



EXPANDING  
ACCESS TO DUAL  
ENROLLMENT AND  
COLLEGE:  
A CASE STUDY OF  
MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS

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National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools  
and Teaching (NCREST)

NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF  
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*advancing quality college courses in high school*

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The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) works to advance education stakeholders' understanding of the complex and challenging work of restructuring schools. To carry out this mission, NCREST conducts research, fosters connections, and shares expertise, resources, and images that help education practitioners, reformers, researchers, parents, and community members to reimagine and create equitable and effective schools. NCREST has worked extensively on research and development related to early college high schools and dual/concurrent enrollment programs. NCREST is affiliated with the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study examines a multi-year effort by Memphis City Schools to scale up access to dual and concurrent enrollment across many high schools with multiple college partners, while also serving large numbers of traditionally underserved students. Memphis is notable among large urban school districts for its sustained investment of resources to a district-wide dual enrollment initiative. Nationwide, urban students are less likely to have access to dual enrollment opportunities: while they represent 29% of all high school students, they account for only 24% of dually enrolled students (Thomas, et al., 2013). Over a four-year period, college course-taking by high school students in Memphis, including many in struggling schools, expanded by 45%, and the number of college partners increased from two to six.

This case study research was undertaken to document how Memphis City Schools implemented the initiative and offer images of practice for those interested in developing similar programs to expand access to dual enrollment. The report was also written to share Memphis' experience with local and state policy makers and other institutional leaders concerned with smoothing the pathway into college.

The study identifies the approaches that Memphis took to expand access, student recruitment and selection methods, and describes how the initiative was implemented. We reached the following overarching conclusions about Memphis City Schools' dual enrollment program:

- Memphis' dual enrollment program offers authentic college course experiences to high school students, the majority of whom are from groups traditionally underserved in higher education.
- Support from district leadership, including successive superintendents and deputy superintendents, played a vital role in making sure that the initiative was prioritized and adequately resourced.
- Dual enrollment programs contribute to the development of a college-going culture in Memphis high schools, including in those schools that are identified by the state as low-performing.
- While access to dual enrollment is often limited to students who earn high grades or scores on ACT tests, Memphis found ways to enroll a wider range of students.
- Memphis structured its program to maximize access to dual enrollment courses by forming and strengthening partnerships and establishing effective administrative structures.

In researching the initiative we reviewed student enrollment data to understand changes in participation and demographics over time. We also visited Memphis in May 2012 to conduct semi-structured interviews with 24 administrators, instructors, and staff representing four high schools, two colleges, and the Memphis City School district office; we observed dual enrollment courses at three different high schools and spoke with students in those courses.

## OVERVIEW

Over a four year period, Memphis City Schools (MCS), a large urban school district,<sup>1</sup> made a major commitment to invest in and expand its dual and concurrent enrollment program to give students from most of the high schools in the district a chance to take college courses. This effort is especially important given the fact that urban students are less likely to have access to dual enrollment opportunities: while they represent 29% of all high school students nationwide, they account for 24% of dually enrolled students (Thomas, et al., 2013). The Memphis City Schools' initiative, called the *Early College Dual Enrollment Program*, is notable in that it included academically low-performing high schools designated as "Priority Schools" by the State of Tennessee and targeted for turnaround through potential state takeover or district intervention.

Dual enrollment, as used in this report, refers to college courses taken by high school students for which they typically also receive high school credit. Called concurrent enrollment when taught by college-approved high school teachers, dual and concurrent enrollment have been viewed by many as a way to better prepare students for college, allow schools to offer a richer set of educational opportunities, and make the education system more cost-effective (Hughes, et al., 2005). However, it has generally been an option available in relatively well-off schools and to high performing students, except in the context of specialized programs such as early and middle college high schools (Barnett & Stamm, 2010). Despite this, many believe that dual enrollment has the potential to assist a wider range of students to make a smooth transition to college, including those traditionally underserved in college (Hoffman & Vargas, 2009).

Memphis City Schools has many years of experience working with underprepared students, offering them dual enrollment opportunities at two longstanding early-middle college high schools. In spring of 2007, a new initiative was developed to offer dual enrollment opportunities to a wider range of students, with strong support from district leadership and directed by Joyce Mitchell, the district's Academic Director of High School Initiatives and former principal of an early-middle college high school. Starting with only two postsecondary partners, agreements were developed with four additional local colleges and universities to increase the number of college courses available to students in Memphis high schools. Likewise, more high schools were recruited to offer dual enrollment to their students, and systems were developed to increase the number of students participating. College course-taking by high school students expanded 45% in four years, from 715 students enrolled in 2008-09 to 1,036 in 2011-12.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS

At the time of this study, Memphis City Schools was the 23rd largest school district in the United States, serving over 100,000 students (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011). The student body was largely African American/Black (83% compared to 17% nationwide, and 26% among large urban school districts) and economically disadvantaged (72% eligible for free- or reduced-priced lunch, compared with 45% nationwide and 56% among large urban school districts) (Sable, et al., 2010). Across the 212 schools in Memphis City

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<sup>1</sup>In fall 2013, Memphis City Schools merged with the Shelby County School District. This research was conducted during the spring and summer of 2012, and thus we only refer to Memphis City Schools. Since the merger, the successor Shelby County School District has continued to implement the dual enrollment program.

