

SEQUENCING & ARTICULATION



High-quality CTE programs provide a sequence of courses that are aligned across learner levels, with opportunities for articulated credit, accelerated learning and career pathways. Collaboration among education providers, particularly between secondary and postsecondary educators, is key to ensuring non-duplicative courses, credit transfer and seamless opportunities for student advancement toward meaningful credentials.

Key Issues to Address
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening collaboration among partners • Clearly communicating with partners and students about changes in instructional delivery and their implications • Identifying and addressing funding and staffing issues to promote equitable access • Reviewing early postsecondary opportunities in the context of the instructional delivery models chosen by secondary and postsecondary partners • Exploring multiple ways to evaluate student learning outcomes for potential credit in the context of a COVID-19-impacted school year

Collaboration across learner levels could be difficult to prioritize within COVID-19-impacted learning, as educators face other immediate challenges, but will be more important than ever. CTE leaders will need to work across secondary, postsecondary and adult levels to realign course sequences as curriculum morphs in a remote or blended learning environment. Memoranda of understanding for articulated credit, credit transfer agreements and early postsecondary opportunities, which include dual enrollment, dual credit, concurrent enrollment and other related opportunities, will need to be reviewed to ensure they are still relevant and applicable. Many districts and institutions used pass/fail grading in the spring, and the implications of this for grade point averages and credit transfer will need to be unpacked this coming school year. Organizations like the [American Council on Education](#) are encouraging institutions to be generous and transparent about accepting credit in the unique circumstances of the pandemic.

Funding will be another important consideration, independent of decisions about in-person or remote delivery, particularly for early postsecondary opportunities for high school students. As state budgets feel the impact of decreased revenue and increased draw on resources, education budget changes are likely. States vary widely on whether and how they fund or support early postsecondary programs, but those that currently have robust funding mechanisms may face budget cuts. If state sources of funding for these programs are targeted for cuts, more of the funding burden will likely fall on districts, institutions or students and their guardians. Federal funding from the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations (CARES) Act can be used to support early postsecondary programs; however, this funding is finite and will be needed for many purposes. In addition, instructor shortages owing to retirements or budget cuts will potentially impact the availability of qualified instructors for both early postsecondary opportunities and postsecondary courses and credentials that are part of stackable pathways.

The most immediate challenge in this element will be coordinating across the secondary and postsecondary systems for early postsecondary opportunities, especially if the secondary school and the college choose different delivery modes or instructional calendars for the 2020–21 school year. Unless stipulated in statute, much of the decision-making power to modify practices around early postsecondary opportunities is deferred to the local or institutional level. Partnerships “in name only,” without a coordinated approach to delivering courses, are likely to struggle more than those that have made partnership and collaboration central to their work, as is recommended by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) [program quality standards](#). By working closely together, high schools and colleges can coordinate decision-making and document necessary changes in alignment with state board of education policy, regional accreditor policy and any state statute in order to continue offering robust opportunities to students.

It will also be important to utilize the full range of strategies for helping students earn articulated credit or

transfer credit for prior knowledge and skills. Expanding the use of prior learning assessment at the postsecondary level would particularly benefit dislocated workers pursuing additional training. Other competency-based approaches for awarding credit, such as badging, certifications, portfolios and challenge exams, can also be used to document student learning within this dynamic environment.



Institutions should work together to continue to provide as many options for students as possible under the circumstances, and minimize the disruptive impact of the pandemic on student opportunity. CTE courses in particular may be seen as more difficult to reconfigure and could be preferentially dropped as accelerated learning options as institutions contemplate how to adjust. This will complicate the availability of a well-trained workforce, further exacerbating economic recovery. Stakeholders need to work together to prioritize these programs to ensure the economy is poised for recovery.

In-person Considerations

If both secondary and postsecondary institutions partnering for early postsecondary opportunities choose the same instructional scenario and calendar for the new school year, logistics will be easier to navigate and these programs can likely continue much in the same manner as they previously operated, with social distancing in mind. Changes to instructional approaches at either institution may have impacts on the way the partnership functions and, ultimately, on students. For instance, if a dual enrollment course is taught at the high school and that high school opens to in-person learning, then the course can probably continue to be delivered largely as usual (with social distancing modifications). However, if a dual enrollment course is taught through the college and that college opens to in-

person learning, but the school district is remote or has cancelled off-campus activities, then the course may no longer be available for high school credit.

Additionally, if students or faculty are moving between in-person campuses, additional health screening and personal protective equipment may be needed. Transportation could also be an issue, particularly if school buses or public transportation had been used in the past, as new safety guidelines could affect availability.

