

# Dual Credit Program Toolkit for Pennsylvania School Entities

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**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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# I. INTRODUCTION

This toolkit provides a resource for secondary school entities to review and consider when developing and implementing dual credit programs.

Dual credit allows high school students to take college-level, credit-bearing courses offered by institutions of higher education and to receive secondary and postsecondary transcribed credit. **Dual enrollment** means that the student is enrolled in two institutions at the same time but does not address how the credits earned are handled. **Dual credit** means that the student is enrolled in two institutions and receiving transcribed credit for the course both at the high school and career and technical center, as well as the sponsoring college. An example of a school where the student does not receive high school credit but can enroll in a college during the school day or summer (dual credit) is Central Columbia School District. Students can enroll in courses at Bloomsburg University, but Central Columbia School District does not put the credit on the high school transcript and does not count them toward high school graduation.

This toolkit assists secondary school entities by providing implementation strategies for dual credit courses based on research findings and Pennsylvania promising practices. These strategies are equally relevant for academic and career and technical courses. An overview of Pennsylvania policy is supplemented with program guidance on implementing new and strengthening existing dual credit programs that result in transcribed college credit for students.

## A. Background

Currently, a number of secondary schools and IHEs across Pennsylvania offer students dual credit opportunities to earn transferable, transcribed college credit while in high school. In academic year (AY) 2014-15 (AY14-15):

1. 300 Pennsylvania schools reported 31,864 student course enrollments in 1,006 courses<sup>1</sup>
2. 10,814 high school students enrolled in dual credit or dual enrollment courses with Pennsylvania community colleges<sup>2</sup>
3. 760 high school students enrolled in 1,671 courses and earned a total of 4,792.5 credits at Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) universities<sup>3</sup> (All of the PASSHE universities, except for Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, enrolled dual credit students in AY14-15.)

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<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania Information Management System, Pennsylvania Department of Education, September 30, 2015. A student in more than one dual enrollment course is counted more than once, hence, use of the term “student course enrollments”.

<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania Information Management System, Pennsylvania Department of Education, September 22, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Data provided by the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education Office of the Chancellor on September 30, 2015. Data includes Dual Enrolled High Students and Early Admit High School Students.

Pennsylvania laws and regulations allow school entities to implement dual credit programs. The Public School Code permits school districts to enter into agreements with one or more institutions of higher education (IHE) approved to operate in Pennsylvania in order to allow resident students to attend those IHEs while enrolled in the secondary entity and to earn transcribed credit both at the secondary entity and the sponsoring IHE.<sup>4</sup>

Per the Pennsylvania School Code, students enrolled for dual credit courses are able to be counted toward the average daily membership as long as the school entity pays the student's tuition, fees, and textbooks.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of PDE-approved Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, secondary entities may use dual credit as part of locally-developed articulation agreements identified in the CTE program approval system. The federal Carl D. Perkins Grant Program requires articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions receiving grant funds for PDE-approved CTE programs of study. Every approved CTE program must be articulated to an IHE.<sup>6</sup> Schools must use the statewide articulation agreement to meet program of study requirements (see Appendix A for details about the statewide articulation agreement program called SOAR). However, secondary entities may use dual credit courses as part of locally-developed articulation agreements in place of articulated courses.

As secondary school entities consider an IHE partner, note that out-of-state colleges must be authorized by PDE before conducting any education activity that awards academic or continuing education credit or charges a fee or tuition, and before establishing a physical presence in Pennsylvania.<sup>7</sup> Secondary school entities need to verify the out-of-state college's authorization to conduct education activity within Pennsylvania.

The Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law requires an IHE's employees to obtain Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Background Check (SP-164), Federal (FBI) Fingerprint Criminal Background Check (Criminal History Report), and Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance (CY-113) if they have direct contact with secondary students under the age of 18.<sup>8</sup>

If the IHE's program is delivered at the high school or career and technical center, the secondary entity should inquire if the IHE dual credit program is

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<sup>4</sup> 24 P.S. § 15-1525 Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education

<sup>5</sup> [22. Pa. Code § 11.5\(b\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> 22. Pa. Code § 339.4 Program Approval

<sup>7</sup> 22. Pa. Code § 31.2 and § 36.1 - 8

<sup>8</sup> [23 Pa. C.S. § 6344 \(a.1\) \(2\)](#)

accredited by an accrediting authority recognized by the US Department of Education.

