Dual Enrollment acts as a crucial onramp to college for more than 50,000 Georgia students. As Dual Enrollment is set up in Georgia, the state pays colleges fixed amounts for tuition, mandatory fees and books so that high school students can take college courses without having to pay for them. Currently, 9th-12th graders can participate, and individual high schools and colleges determine available courses and eligibility requirements.

When the General Assembly reformed Dual Enrollment in 2015, Georgia lagged the nation in Dual Enrollment participation. 

Between FY 2016 and FY 2019, costs doubled as more students participated, growing from $49 million to $105 million. Growth ramped up quickly but is slowing down. From 2016 to 2017, Dual Enrollment in the university system grew 30 percent; three years later annual change is down to 7 percent. Private and technical college Dual Enrollment growth rates are still in the double digits, though they have also slowed.

During the 2019 legislative session, lawmakers introduced House Bill 444 in an effort to curb costs. The bill did not pass, and no program changes were made, but nevertheless the budget was reduced to $100.8 million. The Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC), the state agency that administers Dual Enrollment, responded by reducing reimbursements to colleges for Dual Enrollment courses but did not make any other program policy changes.
HB 444 Projected to Reduce State’s Costs for Dual Enrollment

If the latest version of HB 444 passes, the Georgia Student Finance Commission says that internal projections show that the program will stay around the current allocation of $100.8 million. If the states makes no changes, the most recent budget request for FY 2021 shows a request of $123 million. The governor’s proposed budget for FY 2021 shows a flat $100.8 million allocation for the program. The Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) has not released a fiscal note on HB 444.

State-Funded Dual Enrollment Limited to 30 Credit Hours for Most Students

One of the ways the bill seeks to accomplish cost savings is by creating a 30-hour cap for state-funded credit hours. Students can choose to pay for courses out-of-pocket if they want to pursue Dual Enrollment courses beyond the 30-hour cap. Current Dual Enrollment students with 19 or more credit hours by the end of the fiscal year in June 2020 will be allowed to take 12 additional credit hours.

Dual Enrollment Courses Limited to Core Academic and Technical Courses

HB 444 defines courses that the state will cover through Dual Enrollment:

- Core courses used in HOPE scholarship eligibility calculations: English, math, science, social studies and foreign language
- Career, technical and agricultural education (CTAE) courses aligned with the state’s Career Clusters and Pathways. These courses are taught at technical colleges and may include fields like information technology, health science or early childhood education.

In FY 2019, most Dual Enrollment courses (76.4 percent) were core academic courses, and 19.4 percent of Dual Enrollment courses were CTAE courses. About four percent of courses were neither core nor technical. These courses can include fine arts, health and physical education, for example. Though these courses represent a small share of credit hours, they were growing faster than core academic or CTAE courses.
Dual Enrollment Available to 11th- and 12th- Graders; Most 10th-Graders Restricted to Technical Courses

Right now, state law does not restrict 9th and 10th grade students from taking advantage of Dual Enrollment opportunities, though individual colleges can set their own requirements.

HB 444 prioritizes Dual Enrollment for 11th- and 12th- graders, who can take any eligible Dual Enrollment course, newly defined as a core academic or CTAE course. Most 10th-graders will be limited to CTAE courses at technical colleges. If a 10th-grader wishes to take a core academic course at a technical, university system or private college, the students must make a 26 on the ACT or a 1,200 on the SAT, equal to the requirements for the Zell Miller Scholarship. If the legislation passes, students who participated in Dual Enrollment as 9th-graders prior to this change will be permitted to take any eligible course as 10th-graders. Homeschool students will continue to be eligible under the same requirements.

Eighty-one percent of Dual Enrollment students are in 11th or 12th grade, but more sophomores had been participating. Sophomores had the fastest participation growth rates.  

HB 444 Limits Course Withdrawals and Retakes

The bill prohibits students from retaking Dual Enrollment courses “except under extenuating circumstances” and allows students to withdraw from two courses before being made ineligible for the program.

Statewide, students earn As or Bs in more than 74 percent of Dual Enrollment courses, but students also dropped 11 percent of courses and earned a D or F in 5 percent of courses. Dropped, withdrawn and failed courses pose a risk to students, who in rare instances, may hurt their chances for on-time high school graduation or may risk qualifying for HOPE or future federal financial aid eligibility.
New Roles Defined for Student Finance Commission and Office of Planning and Budget

The bill gives the Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC) new authority to examine whether high schools and colleges are in compliance with Dual Enrollment rules and regulations and to penalize schools who are found to be in violation. GSFC will also be responsible for collecting and monitoring student enrollment and course data and annually measuring and evaluating the program, which is now the responsibility of the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA). Enrollment and student record data previously provided by colleges to the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement will now be provided to the Office of Planning and Budget.

HB 444 Clarifies Dual Enrollment’s Purpose

A 2018 audit report recommended that the state clarify Dual Enrollment’s goals to better shape policies and evaluate outcomes. HB 444 defines the following as the program objectives:

- Promote and increase access to postsecondary educational opportunities for Georgia high school students
- Increase high school graduation rates
- Shorten the time and cost to postsecondary credential completion
- Prepare a skilled workforce

Policy Considerations

Georgia lacks critical data on outcomes for Dual Enrollment students. Now that the program has been in place for five years, Georgia should conduct a high-quality evaluation to ensure that Dual Enrollment is meeting its stated education goals.

In addition to evaluating whether the program meets its goals, the state should collect and report data on participation rates among student groups by race/ethnicity, gender, economic status and geography, and set targets for participation of underrepresented students. A detailed evaluation that includes information on student populations with lower graduation rates, including male, low-income, Black and Latinx students, would help assess the true effectiveness of the program and make sure it is increasing access to postsecondary educational opportunities.
The provisions in HB 444 are a reasonable approach to contain costs and still allow for flexibility and access to Dual Enrollment. However, this legislation should be considered in the larger budget context and research:

- Dual Enrollment represents less than 1 percent of total public K-12 and higher education spending.  

- Georgia has limited resources, yet chooses to forgo billions of dollars through tax credits and other breaks, with an unclear return on investment.

- Dual Enrollment’s benefits are shown through other states’ assessments of their programs, such as shorter time to graduation, increased postsecondary attainment, increased lifetime earnings and tax revenues, and decreased spending on social safety net programs.

Indeed, as the state’s population and economy grow, Georgia should modernize its tax code to keep pace with growth so that limited budget funds can be used to fund effective programs like Dual Enrollment that support education and workforce development.

**Endnotes**


2 GBPI analysis of data from Georgia Student Finance Commission.

3 GBPI analysis of Georgia Student Finance Commission data. See more in GBPI’s report “Dual Enrollment Requires Sustainable Funding to Promote High School and College Success.”

4 GBPI analysis of Georgia Student Finance Commission data. See more in GBPI’s report “Dual Enrollment Requires Sustainable Funding to Promote High School and College Success.”

5 GBPI analysis of Georgia Department of Education data.
Total FY 2020 spending on education was $10.6 billion for Georgia’s K-12 public education system, $2.4 billion for the University System of Georgia and $374 million for the Technical College System of Georgia.
