

Report and Suggestions from IPEDS Technical Review Panel #63: Capturing and Clarifying Dual Enrollment Data (Part II)

SUMMARY: The Technical Review Panel discussed ways in which the IPEDS surveys might be improved to better capture information on dual enrollment. This summary provides feedback on how changes would affect data quality and reporting burden for institutions. Comments from interested parties are due to Amy Barmer, IPEDS Technical Review Panel Task Leader at RTI International, at ipedstrpcomment@rti.org by August 6, 2021.

On March 23 and 24, 2021, RTI International, the contractor for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) web-based data collection system, convened a meeting of the IPEDS Technical Review Panel (TRP) using videoconference technology. RTI conducts IPEDS TRP meetings to solicit expert discussion and suggestions on a broad range of issues related to postsecondary education and the IPEDS collection. As the postsecondary education industry evolves, IPEDS TRP meetings are increasingly critical in addressing changes to ensure that IPEDS data remain relevant, informative, and on the forefront of industry advancements and legislative needs. To this end, IPEDS TRP meetings are designed to foster public discourse and enhance IPEDS data collection, products, data quality, and system user-friendliness. The TRP does not report to or advise the U.S. Department of Education.

RTI's specific purpose for TRP #63 was to discuss opportunities to improve the utility of IPEDS data by collecting additional data on dual enrollment that the postsecondary community and IPEDS stakeholders consider important, while balancing burden for data reporters. Fifty-four panelists represented institutions, the research field, state governments, the federal government, higher education associations, and other experts.

Background

Education stakeholders continue to show great interest in dual enrollment and students who take advantage of the opportunity to earn college credit while taking high school courses. Despite the general view among the community that dual enrollment is growing throughout the postsecondary landscape, the extent of this expansion and its impacts on students and institutions is unknown. Data on dual enrollment are collected in many states and as components in several federal surveys and data collections, but the availability and reliability of these data vary greatly, making them insufficient for evaluating and measuring dual enrollment at the national level.

The National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC)¹ commissioned a research paper² on the topic of high school students enrolled at postsecondary institutions to examine how IPEDS can clarify and improve data collection related to dual enrollment. This research included a high-level review of literature on dual enrollment terms and definitions; an analysis of IPEDS surveys and instructions; and interviews with stakeholders. The findings of this exploratory research highlighted

¹ NPEC was established by NCES in 1995 as a voluntary organization that encompasses all sectors of the postsecondary education community including federal agencies, postsecondary institutions, associations, and other organizations with a major interest in postsecondary education data collection.

² Taylor, J.L. & An, B.P., *Improving IPEDS Data Collection on High School Students Enrolled in College Courses* (NPEC 2017). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. Retrieved 5/24/18 from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>.

the increase of high school students taking college courses, inequities in dual enrollment participation and completion, and variation in institutions' reporting practices and capacity.

The 2017 NPEC paper provided background for a March 2018 meeting of the IPEDS TRP on Capturing and Clarifying Dual Enrollment Data (TRP #55). TRP #55 discussed ways to clarify the definition of dual enrollment in IPEDS and methods for collecting information across survey components to improve stakeholder information. Two changes were implemented in response to the suggestions from TRP #55. The first is the adoption of the new definition of dual enrollment:

Dual enrollment: Refers to students who enroll in college courses offered by an institution of higher education while enrolled in high school or seeking a recognized equivalent. Student performance is recorded on a college transcript and postsecondary credit is awarded for a passing grade in the course.

- **Includes:** All postsecondary courses, independent of course delivery mode, course location, course instructor, whether secondary credit is also offered, and whether the student enrolls through a formal state/local program or enrolls outside a formal state/local program.
- **Excludes:** Credit-by-exam models such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate in which the student is not enrolled in a postsecondary institution.

The second change implemented after TRP #55 replaced the term “dual credit” with “dual enrollment” in the Institutional Characteristics (IC) survey component to distinguish credit earned through postsecondary courses from exam-based credit (e.g., AP, CLEP). Both changes were implemented in the 2020-21 collection year. Other suggestions³ from TRP #55 that have not been implemented include collecting the percentage of high school students enrolled in college credit in the Institutional Characteristics Header (IC-Header) and collecting student counts for dual enrollment in the Fall Enrollment (EF), and 12-month Enrollment (E12) survey components.