## **B. Research**

Research indicates that students who participate in college-level coursework dual credit opportunities during high school tend to remain in college (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Dual credit students tend to transition to college better than students who do not participate in college courses during their time in high school.

By providing a pathway for students to move seamlessly between K–12 and postsecondary systems, dual credit is thought to promote greater support for students' college aspirations and greater collaboration between high schools and colleges (Bailey & Karp, 2003); (Clark, 2001).

The Education Commission of the States summarized current research on outcomes for CTE students. Three outcomes are supported by research: CTE dual credit students are more likely to earn a high school diploma, are more likely to enroll in a four-year institution than other dual enrolled students, and are slightly more likely to enroll in college full-time (Zinth, 2014).

Researchers examined the City of New York's College NOW program, finding that dual credit reduced time to degree, increased the credit load of students after they matriculate, and increased student college performance as measured by grade point average (Allen & Dadgar, 2012). Another researcher conducted a peer-reviewed study using a quasi-experimental research design matching demographic variables and prior academic performance and found that dual credit students were more likely to complete a bachelor's degree (An, 2013). That reconfirmed *The Toolbox Revisited's* original findings that students who earned six or more credits gained momentum towards degree attainment, with 12 credits guaranteeing forward movement to graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

## **C. Definitions and Terms**

There is considerable variation and confusion in the use of the terms dual credit and dual enrollment. States and organizations from across the country use these terms in different ways, and individual programs and schools often use them interchangeably. Some of the research and policy referenced in this document use the terms interchangeably.

Programs, guidance, and laws in Pennsylvania also use the terms inconsistently. Hence the definitions used in this toolkit are being provided to clarify the discussion in this toolkit and are not meant to imply that these definitions are codified in Pennsylvania law, school code, the Pennsylvania School Performance Profile, or the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS).

This toolkit uses the following definitions:

**‘Dual credit.’** A student earns both sponsoring IHE and secondary entity credit for a college course, and the credit is transcribed by both institutions at the time of the course. These courses can be either academic or career and technical courses. In this toolkit, dual credit will be used as the umbrella term for all models of earning college credit where the student receives simultaneous transcribed credit for the course from both the sponsoring IHE and the secondary entity.

**‘Dual enrollment.’** A student enrolls in both the secondary entity and the IHE and takes a college course (irrespective of location, instructor type, or delivery method). The student may or may not receive secondary credit for the college courses completed; hence, not all dual enrollment is dual credit.

#### **D. Policy**

This policy section outlines current legal regulations in Pennsylvania that relate to dual credit courses. The legal citations are below in the footnotes.

The Pennsylvania Public School Code permits a school district to enter into agreements with one or more IHEs approved to operate in Pennsylvania in order to allow its students to attend those IHEs, while enrolled in the school district, and receive credits toward completion of courses at the school district and the IHE.<sup>9</sup>

**Charter schools** – both brick and mortar and cyber charter – are not permitted to enter into dual credit agreements because the Charter School Law does not grant this authority.<sup>10</sup> Charter school students may enroll independently in college coursework. However, the coursework may not be applied toward high school credit or graduation requirements and the student is responsible for covering tuition and related costs.

If a school entity wants to collect the basic education subsidy, the public secondary entity must pay for a dual credit student’s tuition, fees, and textbooks in order to count that student in their average daily membership.<sup>11</sup> This applies regardless of the location of instruction.

