

Support Streamlined Dual Enrollment Courses between SUNY Community Colleges and High Schools

Developing strong connections between high school and college is a critical component in life long success for New York students. Over the last several years, the state has taken a number of actions to strengthen these connections via P-Tech, Early College High Schools, and support for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs. Further support would be given by recommendations in the Governor's Executive Budget for 2019-20.

Dual enrollment is another mechanism that strengthens these connections. Dual enrollment refers to college courses taken by high school students while they are enrolled in high school and who may receive both high school and college credit.

However, some of these connections have come to a halt, particularly for schools with the most underprivileged students because of a recent memorandum from SUNY to community colleges. A 2017 memorandum directed all SUNY community colleges to no longer offer free or reduced-price dual enrollment courses to high school students. The memo also provides that students must pay the tuition cost themselves, and then may be reimbursed by the school districts.

This new policy is problematic on different fronts. First, school districts should be free to enter into any agreement with a community college that will benefit its students and better prepare them for future success. Community colleges have a vested interest in engaging students in higher education opportunities at an early stage so that they have an opportunity to recruit those students and prepare them for successful careers.

Secondly, there is no good policy rationale for prohibiting a school district from paying tuition directly to the community colleges. Many poor families are not able to from the tuition costs and await reimbursement from the school district. We have enough inequities within our system, yet this policy creates further inequities and withholds opportunities from less privileged students. School districts should absolutely be able to pay student tuition costs directly.

This policy has now been in effect for approaching two school years, and the impacts are very negative and consequential. The legislature must act to reverse SUNY's policy. At the same time, to ensure community colleges are not financially harmed based on arrangements they have with local school districts, community colleges State Base Aid and appropriate chargebacks should not be limited based on various dual enrollment structures.

THE COUNCIL strongly supports legislative action to address this issue