



**SOAR: Southwest Outreach Academic  
Research (SOAR)  
Evaluation & Policy Center**

**Gadsden Blended Senior Year  
Pilot Cohort 2019 – 2020 Senior Class  
End of Year Report: July 2020**

Prepared by SOAR Evaluation & Policy Center

New Mexico State University College of Education

Dr. Rachel Boren, Ph.D.

Director

Contact: [rboren@nmsu.edu](mailto:rboren@nmsu.edu)

[alliance.nmsu.edu/soar](http://alliance.nmsu.edu/soar)

Date prepared: July 31, 2020

## **Purpose of This Report**

This report presents main findings for the Gadsden Blended Senior Year (BSY) pilot cohort as of the end of participants senior year and first full year in the program. A total of 34 students at one Gadsden Independent School District high school participated in the pilot year of the program. The purpose of the BSY is to offer high school seniors an opportunity to earn certifications in a student-selected Career and Technical Education (CTE) program of study at the local community college, Doña Ana Community College (DACC). The report mainly focuses on stakeholder feedback about their experience up to this point and identifies key recommendations for improvement and scale up. Student performance in their college courses and program costs are also examined. It is important to recognize that this evaluation is being conducted under extraordinary circumstances, as Gadsden ISD began the 19-20 school year recovering from a ransomware attack and ended the year in the throes of the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing all high school and college courses to abruptly move online in March 2020. There has also been severe educational and economic disruption in the state, and across the country, and there continues to be uncertainty about the future in these areas.

## **Methods and Data**

For the current evaluation report, the SOAR Evaluation and Policy Center collected the following data:

- Group interviews with student participants at the end of September 2019 (start of senior year), December 2019 (middle of senior year), and May 2020 (end of senior year).
- Cumulative college grade point average (GPA) at the end of Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 and total college credit hours earned as of the end of Spring 2020.
- Graduation records to determine if any students did complete their CTE certificate program during their senior year of high school.
- One-on-one interviews with high school and DACC staff and leadership who were involved with planning and implementing the pilot. Feedback focused on what they saw as program strengths and suggestions for improvement or considerations for scale up. Program costs were also provided by each institution.

The evaluation will continue to follow students for two years after high school graduation to determine if they completed their certificate program and if they are working in a related area. A total of 34 students participated in the Blended Senior Year pilot.

## **Results**

### ***Student Performance***

Of the 34 students who participated in the pilot year, 27 of them completed their courses at DACC, and these students are the focus of the current report, as the BSY is Career and Technical Education focused and intended to be completed through the Community College. These 27 students were almost evenly split between males (13 students) and females (14 students), and all but two were Hispanic.

The other seven students chose to pursue college coursework at New Mexico State University.

In order to participate in the BSY, students had to meet the criteria required for all students to participate in any Dual Credit program at the College (<https://dacc.nmsu.edu/dualcredit/how-to-apply/>). Thus, all students had at least a 2.0 high school GPA to qualify.

First, looking at student performance, cumulative college GPAs at the end of Fall 2019 were mostly good, with an average of 3.42 on a 4.0 scale. Cumulative college GPAs in Spring 2020 as a whole were still generally good, with an average of 3.16, though this is slightly lower than the Fall 2019 average. It is also important to acknowledge the unanticipated move to fully online courses beginning in the middle of March, where DACC required all courses to stop meeting in person and to implement all courses virtually. This was due to the pandemic and was very abrupt, and students and faculty had to act quickly to adjust.

Looking next at college credits earned, there was an average of 22 credits earned as of the end of Spring 2020. About one third of participants (n = 9) earned 26 or more credits, while a small amount (n = 4) earned 16 or fewer credits (one student withdrew from the program and did not complete the Spring semester). More information about cumulative credits earned can be found in the table below.

*College Credits Earned as of the End of Spring 2020*

Credit Range:	Number of Students
16 or Fewer Credits	4
17 - 20 Credits	7
21 - 25 Credits	6
26 - 30 Credits	9

In terms of certificates awarded, as of the end of Spring 2020, six students earned a CTE certificate from DACC.