Another impact in this model could be limits on course enrollments due to social distancing requirements. If students had previously accessed CTE courses on the postsecondary campus that now have limited enrollment, adult students who need retraining for immediate employment may be given priority access to these courses. Some postsecondary campuses are addressing this issue by offering more sections of courses at nontraditional times or offering bridge programs, but costs are an issue, particularly if the funding model used in a particular state or area requires institutions to bear additional cost burden for dual enrollment students. Similar challenges could exist at the secondary level if social distancing limits require reduced class sizes and space is at a premium. Dual enrollment or other advanced courses, including those necessary for credit through articulation agreements, could face more limited enrollment or be eliminated due to lack of space.

Remote Considerations

If a course offered for early postsecondary credit is taught through the college and the college is open remotely, then the student can choose whether or not to take the course online, bearing in mind that they may not be getting the same type of education, particularly for courses with lab hours. If a course is taught at the high school and requires lab hours completed in person, but the high school will be teaching all or mostly remotely, then the course may no longer be a good candidate for dual enrollment.

When a course is both suited to the remote environment and offered remotely, either through the college or through a respected third-party provider, that is likely to be the most effective way of continuing to help learners earn early postsecondary credit in this instructional model.

Another challenge if one or both systems go to remote learning is that course sequences may no longer mesh,

as the curriculum drifts from its previous design. While addressing these sequences will likely not be the first order of business as campuses reopen, CTE programs should plan to revisit course sequences, articulation agreements and resulting budget impacts, if remote learning will continue, to facilitate student achievement of early postsecondary credits. Maintaining access to industry certification exams (addressed in more detail in the [Student Assessment](#) section), which often provide articulated credit, will be similarly important for learner opportunity.



Access and Equity Implications

When you are considering this element, remember that existing inequities in access to early postsecondary credit may be even more challenging due to current economic conditions. Supports like transportation and tuition/textbook assistance will be more important than ever for many students. Many low-income learners rely on early postsecondary credit opportunities to make college affordable — if these courses are cut or access reduced, the impact could disproportionately harm those that struggle to pursue advanced opportunities on their own. It will also be critical to design aligned, stackable short-term postsecondary programs that can get individuals back to work quickly while providing the credentials necessary for career advancement and high-quality jobs.

Blended Considerations

As with the remote scenario, CTE programs will need to consider how to maintain quality in a blended course offered as an early postsecondary opportunity or with the intention of credit transfer. In addition, as with the in-person scenario, having students move between two campuses could increase their risk of exposure. If learners will be allowed to transition between campuses, those institutions will need to develop policies for health screening, scheduling and transportation that minimize this risk, such as requiring a certain amount of time to elapse between when the learner is on one campus before coming to the other campus.

Resources, Tools and Examples

- The NACEP Accreditation Commission has released a [Statement on COVID-19 and NACEP Accreditation](#) and compiled [state-by-state guidance](#). NACEP also offers [program quality standards](#) that define characteristics of a quality early postsecondary program in the areas of partnership, faculty, assessment, curriculum, students and evaluation.
- The [Higher Learning Commission](#) (HLC) has released temporary policy, frequently asked questions and procedures for notifying HLC of changes.
- The [College in High School Alliance](#) has compiled guidance from a number of sources.
- The American Council on Education released a [Statement of Principles on Acceptance of Credit](#) this spring.
- The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers has released [guidance](#) on evaluating transfer credit from COVID-19-impacted terms.

This is an excerpt from [High-quality CTE: Planning for a COVID-19-impacted School Year](#). Access the complete guide for additional content about providing high-quality CTE programs in a COVID-19-impacted school year. **Last Update:** June 22, 2020

This document is not legal advice, nor is it an exhaustive list of every consideration or action that CTE educators may need to take for the 2020–21 school year. Readers should defer to federal, state, local and/or institution requirements and guidance. The instructional models, ideas, resources, tools and examples shared do not constitute endorsements of any products, services or strategies, as different products, services and strategies will work in different contexts. As knowledge is gained, this guide may be updated to incorporate new ideas and resources and emerging issues.

Sequencing & Articulation: Key Questions to Consider



Cross-cutting Questions

- What institutional changes will impact early postsecondary opportunities for high school students? How can institutions work together to mitigate those effects?
- How can postsecondary institutions expand accelerated credit attainment through prior learning assessments and competency-based approaches for awarding credit?
- What structures exist to facilitate open, timely communication about changes to instructional delivery or other policies and their implications for students and educators?

In-person Questions

- Will students be allowed to attend courses on the college campus? Will instructors from the college be allowed to come on the high school campus?
- How will institutions develop policies and scheduling and transportation options that minimize exposure risk for learners accessing two campuses?
- Will courses modified for social distancing still count for credit?
- Will enrollment caps impact student access to early postsecondary opportunities or courses needed for articulation/credit transfer?

Remote Questions

- Will courses count for postsecondary credit when learning is happening all or almost all remotely?
- How will you collaborate across learner levels to revisit course sequences? If course sequences and articulation agreements drift too far apart, will you realign or cancel agreements?

Blended Questions

- How will schedules for students be aligned across institutions to account for blended learning?