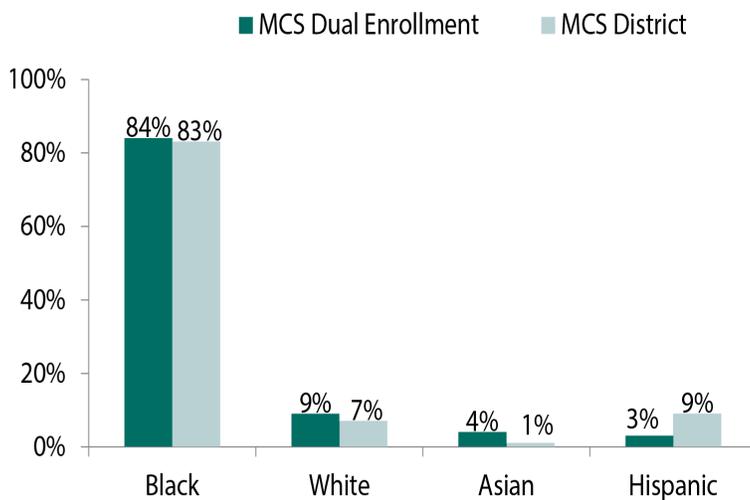
Schools, 95% of the students received Title I support, and 85% were economically disadvantaged (Tennessee Department of Education, 2011).

The district struggled with persistently low graduation rates, ACT scores, and student proficiency on state math and reading tests (Aud, et al., 2012; Tennessee Department of Education, 2012). The district was under a lot of pressure to improve the large number of schools designated as “Priority Schools”—5% of the lowest performing schools in the state—according to the State of Tennessee. The dual enrollment program was viewed by the district as one strategy to improve high schools by increasing the rigor of the high school curriculum and increasing students’ preparation for college.

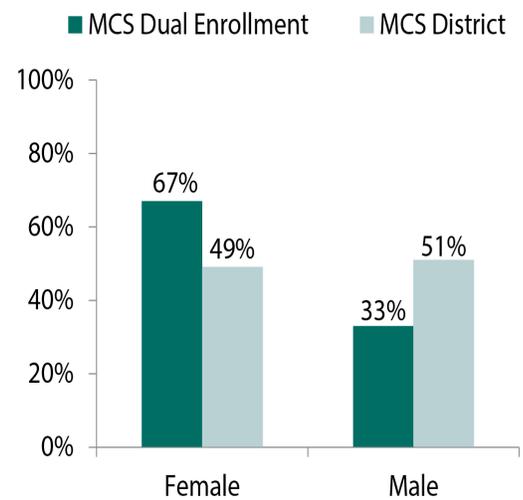
## STUDENTS SERVED BY THE MEMPHIS DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAM

During the 2011-12 school year, the Memphis dual enrollment program served 1,036 high school students, 91% of whom were in grades 11 or 12. These 943 students represented 6% of all the 11th and 12th grade students in the district. The racial/ethnic makeup of dual enrollment students was fairly consistent with the high school population in Memphis, with 84% of the students identifying as African American. In terms of gender, there was a higher percentage of female students (67%) in the dual enrollment program (NCREST, 2013).

Student enrollment by race/ethnicity, 2011-12



Student enrollment by gender, 2011-12



Note: MCS District data (Tennessee Department of Education, 2012)

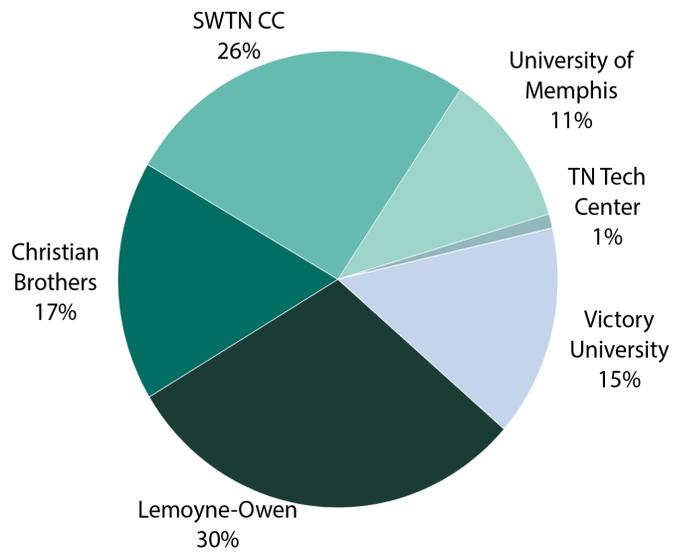
Of the 46 high schools in Memphis, 36 (78%) participated in the dual enrollment program between 2008 and 2012, including all eight high schools identified by the State of Tennessee as “Priority Schools.” Students from two pioneering early-middle college schools – Middle College High School and Hollis Price Early College High School – accounted for 20% of the dual enrollment participants (NCREST, 2013).

Memphis City Schools developed dual enrollment partnerships with six institutions of higher education, reflecting the diversity of postsecondary institutions in the community. They included a public community college (Southwest Tennessee Community College), a public technical college (Tennessee Technical Center), and four private universities (Lemoyne-Owen College, Christian Brothers University, University of Memphis, and Victory University).

About half of the dual enrollment courses were taught in the high schools by college-approved high school faculty, while another half were taught by college faculty on the high school campus or taken on the college campus (personal communication, J. Mitchell, 2012).

Students demonstrated success in their dual enrollment courses. The 2011-12 course pass rate was 95% (at a D grade or higher; 91% at a C grade or higher). In addition, the majority of college course enrollments (66%) resulted in an A or B grade. Fifty percent of the 12th grade students who took dual enrollment courses in 2011-12 earned six or more college credits upon graduating from high school, and 20% earned nine or more credits (NCREST, 2013).