***Qualitative Feedback***

The next section presents notes that were gathered from participant and stakeholder interviews. These are broken up into main areas that are relevant for identifying what is working well and program components that need to improve or that would be relevant for scale up. The final section covers student feedback about their experience moving their courses fully online, as in the middle of March, DACC moved all courses online per regulations that were implemented to mitigate a national health crisis.

How did the program begin and what was the purpose?

- The Bridge of Southern New Mexico sparked the concept of the Blended Senior Year. The framework was conceptualized by Dr. Michael Morehead, board chair of The Bridge and former Dean of the College of Education at New Mexico State University. Dr. Morehead and Tracey Bryan, president/CEO of The Bridge, reached out to then-fellow board member Dr. Renay Scott (former president of Doña Ana Community College) and current board member Travis Dempsey, superintendent of Gadsden Independent School District to propose the pilot.
- The BSY presents students with options for Career and Technical Education pathway certificates with credit requirements that can be completed more quickly than associate degrees offered through Early College High School, but that are more structured than traditional Dual Credit. The slightly lower credit requirements also meant that if students changed their pathway, they could likely still complete a certificate before high school graduation or shortly after. A small group of students chose to attend the nearby four-year institution rather than the Community College

because they did not want a CTE degree. Leadership also indicated that the program provides students with access to postsecondary education they may not otherwise have.

- To get the program launched, the Community College established a workgroup that was made up of staff and key stakeholders at the high school and college levels. This workgroup was designed to have those on the ground and who worked with students the most come together to plan the Blended Senior Year implementation. This group worked through how to launch the program while balancing the time that would be involved for advisors to work with participants as this is a very involved process. Any certificate program offered at the Community College was an option for students (though some programs have age requirements to participate).
- The high school also had a key stakeholder who was involved with planning and implementation who had prior experience with and knowledge of Dual Credit programs, which was described as integral in the launch of the program. This knowledge of what worked, what to avoid, and having relationships with the College was also described as critical for the management of the program during the academic year as well. Stakeholders did suggest that it would have been helpful to have additional representation from the high school in the planning workgroup.

Why are students participating in the BSY program?

- Several students mentioned they only needed a few (or in some cases, just one) credits to complete high school, and they wanted to take advantage of the BSY since they were done with their high school requirements, so they “might as well” get some college credits done early.
- Many also noted they viewed BSY as an opportunity to save money and have college courses paid for.

Was the recruitment and selection process clear? Was the application process smooth?

- Students described how for recruitment, juniors were told about the program and invited to join without a lot of specifics, but they were told about available pathways at the College. This year (with the second cohort), a representative from the College came to the high school to talk with students about the program and how the types of Dual Credit options differ, though parents were not present during this talk.
- Participants indicated that after they were accepted, they were given a series of “tests” to see if they were “willing to do the work,” and if they were committed to the program. Students thought this was an effective way to retain those who were really invested and motivated, particularly since they described the initial recruitment as lacking specifics about what exactly the program would be like. Other stakeholders indicated that introducing students to the program over the course of a few semesters was a good way to prepare students to begin a degree program, as the first check point was the College Success class at the high school, then taking a Government class in the summer of 2019, and then proceeding with Fall 2019 enrollment in multiple courses. These checkpoints required students to demonstrate college readiness beyond test scores and gave students a real idea of what college courses were like.
- DACC advisors were described as very helpful, including how they accommodated class schedules with student work schedules, their high school requirements, and convenient course locations. Students felt their advisors were very committed to their success.
- Stakeholders indicated that communication with parents during the initial recruitment process is critical and could have been improved to make sure parents received all of the important

information about required documents and to get a good overview of the purpose of the program early on. Such communication would also include presenting information about the different campuses, transportation considerations, and the pathway (program) options at the different locations.

Was the onboarding or beginning of program orientation helpful (e.g. the College Success High School Course)? How could it have been better?

- There seemed to be some confusion about students taking general education courses that apply toward the associate's degree and then later a bachelor's degree - families seemed to think that general education courses should be taken, but that is not the purpose of the BSY. The final deliverable of the program is a certificate, and even though these courses are free to take, "getting the general education courses out of the way" is not part of the program intentions.
- Participants talked about the online College Success class during their junior year but felt as though it was a little unorganized and piecemeal. They indicated it would have been more helpful had it been more interactive and planned out. Though the College offers a College Success course, students did not enroll in sections due to how quickly the preparation needed to begin, and because it would have been difficult to make this work with student schedules. The high school did use a DACC syllabus for the scope, sequence, and content.
- Students took the same first college course in Summer 2019, a Government class, which met a high school and college requirement. A few students took the class online if their schedule did not allow for in person. Students had a good experience in this course overall.

