

# College Credit Plus Program

## Performance Audit Summary

### WHAT WE LOOKED AT

In Ohio, students in seventh through twelfth grade can enroll in college courses at little to no cost to their families through College Credit Plus (CCP), a dual enrollment program that allows eligible students to earn college and high school credits simultaneously by taking courses from Ohio colleges or universities. The program is coordinated by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE). While the program is jointly managed, each department assumes different roles and responsibilities. ODHE takes the lead in adopting rules that govern the program and communication, while ODE takes the lead in data verification and directing funding for program fees from the districts to colleges and universities. The purpose of the program is to enhance a student's post-secondary success while improving the career readiness of those graduating from high school in Ohio. As an additional benefit, students and families have the opportunity to save money on tuition costs by completing certain course credits during high school.

Prior to 2015, when the CCP program was created through legislation and became effective, districts could participate in a voluntary dual-enrollment program known as the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option. One key difference between the two programs is that districts are required to offer students the opportunity to participate in CCP and to provide information sessions so that students and their families are informed of their options.

Students were first able to participate in the program during the 2015-2016 academic year (AY 2016), and the program just completed its seventh year. In AY 2021, more than 76,000 students took advantage of the program earning more than 650,000 credit hours.

We reviewed the program's governance, participation, and outcomes along with funding and cost implications related to the program. The purpose of the audit was to determine the impact that the program has on Ohio students and their families while also identifying ways program participation could be improved.



## Online Data Dashboard

In addition to the information contained in the report, data dashboards were created to provide detailed data on CCP usage at the district level. These dashboards provide insights using a variety of metrics including demographic and geographic data. Click here for the [Website](#).

### WHAT WE FOUND

Ohio began offering dual enrollment in 1989 through the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option Program (PSEOP). This program, which existed for approximately 25 years, had several barriers to participation. For example, districts had the ability to discourage its use, such as by limiting a student’s ability to participate in extra-curricular activities or requiring high school students to take multiple college courses to obtain high school credit for an individual class.

CCP was established in 2015 as a replacement for PSEOP and was designed to alleviate many of the participation barriers identified in PSEOP.<sup>1</sup> CCP participation has dramatically increased dual enrollment participation relative to PSEOP. In AY 2015, PSEOP’s final year, the total number of credit hours taken was approximately 190,000. CCP had more than 650,000 credit hours taken in AY 2021, or an increase of approximately 240 percent.

In the first five years of CCP, program participation increased by approximately 50 percent, from 54,053 participants in AY 2016 to 76,601 participants in AY 2021. Based on available data, students who participated in CCP had, on average, 14 college credits completed when graduating from high school in 2020. This is the equivalent of almost five college courses completed, or approximately one semester’s worth of college, prior to enrolling as a traditional college student. These credits can expedite the amount of time it takes to graduate from a college program and provide students with more flexibility when determining their educational goals. In AY 2020, the amount of credits attempted represented a potential cost savings totaling more than \$155 million for Ohio families.

CCP offers four different methods of instruction, and only one requires attendance on the college campus so students have flexibility in how they choose to participate in college

<sup>1</sup> CCP was first operational in AY 2016 as HB 487 of the 130th GA (effective 9/2014) replaced PSEO with CCP. Uncodified language set forth the transition in which PSEO continued for AY 2015 and CCP started operation in AY 2016.

courses and are not required to be on campus. The most utilized option for instructional delivery for CCP students is at the high school using credentialed district employees. In addition to traditional on-campus enrollment, students may also attend courses exclusively online or a college may have an instructor or professor go to the high school to teach a course.

Colleges and universities receive payment for the courses taken by CCP participants in two ways. The first is through a transfer of district state foundation funding from ODE. This transfer is based on the specific educational delivery method utilized by participants and either the corresponding default rate established in legislation or the negotiated rate between a district and a college or university. When a student at a district enrolls in a CCP course, a portion of the foundation funding for that student is transferred to the college or university. This payment is akin to a regular tuition payment, although the cost per credit hour is lower than that of a traditional student. In addition to these transfers, public colleges and universities receive funding from the state known as the State Share of Instruction (SSI) for the education of Ohioans including CCP students that complete courses through the program.

While the program successfully provides many students with advanced educational opportunities, there is room for improvement in key areas. We identified multiple recommendations in the areas of program operations and participation which will enhance the success of the program.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS

**Key Observation 1:** Nationwide, dual enrollment programs have been proven to have a far-reaching impact on participating students. Students who participate in dual enrollment programs are more likely to graduate from high school, go to college, and complete a degree. While the CCP program is relatively new, these trends are identifiable in existing data. For students that graduated from Ohio high schools in 2016, the college enrollment rate was 46 percent higher amongst CCP participants than the statewide average. Further, once these students enrolled in college, the retention rate from year one to year two for CCP students was 48 percent higher than the statewide average.