**Percent of MCS Dual Enrollment college course enrollments by postsecondary institution, 2011-12**



Note: Total number of 2011-12 college course enrollments = 1,889.

**Cumulative college course enrollments, credits, and pass rate by grade cohort, 2011-12**

2011-12 Grade cohort	Number of college course-taking students	Cumulative over students' high school career			
		Number of college course enrollments	Number of college credits earned	College course pass rate (D grade or higher)	College course pass rate (C grade or higher)
9th grade	33	44	118	100%	100%
10th grade	60	134	375	99%	99%
11th grade	366	577	1,463	96%	92%
12th grade	577	1,134	2,768	95%	89%
Total	1,036	1,889	4,724	95%	91%

## PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

There is a growing emphasis among policy makers on the value of dual enrollment for students who are traditionally underserved in higher education. Research has found that participation in dual enrollment is positively related to earning a high school diploma, to enrolling in college, to persistence in college, and to a higher college GPA (Karp et al., 2008). These effects are especially strong for minority male students. Struhl and Vargas (2012) found that students who had participated in dual enrollment in Texas were substantially more likely to enroll in college, persist, and obtain a degree. What is more, Karp (2006) found that students who participated in authentic dual enrollment courses increased their understanding of what it means to be a college student. However, few studies have documented strategies to effectively broaden access to dual enrollment.

Memphis successfully scaled up access to dual enrollment across many high schools with multiple college partners, while also serving large numbers of traditionally underserved students. At the same time, they developed systems and approaches that address many of the concerns that are expressed about broadening access in dual enrollment programs, especially in regard to maintaining quality and consistency.

In this report, we share the findings of a case study of the Memphis dual enrollment program in order to provide insights into how a district, in collaboration with schools and colleges, increased college course-taking opportunities among their students. We provide an overview of the initiative and offer images of practice especially useful for those interested in developing similar programs. This report may also be of particular interest to local and state policy makers concerned with smoothing the pathway into college. See Appendix A for a detailed account of the research process.

## MEMPHIS' APPROACH TO DUAL ENROLLMENT

### **How does the dual enrollment program fit into Memphis City Schools' overall vision and priorities?**

In 2013, Memphis City Schools went through a period of major transition. Due to a number of factors, including school funding needs, Memphis City Schools merged in 2013 with Shelby County Schools, the suburban district that surrounds it. In addition, it was one of only three districts statewide designated as in need of improvement for having failed to attain the majority of state-required achievement and achievement gap closure targets in 2012-13. Nonetheless, we found during our site visit and in subsequent conversations with district officials that work had continued unabated on the dual enrollment program through the period of transition. This was largely due to the district's commitment to this program as well as to the efforts of a network of stakeholders and supporters at the school and college level.

There are a number of reasons why access to dual enrollment has remained a priority for Memphis. First, the district's leaders had the opportunity to view the transformative power of dual enrollment at its two longstanding early-middle college high schools. Early-middle college high schools are small schools located on a college campus in which students take both high school and college courses. Many graduate with substantial numbers of free college credits earned. The district's Academic Director of High School Initiatives, Joyce Mitchell, was the founding principal of the middle college, where she became convinced that high

school students who experience college directly begin to view themselves as real—and successful—college students. With strong encouragement from the superintendent at the time, she made expanding these opportunities a priority when she moved to the district office in 2005.

Interviewees at the district spoke of the ongoing work to raise standards and improve student opportunities, including access to honors diplomas. To be recognized as graduating with “state distinction” in Tennessee, students must graduate high school with at least a B average and at least one of several other accomplishments, such as earning 12 semester hours of dual enrollment or scoring three or higher on two Advanced Placement (AP) exams. Thus, access to dual enrollment can enable students to earn a diploma that is likely to improve their chance for admission to selective colleges.

In addition, district staff believed that high schools designated as low-performing by the state should offer dual enrollment to raise the rigor of their curriculum and create college-going cultures. Despite the many challenges at these schools, there were students eligible to participate in dual enrollment. Those who did so became role models, helping other students to understand the value of working hard to gain access to free college courses while in high school. The programs and the students were a source of pride for these schools and contributed to the sense that progress was being made. One principal said, “Parents are proud of college courses - and students are - and I am too. And [the students are] earning college credit!”

### **How is the dual enrollment program structured?**

While dual enrollment existed in Memphis for many years, the initiative expanded substantially with the start of the Early College Dual Enrollment Program in 2007. This coincided with Ms. Mitchell’s move to the district office and was spurred on by a grant provided by the Middle College National Consortium, an organization promoting middle colleges and dual enrollment opportunities. It was further encouraged by the availability of funding for dual enrollment tuition available through Tennessee’s Hope Scholarship. These scholarship funds could be used by eligible students to cover the cost of college courses taken while in high school.

