

Testimony to the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee hearing on “Grow PA”

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the topic of **dual enrollment** in Pennsylvania. I am writing on behalf of the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics, an independent, nonpartisan, community-supported organization that was established by the university in partnership with elected officials more than 30 years ago. The mission of the Institute is to deliver timely information on complex public policy issues affecting our region to elected officials, community leaders, and the public they serve by providing a nonpartisan forum where diverse viewpoints are discussed, digested, enriched, and applied to the goal of promoting improved quality of life, government efficiency, and economic vitality in Western Pennsylvania and beyond.

With this in mind, we would like to provide you with some information that we believe may be helpful as you draft legislation about dual enrollment in Pennsylvania.

As you are aware, dual enrollment has myriad benefits that accrue to both students and the workforce as a whole. In the Institute’s [first report on dual enrollment in Pennsylvania](#), titled “Prepared for the Future,” we shared that dual enrollment has the potential to offer students:

- A reduction in college costs,
- A smoother transition to the rigor of the postsecondary environment (any postsecondary environment)
- Increased academic motivation and attendance
- Higher likelihood of high school graduation and postsecondary matriculation, and
- A greater chance of postsecondary success (i.e. graduating with a degree or certificate, persisting in an apprenticeship, etc.)¹

These findings, summarized in Zinth and Barnett’s 2018 report “[Rethinking Dual Enrollment to Reach More Students](#),” indicate that middle-achieving high school students “not only can be successful in dual enrollment coursework but also can reap substantial benefits from program participation.”² These findings are also true for students who are first-generation college students or who may have other barriers to accessing a postsecondary education.

In contrast, our findings from Pennsylvania’s existing dual enrollment programming demonstrate that, while many schools are operating successful dual enrollment programs on

¹ Zinth, J. and Barnett, E. (May 2018). “Rethinking Dual Enrollment to Reach More Students.” Education Commission of the States. https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking_Dual_Enrollment_to_Reach_More_Students.pdf

² Ibid.

their own, a lack of state support and guidance has made participation difficult for students who would benefit the most. Instead, the students participating are those who are likely to attend and successfully complete college or postsecondary career training regardless of whether they had access to dual enrollment programs. As a result, many of Pennsylvania's students – a good portion of our future workforce – are missing out on this opportunity.

In response to these findings and to address these challenges in a way that is specific to Pennsylvania, the IOP's Workforce Development Policy Committee convened a task force in 2021 to develop specific, actionable policy recommendations to expand access to dual enrollment across the Commonwealth. Chaired by Senator Camera Bartolotta and Dr. Stan Thompson, formerly of The Heinz Endowments, and comprised of other education stakeholders, this task force worked with national consultant Alex Perry from the College in High School Alliance for more than a year to do an in-depth review of other states' dual enrollment systems and consider existing successful programming in Pennsylvania. The goal was to develop a series of recommendations to inform the creation of a dual enrollment system in the Commonwealth that expands opportunities for students to pursue college and/or careers after high school.

These recommendations are:

- 1) Launch a state-supported task force to develop guiding principles for Pennsylvania's dual enrollment system.
- 2) Expand data collection and public reporting of existing dual enrollment programs.
- 3) Create a formal Dual Enrollment Advisory Council at the state level to advise on dual enrollment policy.
- 4) Encourage dual enrollment programs to be accredited through the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), to demonstrate a commitment to high-quality programming.
- 5) Establish a model partnership agreement to govern relationships between secondary and postsecondary schools.
- 6) Create a dual enrollment scholarship to allow all students or low-income students the opportunity to earn credits for a certain number of courses at no cost.
- 7) Require school districts to notify students and their caregivers about dual enrollment opportunities annually.
- 8) Survey Pennsylvania high schools to better understand instructor capacity issues. (Postsecondary institutions have varying requirements about who is eligible to teach college in high school courses; it would be helpful to understand existing barriers to entry for teachers in some districts.)
- 9) Work with career and technical administrators to create a streamlined path to certification for mid-career professionals who are interested in becoming CTE instructors.

- 10) Create a statewide landing page to provide information about dual enrollment to students and families.
- 11) Develop explainer resources for use by school counselors to improve awareness of dual enrollment opportunities and benefits.

Since the release of [this report](#) in 2022, the Institute of Politics has embarked on a subsequent research project to learn from the efforts of two schools in Western PA – Northgate and Charleroi – to expand access to dual enrollment among underserved populations within their student body. The resulting data and recommendations will be shared with legislators and other stakeholders at the conclusion of the project in early 2025.

Dual enrollment is just one of many strategies designed to effectively prepare students for their future and should be offered alongside other opportunities, including internships and other forms of career exposure, skills-based certifications, and traditional academic courses and extracurriculars. All of us benefit when students have the opportunity to graduate high school with a plan for their future, whether that includes college or some other type of postsecondary training or moving directly into a career. As you consider this and other legislation related to college and career pathways, we are happy to provide additional information.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

Briana Mihok, Ed.D.
Assistant Director of Policy Programs
[University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics](#)
Bnd2@pitt.edu