



UTAH SYSTEM OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION

# MEMORANDUM

January 13, 2023

## Early College as an Access Pathway

National research has suggested that college acceleration courses provide high school students with an easier transition to college.<sup>1</sup> Soon-to-be released research from the Commissioner's Office of Research and Data Science examined the prevalence and completion of early college coursework in Utah and its effectiveness as a tool for high school students to access higher education. Key findings indicate the following:

- High school students enrolling in college acceleration courses are 2.4 times more likely to enroll at a USHE institution after high school graduation.
- BIPOC students are underrepresented in the college acceleration courses.
- Despite the comparable availability of accelerated college coursework, students in rural areas are underrepresented in college acceleration courses.

### **Concurrent Enrollment, International Baccalaureate (IB), and Advanced Placement (AP) Courses at Degree-Granting Institutions**

Concurrent Enrollment (CE) is available to high school students across the state. It allows academically qualified students the opportunity to earn college credits while in high school at extremely low tuition rates (\$5 per credit) subsidized by legislative funding. It is offered by the degree-granting institutions and is focused primarily on General Education courses that will aid with students' timely completion of degree requirements. It is taught by faculty from degree-granting institutions or by high school instructors qualified via master's degrees to serve as adjunct faculty on behalf of a degree-granting institution. Because Concurrent Enrollment courses simultaneously fulfill high school and college graduation requirements, the program is jointly administered by the Utah Board of Higher Education and the Utah State Board of Education. Additional funding through Senate Bill 196 (2015) specifically targets completion of Quantitative Literacy (math) General Education requirements through the Concurrent Enrollment program.

High school students can also meet General Education requirements through the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams. All USHE degree-granting institutions will award students the

---

<sup>1</sup> Allen, Taryn Ozuna, Melissa Laird Thompson, and Maria Martinez-Cosio. "Message, Hope, and Reality." *The High School Journal*, 103(1), (2019): 38-52.

same number of credits in commonly numbered General Education courses for specific AP and IB subject exams. This standardization, determined by faculty major committees, means that students will know exactly what credits they may earn if they meet the minimum exam scores regardless of which USHE institution they plan to attend.

### **Articulation at Technical Colleges**

Technical colleges have articulation agreements that are evaluated and updated annually by each institution with the Utah State Office of Education. Agreements define secondary courses that will be accepted for technical education credit. This coursework is applied to program graduation requirements when students enroll at the technical college, expediting time to completion and saving tuition dollars.

### **Early College and the Board's Strategic Plan**

Early College programs align with several tactics on the Board's Strategic Plan:

- *Increasing access to higher education by ensuring high school students are meaningfully informed about opportunities to earn college experience and credits while in high school and by helping students meet requirements for the Opportunity Scholarship*
- *Increasing timely completion rates through supportive educational practices in introductory courses and streamlining General Education requirements.* The majority of CE offerings are General Education courses and most of the AP and IB subject exams are aligned with General Education courses as well.
- *Improving timely completion rates for underrepresented students by increasing equity in pass rates in General Education courses.* Early college can be a helpful tool for providing access to those courses and for helping students pass them. The major system-level Concurrent Enrollment initiative for the next three years will focus on addressing equity gaps in CE participation and course success.

In the recent update to the strategic plan, the Utah Board of Higher Education committed to enhancing college-in-high school programming and approved a new tactic: *To strengthen and develop educational pathways to increase students' access to and completion of higher education aligned to Utah's workforce.* In order to do this, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education will oversee efforts in the following areas:

- Lead cross-agency cooperation to create a shared goal and definition of educational pathways within Utah;
- Collaborate with USBE, USHE institutions, and OCHE units to lead and coordinate all college-in-high school programs and pathways containing postsecondary coursework or credentials;
- Develop a data collection and reporting framework to assess the quality of educational pathways within Utah;

- Train and support Utah’s Regional Pathways Coordinators to develop and implement clear educational pathways from technical colleges to regional universities; and
- Utilize Talent Ready Utah’s connection to the workforce to align educational attainment with industry-validated occupations.

**Commissioner’s Recommendation**

This is an informational item only; no action is needed.