

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

BIPARTISAN HEARING ENTITLED:

**“INNOVATION TO IMPROVE EQUITY: EXPLORING HIGH-QUALITY
PATHWAYS TO A COLLEGE DEGREE”**

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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Innovation to Improve Equity: Exploring High-Quality Pathways to a College Degree

Chairman Bobby Scott, Ranking Member Virginia Foxx, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about using innovation to improve equity in higher education through dual enrollment programs. My name is Judy Marwick, Provost at William Rainey Harper College.

Located in Chicago's northwest suburbs, Harper College is one of the nation's larger community colleges, serving approximately 15,000 credit students each semester and approximately 35,000 total students annually. The College's academic programs prepare students for rewarding careers and for transfer to four-year universities. I, Dr. Kenneth Ender, President of Harper College, and my colleagues are honored to share with you some of the best practice models Harper College has created to ensure students enroll in an institution of higher education college-ready and complete a high-quality degree or certificate. We are also encouraged that the House Education & Labor Committee is seeking the input of stakeholders such as us to inform the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

The Northwest Educational Consortium for Student Success

In 2010, Harper College engaged in a transformational partnership, entitled the Northwest Educational Consortium for Student Success (NECSS), to ensure that every high school student and college graduate will have the opportunity to be prepared for 21st century careers and postsecondary success. NECSS is a regional educational collaborative comprised of Harper College and three high school districts (a total of 12 public high schools) to serve 23 communities. Together, we created an intergovernmental agreement with a statement of goals and objectives, a shared organizational design, and specific accountability measures.

The goal of the partnership is to improve curriculum alignment and early college opportunities to increase the percentage of students who graduate ready for college and to create pathways that lead to postsecondary credentials. The primary reason for the regional partnership's short- and long-term successes is a strong, consistent, and focused collaboration through innovative practices and a unified process for data collection, accountability, and transparency.

The early work of the partnership was to reduce the need for high school graduates to enroll in a developmental mathematics class upon college matriculation. In 2010, only 46% of the recent high school graduates who attended Harper College were qualified to enroll in a college-level mathematics course. In 2018, 82% of those students were so qualified. We achieved this result through data sharing to establish the need for the work, curriculum alignment, and an expansion of college placement methods and practices.

We determined that all high school seniors should be enrolled in either a calculus or pre-calculus course, a general education dual credit math course, or an aligned Algebra III course to prepare the student for college-level mathematics. The high schools recommended one of these three options to all seniors and Harper offered the dual credit math course at the high schools, taught by high school teachers who held the credentials to teach introductory college-level mathematics.

Following the successful collaborative work in mathematics, we shared additional college data showing that attainment of 15 college credit hours was a tipping point to predict student persistence and completion. Using this data in discussion with our high school partners, we decided to launch our next major project, The Power of 15.

The Power of 15

The Power of 15 was founded on the premise that most high school students should be able to graduate from high school having earned 15 hours of college credit in a combination of AP, dual credit, and credit by exam. Senior year should be a time for students to catch up if they are not yet college-ready or to speed up and begin college-level course work while still in high school.

The Power of 15 represented a dramatic expansion of our dual credit offerings, particularly those taught at the high schools during the school day. In 2012, 1,121 high school students were enrolled in one or more dual credit classes at Harper College. In 2017, over 4,000 students were enrolled, more than tripling the impact. Additionally, one of the local school districts extended their dual credit offerings by partnering with institutions other than Harper College, resulting in a total impact of over 6,000 students district-wide who were enrolled in at least one dual credit course in the 2017-18 academic year.

Dual credit classes are delivered in several formats. In some cases, high school students travel to the community college campus for class. This happens most frequently when the high schools either do not have the laboratory facilities needed for the class or when they do not have a qualified teacher. More often, the dual credit classes are able to be offered at the high schools.

As we have developed the Power of 15 initiative and expanded dual credit, most classes are now being taught at the high school during the school day. This is important because it eliminates the need for transportation costs and time. In 2012, 295 dual credit students attended class on Harper College's campus, while 855 students took college classes at the high schools. In 2017, slightly fewer students were coming to Harper College's campus, while 3,865 were taking a dual credit college course taught at their local high school during the school day. We are also currently offering one class in an online format that is delivered by a college instructor to several high schools.

At Harper College, dual credit classes were traditionally in career areas. In 2012, 82 dual credit students were enrolled in a class designed to transfer to a baccalaureate program at a

university, while over 1,000 students were enrolled in a class that was a part of a career pathway leading to employment. The Power of 15 initiative served to expand career education options (currently 1,900 students are enrolled) but had a more dramatic impact on general education offerings designed to transfer. In 2017, 2,539 students were enrolled in transfer classes expanding early college opportunities for students.