**Key Observation 2:** As of 2021, nearly 8,000 associate degrees and certificates had been awarded to CCP students while they were still in high school. Further, for those that enrolled in postsecondary programs, we found that CCP students earned bachelor's and associate degrees while earning a similar number of total credits to their peers that did not participate in CCP. This means that the program is helping them to save money in college because these students are taking fewer courses than peers while enrolled exclusively in

college. The average CCP student saves approximately \$4,400 in tuition, fee, and textbook costs.

**Key Observation 3:** Nationally, participation in dual enrollment programs has been shown to close equity gaps for economically disadvantaged and minority students. However, the impact of this opportunity has been limited due to lower rates of participation of economically disadvantaged and minority students. For Ohio’s dual enrollment program, College Credit Plus we identified several factors that likely contribute to this lagging participation rate that are likely to be barriers for some students in these populations.

**Key Observation 4:** While CCP has achieved the initial program goals of improving overall participation rates and minimizing barriers for students, there are no formal goals and objectives to guide the future of the program. In particular, the data collected by ODHE and ODE on program participation is largely used to report out historical performance. This information, if used strategically, could be the basis of a forward-facing plan designed to increase access to the program in underserved populations, expand participation to save families additional tuition costs, and proactively respond to the evolving needs of Ohio’s future workforce and economy.

## PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

With the exception of AY 2021, which was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCP program has seen growth in participation in each year of existence. This growth has occurred both in the number of individuals participating and in the number of credits which are attempted and earned. Ohio has one of the highest rates of dual enrollment in the country. However, the market for talent is increasingly competitive for job seekers, businesses, and governments seeking to encourage economic growth. Ohio benefits from a well-educated workforce and identifying ways to increase participation in CCP can help give graduating seniors a competitive edge.

Our review of program participation and outcomes identified some key areas that will assist overall participation and enhance program experience for Ohio’s students and families. We further identified areas where changes could be made to encourage low-income and minority students to participate at a greater rate.

**Recommendation 1:** Providing information and promoting CCP to families encourages and increases program participation. Traditional school districts are required by law to begin providing information regarding CCP to students and families beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. However, several districts self-reported that they failed to comply with this requirement and there is wide variation as to when information is first provided to families. ODE is broadly responsible for administering the educational policies of the state including the

administrative responsibilities of school officials and personnel and should work to ensure compliance with requirements specific to CCP. ODE and ODHE should take a larger role in the marketing, communication, and compliance of the program. As a part of this, the Departments should consider, using rule writing authority if necessary, developing standard communication forms that Districts would be required to use to eliminate confusion regarding the use of state funding for the program. Ensuring consistent communication and marketing of the CCP program and offering clear CCP enrollment forms will help to increase program participation. Also see **Recommendation 7**.

**Recommendation 2:** College courses can be taken through CCP on a college or university campus, in a high school setting, or online. Currently, the CCP delivery methods that are the most easily accessible to students are those models which are held at a high school campus. In order to improve overall CCP participation rates, school districts should work to increase the number of classes available in the high school setting. This will require decisions to be made at the local district level based on the needs of the community. In some instances, it may require the credentialing of additional high school teachers, sharing credentialed teachers among school districts, or leveraging county Educational Service Centers to provide CCP instruction. In others, it may require strong partnerships with colleges or universities to provide professors on the high school campus. By expanding access to CCP courses at the high school, students will be able to more easily participate in the program.

**Recommendation 3:** The General Assembly has allocated a total of \$8 million in grant funding for the purpose of increasing the number of CCP credentialed high school teachers which was jointly administered by ODE and ODHE. The most recent grants were awarded in FY 2020 and provided funding through FY 2023. Entities were awarded funds to be used towards graduate coursework necessary to credential teachers to instruct CCP courses. Grantees received funding through a reimbursement of expenses once claims were verified by ODE. However, the law did not grant ODE the authority to require that individuals complete the credentialing process. This means that grant funding may not be maximized as individuals may ultimately choose to not seek out credentialing. If future grants are awarded, ODE and ODHE should work with the General Assembly to require the attainment of CCP instructor credentials as a condition of the award, along with a required service period. Doing so would help to ensure that the grant funds are fully maximized for their intended purpose of increasing the number of CCP credentialed teachers. In turn, this could result in increased program participation.

**Recommendation 4:** Traditionally underserved students, particularly those that are low-income or minority, participate in the CCP program at a lower rate than their peers. The

reduced rate of participation is due, in part, to barriers that these populations face that impact the ability to attend courses online or on campus. To improve program participation, ODE and ODHE should work to minimize barriers to participation such as limited access to support services and high speed internet for these students. In doing so, the Departments can improve CCP participation rates for traditionally underserved students, allowing more families to take advantage of program benefits, including exposure to advanced educational opportunities and cost savings associated with pursuing post-secondary education. As additional data is collected and incorporated into long-term strategic goals, ODHE and ODE can work with colleges and universities and districts to design and expand targeted initiatives to further address barriers and develop a plan to increase participation.

