

**LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE
BILL ANALYSIS**

Bill Number: SB 229

52nd Legislature, 1st Session, 2015

Tracking Number: .198022.1

Short Title: Remove Requirement for Certain School Classes

Sponsor(s): Senators Gay G. Kernan and John M. Sapien

Analyst: Travis Dulany

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FOR THE LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE

Bill Summary:

SB 229 removes a requirement in the *Public School Code* that at least one of the units required for high school graduation must be earned through one of the following means:

- an Advanced Placement (AP) or honors course;
- a dual credit course offered in cooperation with an institution of higher education; or
- a distance learning course.

Fiscal Impact:

SB 229 does not contain an appropriation.

Substantive Issues:

Next-step Plans

It may be important to note that, although SB 229 removes the requirement to earn at least one credit through an AP/honors, dual credit, or distance learning course, the bill still requires students to include one or more of these courses – or a career-technical course or pre-apprenticeship program – in the student’s next-step plan (see page 9, line 23 through page 10, line 10). This provision may help to encourage students to enroll in at least one of these courses without requiring them to do so for graduation.

LESC Testimony

During the 2013 and 2014 interims, testimony and committee discussion during Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) meetings called into question the efficacy of requiring these courses for graduation. During committee discussion, school district testimony noted that this graduation requirement can be difficult to meet because AP/honors, dual credit, and distance learning course offerings vary widely throughout the school districts and are dependent upon school district resources and the capacity of local postsecondary educational institutions.

Additional testimony from school district officials noted that there are higher success rates in postsecondary education among students who participated in AP and dual credit in high school;

however, this is merely a correlation, not a causal relationship, and students who took the initiative to enroll in these advanced courses were likely to enroll in them regardless of the graduation requirements.

A committee member further noted that students who are not qualified candidates for AP/honors or dual credit courses will utilize the option to take a distance education course during the student's freshman or sophomore year in order to meet this graduation requirement, which indicates that this statute does not necessarily improve AP or dual credit participation rates.

Although there is agreement that these programs are helpful to students, testimony to the LESC about increasing AP and dual credit participation has focused on improving access and the early identification of students who are likely to excel in these programs (see "Background," below).

Strategies to Improve Advanced Placement Success

Each year, The College Board publishes its *AP Report to the Nation*, which, among other items, identifies key strategies to improve AP success. Rather than requiring enrollment in AP for graduation, these strategies tend to focus on:

- alignment of curriculum and instruction;
- removal of financial barriers in taking the AP exam;
- support for teacher professional development; and
- identification and recruitment of students with potential to succeed in AP courses.

Model Policy Components for Dual Credit

Similar to some of the strategies noted for AP, model policy components for dual credit published by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) highlight opportunities to increase dual credit success. Also, like the AP strategies, the model policy components for dual credit do not necessarily endorse the inclusion of dual credit in state graduation requirements.

According to ECS, states should consider the following when developing dual credit policy:

- access – to increase the likelihood that underserved students will participate in dual credit, state policies should:
 - require districts/institutions to allow all eligible students to participate;
 - include both two- and four-year institutions;
 - determine student eligibility requirements based on demonstration of ability to access college-level content (i.e., placement exams);
 - consider removing caps on the maximum number of dual credit courses students may complete;
 - clearly state that students earn both secondary and postsecondary credit for successful completion of approved postsecondary courses;
 - annually provide all students and parents with program information; and
 - make counseling and advisement available to students and parents before and during program participation;
- finance – to ensure that state policies offer incentives for district and institutional participation, and to remove barriers for middle- and low-income students, state policies

should fully fund or reimburse districts and postsecondary institutions for participating students; and

- course quality and transferability – to maximize the benefits of dual credit, policies should ensure that:
 - courses meet the same level of rigor as the course taught to traditional students at partner postsecondary institutions;
 - instructors meet the same expectations as instructors of similar traditional postsecondary courses and receive appropriate support;
 - institutions publicly report on student participation;
 - programs undergo evaluation based on available data; and
 - student dual credit will apply toward postsecondary completion.

Background:

Advanced Placement and The College Board

AP takes its roots in the post-World War II era, when the Ford Foundation created the Fund for the Advancement of Education. In two studies supported by the fund, educators recommended that secondary schools and postsecondary institutions work together to avoid repetition in course work at their respective levels and to allow students to advance as quickly as possible.