With the support of Memphis leadership, the following steps were taken to broadly expand dual enrollment opportunities:

- District dual enrollment staff established strong working relationships with local colleges and universities, increasing the number of postsecondary partners from two to six. They also built strong two-way communication channels. One college representative talked of having the Memphis dual enrollment office on “speed dial.”
- They created a list of district-approved dual enrollment courses, matching each college course with a high school requirement. This simplified and standardized the way that a given college course is categorized for credit toward high school graduation requirements.
- All eligible students could take dual enrollment courses free of charge. The district maximized the use of state funds and negotiated with private colleges to match public college tuition rates. In addition, they provided district funds to cover tuition when

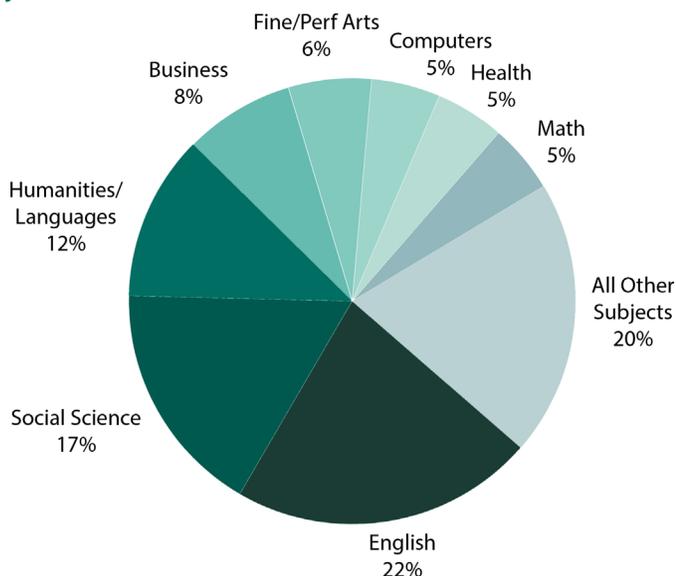
necessary so that all courses were free to students.

- Individual schools determined the specific courses, partnerships, and delivery modalities that worked best given their priorities, location, students, resources, and number of faculty with the academic credentials necessary to be certified as adjunct instructors at a college. Thus, some schools with teachers who qualified to teach at the college partner offered concurrent enrollment courses at the high school taught by high school faculty; others brought in college professors from the college. Some schools preferred to emphasize core general education college courses such as English Composition, Sociology, and College Algebra, while others offered career-oriented courses such as Introduction to Business and Medical Terminology. Many high schools worked with more than one college.
- The district dual enrollment staff developed a customer service orientation to support the high schools' priorities. The district office brokers relationships with the postsecondary institutions and facilitates the formal administrative arrangements needed for the specific courses to be implemented. According to numerous school-based dual enrollment liaisons, the office works quickly and efficiently to resolve problems.

### What courses do students take?

Among the different schools visited, there were a variety of course taking patterns observed. Some schools implemented dual enrollment by initially offering just a few courses and then gradually expanding the number to address different areas of student interest. In one school, students were polled to see what courses they would be interested in taking in order to identify courses that would enroll the minimum number of students (in this case, 12) needed to offer the course. In 2011-12, the highest percentage of college course enrollments for MCS dual enrollment students occurred in English (22%), followed by Social Science (17%) and Humanities or Languages (12%) (NCREST, 2013).

Percent of MCS Dual Enrollment college course enrollments by subject area, 2011-12



Note: Total number of 2011-12 college course enrollments = 1,889.

In a few cases, courses were offered that had few or no eligibility requirements. This was often done to increase the number of courses that could be taken by less academically advanced students. One example of this was a University of Memphis philosophy course that was open to any interested students in selected schools. A University representative remarked that, "It seemed to help students with thinking skills and their approach to life." At a different school, Medical Terminology was offered and open to a wider range of students due to its less restrictive eligibility criteria. According to the school dual enrollment liaison, it provided a valuable introduction to both college and health careers for the students who took it.

# STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

## **How does Memphis inform students about opportunities to enroll in college courses?**

Both the district and the individual schools played important roles in publicizing the dual enrollment program. The district dual enrollment staff hosted informational sessions in collaboration with the Parent and Community Engagement Office. They also reached out to PTAs, parent assemblies, and community organizations. Annual meetings were held with district counselors to update them on dual enrollment procedures and policies.

School-based counselors and dual enrollment faculty worked to make entering freshmen aware that dual enrollment can be an option in grades 11 and 12 if they work hard. As one commented,

*Students know about dual enrollment from 9th grade. We encourage them to start then to be prepared. Also, it helps students to realize what grade is needed on the ACT to qualify for dual enrollment. It may get them interested in taking more honors and science courses.*

The counselor added that she believes that these conversations with students early on have helped students to set their academic sights higher.

We observed two strategies used by schools to raise student awareness of dual enrollment opportunities. The first was to inform students of college courses that may be available and encourage them to apply for enrollment. A counselor described the outreach to students.

*We're trying to recruit students for next year. I put out an announcement three weeks ago. We went to talk to 10th and 11th graders in their classrooms and told them if you make the ACT or PLAN scores, then you can participate in college courses.*

The other common approach used in a number of schools was to review students' eligibility for dual enrollment based on ACT scores and GPAs and then extend invitations to those eligible to participate. One teacher told us:

*Together, we go through 11th grade ACT scores to see who will qualify for dual enrollment. Then we let students know if they qualify for dual enrollment—in both math and English.*

## **How are students selected for participation?**

Students wanting to take most dual enrollment courses must meet minimum criteria to participate. Most general education courses are limited to students who are in 11th or 12th grade and have earned a minimum score of 19 on the ACT. However, a number of colleges have established different requirements - several require a minimum GPA of 3.0, and not all require the minimum ACT score.

Access to dual enrollment expanded through postsecondary Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses,

which tend to have less stringent entry requirements. A Memphis City Schools administrator said, “We are aiming to serve midline (academic middle) students. CTE can be a catalyst for these students—you can include students with potential rather than just the high achievers.” Consistent with national trends, about one-third of Memphis’ total dual enrollments (30%) were in CTE courses in 2011-12.