As previously indicated, in the case of PDE-approved CTE programs, secondary entities may use dual credit as part of locally-developed articulation agreements identified in the CTE program approval system.<sup>12 13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [24 P.S. § 15-1525 Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education](#)

<sup>10</sup> 24 P.S. §§ 17-1732-A(a)(1) and 17-1749(a)(1)

<sup>11</sup> 22. Pa. Code § 11.5(b)

<sup>12</sup> 22. Pa. Code § 339.4 Program approval

<sup>13</sup> Public Law No. 109-270

Out-of-state institutions of higher education must be authorized by PDE before conducting any education activity that awards academic or continuing education credit or charges a fee or tuition, and before establishing a physical presence in Pennsylvania.<sup>14</sup>

The Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law requires employees of the IHEs to obtain state, federal, and child abuse clearances if they have direct contact with secondary students.<sup>15 16</sup>

## II. PROGRAM GUIDANCE

As entities develop or modify dual credit courses and programs, experience from the field suggests common issues to consider and potential problems to address. Some of these recommendations come from national organizations or other states with considerable experience with program development and implementation. Not every issue is relevant for every program, but this listing of some of the most common issues can assist your school entity in building a strong program that serves the needs of a wide range of high school students in Pennsylvania.

### A. School-Level Implementation

This section includes information and suggestions for implementing effective dual credit programs online, on campus, or at the secondary entity.

#### 1. General Considerations: Structuring Dual Credit Programs and Courses

The following are relevant for effective dual credit programs regardless of the model implemented. Offering dual credit is a partnership between the secondary entity and the sponsoring IHE; hence, the organizations share responsibility in creating a program that serves the needs of the students while maintaining program quality. The partnership should:

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<sup>14</sup> 22. Pa. Code § 31.2 and § 36.1 - 8

<sup>15</sup> [23 Pa.C.S. § 6344 \(a.1\) \(2\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> Act 15 of 2015 amended the Department of Human Services (DHS) Child Protective Services Law and extended the requirement for background checks to certain employees of higher education institutions. This will include a professor who has one student who is also enrolled in a high school but is also taking a course at the higher education institution. It will be the responsibility of the higher education institution to ensure that the required clearances have been obtained. PDE has authority over the issue of background checks for students enrolled in teacher preparation programs. DHS has enforcement authority for all other issues related to background checks in higher education institutions. Excerpts of the guidance provided by DHS on this topic: Are there any exceptions to the certification requirements for employees of an institution of higher education? Yes. Certifications are not required for employees of an institution of higher education whose direct contact with children, in the course of employment, is limited to either: A. Prospective students visiting a campus operated by the institution of higher education; or B. Matriculated students who are enrolled with the institution. THE EXEMPTION UNDER (B) SHALL NOT APPLY TO STUDENTS WHO ARE ENROLLED IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL. How is matriculated student defined? Matriculated student is defined as a student who is enrolled in an institution of higher education and pursuing a program of study that results in a postsecondary credential, such as a certificate, diploma or degree. [The complete guidance document is available.](#)



- a. Ensure dual credit courses are aligned to district graduation requirements, CTE programs of study, or to a career pathway offered at the school. In special cases, a course that is not offered at the secondary entity but that aligns to the student's career goals can be provided through dual credit.
  - b. Establish admissions criteria to ensure students are college-ready. Criteria based on performance on entrance tests or other achievement measures provide the most equitable criteria for participation. Potential measures include tests, end-of-course grades, teacher recommendations, and students' work portfolios.
  - c. Engage all parties early in the discussion of goals of the program to determine the organization of the program including such items as location of instruction, who teaches the course, primary contacts, responsibilities, processes, requirements, etc.
  - d. Establish secondary entity funding to pay for tuition, fees, and textbooks. Some schools use Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) funding or local foundation funding to partially cover costs.
  - e. Ensure that all students earn college credits on an official college transcript.
  - f. Enroll students early in the course. Students should not purchase college credits after the class has been completed and their success is assured. This not an authentic approach for students to experience college-level coursework. Official enrollment should occur prior to mid-terms. Consequences of dropping a class or withdrawing from a class should follow the IHE's transcript policies that are similar for full-time students.
  - g. Consider offering high school courses that ensure that the student achieves sufficient competency so that they can avoid developmental courses upon entering an IHE. This can be achieved by offering prerequisite high school courses that prepare students for the college-level courses offered as dual credit, such as a rigorous college prep sequence. Faculty collaboration between the secondary teachers and the college faculty can enhance the quality of the courses leading up to the dual credit courses and help students avoid developmental status upon matriculation.
  - h. Dual credit courses should be weighted similarly to Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses in the school's grading system. This includes both academic and technical courses.
- 2. On-campus/On-site Dual Enrollment Programs: Courses Taught by College Faculty**
- a. Integrated course enrollment assimilates high school students into a traditional college course on the sponsoring IHE campus taught by IHE faculty. This is considered by many to be the most authentic form of dual credit for students.
  - b. Stand-alone courses offer college courses to cohorts of high school students on the college campus or at the high school taught by college