RTI convened TRP #63 to continue the discussion from TRP #55 on practicable ways to collect and clarify dual enrollment data within the IPEDS data collection, while balancing the burden for data reporters. The 2017 NPEC paper continued to serve as background for the TRP #63 and the authors provided an overview of notable changes to the dual enrollment landscape and trends since 2018. Panelists reviewed discussion items covered during TRP #55, as well as an overview of other federal and state data collections on dual enrollment to inform discussions on incorporating dual enrollment data in IPEDS. RTI asked panelists to provide feedback on the most important and feasible changes to prioritize for implementation while also considering potential burden on data reporters.

Discussion Item #1: Institutional Characteristics

The IPEDS Institutional Characteristics survey components (i.e., IC Header and IC) collect limited information on dual enrollment. Panelists from TRP #55 considered two aspects of dual enrollment as an institutional characteristics: (1) Does an institution *offer* dual enrollment for students who have not earned a high school degree (or its recognized equivalent)? and (2) Does the

³ The following topics were planned but not covered in TRP #55: collecting dual enrollment data in the Graduation Rates and Outcome Measures survey components; collecting dual enrollment in a separate survey; and discussion on priorities, feasibility, and unintended consequences of collecting more dual enrollment data in IPEDS.

institution *accept* college credits earned prior to high school graduation? The IC survey component, Part C, collects information on whether the institution accepts credit earned prior to admission and lists dual enrollment⁴ as one of the options. However, no information is collected on whether the institution offers dual enrollment courses or programs.

Panelists discussed how IPEDS could better capture and reflect the various aspects of dual enrollment offerings and participation. Options evaluated by the panel included asking institutions to report information such as whether the institution offers dual enrollment courses or programs, the extent of dual enrollment offerings, and the location of dual enrollment course offerings. Panelists also considered whether the existing IC survey component question that asks about acceptance of dual enrollment credits⁵ should be retained.

Dual enrollment offerings. Panelists discussed adding data elements in IC Header and the IC components to collect data on institutions' dual enrollment participation. This could be accomplished by either (1) adding an options for dual enrollment courses and/or programs to the list of types of instruction/programs offered by the institution under Part A of the IC Header component, or (2) adding a new, separate question to the IC component, Part C, that asks whether an institution offers, or participates in, dual enrollment programs or courses. To make information more useful for data users, panelists suggested separate questions for courses and programs:

- Does your institution offer dual enrollment courses? (yes/no)
- Does your institution offer dual enrollment programs? (yes/no)

Panelists generally agreed that collecting separate data on dual enrollment courses and programs would better align with how institutions organize their dual enrollment offerings. For example, institutions may offer an organized program of study, offer dual enrollment courses or allow high school students to simply enroll in credit courses through the institution, or both. If this suggestion is adopted, the language should be consistent with the definition of dual enrollment and guidance should align with other IPEDS components that collect data on dual enrollment.

If the questions would function as screening questions, which would use institutions' responses to determine whether additional detail would be required in other IPEDS survey components, they should be included in the IC Header survey component. If not, they could be included in either the IC Header or the IC survey component.

Extent of dual enrollment offerings. Panelists discussed the possibility of measuring the extent to which the institution offers dual enrollment, by collecting the percentage of an institution's student counts who are high school students (or a recognized equivalent) enrolled in college credit for the most recent fall term. This information could be collected by asking institutions to indicate if the extent of their dual enrollment fell above or below a certain threshold of their enrollment, or by asking institutions to report a specific percentage of their enrollment represented by high school students. Panelists noted that, because the actual range of this value among institutions is unknown, establishing an appropriate threshold would be particularly challenging. The panel generally agreed that the percentage of dual-enrolled students could be more accurately derived if the IPEDS enrollment surveys collected additional data on dual enrollment. Furthermore, because many

⁴ Note that "dual enrollment" replaced "dual credit" based on input from TRP #55.

⁵ "Does your institution accept any of the following?" under which "dual enrollment" is an option to select.

institutions would need to calculate their percentage to determine whether they meet that threshold, asking them to do so in the IC survey component would create additional burden without adding sufficient value to the data.