Was the BSY experience what students expected?

- Overall, students enjoyed their experience in the BSY, describing how they liked being around college students who were also focused on their learning, and staff agreed that students seemed engaged and that they appreciated the ability to take classes elsewhere other than their high school. Students talked a lot about how they enjoyed getting a sense of what college is like – the amount of work, atmosphere and other students, and the faculty.
- Several participants also described how they thought that college faculty would be stricter with them but instead were more lenient about class requirements. Participants regularly received the message from faculty that "it's on you," and it's the student's responsibility to do the work. Students further described that their college instructors had different teaching styles and personalities compared to most of their high school teachers.
- Staff and leadership indicated that their expectations of how the year would unfold were mostly achieved, however, not as much in terms of where students took their courses, as many students ended up not coming to the Las Cruces College campuses to take their courses and instead mostly stayed near their high school. About a quarter of participants traveled to Las Cruces for classes. Students who did not have a specific program in mind at the start tended to choose taking courses that were closer to the high school rather than making the drive to Las Cruces or working with the public transportation that was provided.
- Though public transportation was made available to students, many chose not to use it as they indicated the timing does not fit well with their course schedules.
- Describing a typical "what to expect" for students can also be challenging, because each student is different. This includes what pathway they are interested in, preferences and needs in course

modes/times of day, placement scores and prerequisites, and so on. Though this can be described as a structured Dual Credit program that aims for students to complete a CTE certificate, the “typical” experience can be hard to communicate to prospective students.

Did students find the program easy, manageable, or challenging? How so? What was the workload like for other stakeholders involved with implementation?

- Overall, students thought the BSY expectations were manageable, particularly since they found the flexibility with college course scheduling easier to work with if they were also balancing a job or family expectations.
- Though the flexibility of course scheduling was described by many as a plus, a minority of students did indicate that sometimes it was difficult to manage both college and high school events they wanted to attend, as they were still high school seniors. They liked Google Classroom and found that to be a helpful way to receive announcements from the high school, with students overwhelmingly preferring this approach over email.
- Staff indicated that one non-trivial and unanticipated challenge came up shortly before Fall 2019 classes started. At that time, several students changed their minds about their schedules, and the advisors had to advise and register them again. This process was time consuming during an already busy time of the year. Travel seemed to be the main reason why students changed their minds and ultimately decided not to commute too far to their college courses, or they ended up not having a car or other means they were hoping to have by the time classes started.

What were the most helpful components of the program for students? The least helpful?

- Students described the best part of the program as the flexibility to participate in college classes and “still enjoy high school,” going further to share that they found the college experience more enjoyable because “you are left to your own devices.” They liked how they could work on assignments when they wanted to rather than during specific times allocated to do so.
- Participants had access to College computer labs and support services (e.g. tutoring) and were able to utilize these without issues. Many students used the computer labs but few used tutoring, though those that did indicated it was helpful.
- Students who took online courses generally found these manageable, though they did note that students should not sign up for online courses expecting them to be easier than in-person courses. Staff also indicated that advising students into online courses was not done without first examining their prior performance and proficiency, as this mode requires a lot of self-regulation.
- Staff felt that students had a better understanding of the registration process and what was involved when registering for Spring 2020 courses compared to registration for Fall 2019. Students also felt more prepared to register as they understood what degree plans are and that these give them a guide for what courses to take.

What do stakeholders think is still needed at this point for the program to be successful?

- Students noted how it took a long time to get their books for Fall 2019, which they felt made the start of the semester difficult. They had to go through the centralized process the district follows to get books for Dual Credit students. It also took longer than students expected to get an access

code to get into the WebAssign module for their courses. For the Spring 2020 semester, students were able to pick up their textbooks at the College before classes started.