**Recommendation 5:** For those students who choose to attend CCP courses at a college or university, there is little to no program specific orientation available to them. While colleges and universities have orientation programs for traditional students, new CCP students may not benefit from those to the same degree as orientations specifically tailored to them. ODE and ODHE should work with colleges and universities to ensure there is a robust and uniform orientation program for CCP participants. These orientation programs should be designed in a way that the comfort level of CPP participants is increased as they navigate college course and so that they are prepared for the rigor and expectations of college courses.

## PROGRAM OPERATIONS

The CCP program functions as a collaborative effort with ODHE and ODE providing funding and general oversight and high schools, colleges, and universities responsible for the education of students. While there is no direct funding support for the operations of this program, the staff working on this program are funded through general appropriation to the Departments; ODHE employs two full-time positions dedicated to implementation and oversight functions. To the extent that public funding is applied to the program, it is in the transfer of school foundation funding from districts to colleges and universities for those students participating in CCP and the inclusion of CCP students in the calculation of the State Share of Instruction (SSI), which is distributed to public colleges and universities through ODHE.

Our review of the program's governance, funding, and cost implications led to multiple recommendations that would improve overall programmatic operations. In particular, our recommendations are focused on the strategic utilization of data and improved oversight in order to develop goals and objectives for the program.

**Recommendation 6:** The CCP program does not have distinct, progressive, measurable program goals supported by routine data analysis and evaluation. While ODHE and ODE both collect significant amounts of data related to the CCP program and student participation, this information is focused on outputs, such as the number of courses taken in a year, and not outcomes, such as reduction in time spent pursuing a degree or certificate program. As appropriate program oversight is established and data collection is enhanced to include outcome data, formal goals and metrics should be developed to ensure desired programmatic outcomes are being achieved and to identify areas for improvement.

**Recommendation 7:** The laws governing CCP establish specific duties for ODHE and ODE related to the distribution of funds and data collection and reporting. They further require the establishment of an advisory committee to assist in the development of performance metrics and monitoring of the program’s progress. However, the laws do not identify who is responsible for overall program oversight. ODHE, ODE, and the CCP advisory committee should work with the General Assembly to clarify and strengthen the management, oversight, and compliance monitoring functions necessary to allow CCP to reach its potential. In doing so, they should consider what structures and resources will be necessary to continue to monitor and improve the program in order to provide strategic direction that will support the evolving needs of Ohio’s students, economy, and workforce.

**Recommendation 8:** There is a significant amount of data collected by both ODHE and ODE regarding the CCP program, and the content and quality of this data exceeds that of most peer state dual enrollment programs. This data is largely related to program participation while students are in high school and is used to comply with annual reporting requirements that provide historic detail on the outputs of the program. While the data collection practices used by ODHE and ODE are generally good in comparison to peer states, there is room for improvement. In some cases, there are data fields that are incomplete, particularly as it relates to demographic information, and data that is inconsistent in nature, such as identifying the type of courses being taken. This type of information is critical in identifying where program improvements could be made. Both ODHE and ODE should work to ensure that the CCP data collected is both complete and consistent. This information can then be leveraged to identify and work towards strategic programmatic goals.

**Recommendation 9:** When a student takes college courses through the CCP program, ODE directs payment to the college or university based on a default rate that is specified in ORC. The default rate varies based on the delivery model and contains both a maximum and minimum charge. The current formula that establishes the default rate uses a set dollar amount identified in ORC as a baseline and has not been significantly updated since the program first began. The General Assembly should review the default payment rates to ensure that they appropriately reflect the current cost to IHE’s to provide CCP courses to

high school students. In doing so, the General Assembly should consider how future changes to the foundation funding model might impact the program's default fee rates.

**Recommendation 10:** In addition to CCP participation fees, school districts are also required by law to cover the costs of textbooks, which can be costly. One way to reduce the impact of purchasing textbooks is through the use of open educational resources (OER), which are freely accessible, openly licensed text, media and digital assets including college textbooks, online supplements, etc. While efforts have been made to expand opportunities for the use of open educational resources in the state, their current utilization appears to be limited. The General Assembly should require ODE and ODHE promote opportunities to increase the use of OER materials among CCP participants and could consider splitting the cost of educational materials between colleges and universities and high schools. A strategic effort should be made to align existing and available OER materials with CCP courses offered among the State's various colleges and universities. Collaborative efforts should be aimed toward gaining wider acceptance and adoption of OER materials among Ohio's colleges and universities. Increased adoption of OER textbooks would reduce costs to school districts, which could, in turn, encourage further participation in the program.

**Issue for Further Study:** Public colleges and universities receive funding from the state through the State Share of Instruction (SSI) to subsidize the cost to educate Ohio residents. This funding is based on a complex formula that takes into account student enrollment and academic outcomes and is based on detailed cost information reported by institutions to ODHE within the Higher Education Information (HEI) system. The formula does not differentiate CCP students based on course delivery model. This means that a CCP student using the high school instruction delivery method would generate the same SSI value as an on-campus CCP student. As a result, the SSI funding received for the education of CCP students may be outsized relative to the actual costs of that education. ODE and ODHE should work with the General Assembly to re-evaluate how to best set and deliver SSI payments to ensure the payments align with the costs incurred by colleges and universities to deliver CCP services.