



AMERICAN YOUTH POLICY FORUM
BRIDGING YOUTH POLICY, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH

Setting the Record Straight: How Trendy Approaches to College Access Might or Might Not Be Helping Low- Income Students

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Resources

The College Ladder: Linking Secondary and Postsecondary Education for Success for All Students

Available online at www.aypf.org/publications

Moving the Needle on Access and Success (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, WICHE)

Available online at <http://www.wiche.edu/policy/>

Definition

Secondary-Postsecondary Learning Options (SPLOs) are schools and programs that link secondary education with two- and four-year institutions of higher education and allow high school students to participate in college-level courses for credit and not for credit.

Categories of SPLOs

- **Dual Enrollment**
- **Tech Prep**
- **Middle/Early College High Schools**
- **Programs Serving Disadvantaged Youth**

AYPF considered 22 evaluations of SPLOs for *The College Ladder*.

WICHE also considered International Baccalaureate across the country.

Dual Enrollment

Programs that provide opportunities for high school students to participate in college-level coursework in hopes of earning postsecondary credit.

- **Institution-specific dual enrollment programs**
- **Advanced Placement (AP)**
- **Statewide dual enrollment programs**

Tech Prep

A planned sequence of study in a technical field that typically provides students the opportunity to earn postsecondary credit toward a technical certificate or diploma. Tech Prep is funded under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technology Education Act through grants to states.

Middle/Early College High Schools

Both are located on or near a campus of a postsecondary education institution and supplement their course offerings by enrolling students in college courses for both secondary and postsecondary credit.

- **Middle college high schools graduate students with a high school diploma and some postsecondary credit**
- **Early college high schools encourage students to remain for a fifth year to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree or significant transfer credit towards a bachelor's degree**

Programs Serving Disadvantaged Youth

Targeted at out-of-school or disadvantaged youth and provide an opportunity for them to participate in challenging, college-level coursework with appropriate support. These programs are typically offered by community-based organizations or community colleges.

International Baccalaureate

A comprehensive two-year international pre-university course of study, available in English, French, and Spanish, the leads to examinations and an IB diploma. It generally allows students to fulfill the requirements of their national or state education systems; internationally mobile students are able to transfer for one diploma program school to another.

AYPF's Initial Questions

- **Is there evidence that these different models of SPLOs are effective at increasing academic performance, closing the achievement gap, and increasing entry to and retention in postsecondary education, particularly for first-generation, low-income, or students of color and students with disabilities?**
- **Do financing mechanisms support equity and access by all students? Is there evidence that these programs are cost effective?**
- **Are college courses for high school students as rigorous and at the same level as regular college courses?**
- **What evidence exists to demonstrate that these programs meet their respective goals of serving a specific target population or solving a specific problem?**
- **Who should pay for high school students to take these courses and what are some of the financing structures? Should federal student aid dollars be used to support high school students?**
- **On what outcomes should these programs be measured: high school graduation or grades, attainment of college credit, entry to postsecondary education, and/or completion of degree?**

Areas we were able to consider

- **Type of student served**
- **Sources of funding**
- **Course rigor**
 - program location
 - teacher and faculty preparation
 - prerequisites for participation
 - program length
- **Extra supports**
- **Formal sanctioning**
- **Transferability of credit**
- **Collaboration**

Data Limitations

- **Few third party evaluations**
- **More qualitative than quantitative**
- **Considered short-term outcomes (at high school graduation, after one semester of postsecondary education)**
- **Few follow participants through college graduation or into job market**
- **Difficulty accessing data from two unique systems (K-12 and postsecondary)**

Outcomes Considered

- Credits earned during high school
- Performance on high school standardized tests
- High school graduation rates including other high school outcomes
- College-going rates
- College placement test/remediation
- College course grades/GPAs
- College retention
- Degree attainment/time to degree
- Job market outcomes

Lessons Learned

Type of Student Served

SPLOs are viewed as a strategy to increase postsecondary access for underserved populations.

Lessons Learned

Funding

Funding formulas must distribute dollars fairly, so that institutions are paid based on the amount of services they provide to students.

Lessons Learned

Course Rigor

SPLOs need to ensure they provide college-level courses and work.

Lessons Learned

Course Rigor Continued

Several program elements to consider include:

- **Location**
- **Faculty preparation**
- **Prerequisites**
- **Program length**

Lessons Learned

Extra Supports

For students to be successful, SPLOs need to provide appropriate experiences and supports to their students based on their individual needs.

Lessons Learned Extra Supports Continued

Most common extra supports:

- Caring adult advisors
- Academic assistance and tutoring
- College success class
- Peer support network in safe environment

Lessons Learned

Formal Sanctioning

While many states have some state framework to support SPLOs, many SPLOs have grown as a result of flexible local policies.

Lessons Learned

Transferability of Credit

Very little data is available on what courses transfer for credit or how students use credit earned from participation in a SPLO.

Lessons Learned

Collaboration

Collaboration between secondary and postsecondary teachers and administrators helps create a supportive environment for SPLO participants.

Policy Considerations

- **Do SPLOs reduce time to degree and result in savings for students, families, and the public?**
- **What is the value of SPLOs in providing college experience to wide range of students?**
- **Funding: responsibilities of K-12 and postsecondary systems**
- **Funding: cost to student/families**

Policy Considerations Continued

- **K-12 and postsecondary system alignment**
- **Equitable Access to SPLOs**
- **Quality and Accountability: who's responsible?**
- **Data Collection, Evaluation, and Research**



The College Ladder

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