

Expanding access to high-quality dual enrollment through a unique teacher qualification model: A brief

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States have long struggled to expand access to dual enrollment due in part to the limited number of high school teachers who are qualified to teach these courses.¹ In most cases, high school teachers must meet the same qualifications as college instructors. This usually means having graduate-level credits or a master's degree in the dual enrollment subject they teach. However, most high school teachers have a bachelor's degree in their subject area and a master's degree in education or teaching.

Dual enrollment is a nationally recognized term for college courses that high school students can take to earn college credit. In Oregon, these courses are called **dual credit**, and they are taught in the high school by high school teachers. Oregon also uses the terms **college credit in the high school** and **accelerated learning** to refer to the variety of models that give high school students the opportunity to earn college credit.

Oregon has worked to expand access to dual enrollment through a model called sponsored dual credit. This model started in rural Oregon nearly two decades ago because schools did not have enough teachers who met traditional college teaching requirements. Sponsored dual credit is now widely used across the state and has grown faster than other models of college credit in the high school. In the 2023–24 school year, 28 percent of college credit in the high school courses were sponsored dual credit, representing 1,429 courses and more than 28,000 students taking these courses.



Sponsored dual credit is different from dual credit because high school teachers do not need the same academic credentials as college faculty members; instead, they qualify by taking part in ongoing professional learning with a partnering college or university.

Oregon’s sponsored dual credit faculty standards provide guidance on how teachers are qualified to teach college credit in the high school. There are standards for instructor roles and responsibilities, frequency of interaction between sponsored dual credit high school teachers and sponsoring faculty members, use of feedback to high school teachers for continuous improvement, and access to essential resources that are comparable to those available at the college level.

Teachers qualified through sponsored dual credit are required to meet at least once per term with their sponsoring faculty member, and there are three main ways these interactions take place: professional learning communities (PLCs), individual mentorship, or co-teaching. PLCs between high school teachers and a faculty mentor who teaches the course at the college or university are the most common form of interaction. PLCs can take place in-person, online, or in a hybrid format. This allows partnerships in rural and geographically widespread areas to meet the standards.

High school teachers interviewed for this study shared positive experiences with PLCs.

“Just having a PLC with other math teachers is incredible. Getting to talk about what we’re teaching and ways that we’re teaching and some games that we play to help teach or how do you review and what do your tests look like and can they use notes—all that kind of stuff—is very, very helpful.”

– Sponsored dual credit high school teacher

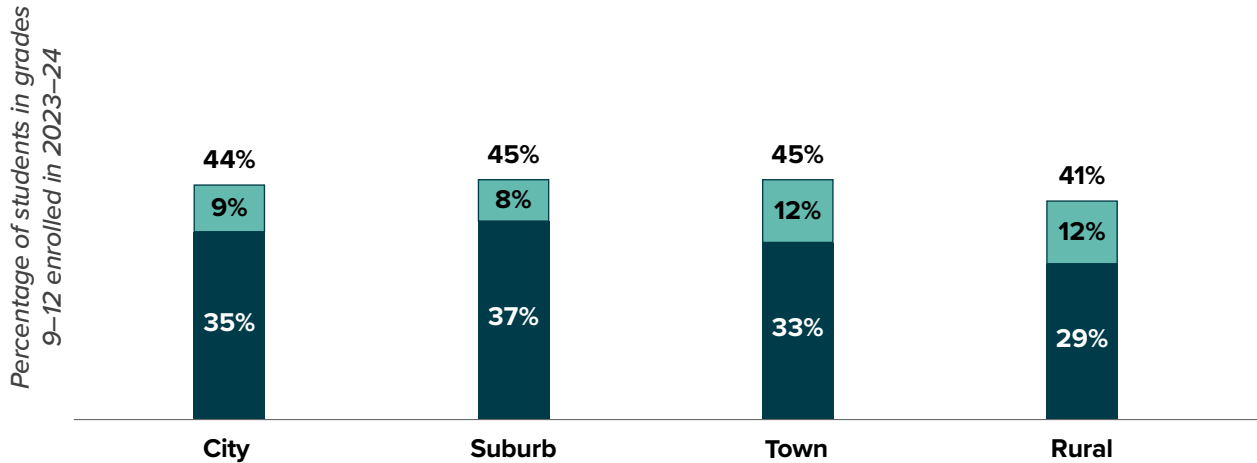
Sponsored dual credit has led to positive outcomes for Oregon students: It has expanded access to college credit in the high school, and its positive impact on student outcomes is equal to the positive impact of dual credit.

Sponsored dual credit is achieving a key goal of expanding access to college credit in the high school. Since 2020–21, the share of students who enroll in at least one dual credit or sponsored dual credit course has increased from 36 percent to 43 percent. In 2023–24, participation in college credit in the high school is estimated to be 10 percentage points higher than it would have been in the absence of sponsored dual credit.

A higher percentage of students in rural areas and towns participate in sponsored dual credit, and thus, sponsored dual credit has been especially important for reducing gaps in access to college credit in the high school for students in these geographic areas.

