

THE STATE OF CTE: EARLY POSTSECONDARY OPPORTUNITIES

Executive Summary

Early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs) provide more than 5.5 million secondary learners annually an intentionally designed authentic postsecondary experience (such as dual or concurrent enrollment) leading to college credit that counts toward a recognized postsecondary degree or credential.¹ Studies demonstrate the value of these types of programs for learners, including increasing the likelihood of graduating high school and improving postsecondary attainment and other outcomes.² EPSOs also act as an effective entry point to postsecondary education for learners who are less likely to be familiar with available postsecondary opportunities.^{3,4}

Career Technical Education (CTE) courses make up approximately one-third of all EPSO enrollments and are a critical component of a high-quality CTE program of study, bridging secondary and postsecondary learning.⁵ CTE EPSOs also offer increased variety through new and innovative delivery options such as Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools, industry-recognized credentials and more. To better understand how CTE EPSOs serve learners, Advance CTE, in partnership with the College in High School Alliance, surveyed State CTE Directors to better understand state policies that support EPSOs in CTE. The survey revealed five key findings:



Expanding equitable access to CTE EPSOs is a top priority, but challenges remain in supporting access for historically marginalized learners. Even though 87 percent of responding states reported that expanding access to EPSOs is a top or the highest priority, less than 30 percent feel that EPSOs are “very equitable” or “mostly equitable.” While states noted that scholarship and tuition supports reduce barriers to entry, burdensome entrance requirements and a lack of information about EPSOs limit a learner’s ability to participate.



More learner supports are needed to expand equitable access to and success in EPSOs. Because of the highly decentralized nature of EPSOs, local education agencies or partner institutions of higher education are responsible for providing the majority of learner supports. Statewide support programs are limited and largely designed for instructors and counselors rather than learners. While a lack of capacity was reported as a major challenge for implementing these types of programs, research from statewide programs reveals positive outcomes for learner groups, especially historically marginalized populations, that receive these types of support.

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Many states collect data on CTE learner participation in and outcomes from EPSOs but do not report data disaggregated by subgroup and by program.

Most states reported collecting enrollment and outcome data for CTE concentrators, but less than half disaggregate outcomes data by learner subgroup or special population. Even fewer states (20 percent) make CTE EPSO data publicly available. Increasing transparency in collection and reporting allows states to make more informed decisions to target learner enrollment and supports in EPSOs and allows learners and families to make more informed decisions about what programs are most effective and appropriate for their career journey.



States have a critical role to play in improving credit transfer efficiency for CTE EPSOs.

Barriers such as the decentralization of articulation agreements and a lack of collaboration between secondary and postsecondary systems make automatic credit transfer inefficient. These barriers limit options for learners and increase the burden to navigate complex postsecondary systems. While 71 percent of states reported having some level of statewide articulation for CTE EPSOs, many states reported that CTE credits do not transfer to certain institutions in their state. States are making progress toward ensuring intentional acts of dual enrollment by aligning articulated credit to CTE programs of study, but they can go further in reducing barriers in articulation and transfer to improve opportunities for all learners.



Recruiting and training qualified CTE EPSO instructors is a top barrier to expanding CTE EPSOs.

CTE EPSO instructors often must be qualified in their industry and qualified to teach at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. Accreditation requirements can often limit districts' ability to recruit qualified EPSO instructors, and these difficulties are exacerbated by a lack of aligned supports and incentives. A plurality of states reported not having a statewide program to support or incentivize the hiring of CTE EPSO instructors, in particular.

As states recognize the ever-growing value of EPSO opportunities for CTE learners, they can take the following steps to better advance and support CTE EPSOs. These recommendations contribute to the full implementation of equitable, high-quality EPSOs.

- **Identify and remove barriers to access**, including restrictive costs or entrance requirements, and target specific learner populations for recruitment.
- **Increase supports for learners** enrolled in EPSOs to ensure completion.
- **Improve state data collection and reporting** for EPSOs, particularly highlighting outcome data disaggregated by CTE program and learner demographics.
- **Expand statewide and inter-state articulation agreements** to account for all types of CTE EPSOs.
- **Adopt flexible licensure requirements** that recognize the equivalent value of industry expertise and education for CTE EPSO instructors.
- **Expand innovative supports and incentives for CTE EPSO instructors**, including subsidizing pay gaps and providing additional benefits beyond salary.

Endnotes

¹ National Center for Education Statistics. (2013, February). *Dual credit and exam-based courses in U.S. public high schools: 2010-2011*. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013001.pdf>

² College in High School Alliance. (2020). *Evidence of success*. <https://www.collegeinhighschool.org/evidence-of-success>

³ An, B. P. (2013). The impact of dual enrollment on college degree attainment. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 35(1), 57-75. <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/15260/15260.pdf>

⁴ Henneberger, A. K., Witzten, H., & Preston, A. M. (2020, May 7). A longitudinal study examining dual enrollment as a strategy for easing the transition to college and career for emerging adults. *Emerging Adulthood*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2167696820922052>

⁵ *Ibid.*