- Though students were appreciative that tuition was paid for, those who were in pathways that required specific software, such as Photoshop for the creative media program, indicated that, though the software was available in the computer labs, students often needed these tools outside of lab hours. Some students also indicated that they had to purchase an account on a Pearson website to turn in their homework or for e-books and that this was around \$100. Gas was also an unexpected expense that students encountered and that they described as non-trivial.
- Stakeholders noted that these are still high school students who had high school requirements to complete during the BSY experience. Reminding participants to complete their Edgenuity requirements at the high school (as these cannot be done online) while managing their college needs was time consuming.

What is needed to scale the program up or to implement it elsewhere?

- For scale up, there will need to be sufficient personnel to ensure that students have enough time with College advisors to register them for courses and more broadly to prepare them for the college experience, including discussing their transportation circumstances, course needs and schedules, and placement test results. Degree plans and the registration process are new for these students, and they require time with advisors who are already handling a lot, and to add this onto advisors already packed responsibilities is not sustainable if additional students are added to the program. Financially, the College does not seem to receive a lot of help for supporting Dual Credit. This is another possible impediment to scale up.
- To implement this program elsewhere or scale up, staff emphasized the importance of ensuring that advising and course registration was set at the time of the initial advising meetings without any concerns that students would change their minds, resulting in additional time on the part of a limited advising team. This was a substantial issue before the Fall semester began, and whatever can be done to prevent or reduce student last minute changes would be ideal.
- Overseeing participants at the high school is also an involved effort. This includes regular and often ad hoc communication and problem solving that is tailored to each student's circumstances. Having school counselors more involved would be helpful in addition to any other high school staff who are impacted by the program. If more students participate, there will need to be sufficient high school personnel who have the time to work with these students.
- General education advising is different than Dual Credit advising, as the latter has several specifics and protocols for the high school students to follow. It is important that anyone working in this capacity with Dual Credit programs has an in-depth understanding of these rules.
- The high school is exploring ways to sustain the program with more participants. It is helpful to have one main point of contact, but it is also important that other counselors are knowledgeable about the program.

How did students react to the abrupt move to fully online courses in Spring 2020 (per the pandemic)?

- Students who participated in this focus group indicated that they have overall adjusted well to the move to fully online courses and that they are comfortable with Zoom. However, they did note that assignments sometimes seemed to add up very quickly and much faster than when

their courses were in person. Other stakeholder feedback also suggested that students had a relatively smooth transition to online courses and that students were at a point where they could ask their professors for help if they needed it. Instructors were also described as accommodating to student challenges. It is also possible that some students did not have reliable internet or technology they could use for classes (which is not unique to this specific group and is a challenge for many students and families at home), which may have impacted their ability to fulfill course requirements.

- Being that this is a CTE-focused initiative, some students were enrolled in programs that had hands-on training, such as nursing. Though these courses can be hard to teach online, even with virtual software, students noted that their instructors worked to provide options for students to procure equipment they could use at home where possible. Though these options were not the same as the more expensive and high-tech equipment they would have at DACC, these options could still help students practice hands-on skills while courses remain online. Even with the possibility that in-person courses may be offered later on but in smaller sections to accommodate social distancing, this may impact student's ability to enroll in the courses they need as fewer seats will be available (unless additional sections are scheduled, which will have additional costs for the institution). This may in turn negatively impact students time to complete their degree if they have to wait to take their required courses.
- Students also gave advice for next year's cohort, as it is likely their courses will start online, as well. These seniors noted that it is important for students to reach out to professors through email, Zoom office hours, or by phone, as staying connected to their instructors was helpful for those who did and provided some sense of normalcy. Students also described how these faculty are important for students to know, as these are the individuals who have key connections and knowledge about their career fields of study, and these relationships can prove valuable beyond the boundaries of course grades.
- Pandemic aside, most seniors had clear plans for next Fall, with most indicating they are continuing their education in the field they are currently studying.
- Though this report focuses on the first BSY participants who just completed their senior year, it is worth noting that the second class (juniors last year, entering their senior year this Fall) had a difficult time with the abrupt shift to online courses. College advising had to be done online and over the phone, with forms exchanged electronically rather than having in person sessions at the high school that were planned. As mentioned elsewhere in the report, these students are new to the college experience and advising is more than just about what courses to take - it is about what college is like and what to expect. The advising process was a more time-consuming effort on the phone or virtually compared to in person, though feedback did indicate that more families and parents were able to join in on the advising calls compared to in person advising at the high school. Stakeholders expect the registration process to be smoother for Spring 2021, and the evaluation will look at how that process goes when the time comes.