Figure 1. Sponsored dual credit is narrowing geographic disparities in access to college credit in the high school in 2023–24

■ Enrolled in any dual credit course ■ Only enrolled in a sponsored dual credit course



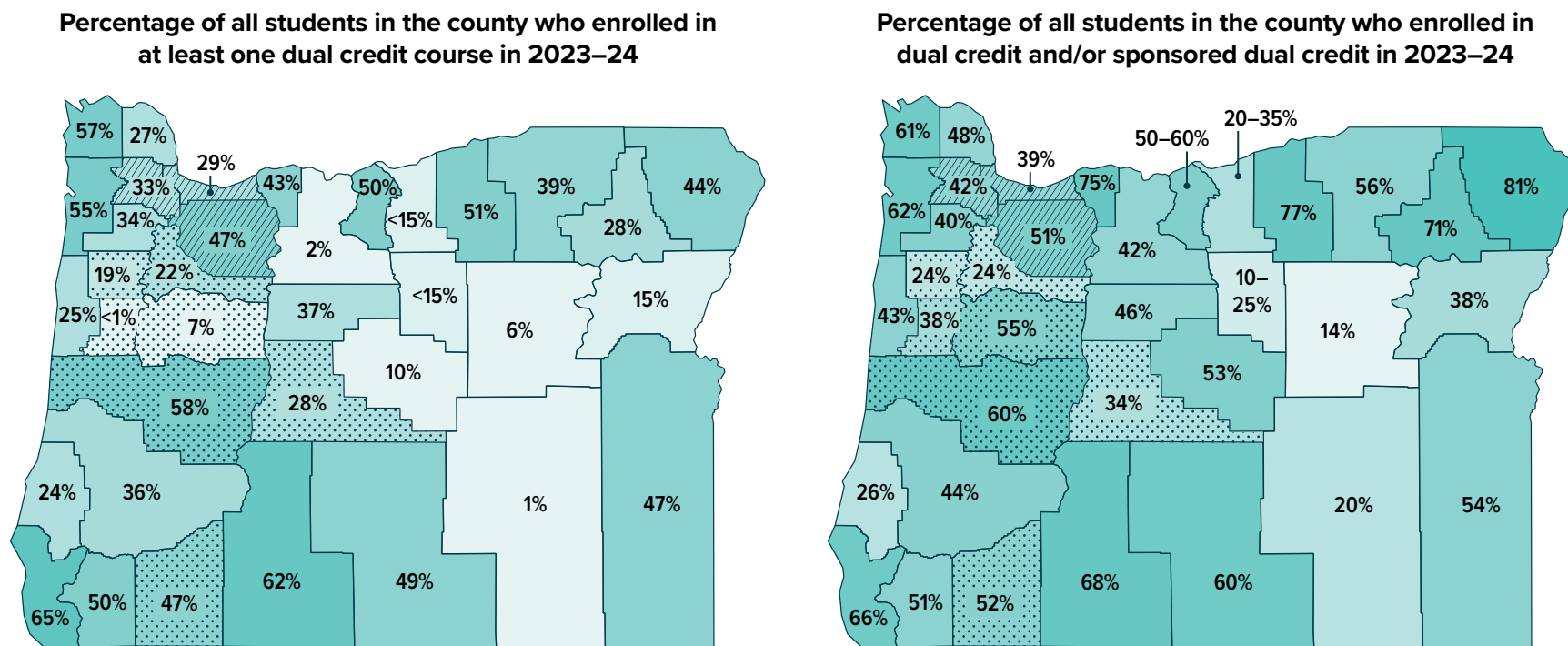
Note: Sample includes all students in grades 9–12 who were enrolled in an Oregon public school in 2023–24 with a non-missing locale code: N = 181,600. City, Suburb, Town, and Rural locales defined by the National Center for Education Statistics. Participation rates for the two groups may not sum to the overall participation rate due to rounding.

Source: Authors’ analysis of Oregon Department of Education and Higher Education Coordinating Commission data.

The rural trends seen statewide are mirrored across counties throughout Oregon. Sponsored dual credit has led to substantial participation gains in rural counties in central, eastern, and northern coastal Oregon.

Figure 2. Sponsored dual credit is increasing access to college credit in the high school in rural counties across the state (2023–24)

Rurality ■ Rural ■ Hybrid ■ Primarily urban



Note: Map shading corresponds to the percentage of students in the county who enrolled in at least one dual credit course (left map) or who enrolled in dual credit and/or sponsored dual credit (right map) in 2023–24, with darker shading indicating a higher percentage. Counties are classified as rural, hybrid (primarily rural but including a city with a population over 50,000), or primarily urban, as defined by The Ford Family Foundation (2025). In the figure, rural counties are shown with no fill, hybrid counties with a dotted pattern, and primarily urban counties with a hashed pattern. Sample includes all students in grades 9–12 who were enrolled in an Oregon public school in 2023–24: N = 181,600.

Source: Authors’ analysis of Oregon Department of Education and Higher Education Coordinating Commission data.