faculty. Secondary students are not integrated into classrooms with other college students, and the courses are taught by IHE faculty.

- c. On-campus orientation to high school students should be provided to include issues such as parking rules and regulations, class location, attendance policies, student identification cards, library access, eating facilities, tutoring services, or other college provided services that are available to dual credit students.

### **3. Dual Enrollment Programs: Courses Taught by Secondary Teachers**

- a. All parties must ensure that dual enrollment courses retain IHE-level expectations and outcomes.
- b. The IHE ensures that secondary teacher qualifications are aligned with Middle States Commission of Higher Education requirements or other IHE accrediting body expectations for quality. Generally, these qualifications mimic the qualifications for adjunct IHE faculty in the specific discipline being taught.
- c. Secondary teachers are trained by IHE faculty and serve as adjunct faculty for dual enrollment courses offered at a secondary entity to a cohort of high school students.
- d. The IHE faculty work with and oversee the secondary teachers as they teach dual enrollment courses. This includes coordination of course expectations, grading, course logistics, texts, and college policies and procedures.
- e. To facilitate expansion of the pool of qualified secondary teachers, school entities should consider adjusting hiring qualifications to match IHE adjunct faculty qualifications. Alternatively, the secondary entity could provide financial support for a current secondary teacher to gain approval as an IHE adjunct for the dual enrollment course.
- f. An approval process is established for short- and long-term substitute secondary teachers in the dual enrollment classroom. Establish procedures prior to delivering classes, including a timeframe and procedure for notifying the IHE of the substitution. The secondary entity should submit the substitute's qualifications for IHE evaluation to gain approval for them to teach the dual enrollment class as soon as feasible.
- g. Both enrolled and non-enrolled secondary students can be blended into the same classroom. This is an important strategy for small secondary entities or career and technology centers. Expectations of student performance and course content cannot however be changed to facilitate the blending of students.
- h. IHEs offering dual credit programs should be accredited to ensure high school courses are as rigorous as IHE courses and high school teachers meet the academic requirements for IHE faculty.

## **B. Establishing Relationships with Postsecondary Partners**

### **1. Identify institutions of higher education partners by:**

- a. Establishing purpose and goals of the dual credit program and finding IHE partners who can meet these goals. Multiple IHE partners might be necessary to meet the goals for all students.
- b. Finding IHE partners through discussions with other secondary entities in the region. Often IHE partners work within an established geographical area so finding potential partners can be facilitated by examining which IHEs are working with other local secondary entities.
- c. Beginning discussions in the fall for implementation the following academic year. Developing these agreements can take considerable time for both entities. Working out details in time to get courses into the secondary entity's scheduling guide improves the process for students, parents, teachers, and school counselors.
- d. Demonstrating that the IHE and the secondary entity are sensitive to the need for flexible local policies and procedures. Both entities have policies, procedures, and legal requirements that will need to be examined and addressed to facilitate implementation of the program.