Dual enrollment locations. Panelists also considered a proposal to add a question to the IC Header component to collect locations where dual enrollment courses and programs are offered (e.g., at one or more high schools, at a postsecondary institution/college campus, online/via distance education, or other) and whether the collected data would be useful. Panelists advised against making changes at this time and suggested focusing instead on priority items.

Accepting dual enrollment credit. The panel considered whether the existing IC survey component question that asks about acceptance of dual enrollment credits⁶ should be retained. Panelists noted that in its current form, the data are limited in what is captured (via checkbox) and without context, the data collected could be misleading to consumers. For example, the institution’s decision to accept these credits may be based on a number of factors, including the course type, the institution granting the credit, or the student’s program of study. In some cases, an institution may accept dual enrollment credits but those credits may not count toward the student’s program of study. Further, some institutions do not differentiate between dual credit and general transfer credit. Whether and how the credit transfers to another institution depends on institution and state policies. Simply asking whether an institution accepts credits earned in dual enrollment raises more questions than answers. Assuming the panelists suggestion to collect dual enrollment offerings is adopted, panelists noted that this question could be simplified to only collect whether an institution accepts credit for life experiences, AP credits, or neither. Eliminating “dual enrollment” as an option altogether would not result in any significant information gaps in what is known about institutions’ dual enrollment participation.

Discussion Item #2: Enrollment

The IPEDS enrollment surveys (i.e., EF, E12) do not separately collect the number of dual-enrolled high school students at an institution. IPEDS instructions advise data reporters to classify high school students enrolled at their institutions for credit as non-degree/non-certificate-seeking students, aggregating them together with all other non-degree/non-certificate-seeking students who already attained a high school credential. Therefore, it is not possible to disaggregate the dual enrollment population from other non-degree/non-certificate-seeking students in IPEDS enrollment data. With dual enrollment becoming more prevalent at postsecondary institutions, the ability to examine this group of students more closely, and therefore the need to isolate them from other non-degree/non-certificate-seeking students, is gaining interest among higher education stakeholders.

Dual enrollment counts. To address this data limitation, panelists from TRP #55 suggested adding a new column to the core enrollment screen of the EF survey component⁷ to specifically collect dual enrollment counts. This additional reporting column would be separate from the broader two categories of degree/certificate-seeking and non-degree/non-certificate-seeking, separating out dual

⁶ “Does your institution accept any of the following?” under which “dual enrollment” is an option to select.

⁷At the time of TRP #55, this suggestion applied only to the EF survey component due to differences between the EF and E12 survey components. Since TRP #55, NCES modified the E12 survey component in 2020–21 so that it now shares the same core enrollment screen as EF; therefore, the prior TRP #55 suggestion now applies to both EF and E12.

enrolled high schools students from college students who have already attained a high school credential. Because this suggestion was not implemented after TRP #55, the current panel discussed whether it is still valid and should be pursued.

Panelists generally agreed with the prior suggestion to add a column for dual enrolled high school students to the core enrollment screen while maintaining all current student subgroups (e.g., full-time/part-time, gender, and race/ethnicity). The suggested modifications would result in the following three mutually exclusive categories:

- Column 1: degree/certificate-seeking;
- Column 2: non-degree/non-certificate-seeking (not dual-enrolled); and
- Column 3: high school students (dual-enrolled).

Some panelists suggested nesting the new column for dual-enrolled high school students under the broader category of non-degree/non-certificate-seeking students, which would serve to maintain the enrollment trends among non-degree/non-certificate-seeking students collected in IPEDS. Other panelists pointed out, however, that dual-enrolled high school students may in fact be degree/certificate-seeking students; therefore, these panelists suggested the new column remain independent (while recognizing that current reporting guidance instructs institutions to consider these students as non-degree/non-certificate-seeking prior to their receipt of a high school diploma or recognized equivalent).

Panelists considered the level of reporting burden that this change would introduce for institutions, especially because the core enrollment screen repeats four times to collect data on full-time women, full-time men, part-time women, and part-time men, and contains race/ethnicity subgroups for each. Therefore, panelists considered alternative options for collecting dual enrollment counts, including the addition of a new screen dedicated to dual enrollment counts instead of the proposed new column on the core enrollment screen. This new screen would collect data for a more limited number of subgroups and would not include race/ethnicity breakdowns.