In addition, collaboration with partner colleges and universities has extended to preparation of potential dual enrollment students. One college began offering its college success skills course, College 101, to high school students. Another university recently implemented an ACT preparation course in its partner high school to increase the number of students eligible for dual enrollment courses.

### **What kinds of support does Memphis offer students to increase their chances of success in college courses?**

According to those we interviewed, students who struggle in their dual enrollment classes frequently receive two kinds of extra support: a) in-class, from the teacher or peers and b) out of class, usually from academic coaches or other adults.

In-class support typically takes the form of instruction by faculty on college success skills, such as how to take effective notes, write proper citations, revise written work, and safeguard one’s GPA. One college faculty member expressed appreciation of the fact that, because she meets with her high school students every day, she has more time for this kind of support. Another instructor paired up her stronger and weaker students so that extra help with writing could be offered during class. At the same time, students noted that they were often expected to be more independent in their dual enrollment courses because they are college classes. They expressed that college faculty were less likely than high school teachers to accept excuses or provide extensions when work is late.

With regard to out of class support, much depended on individual school circumstances and people, bolstered by some targeted assistance and funding from the district. In one school an academic coach supported by district funds provided extra attention to the students in dual enrollment classes. The coach made it her business to be the “mother hen” of a class when she was worried about how the students were doing. She said, “I show up in class. I ask students about what they’re doing. I email with the teachers. Kids come into my office to type up papers or work on assignments.” At another school, where students were struggling with a difficult course, the counselor asked for—and received—district funds to hire a tutor.

However, a great deal of the help that students received was from peers, sometimes with the encouragement of faculty, but often under their own initiative. In one case, an academic coach who was asked to provide support for a class outside of his disciplinary expertise encouraged students to work together; he commented wryly,

*I couldn’t solve many of the problems that they were working on, so I’d encourage those students who had figured it out to help others in the class....Students who had succeeded in similar problems were asked to talk through their thought process on the board to instruct the others.*

In other cases, students took the initiative to meet up in pairs or small groups to help each other. They worked together in class or organized out of class meeting times. Those who were most advanced in the subject material appeared very willing to help their classmates.

In addition, one college set up an explicit early warning system, with particular concern for students who lagged on attendance. The dual enrollment coordinator said:

*I put in place the 24-hour snapshot. After [each time the class meets], the teachers send a quick snapshot email to the high school counselor, college department chair, and me indicating any absences, behavior problems, kids being pulled out from class for sports, or leaving early. And if this is happening several times, I contact the high school counselor...And if it's a big issue, then I have to get the district involved.*

At two other colleges, staff were designated to provide needed help to dual enrollment students. However, interviewees indicated that the colleges generally left support for students up to the schools.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INITIATIVE

### **How is the initiative managed and funded?**

The three-person district dual enrollment office was primarily responsible for managing the initiative, particularly during the planning phase prior to offering a course. Matching schools and colleges together is an important part of the district's role and—with growing interest in the dual enrollment program and increasing competition for students among colleges—the district staff were careful to remain neutral in advising on school-college partnerships. District staff advised schools of their partnership options but allowed the school-based teams to make the final decision on the colleges that they wished to work with.

Each partnering high school and college had a dual enrollment coordinator who oversaw the initiative and served as the primary liaison to the district. At the high school, the dual enrollment coordinator was typically a counselor or instructor who took on this additional role. Similarly, the college dual enrollment coordinator was usually a person who added this work to his or her other administrative or instructional responsibilities. One college also assigned a lead liaison in each department to interact with the dual enrollment coordinator on behalf of the faculty. While the high school and college coordinators worked closely with the district office, they did not seem to have much regular contact with one another.

The district was responsible for ensuring that college course tuition, fees, and books were fully covered through a mix of funding from the state's Hope Scholarship, college waivers, and district funds. Undergraduate college tuition per 3-semester hour course ranged from \$499 to \$3,000 at the participating Memphis area colleges. The Hope Scholarship provides \$300 per student for each college course taken through dual enrollment. The amount that colleges received from the district ranged from \$0 to \$85 per course. The balance was waived by the college. Required textbooks, which averaged \$150 per course, were purchased directly by the district. Thus, there was no cost to the student or family to take a dual enrollment course, making it possible for students from all income levels to participate.

## **Who are the champions of the initiative and what roles do they play?**

The dual enrollment program has been championed by key individuals in the district, at the schools, and at the colleges. First and foremost, the leadership of Memphis City Schools has been instrumental in advancing the growth of the dual enrollment program. A former Superintendent was an early strong supporter who felt that the opportunities provided by the two early-middle college high schools should be extended to other high schools and their students. Subsequent district superintendents and deputy superintendents have continued to support this initiative by allocating staff time, funds for administration and student support, and by underwriting tuition and books.

In addition, there were individual champions at a number of the participating schools and colleges who played an important role in promoting the growth of dual enrollment opportunities, including dual enrollment coordinators and other faculty members. They served as ambassadors for the program who were able to garner buy-in from school or college leaders, who then became proponents for the dual enrollment program themselves. One principal noted:

*[The teacher] plays an important role. She has been here for 26 years. She's so invested in the kids in the building, and she got me involved in dual enrollment. She approached me about it. She was a big catalyst in getting the dual enrollment course here. She does a lot of the digging into what we can try at our school. This is the third year [we're doing dual enrollment] with the University of Memphis.*

District representatives also mentioned a catalytic role played by organizations representing the business community. One example cited was the involvement of Leadership Memphis, the umbrella organization for a new initiative to identify labor market areas that would strengthen the local economy. The district and Leadership Memphis formed a work group to discuss how the schools and business community can collaborate to produce more qualified high school graduates and college-prepared students to meet the needs of employers. They have encouraged the expansion of dual enrollment opportunities.