### ***Financial Considerations and Time Involved***

One of the goals of this pilot is to ultimately scale the BSY program across the region and the state, and this cannot be done without understanding the costs incurred by DACC and the high school in addition to the total hours that were spent on program planning and implementation.



First, with the number of student credit hours taken at DACC, a total of \$46,768 in tuition was waived for these students. This was calculated at \$74 per credit hour times 632 hours for the year. DACC also waived placement test fees for students, which totaled \$1,125. This was calculated at \$25 per test and 45 students who were tested, though not all of these students became BSY participants. Also, if the program scales up, DACC will need to pay additional adjunct instructors for the necessary sections, which will cost them between \$5,562 and \$7,000 for an experienced instructor.

There are other financial considerations for the high school, as well. The district pays for student textbooks, meaning they had to pay for BSY college textbooks for all 34 students, rather than using books they already had in stock for participants. The total amount the district had to spend on BSY textbooks was approximately \$15,751.26 (this includes costs for students at DACC and those who took courses at the four-year institution instead). The district also incurred public transportation costs for students so they could attend their classes if they did not have the means to get to the appropriate DACC campus. Those totals were given for both the 2018 - 2019 year (when students were juniors) and 2019 - 2020 year. The 2018 - 2019 costs totaled \$12,021.59 for student transportation to DACC in Sunland Park and totaled \$4,048.10 for student transportation to the DACC Anthony Center in 2019 - 2020 (no students required transportation the second semester). The table below presents costs incurred by the Gadsden Independent School District for Blended Senior Year pilot participants. Note that the DACC Per Pupil Average costs are based on the 27 students who took classes at that institution, and the Gadsden ISD Per Pupil Average costs are based on all 34 BSY participants. Additionally, DACC estimated dual credit state reimbursement total was based on the 2018-2019 credit hour rate of \$15.76 per credit hour, and average was calculated using the average credit hours DACC students completed in the 2019-2020 academic year. Gadsden ISD staff supports estimates are based on the average salary for a K-12 administrator in New Mexico.

<b>COST of IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>TOTAL For BSY PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>PER PUPIL AVERAGE</b>
<b>Dona Ana Community College</b>		
Waived Tuition (632 hours)	\$46,768.00	\$1,732.15
Waived Placement Test Fees	\$675*	\$25.00
Est. Dual Credit State Reimbursement	-\$9,960.32	-\$346.72
<b>TOTAL EST. EXPENSE TO DACC</b>	<b>\$37,482.68</b>	<b>\$1,388.25</b>
<b>Gadsden ISD</b>		
Textbooks	\$15,751.26	\$463.27
Transportation (2018 - 2019 Year)	\$12,021.59	\$353.58
Transportation (2019 - 2020 Year)	\$ 4,048.10	\$119.06
Additional Staff Supports for Students (100 hours)	\$9,728.95	\$286.15
Minus Cost Per Pupil Savings on Instructor Costs	-\$11,135.00	-\$327.50
<b>TOTAL EST. EXPENSE TO GISD</b>	<b>\$30,414.90</b>	<b>\$894.56</b>

*\*DACC waived testing fees for 45 students totaling \$1,125; however, for the final total, only the fees for the 27 students who participated in the BSY are included (\$650)*

As DACC has logistics and costs they will incur with additional sections they may need to offer, the high school also has considerations about their teachers and sections. With two teachers at the high school teaching College Success sections, this reduces the time they can teach other students at the high school. These sections taken up by the College Success course were then spread out to other sections to accommodate non-BSY students. This program is designed to give students one foot into college, though it is not best for every single student in high school. Still, even if only one to two-thirds of seniors are enrolled in college courses in a given semester, this has implications for how the high school schedules their courses and how they can accommodate students who are not in the BSY.

In terms of time involved, this was a non-trivial effort for the high school and the College. The time estimates for the planning phase (before students started the program) included the effort that leadership and key staff at the district, high school, and College spent in meetings to outline their vision and goals for the program, identifying and mapping out the specifics of how the pilot should be launched and implemented, participant recruitment, and student testing. Estimates of this effort by those involved totaled 183 hours.