### **2. Establish a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that:**

- a. Identifies individuals at the secondary entity and IHE who serve as primary contacts. Include offices, positions, and other appropriate contact information in the MOU.
- b. Specifies financial responsibilities of the secondary entity and the IHE.
- c. Specifies how and when payment for courses and books will occur.
- d. Identifies the target grade levels.
- e. Establishes where and how the IHE courses will be offered, including a timeline of important deadlines.
- f. Identifies student access to college facilities and on-campus and online services.
- g. Addresses issues relating to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Establishes Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 plan processes and identifies the responsibilities and timelines of each party.
- h. Establishes student data sharing agreements.
- i. Establishes course assessment and teacher assessment responsibilities.
- j. Should be signed by each institution's highest level of leadership.

### **3. Establish a relationship between the secondary entity and IHE that:**

- a. Maintains communication through partnership meetings between the secondary entity and IHE key individuals.
- b. Identifies individuals beyond the primary contacts at both the secondary entity and the IHE with other defined roles related to program implementation such as placement testing, admissions, academic advising, etc.

- c. Clarifies who answers parent/guardian questions about the program, courses, and student performance.
- d. Clarifies communication expectations for the secondary teacher and IHE faculty regarding coursework, grading, and issues of course standards.
- e. Determines a timeline for identifying new course offerings, qualifying dual enrollment high school teachers, student application, student admission testing, student enrollment, course beginning and end dates, course grading, etc.
- f. Provides help desk assistance, online and on-campus library resources, learning management system access and training, and other key academic resources to students and high school dual credit course teachers as appropriate.
- g. Clarifies which institution's student rules apply and their consequences in various circumstances (e.g., plagiarism, smoking, aggressive behavior, absenteeism, etc.).
- h. Shares data to facilitate course and program assessment and evaluation.

#### **4. Faculty Collaboration**

- a. Collaboration on appropriate secondary course sequences prepares students for enrolling in college-level work. This collaboration should occur regardless of the structure of the dual credit program.
- b. Establish communication mechanisms between secondary teachers and IHE faculty on procedures, student expectations and course content. For dual credit courses in career and technical program of study sequences, communication must address issues that ensure each course includes the required elements of the CTE program of study and the college course content.
- c. Establish discipline-specific professional development opportunities at the IHE for secondary teachers.
- d. Ensure the secondary entity and the IHE provide mechanisms and funding so that counterparts from both entities can meet.
- e. For dual credit programs, the partnership should conduct course-level professional development to ensure the secondary teacher understands content, grading standards and pacing of course content. Whenever possible, college faculty should be encouraged to share examples of assessment materials including laboratory assignments, homework, and tests to assure alignment between in college content and the content delivered in the secondary entity classroom.

#### **5. Ensuring Quality**

- a. Ensure that course content, rigor, and outcomes are equivalent regardless of who teaches or where the course is delivered. IHE administrators should encourage IHE faculty to share course materials to ensure alignment.

- b. Implement course-specific annual professional development coordinated by the IHE to enhance course alignment and build relationships between secondary teachers and IHE faculty.
- c. Enhance transferability of courses by ensuring that the college transcript uses the same course designators and numbers for dual enrollment students as are used for their matriculated students.
- d. Provide access to student support services (tutoring, counseling, online resources, supports for students with disabilities, etc.) to assist students in achieving success. If the student cannot visit the campus to receive these supports, the IHE should explore online or virtual options to provide services. Secondary entity staff can be trained by the IHE to assist in delivering some of these student supports.

## **6. Articulation: Course Equivalency and Transfer**

- a. Explain to students and their families the portability of dual credit coursework and the transfer credit process
- b. Encourage students to use the [Pennsylvania Transfer and Articulation Center \(PA TRAC\)](#) – located at [PAcollegegetransfer.com](#) – to learn how dual credit courses transfer to colleges and universities participating in the statewide college credit transfer system. Participating colleges include Pennsylvania's community colleges, the universities in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, the state-related universities, and several independent colleges and universities. Students should work with school and college counselors to create and use a PA TRAC Student Account to compile their course history in one location, compare transfer credit for several colleges, and track their transfer progress.
- c. Address program assessment and evaluation, (i.e., course equivalency and transferability experiences of students who matriculated from the dual credit program).
- d. Consider how coursework from multiple IHE partners can be structured together to meet high school and college program requirements for various majors. Students benefit most when the secondary school and their multiple IHE partners work collectively to facilitate long-term educational goals.

