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Columbia University Study Supports Aims of Louisiana's Dual Enrollment Program

A recent study conducted by Columbia University's Community College Research Center shows that dual enrollment programs, which allow students to earn high school and college credit simultaneously, promote positive outcomes on such measures as high school graduation and college enrollment rates, college grade-point averages and progress toward college completion.

The report bodes well for Louisiana's statewide dual enrollment program, administered by the Louisiana Board of Regents, which has been significantly expanded for 2007-08 in hopes of increasing both high school graduation rates college enrollment, and improving job opportunities.

"We've gone from several hundred participants in the first year of the program, to more than 4,300 as we've expanded this year," said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie.

"The Columbia study is further confirmation that the state's investment in the program will have a meaningful impact on college access and success in our state."

The Columbia study, entitled "The Postsecondary Achievement of Participants in Dual Enrollment: An Analysis of Student Outcomes in Two States," found that students from a broad spectrum of backgrounds benefit from enrolling in college courses while still in high school and argues that the recent expansion of dual enrollment programs across the nation may well be warranted.

In addition, the study demonstrates that while dual enrollment programs have traditionally focused on high-achieving students, the programs are increasingly perceived as beneficial in promoting academic rigor and easing the transition from high school to college for students with average GPAs and an interest in technical careers.

Students who participated in dual enrollment in high school had significantly higher cumulative college GPAs three years after high school graduation than did their peers who did not participate in dual enrollment programs. They also earned more college credits (indicating progress toward a degree) than non-participating peers.

Because the study found that dual enrollment programs seem to benefit a wide range of students, they suggest that dual enrollment courses be offered tuition-free for low-income students. They also propose that offerings be expanded, including those involving career and technical fields, and that restrictive eligibility requirements should be loosened.

Louisiana's Dual Enrollment Program is already conforming to those guidelines. The state will pay tuition costs for eligible 11th and 12th grade students who enroll in the program. The program is flexible, offering three levels of courses, depending on student interests and assessment scores: college- level/degree credit; enrichment/developmental; or work skills.

“The big conclusion is that we have some real evidence now that this is an effective strategy for helping students make a better transition to college and persist in college once they're there,” said Katherine L. Hughes, author of the Columbia study and assistant director of the Community College Research Center.