For monitoring and implementation during the year, again, this was very involved for these stakeholders. Staff at the College and high school spent a lot of time working with students to advise them and follow up with them throughout the semester, which included DACC advisors (and administrative assistant help) and the high school coordinator who frequently checked in with students and served as their main liaison with the College. The time involved was heaviest at the very start, middle, and end of the semester, as this is when students are registering, getting their books, and when their grades were posted. The time involved by high school and College staff for *implementing* the BSY during the year and assisting with student and program needs totaled 340 hours (100 hours for the high school/District and 240 hours for the College).

### **Main Findings and Recommendations**

Overall, participants found their time in the BSY to be positive and enjoyed the college experience. Aggregate academic performance was generally good with mostly A's and B's, though performance was slightly poorer in the Spring semester. Additional data will be collected from the Department of Workforce Solutions and from participants during the next two years, and records will be checked to determine if more students complete their certificate programs. Assessment of the data collected *up to this point* yielded the following main observations and recommendations:

#### *Program Launch and Setup*

- Having a working group made up of key staff and stakeholders who work with students and understand what is involved with preparing, registering, and supporting them during their first exposure to college was a good way to plan the program's launch. An additional faculty member from the Community College could have offered additional insight into some of the degree plans and faculty perspective with this program's purpose and population. More representation from the high school would also help ensure that more staff at the high school are knowledgeable about the program and their perspective would also be useful.
- During the first year of the program, setting everything up needed to be done quickly, and there was a lot to plan. One of the first components that had to be ready was the College Success

course, which due to time, was offered at the high school rather than the College. Students felt the course seemed a bit rushed, however, this year (with the second cohort), there was more College staff involvement early on in recruitment and screening processes. Integrating the College into processes early on where possible only benefits students and stakeholders alike.

### *Recruitment and Application*

- The series of check points students had to pass through was lauded by students as a good method to have students self-select out of the program and identify early on if they were unlikely to succeed in the program. In particular, casting a wide initial net and advertising to students in groups was an effective way to let them know about the opportunity (compared to emailing them). Staff and leadership also indicated that a process that had multiple check points for students to pass was also a good way to phase students into the program. The stakes are high if students fail any college courses as those are permanent on their transcript and are hard to recover from in terms of impact on GPA. The program should continue to phase students into the program with these checkpoints, which were positively received by students and facilitators.
- This program presents a way for some students to take college courses who may not otherwise have the opportunity to do so and allows them to take these courses while still enrolled in high school for what is likely a less intimidating experience than enrolling after high school. Stakeholders talked about how the net for potential participants can be cast wider to reach students who truly would not have gone to college were it not for this program - what is the best way to reach this group? This is worth discussion among leadership.
- During the recruitment and application process, parents and families need to be well informed about the program – what it is, what commitment is involved, and to have the opportunity to ask questions and talk with those involved with program implementation. Parental involvement and interest in their student’s experience varies, as some are very involved and others are more hands off, but it seems they trust administrator decisions. Many students indicated that their parents were unsure about how the BSY was different than high school, indicating that though they signed the permission forms and may have come to advising sessions, parents did not understand the program goals and intentions. Integrating parents into information sessions and any advertising or recruitment would help them understand the program better and would address the next recommendation as well. With the remote advising sessions conducted for the second BSY class (due to the pandemic), more families were able to experience this process compared to in person advising sessions and continuing to engage families virtually is worth exploring.
- Advisors having to change student schedules shortly before the Fall semester started was an unexpected challenge and non-trivial effort. It is important for students (and parents) to understand that the registration process in college is different than what is involved in high school and that changing schedules can be a time consuming and involved process for staff, particularly because for Dual Credit students, they have to come to the advising office and have this done manually. Students seemed to have a better understanding of degree plans and registering when they signed up for Spring 2020 courses compared to Fall 2019 and this big change did not happen again, but ideally it would be reduced if possible (realistically, avoiding change altogether is unlikely). Evidence indicates that advisors did take the time to work with

students to prepare them for the BSY, but this is worth noting for subsequent cohorts and is as a consideration when preparing for scale up or implementation elsewhere.