## **C. Financial Considerations**

### **1. Tuition and Fees**

- a. The Pennsylvania School Code requires that secondary school entities must pay the tuition for dual credit only if the entity is submitting the student in the average daily membership used for calculating the basic education subsidy.<sup>17</sup>
- b. Tuition and fees vary by IHE. It is important to be aware of these pricing differences, since cost may prohibit student participation and equal access to dual credit courses.

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<sup>17</sup> 22. Pa. Code § 11.5(b)

- c. Dual credit costs should be addressed in the agreement between the school and the IHE.

## **2. Textbooks, Software, Hardware and Equipment**

- a. Secondary school entities must assume the cost of the textbook only if the school entity is seeking basic education subsidy for the student enrolled in the dual credit course.<sup>18</sup>
- b. Secondary school entities can place adequate numbers of textbooks in the school library for students to borrow. However, an increasing number of courses require each student to have an online registration for the course materials that is acquired through the purchase of the course materials and cannot be shared or transferred to other students. In these cases, each student must have their own dedicated copy of course materials to enroll in the course.
- c. IHE programs and instructors should be sensitive to changes in textbooks to ensure that changes are sufficient to warrant the secondary school entities purchasing a new edition of a textbook.
- d. For dual credit programs, secondary entities should be aware that certain software, hardware, or equipment purchases might be required to maintain content alignment with the college-level course content. This is particularly true with science, computer-based courses, and other career and technical education programs.

## **3. Transportation**

- a. Secondary school entities can establish grants for families to help support transportation to the IHE.
- b. By offering dual credit courses at the secondary entity, transportation issues are eliminated.
- c. Student can pay for transportation fees including bus tokens, parking permits, tolls, or other transportation-related expenses.

## **D. Student Admission, Access and Supports**

### **1. Student Admission**

- a. Policies should clearly outline eligibility criteria for student participation. These criteria should limit admission only on criteria that relate to a student's ability to succeed in the college-level class, otherwise the program risks encouraging inequitable student access. Some criteria are applied to the whole program and others are course-specific. Common program or course admission criteria might include:
  - i. a placement examination or SAT/ACT score;
  - ii. a minimum age and/or grade level for student participants;
  - iii. a minimum GPA;

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

- iv. written recommendation from high school teacher or counselor;  
and/or
  - v. written permission from parent or guardian.
- b. One strategy to expand access is to provide initial college courses that do not require a placement exam such that the student can acclimate to the college environment prior to experiencing courses of higher rigor.
  - c. IHEs often have concerns about meeting the requirements under the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and ask parents and students to sign FERPA waivers. However, federal government guidance to parents and secondary entities allows information to be shared between the two enrolling institutions without the need for waivers.

**Question:** *“If a student under age 18 is enrolled in both high school and a local college, do parents have the right to inspect and review his or her education records?”<sup>19</sup> Can the secondary entity and the IHE exchange information on that student without a signed waiver?*

**Response:** “If a student is attending a postsecondary institution - at any age -- the rights under FERPA have transferred to the student. However, in a situation where a student is enrolled in both a high school and a postsecondary institution, the two schools may exchange information on that student. If the student is under 18, the parents still retain the rights under FERPA at the high school and may inspect and review any records sent by the postsecondary institution to the high school. Additionally, the postsecondary institution may disclose personally identifiable information from the student’s education records to the parents, without the consent of the eligible student, if the student is a dependent for tax purposes under the IRS rules.”<sup>20</sup>

- d. Students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan should be identified to the IHE as early as possible so that any accommodations that are available for the student can be implemented during the registration and placement testing processes.

## **2. Daily Program Management: Role of School Counselors**

School counselors and counseling office staff play a key role in managing the day-to-day operation of dual credit programs. While others at the school entity occasionally serve as the single point of contact for the dual credit program, school counselors are most commonly assigned to manage the daily operations of the program.

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<sup>19</sup> [Federal government guidance on FERPA](#) for parents and students related to dual credit.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.