



DUAL ENROLLMENT

Smoothing the Transition to Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities

Dual enrollment can serve a dual purpose for students with disabilities. It can give students an academic head start *and* the chance to walk through the process of obtaining the accommodations they will need for college work.

The Problem

The transition to higher education is rarely easy for students with disabilities. In K-12, the schools were responsible for ensuring these students received the supports they needed. In college, the students are responsible.

- **To receive any accommodations**, these freshly minted adults must find their way to the campus disability resource center, declare their disability, and then negotiate accommodations. *All by themselves.*
- **This process leads many students to leave their disability undisclosed** or to wait too long to disclose it.

Here are some simple steps Arizona can take to increase the participation of students with disabilities.

Leverage Transition Plans

When students turn 16, their individualized education programs (IEPs) must include transition plans to prepare them for post-school life. These plans *should* be the foundation for students' postsecondary pathways and encourage students toward dual enrollment courses, yet that rarely happens.

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Consequently, most students with disabilities exiting high school never enroll in any postsecondary education or show up unprepared.

However, **if dual enrollment is identified as a transition service in a student’s plan, the high school staff can work with college staff to get the student the accommodations or services on the student’s IEP.** Arizona—and other states—can take these simple steps to make this vision a reality.

1. **Lower the required age for transition planning.** Federal law requires transition planning to begin at age 16, but [experts recognize](#) that this type of planning should begin much earlier—and for all students. Twenty-three states have already lowered the transition planning age to either 14 or grade 9, and [Florida recently lowered](#) the age to 12 or grade 7. Arizona could be the next to act.
2. **Support transition planning.** IEPs *do* apply in dual enrollment courses while students earn college credit. Transition plans are the key, and schools could use guidance documents, sample plans, and technical assistance to develop strong plans that leverage dual enrollment opportunities.
3. **Notify families.** Policymakers could require schools to notify students and parents of dual enrollment opportunities—including CTE—as part of IEP transition plans.

“IEPs for students with disabilities could include transition services in the form of coursework at a community college or other postsecondary institution, provided that the State recognizes the coursework as secondary school education under State law.”

Excerpt from the [Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities](#) by the U.S. Department of Education (USED)

Support Community College Efforts

With clear agreements and the right resources, Arizona can empower stakeholders to develop robust dual enrollment programs for all students.

1. **Modify intergovernmental agreements.** State law already requires intergovernmental agreements between community colleges and school districts to identify “the responsibilities and services required of each party.” Effective agreements will name funding options, identify staff training needs, and require a process to ensure students with disabilities experience equal access to dual enrollment with support. See the example from Arizona Western College.

**Excerpt from Arizona Western College Intergovernmental Agreement with
Yuma Union High School District**

School District will determine the appropriate accommodations for each qualified student with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as applicable, submit appropriate documentation on students with disabilities to the Disabilities Coordinator at College, and implement accommodations or special education services as required by Federal and State law and as negotiated between the College Disability Resource office and School District. School District shall work with the College in determining appropriate accommodations or special education services. School District shall be responsible for ensuring that each qualified student receives a FAPE in conformity with his or her 504 Plan or IEP, including special education and related services, as applicable, and shall continue to have the financial and administrative responsibility for providing and implementing all necessary accommodations or services. This agreement does not relieve School District of any of its legal duties under applicable Federal or State law, including but not limited to School District's obligations relating to child find, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities.

- 2. Create stakeholder resources.** The Arizona Department of Education could form a joint task force with community colleges to develop resources and a plan to incorporate dual enrollment into all training and resources. In particular, the state should clarify how IDEA and federal Perkins funds can support these efforts.

The Bottom Line

Arizona's students with disabilities have the lowest participation rate of all subgroups in dual enrollment classes, according to a 2023 [report](#) from the Helios Foundation.

But when Governor Hobbs signed SB1729 in May 2023, Arizona joined other states in asserting its commitment to improve. Now it's time for the tough part—implementation.

Taking the steps noted in this report will go far in developing a dual enrollment environment that both embraces and expects students with IEPs. The state should also build upon the Helios Foundation's work by continuing to monitor the gap and—hopefully—chart improvement.

Dual enrollment offers a proven pathway from high school to college or career for all students—regardless of whether or not they have an IEP. With a few adjustments, Arizona can ensure this life-changing bridge to college or career is accessible to all students.