- Related to the unanticipated schedule changes, some students were hopeful they would have their own transportation when classes started even though this was not available at the time they registered, and when that did not come to fruition at the start of classes, students changed their schedules so they would be close to their high school. This is another area that needs to be discussed with students in detail when they register. Though staff do discuss considerations with students and feedback indicates that they are very helpful and supportive of participants, this is worth noting for future cohorts or others who wish to implement a similar program. Further, though public transportation was available for students, many indicated the schedule was not conducive to their college course times. Arranging this public transportation option for students was a great idea, but very few used it. If students continue to not use public transportation, leadership should evaluate if this is worth continuing to fund (particularly if classes primarily remain online).
- Staff involved with the program talked about how the BSY is designed to introduce students to Career and Technical Education, and that field trips to DACC are a good way to show students their options and what DACC has to offer them. This would also be great for families so they could have a better sense of what their students would experience and may alleviate transportation concerns that several participants and families had this year about their children taking courses further away from the Gadsden area. A DACC virtual “tour” is also worth planning should operations continue to stay remote, and this could be a fun and informal way to begin to introduce students to college.

#### *During the Program*

- Many participants did not have their textbooks when classes started in the Fall semester due to the lengthy process of obtaining books for Dual Credit courses that is run through the district. For the Spring, participants were able to pick up their textbooks like traditional students do, and it is important that they continue to have their textbooks before the semester starts as this puts them behind otherwise. There were also technical issues with students obtaining their college IDs, and while some things can't be helped, this hiccup is worth noting for future cohorts to see if it can be avoided or addressed in any way.
- The costs of additional supplies and materials were areas students indicated they needed help with. This was mainly special software for courses in pathways such as creative media, and though software was available in the computer labs, students claimed they needed access after lab hours and had to purchase the software to complete course requirements (and without labs fully operational due to the pandemic, this may not be an option anyway). Some students also said they had to purchase access to Pearson for a class. These tools presented participants with unexpected costs that should be told to students as possible expenses they may incur (if they are not already) and noted for future cohorts and scale up. Students also indicated that gas was expensive for them as they had to commute to classes. If students do not choose to use public transportation, they should be presented with estimated costs of gas for commuting to their courses - this would be important for them as they plan and may influence their choices.
- Staff who worked directly with participants suggested that students who did not perform well academically needed a little extra help and reminders about their college courses and that

maturity may have been a factor. These are still high school students, as mentioned elsewhere, who are accustomed to a more structured style in their schooling. To help address this maturity issue, it was suggested that current participants could talk with prospective students about the experience to provide them with a realistic idea of what the BSY involves and to give them a sense of the work and high stakes of not taking the program seriously.

- The unexpected shift to online courses in the middle of the Spring 2020 semester was a surprise to all students, faculty, and staff, and everyone had to act quickly to adjust. Online instruction will continue in Fall 2020 and likely beyond, and students need to be prepared for this mode of instruction as much as possible. This can include advice from current participants who are available to talk with new seniors and should include input from College advisors and those at the high school who work with students regularly. The second class of participants already had challenges with virtual registration and advising, as they were completely new to the process and to college itself and they did not have time to prepare. This evaluation will continue to track student progress and feedback about the BSY to determine if the online experience impacts either of these areas. There are still opportunities to prepare future students for online courses and the online advising process. It also is important that others who are considering implementing a similar program understand the effort involved with registering high school students for their college courses and introducing them to college in general in a fully virtual environment.
- Also on the topic of moving to online courses, students who participated in the end of year focus group described a positive experience with this shift, and although it was abrupt, students seemed to adjust well. Students who are used to working with specialized equipment for their CTE program noted that their professors are finding other options for the time being to provide them with some form of hands on experiences until they can get back to the classroom. Students did mention that assignments seemed to accumulate more quickly compared to in person courses, which would be good for staff to note as they prepare the next senior cohort for likely remote instruction in the Fall. Students also talked about how future participants should be encouraged to reach out to their professors through email, phone, or virtual office hours, as it is easy to seem disconnected from the instructor but there are key ways they can engage throughout the semester that students may not pursue without encouragement.