Panelists noted collecting dual enrollment counts by race/ethnicity as a priority from a research perspective. Panelists noted that substantial equity gaps exist in dual enrollment participation and collecting dual enrollment counts by race/ethnicity would allow data users to examine these issues more deeply.

To address the potential burden that may be imposed on institutions with few dual-enrolled high school students, panelists also considered a hybrid approach, in which institutions with dual enrollment levels below a certain threshold would be asked to report only the total number of dual-enrolled high school students rather than enrollment counts disaggregated by all student subgroups currently collected. One potential approach to reduce burden could be adding a row to the core enrollment screen rather than a new column for these institutions, thereby not collecting dual enrollment counts by race/ethnicity. However, as panelists noted in relation to the IC Header and IC survey components, the concept of a threshold introduces its own set of challenges, including determining the appropriate cut-off, and the level of burden added by asking institutions to calculate their dual enrollment percentages to know whether they exceed the threshold and must report in detail.

Regardless of whether dual enrollment counts are ultimately collected using a new column on the core enrollment screen or through another method that may be less burdensome, panelists agreed that

these changes should be implemented in the E12 survey component, and if possible, also in the EF survey component. Panelists recognized that reporting the data in both could introduce burden for institutions but noted the value of adding it to each (e.g., the E12 survey component represents a more complete picture of an institution's enrollment, but many traditional academic measures such as graduation rates rely on fall cohorts established in the EF survey component). Panelists agreed that modifying only the EF survey component would be insufficient for several reasons, including complications with the timing of census and reporting dates, and the fact that this approach would not capture students who are dual-enrolled only in the spring. RTI would appreciate additional feedback from the community, particularly about the ability of institutions to report this information and the burden of doing so, to inform this decision.

Instructional activity for dual-enrolled students. The E12 survey component currently asks institutions to report the amount of total instructional activity during the reporting period (either in clock or credit hours, depending on how institutions measure their activity), which is then used to calculate a full-time equivalent (FTE) student count. The panel considered whether this total instructional activity should be collected separately for dual-enrolled students (assuming the TRP's suggestion to modify the survey to collect dual enrollment counts is adopted), which would provide researchers with a measure of the intensity of dual enrollment at an institution beyond a simple head count.

Panelists noted that the intensity of dual enrollment can differ widely among institutions, with substantial variation in the number of credits students take (e.g., at some institutions students may average a small number of credits, whereas at others students may carry a full course load, especially where formal dual enrollment programs exist). Therefore, collecting this information could significantly help researchers understand the nature and scale of dual enrollment activity at a particular institution. Panelists recognized the potential burden that could be imposed on institutions, however, and noted that quantifying that burden and the potential benefit would be challenging. RTI would appreciate feedback from the postsecondary community on the potential value and additional burden of collecting instructional activity data for dual-enrolled students.

Discussion Item #3: Finance

The IPEDS Finance survey component does not currently collect any separate information regarding dual enrollment. Although revenues and expenses related to dual enrollment are included in those survey sections, the specific amounts attributable to dual enrollment are not broken out from other institutional revenues or expenses. Panelists discussed how IPEDS could better capture and reflect the various financial aspects of dual enrollment activity and arrangements at institutions. Options evaluated by the panel included asking institutions to report information such as the primary source of tuition for dual-enrolled students (e.g., student/parent, school district, state, etc.), *where* they account for dual enrollment revenues (e.g., tuition/fees, state appropriations, state grants/contracts, etc.), and whether they discount tuition for dual-enrolled students. Panelists also considered whether it would be feasible to collect revenues and expenses related to dual enrollment separately from other institutional revenues and expenses.

Panelists acknowledged interest in finances related to dual enrollment among the higher education community, but noted that, because of postsecondary institutions' financial systems, data, and reporting requirements, the value to researchers would require substantial burden on institutions. For

example, additional data on the source of dual enrollment tuition would likely only be valuable if institutions reported actual amounts, which would be too burdensome on institutions. Similarly, while knowing more about tuition discounts for dual-enrolled students could be useful to researchers, a simple yes/no question would not sufficiently capture the myriad ways discounts could be applied. Panelists did not suggest modifications to the Finance survey component and instead suggested exploring this topic in a future TRP dedicated to the Finance survey.