A rural college partner explained why sponsored dual credit is important for rural schools:

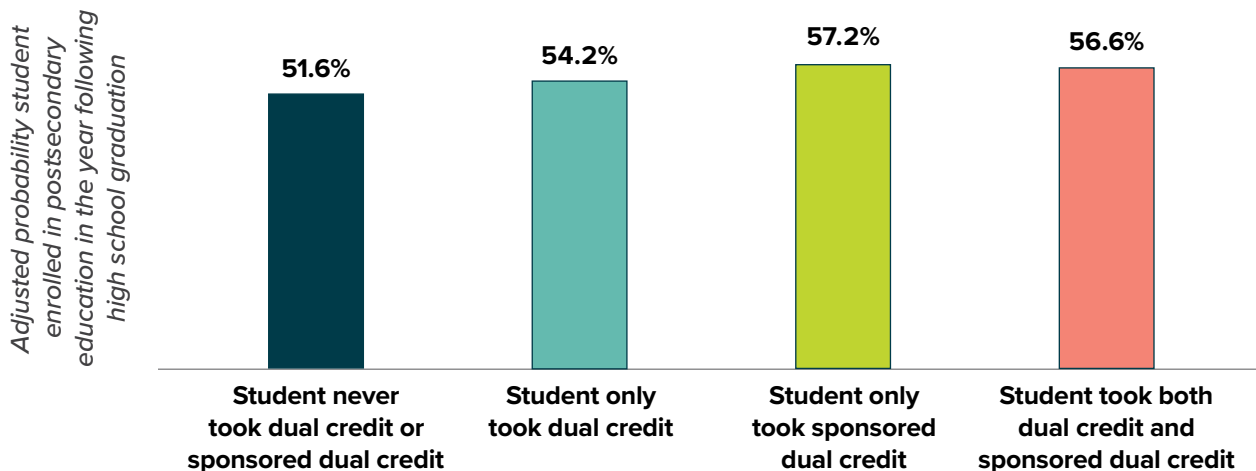
“I feel like our faculty are awesome and want to do it, and they like it as well. I think the only concern is the time and capacity. This is the work they want to be doing. They are excited to do these sponsored dual credit trainings and the mentorship piece ... It’s the work that they really enjoy and resonate with. They understand the need and the importance for sponsored dual credit and reaching our more rural areas that might be considered dual credit deserts, that maybe they don’t have the traditional type credentialing. Students don’t have access to other options because they’re so far away from a campus and can’t drive in. So, I think they understand the importance of sponsored dual credit.”

– Postsecondary Partner

Examining data from 2018–19 to 2023–24, the positive impact of sponsored dual credit on student outcomes is equal to the positive impact of dual credit. In other words, regardless of how teachers are qualified to teach college credit in the high school in Oregon, high school students are experiencing similar benefits. Students who enroll in sponsored dual credit or dual credit are equally more likely to:

- Take advanced coursework in the subsequent academic year
- Graduate from high school on time
- Enroll in postsecondary education in the following year

Figure 3. High school graduates who take sponsored dual credit or dual credit courses are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education after high school



Note: Vertical bars represent the regression-adjusted probability that a high school graduate enrolled in any postsecondary institution in the academic year following high school graduation. Regression models adjust for school, cohort, student demographic characteristics, and the count of individual advanced courses taken during high school.

Source: Authors’ analysis of Oregon Department of Education and National Student Clearinghouse data.

Additionally, learning outcomes are the same for students who took sponsored dual credit or dual credit courses: Specifically, for high school graduates who attend an Oregon public college or university, there are no differences in their first-year number of college-level credits earned, grade point average, and completion of college-level math and English courses.

States that are grappling with how to expand their dual enrollment educator pipeline—and particularly states that have gaps in access between rural and nonrural areas—should view sponsored dual credit as a lever for reducing access gaps.

To improve access to college credit in the high school and high school and postsecondary outcomes, faculty standards for college credit in the high school should not only focus on faculty credentialing but also on the quality of K–12 and postsecondary interactions and ongoing professional learning. High school teachers and college faculty members emphasized that their partnerships were most effective when they focused on the common goal of improved student success and when they nurtured and embedded the values of connection, collaboration, and mutual respect between educators.

Oregon’s sponsored dual credit model has clearly demonstrated that reimagining teacher qualification requirements can help expand access to high-quality dual enrollment. However, sponsored dual credit has not remedied all access barriers for students in the state. Students in special education and those who receive English language learner services still take college credit in the high school at much lower rates than their peers. To address these gaps, Oregon will need to examine the structural barriers that hinder certain groups of students from enrolling in college credit in the high school and address practices and mindsets about who belongs in these programs. Only by addressing these issues will the state live up to its vision that every student in Oregon will have access to college credit in the high school.

About this brief

This brief is a summary of the study “Expanding access to high-quality dual enrollment through a unique teacher qualification model.” The full study can be found here <https://educationnorthwest.org/publications/expanding-access-high-quality-dual-enrollment-through-unique-teacher-qualification>.

Endnote

¹ Zinth, J., Williams, A., Perry, A., & Parks, J. (2022). Building a concurrent enrollment teacher pipeline: Opportunities, challenges, and lessons. College in High School Alliance. <https://collegeinhighschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/BuildingaConcurrentEnrollmentTeacherPipeline-OpportunitiesChallengesandLessons.pdf>