#### *Scaling the Program Up or Implementing it Elsewhere*

- Though they demonstrated college readiness per test scores and academic performance, participants were still high school students who were experiencing college for the first time. Advising them (and their parents) is about more than setting up a schedule - it involves preparing students and their families (possibly) for what college involves and is a time intensive process. The College Success course is helpful for presenting important information for participants as a whole, but students have individual needs and circumstances to manage. This also includes support and regular contact at the high school. To scale the program up, a dedicated individual who serves as the main point of contact and triage for the high school, College, and students is needed. This individual would need to be accessible for students and has to understand student's high school needs and Dual Credit protocol from the college perspective and could serve as the main advisor for this group. If more students participate, the program will not succeed if additional responsibilities are merely added to current staff.

- The need for constant contact with participants at the high school was non-trivial and at times heavy, particularly during the very start, middle, and end of the semester. The time spent advising and following up with students by College staff was also very involved as well. This cohort had 33 students (though fewer took DACC courses), and with scale up, the time involved to support these students at both institutions will greatly increase. It is important to note this and plan accordingly for subsequent scale up in order to be proactive. Monitoring and implementation hour estimates by DACC and high school staff totaled 340 hours, which will increase greatly with additional participants. To echo the prior bullet point, having someone dedicated to this program or general Dual Credit advising who is shared by the College and high school would be important for program success and scale up. This remains a strong need should courses remain online, as this central point of contact is critical for student support regardless of how classes are delivered.
- Financially, it would be important for the College to receive additional formula funding, reimbursement, or some sort of support for their role in the Dual Credit effort to support this point of contact and any other staff/materials needed for these students. There were talks of the College and district sharing an advisor, and since funding used to be provided by the legislature but then apparently ended, advocating for this support will be important if college and career readiness continue to be of interest to the State of New Mexico. If students do continue with college courses after high school, the College will earn those tuition dollars, however, there is a lot of work involved for the College while the student is in high school.
- Scaling the program up will require that the Community College has sufficient course offerings to accommodate participants. This means that faculty will need to commit to a summer course and that multiple sections of common courses that cross multiple pathway plans will need to be scheduled, which is a lot of work and will mean recruiting faculty. Having another faculty or department chair in the working group would help as they can share their perspective on scheduling and recruiting from the faculty pool, and it is important that course offerings are taken into account when offering the BSY to additional students.
- The College and high school invested a lot of time with the planning and implementation of the BSY pilot (591 hours). This includes time spent preparing for the program launch, recruitment, advising students, testing them, checking in with them during the year, and addressing individual concerns and issues they may have faced. This added up quickly, however, feedback indicated that Dual Credit is a good recruitment mechanism for students to enroll in College after they graduate high school, and here, only three students completed their certificate program their senior year. This means that there are still several students who need to take DACC courses without the tuition waiver, and if enough students continue their degree program after high school, DACC will be better able to support the necessary resources to accommodate these students (staff, instructors). This data will be examined next year, as if students choose not to continue their courses, this will be important to note to determine if there can be anything done to address it.
- To scale up or implement the program elsewhere, clear guidelines about the goals of the program, intended population, and protocol will be helpful to have in writing to share not only with others who are interested in this type of program but within the current district in general. This should be in an accessible format that is brief and easy for others to pick up and understand. This will ensure consistency of information that is shared among a variety of groups

who are directly or indirectly (e.g. other faculty, parents) involved with implementation or who are otherwise impacted by the program. Having this information accessible will also help parents and students understand why they are being guided to take certain courses even though they could complete general education courses that apply to an associate's degree - that is not within the scope of this particular Dual Credit program.

- It is evident that one key reason the program was able to launch quickly and that it has run smoothly up to this point (with a few expected hiccups but nothing identified as egregious) is because one of the key stakeholders at the high school already had relationships with relevant individuals at the College and had prior experience with Dual Credit. Understanding lessons learned and who to contact to address student needs before the program begins helps ensure timely resolution of issues and helps students avoid spending a lot of time trying to figure out who to call if they have a problem. Identifying best practices and building relationships between the high school and College is important for others who are considering implementing a similar program.
- Finally, it is critical to recognize the extraordinary impact the pandemic has had on education and the economy, which will likely be felt for years. There is still uncertainty about what will unfold these next couple of years, and BSY students may choose not to enroll in courses if they are limited in availability or if they remain fully online, as this is not how the program was intended. Their career options may also be limited with the pandemic's hit on the economy. It is important to keep the pandemic in mind when thinking about subsequent cohorts and scale up.