



## Double the Numbers: A Jobs for the Future Initiative

# Head Start on College: Dual Enrollment Strategies In New England 2004–2005

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each year, more and more high school students reduce their college costs and get a head start on college through programs that enable them to earn up to two year’s worth of tuition-free college credit. Although dual enrollment, as such arrangements are commonly known, is more often thought to be a solution to the “senior year blues” for advanced students, that is not, in fact, its only purpose. In a number of states, dual enrollment serves “average” high schoolers, some on technical and career tracks, some headed for liberal arts Associate’s or Bachelor’s degrees. Policymakers and educators concerned with improving the access of students underrepresented in postsecondary education are also beginning to con-

sider dual enrollment as a strategy to introduce higher education to a “second population”: young people who may not consider themselves “college bound.” The hypothesis is that dual enrollment, if structured properly, can accustom these students to the demands of college while supporting them to meet those demands within their more familiar high school environments.

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation asked Jobs for the Future to explore the degree to which secondary and postsecondary institutions in the six New England states are implementing dual enrollment. This report of the findings of that research focuses on secondary/postsecondary systems and programs serving the second population—those who may not consider themselves “college bound.” Following a summary of the national picture of dual enrollment policy and programs, we review dual enrollment in New England, present JFF’s findings, and pose questions about whether dual enrollment could—or should—be developed as an approach to increasing the number of college graduates in the region. The report includes vignettes of 19 dual enrollment partnerships, with examples from each New England state.

While JFF found promising and innovative programs and institution-based initiatives that show the promise of dual enrollment, the major challenge facing expansion of dual enrollment in New England is the absence of legislation and institutional policies that would permit: 1) college courses to replace high school courses in order to accelerate students through postsecondary education and



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shorten time to the degree; and 2) high school or college funds to be used to pay for the participation of high school students in post-secondary courses and programs.

## Questions and Observations

Given the uneven distribution of dual enrollment programs in New England, the absence of state-level policies, and the lack of urgency in regard to increasing the college degree attainment rate, Jobs for the Future recommends that further conversation build on what already exists at the program and higher education systems levels. The New England states differ from each other in the organization of their state departments of education and higher education. Thus, at the state policy level, each state will have to decide whether dual enrollment will fit with its mission and goals in regard to increasing college graduation rates for underrepresented students.

*The Program Level:* Stand-alone programs serving small numbers of underrepresented students exist in isolation from one another. At minimal cost, practitioners leading these programs might form a loose network to share ideas, collect and compare data, and support other partnerships wishing to provide opportunities for “at risk” students.

*The System Level:* New Hampshire and Connecticut have substantial dual enrollment programs embedded in their community and technical college systems, but the programs appear to exist “under the radar.” A study of the return on investment that results from dual enrollment could potentially strengthen the argument for further growth.

*State Policy:* The New England states rank high in college graduation, yet gaps would become apparent if these states were to disaggregate their high school completion and college going data by race and income. The states should ask how or whether dual enrollment would be an effective strategy to address those gaps.

## Methodology

To identify innovative dual enrollment programs, JFF disseminated a survey in 2004 to the over 3,400 secondary and postsecondary institutions in New England. Eighty-five institutions responded (see Appendix A), and from these JFF selected nineteen to profile here. The institutions reviewed their profiles for accuracy in May 2005. JFF also:

- Analyzed state policies, both those in place and those in the pipeline, by talking with key staff in the six states and by using the Web;
- Identified and interviewed a number of program experts to learn more about specific programs; and
- Conducted site visits or interviews with staff at the programs profiled.

JFF conducted over 50 interviews and researched over 25 programs. In deciding which programs to include here, we used criteria developed by JFF for its “Double the Numbers” initiative. Those criteria, listed in greater detail in the guide to dual enrollment programs in New England (see page 15), include the following:

- The program serves a wide range of students, including those not traditionally “college bound.”
- The program provides academic, financial, and social supports to dually enrolled students.
- The program develops college readiness skills and habits of mind.
- The program involves a secondary/postsecondary partnership embedded in a broader high school reform and/or P-16 effort.
- The program has a sustainable funding structure.
- The program tracks and analyzes outcomes.