The *Middle College National Consortium*, based in New York City, played an important role in the development of the dual enrollment program. They were an early proponent of expanding access to dual enrollment to a much wider range of students and supported the development of the original two early-middle college high schools in Memphis. They also offered financial and technical assistance in the development of the *Early College Dual Enrollment Program*.

## **What measures are in place to assure that authentic college courses are offered?**

Although ensuring the quality of dual enrollment courses is an important concern for everyone involved, we found that colleges took primary responsibility. As one district staff member stated, "We sometimes go out to different schools to monitor the classes, but monitoring the rigor is done by the college."

At the high schools we visited, dual enrollment courses were mostly taught in the high school building to a class of all high school students. Hence, one of the main concerns expressed by college faculty was that the

rigor and standards of the college courses be maintained under these conditions. The following measures, consistent with the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships' (NACEP) national standards, were taken to ensure the authenticity of the college courses:

- The same syllabus and materials were used in the traditional college course and in dual enrollment courses. In cases where a new syllabus was created, the high school instructor was required to submit it to the college for approval.
- The grading procedures and policies used at the college for calculating the final college course grade were also used for dual enrollment courses. Grades for dual enrollment courses were submitted to the college for direct transcribing.
- College departments were charged with the responsibility of hiring or credentialing qualified faculty. This was typically achieved by using existing college faculty or adjuncts, including high school teachers already serving as college adjuncts. In one case we observed, a high school concurrent enrollment instructor was also teaching the same course at the college in the evening.
- Professional development sessions were provided for the faculty, sponsored by the college or the district. These sessions included a range of topics related to quality assurance such as setting standards, writing syllabi, identifying goals, and classroom management techniques.
- College liaisons or faculty visited dual enrollment classes to observe instruction.
- In general, a minimum ACT score was required for program participation so that students demonstrated a level of preparation permitting them to fully engage in college courses.

One math high school concurrent enrollment instructor interviewed indicated that all the instructional materials in her course came from the partner university. With her concurrent enrollment students, she used the course syllabus provided by the university as well as the same textbooks used in the course taught on the university campus. For assessments, she created chapter tests as well as final exams, which were not reviewed by university faculty. However, she was required to submit a spreadsheet with the grades for each test and a description of how the final grades were calculated; only test results were used for the final grades at this particular university. The instructor pointed out that she had a different grading policy for the high school final course grade, which incorporated both test and homework grades.

A college representative described what his institution has done to ensure course quality in English Composition:

*Faculty are critical to the quality issues. English Composition is...the most asked-for course. English is the poster child in the college when it comes to maintaining quality...[We] have the high school faculty come to the college for a special orientation. The English faculty orientation includes information on how to look at student work.*

In our conversations during the site visit, college and university representatives expressed a desire to continue improving their approaches to assure dual enrollment course quality. Some of the ideas they shared included increasing the number of visits to the high schools, having students fill out teacher evaluation surveys, and holding mandatory professional development workshops for faculty teaching dual enrollment—all practices promoted by NACEP’s national standards.

### **What are the facilitators and barriers to implementation and expansion?**

Over the past few years the dual enrollment program has grown; the program has benefitted from support and funding at the district and state levels. Other factors that have facilitated program expansion include:

- The efforts of champions at district, school, and college levels.
- Growing college interest in dual enrollment due to their belief that it benefits them as institutions as well as the community.
- An increased willingness on the part of several colleges to make efforts to meet the needs of different high schools.
- Increased college faculty buy-in. Taking part in the program convinced many that high school students can do college coursework under the right circumstances.
- Some movement from offering AP classes to offering dual enrollment. Several interviewees commented that students had a greater likelihood of earning college credit via dual enrollment than by taking the AP course exam. Memphis recently began weighting AP and dual enrollment courses equally in GPA calculations.

While a number of factors have influenced program growth, there are also some potential barriers that may hold back the program from further expansion. Some of these include:

- Limited numbers of teachers who hold the credentials necessary to teach college courses.
- Uneven buy-in from schools within the district.
- Lack of student awareness about the program.
- Lack of confidence among students in taking challenging courses.
- Transportation issues that limit the number and types of courses students can take on the college campus.
- A time-consuming application process.
- Limits on staff time to help students with administrative requirements.

Other challenges related to teacher workload configurations, staff availability, and student awareness and willingness were noted by some of the interviewees:

*Student-teacher ratio has to be considered. Currently, it's about 28:1 ratio. A dual enrollment class typically has only 13 students, so who's picking up the 14 students that the instructor is not teaching? And putting a wedge between the teachers doing dual enrollment and the other teachers is not good. Because of student ratios, the dual enrollment course is a lot smaller and you have fewer papers to grade.*

*Freeing up counselors' time is important. Then they can focus on college and career readiness, versus all the administrative stuff they end up taking on from the principal. And once we put that in place, then bringing in more dual enrollment opportunities is a natural segue.*

*Some students don't know about dual enrollment...There are family issues too. Families who value this opportunity—they do everything to make this happen. They'll show up at the district office because their kid didn't get their college book. So family is a factor.*

