. Because federal law protects personal student information, it is key that students understand that they themselves are responsible for ensuring they submit their college transcripts when they enroll in their college or university. We offered recommendations which we hope will support Washington's students as they jump-start their careers and education.

Recommendations

We made a series of recommendations to audited institutions to improve their communication with students around transfer of credit, such as posting or providing a link to the student transfer rights and responsibilities. We also made a recommendation to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop and distribute guidance to school districts to ensure students who participated in College in the High School know they have earned college credit and have a college transcript.