Discussion Item #4: Human Resources

The Human Resources (HR) survey component, which examines the makeup of institutions' instructional and other staff, is another IPEDS survey component that does not separately collect any information on dual enrollment instruction. Panelists considered various ways in which the HR survey component could be modified to better illuminate topics of interest such as who/what type of instructors are teaching college courses to high school students (e.g., a high school teacher not affiliated with the institution, a high school teacher with adjunct status, a full-time institution faculty member, etc.), who pays those instructors (e.g., the institution or the district), the number of institutional instructors teaching dual-enrolled students, and the salary outlays to those instructors. Panelists generally agreed that modifying the HR survey component to collect these data would be incredibly burdensome if changes were incorporated at the level of detail necessary to result in useful data.

Panelists further discussed how dual enrollment affects the student-to-faculty ratio at an institution. Currently, the student-to-faculty numerator represents the number of fall FTE students, which includes dual-enrolled high school students. However, the denominator of the student-to-faculty ratio is based on instructional faculty, which may or may not include faculty teaching dual enrollment courses (e.g., a high school teacher unaffiliated with the institution would not be included, but an adjunct or full-time institutional instructor would be). Panelists noted the challenges with reconciling dual enrollment with the existing student-to-faculty ratio and acknowledged the need to better determine the instructional makeup of these courses. Panelists suggested further exploration of this topic, including how to define these instructional activities, perhaps through additional discussions in a future TRP meeting.

Discussion Item #5: Student Outcomes Surveys

The postsecondary community is increasingly interested in how dual enrollment participation may affect longer-term student outcomes (e.g., degree attainment), with a growing body of literature examining the relationship between dual enrollment and various measures of postsecondary success. Therefore, the panel discussed possibilities for improving the IPEDS Completions, Graduation Rates (GR), and Outcome Measures (OM) survey components to enable data users to better explore those connections.

Completions. The Completions survey component does not currently include guidance on whether institutions should report credentials earned by dual-enrolled high school students. Panelists from TRP #55 suggested adding clarifying instructions that institutions should include students who (1) receive a credential before earning their high school diploma (or equivalent); and (2) students who complete their college coursework for a credential before graduating from high school but receive the

credential after their high school diploma. The current panel agreed with this suggestion from TRP #55 and suggested adding this clarification to the survey instructions.

Panelists also considered a proposal to add an element to the “completers by level” screen of the Completions survey component to collect the number of students who completed a credential entirely via dual enrollment (i.e., distinguish dual-enrolled completers from the total number of completers already collected on this screen). Panelists expressed support for collecting this information for appropriate award levels (e.g., certificate and associate’s degrees) and suggested modifying the survey to capture these data.

Graduation Rates and Outcome Measures. The GR and OM survey components do not currently capture dual-enrolled students, as institutions are instructed to include only degree/certificate-seeking students in the GR and OM cohorts, and dual-enrolled students are considered non-degree/non-certificate-seeking according to IPEDS reporting guidance. Because of community interest in examining how dual enrollment experience impacts student outcomes, the panel discussed the ways the GR and OM survey components could collect data on students with prior dual enrollment experience. However, panelists agreed that the level of detail institutions would need to report in order to provide useful data would create undue burden. Furthermore, due to the federally mandated nature of those survey components, the panel advised against making changes at this time.

Next Steps

Once the TRP summary comment period has closed, RTI will review the comments and will outline recommendations for NCES based on the outcome of the TRP meeting and subsequent public comment period. NCES will review the recommendations to determine next steps and submit proposed burden estimates to the Office of Management and Budget for information collection clearance. The current collection approval extends through the 2021–22 data collection.

Comments

RTI is committed to improving the quality and usefulness of IPEDS data as well as strategies that might help minimize additional reporting burden. We encourage interested parties to send any comments or concerns about this topic to Amy Barmer, IPEDS Technical Review Panel Task Leader, at ipedstrpcomment@rti.org by August 6, 2021.