In particular, the district leadership has been exploring ways to increase the pool of teachers for dual enrollment. In 2012, the district dual enrollment office sent out a notice to all 6,000 teachers in the district asking about whether they had the credentials necessary, and interest in, teaching dual enrollment courses. A district staff member reflected:

*That's something we're looking at and thinking about—how to get more teachers with 18 credit hours in [graduate] coursework to offer more dual enrollment? In terms of professional development, how might we maybe create online courses to get the accumulated college credits for teachers so they can get college adjunct status?*

## PROGRAM IMPACT AND BENEFITS

### **What benefits do students derive from participating in the dual enrollment program?**

Program administrators view dual enrollment as a natural extension of the overall district focus on getting students better prepared and ready for college. Aimed at providing high school students with an early start and exposure to college course-taking, the dual enrollment program served 715 students in 2008-09, growing 45% to 1,036 students in 2011-12. Dual enrollment seniors earned an average of five college credits—at no cost—upon graduating from high school (NCREST, 2013).

Other benefits mentioned by interviewees included:

- Transferrable college credits, for which students paid nothing.
- Both high school and college credit for a single course, potentially reducing the time needed to earn a college degree.

- Exposure to college courses while in high school, and thus, a better understanding of what is expected in college.
- Improved skills in time management and handling responsibility as well as improved study habits.
- Increased confidence in their ability to handle college.

A high school math instructor working with dual enrollment students commented on the value of dual enrollment to her students.

*[The dual enrollment math course] was very challenging. It taught the students responsibility and independence. The teacher gave out the work and provided no reminders—you were supposed to do it on your own time.*

*The students had to think more...In high school math, you're given a formula and you use it; you're not doing critical thinking. In the [dual enrollment math course], you have to solve problems. You would draw on things that you had used from other chapters and blend them together. You would have to take what you'd learned and combine it in new ways to reach a conclusion.*

*The biggest advantage of dual enrollment is that it's a dose of reality about what college will be like. An F doesn't bother the instructor. It's up to the student to do the work and to be responsible.*

At one school, students participating in a dual enrollment course were allowed to change out of the mandatory school uniform for the course and the rest of the afternoon. While this may not seem as significant to the adults, this privilege was the first thing one student mentioned when talking about her dual enrollment course.

### **What do schools and colleges gain from participating?**

High schools and colleges benefit in several ways from participating in the program. For both entities, the mere presence of a dual enrollment program seemed to influence institutional planning and conversations around college readiness. Administrators and leaders who were not directly involved in the day-to-day coordination of the initiative were nonetheless deeply thoughtful about how dual enrollment was aligned with the schools' and colleges' goals to increase students' college readiness. Several school leaders expressed pride in offering the program at their school and described how it has helped to raise the reputation of the school.

A district representative explained how the district focused on finding clusters of students who could benefit from this college opportunity in low-performing schools:

*Some schools in the district have been designated as [Priority Schools eligible for inclusion in the state's] Achievement School District (ASD) because they are in the bottom 5% in the state. Unless there are improvements, the state will take over the schools. All eight of the ASD eligible schools are offering dual enrollment, and kids are doing well.*

Colleges also benefited in a variety of direct and indirect ways by participating in dual enrollment. Interviewees noted the following ways that colleges benefited:

- Recruitment of potential students.
- Revenue from increased enrollment numbers.
- Involvement in supporting community priorities.
- Engagement in high school–college partnership work.
- Better preparation of future students.
- Potentially increasing the rate of on-time graduations.

From the colleges' perspective, better-prepared high school graduates who have already earned college credits can be expected to do well in college. A college representative stated:

*Dual enrollment is the way to go. You can't do higher education without it now. The State of Tennessee changed its funding [formula for higher education]. We're outcomes based now. Persistence and graduation rates determine your funding. So [it helps if] you can get kids with college credits and shorten their time to graduation and get them to finish on time.*

The significant role of dual enrollment for recruitment purposes was highlighted by a number of college representatives:

*We have two good reasons to do dual enrollment: one, to work with high schools, and two, to recruit students, since a good percentage of kids enroll here afterward.*

*Colleges benefit because this brings good word of mouth about the college and [is] a good way to recruit future students. It also brings in money through [the state's funding formula for colleges] and helps to achieve aspects of institutional missions aimed at serving the surrounding community and helping to get students more prepared before entering college.*

## FINAL THOUGHTS

In reviewing the findings from our research at MCS, we reached several overarching conclusions:

***Memphis' dual enrollment program offers authentic college course experiences to high school students, the majority of whom are from groups traditionally underserved in higher education.*** According to research, students from traditionally underserved groups are likely to experience a range of benefits from participating in dual enrollment (Karp et al., 2008). Memphis has large numbers of these students, and the district has been successful in expanding the proportion of students who are able to participate in dual enrollment. Students are most likely to benefit from dual enrollment that involves actual college courses and authentic college experiences (Karp, 2006). The participating colleges and universities have taken responsibility for primary oversight in ensuring the quality of dual enrollment to make sure students benefit from authentic college courses.

***Support from district leadership, including successive superintendents and deputy superintendents, played a vital role in making sure that the initiative was prioritized and adequately resourced.*** Their support was encouraged and facilitated by a range of champions of the initiative. Support from top leadership is often viewed as essential to the success of any enterprise. Key to maintaining top leaders' attention to this initiative was the presence of knowledgeable champions with experience at the school and/or district-levels and technical and financial assistance from a national organization, the Middle College National Consortium.

