

Changing the dual-credit game

How a community college would increase options

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Katie Goodrich (center) and Lindsey Mickelsen work on a project about vectors in their college-level trigonometry class at Skyline High School on Thursday afternoon. Taylor Carpenter / tcarpenter@postregister.com



Aman

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Some high schoolers have figured out how to be in two places at once.

This school year, there are 579 dual-credit course enrollments in Idaho Falls School District 91. Dual-credit courses allow students to simultaneously gain high school and college credit for one course.

Idaho students can receive college credit in their high school classrooms from teachers certified to teach college-level courses by a university.

Idaho State University, College of Southern Idaho, College of Western Idaho, Lewis Clark State College, North Idaho College and Boise State are post-secondary institutions offering dual-credit courses to area high school students.

In District 91, most dual-credit courses are earned through College of Southern Idaho, Idaho State University and Boise State University, district spokeswoman Margaret Wimborne said.

But if the proposed [community college](#) becomes reality, the number of dual-credit courses offered in the area could increase dramatically. Eastern Idaho Technical College cannot offer dual-credit courses, but the community college could.

Why EITC can't offer dual-credit courses

“Dual-credit is one of those things that has no downside to it at all,” said **Rick Aman**, EITC’s president. “It’s driven me crazy that we can’t offer it.”

Sharee Anderson, vice president of instruction and student affairs, said EITC cannot offer traditional dual-credit technical courses because in order for a student to enroll in technical career courses, they first would need to complete college-level general education courses such as English and math.

“We are currently not allowed to do the traditional dual-credit,” Anderson said. “As a community college, we would be able to offer many general education dual credits to high school students.”

Another problem, Anderson said, is that EITC courses have waiting lists that can grow as deep as 200 students. The chances of a high school student enrolling in those courses is slim, she said.

EITC currently offers Advanced Opportunities Technical Competency tests which allow high school students to document proficiency skills and abilities they learned in high school, according to nextsteps.idaho.gov.

Dual-credit helps students

In the 2016-2017 school year, 1,356 District 91 students are enrolled in Advanced Placement and/or dual-credit courses.

“I think we have a solid number,” District 91 Director of Secondary Education Sarah Sanders said. “We are really looking to expand our capabilities in offering these courses.”

Skyline High School senior Eric Gillman, 18, is on track to earn 14 college credits by the time he graduates in May.

“This year has been really challenging,” Gillman said. He spends three hours a day at Compass Academy for an EMT course, for which he is earning 10 college credits, and three hours at Skyline taking six other regular credits. He also has two part-time jobs.

He also is enrolled in AP Calculus, for which he is on track to earn four college credits.

“I’ve always been told and raised by my dad to take as much as you can and do as good as you can in school,” he said.

Sanders said dual-credit courses can have a variety of effects on students, but that for many, it gives them the confidence they need to go on to college.

“I think when they realize that they can be successful in a college-level course already as a junior or senior, that’s encouragement right there,” Sanders said.

Statewide statistics

The one-year, go-on rate in Idaho — the percentage of students continuing their education after high school — dropped from 52 percent to 46 percent between 2014 and 2015, according to the [2016 Idaho High School feedback report](#).

One of the state's strategies for increasing the go-on rate was to make more college courses available to high school students by expanding dual-credit offerings.

Academic checklists for students in grades 8-12 are available on nextsteps.idaho.gov. The state recommends students start enrolling in dual-credit courses their sophomore year if they want to graduate early or gain college credit.

Students can enroll in dual-credit courses when they turn 16, unless given special permission by a school counselor to enroll earlier.

Grades received in dual-credit courses appear on both high school and college transcripts.

The community college difference

Anderson said EITC doesn't offer a wide range of general education courses because if a course doesn't apply to a particular technical degree, it isn't offered.

"The college was set up to do only the technical associate degrees and nothing else," Aman said. "The community college breaks that and turns us into the standard."

Anderson said that if EITC becomes a community college, high school students would be able to take college courses on the community college campus.

Sanders said the ability to offer dual-credit courses as a community college would affect District 91 in many ways. She said it would allow the district to expand its offerings exponentially and be able to collaborate in career and technical programs.

Kathleen Parsons, a counselor at Hillcrest High School in Bonneville Joint School District 93, said she assumes with a community college in Idaho Falls, students would have more opportunities to take dual-credit courses.

"We're anxiously waiting to see how that's going to impact our students," Parsons said.

EITC currently allows District 93 high schools to use its campus for dual-credit courses, Parsons said. She said it's a matter of access for students, and that since it's centrally located in the district, students have access to all the teachers certified to teach dual-credit courses.

Increased opportunities

Anderson said one misunderstanding people have about the possibility of a community college is that the technical college would be replaced with the community college.

"The technical school will remain exactly the same," Anderson said. "The only thing we're adding are the (general education credits)."

She said the school would offer the same programs and might even offer new ones funded by the community college.

The increased opportunities will help more eastern Idaho students afford to attend college and succeed at the college level, Aman said.

"I think (dual-credit) is really important," he said. "We have a really poor go-on rate."

Aman said if EITC became a community college, it could offer concurrent enrollment, which allows high school students to attend classes on a college campus.

“If we start to offer a couple hundred of these gen ed courses on campus, high school students can come on campus and literally have that college experience,” Aman said.