Power of 15 expanded rapidly and, like any new project, encountered some challenges. Initially, college faculty were concerned about less enrollment on campus and less control of academic standards in the high school classroom. High school teachers were concerned about being assigned to teach college courses rather than elective courses that they had enjoyed teaching in the past. These challenges were addressed by a focus on student pathways and the cost of post-secondary education as well as the reality that at each institution, the administration sets the schedule. The data sharing agreement was difficult as both high school and college administrations worried about FERPA and other data sharing restrictions. It was also important to design timelines, requirements, and processes that were transparent to all concerned. High school staff learned a great deal about college requirements, processes, and standards. Similarly, college staff developed a better understanding of high school operations and requirements.

A commitment to dual credit for students and compromises were necessary and ongoing. We developed a dual credit handbook and a chart of what classes were being requested, when classes had been approved, and when they would be offered. While this process was time consuming and sometimes difficult as we expanded, there is much to be said for a closer alignment between secondary and postsecondary systems. Students often fall through the cracks in the educational pipeline and it is easy for one system to blame the other for students' lack of achievement. When we agree as a community that we are all responsible for the students and make seamless the educational pipeline, everyone benefits.

The Impact of Our Dual Credit Program

Collaborations such as NECSS not only promote post-secondary education as a necessary path to a job with a wage supporting a middle-class life style, but completion of a dual credit class shows students that they can achieve at the college level. Dual credit courses compliment and expand early college opportunities for students in fields where AP courses are not available, as well as help lower remediation rates.

There were 6,488 high school graduates in June 2018 among the 12 NECSS high schools, with 46% of the students identifying as not white and 27% are low-income. While the early college attainment rates are lower for low-income and minority students, they are all increasing. Of the low-income students, 19% graduated with at least 15 hours of college credit up from 13% two years ago. Among all students, 32% are graduating with at least 15 hours of college credit. Further, when we consider students who received a "C" or better in at least one dual credit

course, the low-income students attain this mark at the same percentage (54%) as all district students.

Overarching Implementation Challenges

Costs

The most significant barrier to broad expansion of dual credit programs is the cost. Different states and districts have varied approaches to this issue. Some colleges charge full tuition for dual credit students, while some charge a flat fee or nothing if the course is taught at the high school. Harper College initially charged full tuition because most of the courses were taught by our faculty on the college campus. We then moved to charging tuition only for on-campus classes taught by college faculty and no fee for classes taught by high school teachers at the high school. However, we found that scaling up dual credit offerings necessitated hiring a full-time staff member and, in many cases, we provided stipends to college faculty for collaboration with high school teachers. We are currently charging \$50 per student per course for classes taught at the high schools, with one of the districts passing this fee on to the students. Another district pays the fee on behalf of the students – and at their request, we are considering reducing this fee.

Credentialing

A second barrier that also has a relationship to cost is the credentials of high school teachers. High school teachers are generally required to have a baccalaureate degree in the subject, and those who have master's degrees quite often have them in the field of education. However, the credentials to teach at the freshman and sophomore college level are generally a master's degree in the discipline or in a related field with a minimum of 18 graduate hours in the discipline. Thus, many high school teachers are not qualified to teach dual credit courses.

NECSS has addressed this issue through a collaboration with a local university to offer the necessary graduate hours to a cohort of teachers. The university was willing to offer the classes to the cohort of teachers at a reduced tuition and taught at one of the high schools. In one case, the district paid the tuition for the teachers. Another district did not offer this benefit and few of their teachers enrolled. As the NECSS high schools hire new teachers, they are adding teachers with the credentials to teach dual credit classes. Generally, teachers with master's degrees are paid a higher salary. This could be a barrier for some school districts.

Legitimacy of Dual Credit Courses

A third barrier involves college course standards and retaining the legitimacy of dual credit courses. When dual credit began in Illinois, some universities did not accept college credit if it was taught at the high school and counted for high school credit. We have come a long way since then and dual credit is widely accepted. However, it is important that colleges retain control of the curriculum, learning outcomes, and standardized assessments for dual credit courses. The courses need to be the same, whether offered on the college's campus, at the high

schools, or online. Course prerequisites and instructor qualifications must be the same. In an effort to provide more dual credit opportunities to students, it is tempting to overlook some of the course standards. This is a danger we must guard against, for if we do not truly provide college-level courses to high school students, we do them no favors as they will not have learned what they need to be successful when matriculating to college and the courses will soon cease to be accepted by the universities and industry. Dual credit must be an opportunity to take a college course while still in high school. It cannot be college credit for a high school course.

Policy Considerations

Early college credit whether in the form of dual credit, AP credit, credit by exam, or middle college experiences reduces the cost of education and promotes college enrollment and pathways to certificate and degree completion. Policies should promote and expand these opportunities by doing the following:

- Make available Pell Grant funding for students to enroll in dual credit courses.
- Establish and offer grants or incentives to institutions of higher education and school districts to offer dual credit courses taught by qualified high school teachers.
- Establish and offer grants or incentives to institutions of higher education and school districts to support educational models such as NECSS to ensure alignment of course work, accelerated coursework, and methods to address remedial education.
- Review provisions in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to address challenges that deter institutions of higher education and school districts from collaborating through partnership models like NECSS, while still fully protecting the privacy of students.