***Dual enrollment programs contribute to the development of a college-going culture in Memphis high schools, including in those schools that are identified by the state as low-performing.*** In the schools we visited, we observed that dual enrollment programs were an important part of the efforts of school leaders to create a college-going culture. Students were given clear messages about how to become ready for college beginning in the 9th grade. With college courses offered in the building, students were more likely to be able to visualize what college might be like.

***While access to dual enrollment is often limited to students who earn high grades or scores on ACT tests, Memphis found ways to enroll a wider range of students.*** While many college courses are only available to the most academically qualified students, there are a number of courses that are open to a wider range of students. Most importantly, college career technical education courses can be taken by students who have lower grades or scores on standardized exams. In addition, some colleges allow some flexibility regarding GPA and ACT exam scores, enabling more students to have access to college courses. The new College 101 success skills course, offered by one college to high school students, can provide an introductory college course experience for a wider range of students.

***Access to dual enrollment courses is also greatly facilitated by Memphis' commitment to offering courses at no cost to students.*** Using a combination of state and district funds and tuition waivers from colleges, students are able to take college courses without cost. This is not the norm nationally (NCES, 2010) and shows a high level of commitment to reducing barriers to student participation.

***Memphis structured its program to maximize access to dual enrollment courses by forming and strengthening partnerships and establishing effective administrative structures.*** The dual enrollment initiative's success is in large part due to the close relationships that the district's Academic Director of High School Initiatives and her staff have developed with school and college partners over time. Systems they have put in place that make the program function smoothly include a list of high school requirements that can be fulfilled by district-approved dual enrollment courses and systems for pairing up schools and colleges that are a good fit for one another. These administrative structures permit new schools and courses to be added regularly, leading to program growth and increased student opportunities.

The dual enrollment program developed by Memphis City Schools could be replicated in other large, urban school districts interested in making these opportunities available to students. The initiative's success was greatly facilitated by the commitment of financial and human resources by the State of Tennessee and Memphis City Schools, though we believe that other districts could find ways to expand access to dual enrollment as well. Colleges stand to benefit through improved student success and student recruitment. High schools can improve their college readiness offerings and take pride in graduating students who have already completed college credits. However, the main beneficiaries will be the students who have the opportunity to engage in higher education experiences while in high school and increase their chances for success in college and beyond.

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## APPENDIX A: RESEARCH METHODS

The research, using a case study approach (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2002, 1992), was designed to answer the identified research questions about the implementation of dual enrollment in Memphis City Schools. These questions (see sub-headings in the report) were addressed, and then overarching conclusions about this initiative were drawn.

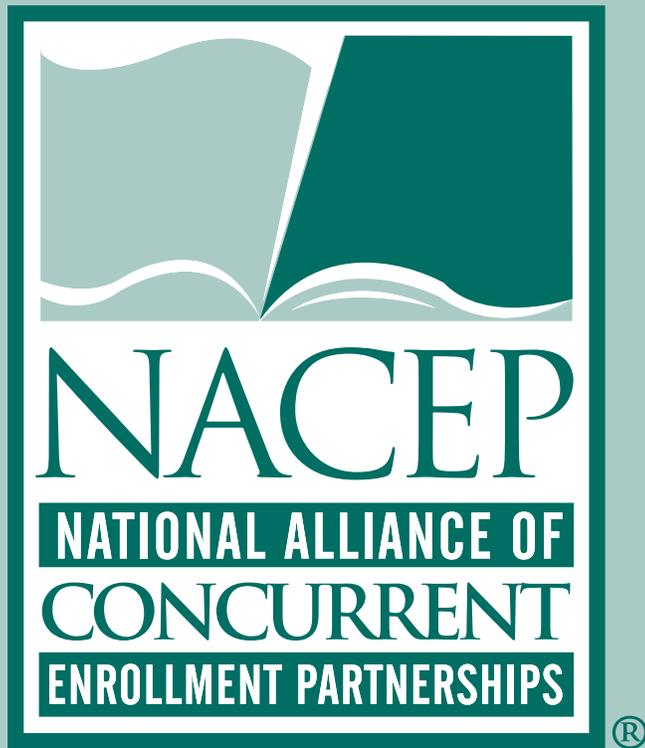
**To create the case study, we drew on two primary sources of data:**

### **Student data**

The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST), a research center at Teachers College, Columbia University, has analyzed individual MCS student dual enrollment data for the academic years 2008-09 through 2010-11 and created reports on their participation and performance in college courses. The information offers important insights into the achievements of the overall program and those of different sub-groups of students. It also provided contextual information about the sites visited for this case study. Data from these reports was especially important in addressing questions of program benefits.

### **Site visits and follow-up interviews**

NCREST researchers spent several days in Memphis in May of 2012. The visit was supplemented by selected follow-up telephone calls made in the summer of 2012. In total, we interviewed 24 administrators, instructors, and staff representing four high schools, two colleges, and the Memphis City Schools district administration. College representatives interviewed included dual enrollment coordinators, a Provost, a department chair, and a faculty member. High school staff included dual enrollment coordinators, English and math dual enrollment instructors, principals, a tutor, and a school improvement coordinator. District staff interviewed included the dual enrollment director, coordinator and other support staff, the career technical education director, the director of counseling, and an academic coach. Interviews were guided by semi-structured interview protocols created by NCREST researchers. Extensive field notes were taken and subsequently coded in alignment with the research questions for our case study. In addition, we observed dual enrollment courses at three different high schools and spoke with students in those courses.



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