According to The College Board, in 1952 a pilot program was launched introducing advanced courses in 11 initial subjects. By school year 1955-1956, The College Board took over administration of the program, which was named the College Board Advanced Placement Program. Data for AP in New Mexico, which date back to 1976, indicate that 28 students in five secondary schools took 33 AP exams at the time and that their scores were reported to six postsecondary institutions.

More recently, testimony to the LESC from The College Board during the 2014 interim highlighted initiatives that help improve AP success rates in New Mexico. These initiatives focus on improving the AP experience for students, increasing outreach, earlier identification of AP candidates, and financial aid for students seeking to take the AP test. More specifically, the initiatives include:

- enhanced communication and outreach to students, parents, and counselors in English, Spanish, and Diné;
- Preliminary SAT (commonly known as PSAT) and National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test fee subsidies;
- the AP start-up program;
- expanded professional development for both teachers and academic advisors, including online professional development for rural teachers;
- the AP course start-up program specific to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics courses, including online AP courses;
- AP exam fee subsidies; and
- a full-time, in-state initiative manager from The College Board.

Dual Credit

In 2007, the LESC endorsed successful legislation to create, for the first time, a dual credit program in state law. This program allows high school students to take courses offered through a postsecondary educational institution and earn credit at the high school level and the college level simultaneously. Dual credit is frequently said to fulfill a number of purposes and produce a number of benefits, among them:

- providing high school students an introduction to college life;
- affording high school students access to college-level material;
- shortening the time – and thereby the expense – required to complete a postsecondary degree; and
- enhancing the academic and vocational offerings of the school district.

During the 2013 interim, the LESC heard testimony from the Vice President of Policy and Programs, ECS, regarding model state policy as it relates to dual credit enrollment. This presenter emphasized that:

- dual credit programs should not hinge upon the creation of a partnership between a district and one or more postsecondary institutions and would afford greater access if (1) students are allowed to participate in dual credit regardless of whether their high school has a partnership; and (2) public postsecondary institutions are required to accept eligible students;
- while students will oftentimes elect to enroll in courses at community colleges, where costs are typically lower, state policies should not prohibit public four-year institutions from participating in the program; and
- student eligibility should be based on quantifiable indicators of a student's ability to succeed in a postsecondary course (e.g., completion of prerequisite courses; college placement exam scores in reading, writing, or math, where appropriate; and/or other proxies of college readiness such as ACT or SAT scores).

Testimony during the 2013 interim also noted a number of innovative ways in which dual credit is being implemented in other states:

- Texas: districts must annually set enrollment goals for advanced courses (not just dual enrollment); performance evaluation includes a student's demographic and socioeconomic information;
- Tennessee: dual enrollment goals are part of the community colleges' performance funding formula;
- Arizona: an advisory committee of full-time faculty assists in course selection and high school implementation; the committee reviews and reports whether course goals and standards are understood and maintained;
- Colorado: the Concurrent Enrollment Advisory Board creates common procedures across K-12 districts and colleges; the board has the authority to make policy and funding recommendations to boards and the legislature; and
- Missouri: high school instructors have a faculty liaison on campus who provides on-site supervision and evaluation.

Finally, with regard to Colorado specifically, the ECS Vice President for Policy and Programs noted that recent policy changes for dual credit in that state included:

- eliminating all age and grade-level restrictions;
- creating uniform financial policies;
- authorizing “double-payment” between K-12 and higher education funds;
- eliminating “pre-payment” requirements for courses;
- adding remedial courses (in grade 12) and career technical courses;
- creating a “fifth year” option for advanced students; and
- establishing accountability/reporting requirements and common contract language.

Committee Referrals:

SEC/SPAC

Related Bills:

SB 157 *High School Work Force Assessment System*
SB 207 *Prohibit Some Education Fees & Allow Others*
SB 328 *Graduation Standards to School Boards*
SB 496 *Career Tech Education Courses as Electives*
SM 21 *“New Mexico GRADS Day”*
HB 145 *Graduation Standards to School Boards*
HB 178 *Career Technical Education Courses & Terms*
HB 308 *School Workforce Assessment System*
HB 345 *Gov’t Literacy as Elective & Dual Credit*