

The Case for Dual Enrollment – A Model for College Access

August 5, 2010

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Abstract

In Patrick County Public Schools in Patrick County, Virginia, in 2007, one of the goals that developed for the school district was to increase the opportunities for students to enroll in dual enrollment programs. The dual enrollment model is not new to Virginia's secondary educational program. This model has been available to Virginia students since 1988 (Catron, 1998). Dual enrollment/dual credit programs enable secondary students to take college classes while enrolled in high school. The program described takes the dual enrollment opportunities to another level by enabling high school seniors to earn a college associate's degree and a high school diploma simultaneously.

Rationale for a Dual Degree Program

The Patrick County model for students earning dual degrees is called the *D-squared Program*. D-squared was designed as collaboration between Patrick Henry Community College in Martinsville, Virginia, and the school system's only high school (Patrick County High School). Students can earn a degree from the college and a high school diploma at the same time. Research conducted revealed that at least 120 students in the graduating classes of 2007 and 2008 earned college credit with many transferring those credits to four-year colleges such as the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech. However, the research revealed that these students were not eligible for certain college grants based on the fact that they could not enter college with an associate degree. A review of data indicated that the school division has a high rate of students going on to college. In 2007, 2008, and 2009, the graduating classes had an 86% "college-going rate". However, after further research, over 55% of the students were going to

community college first and either terminating their education at that level or transferring to a four-year college. Also the staff had discussions with parents who were concerned about college expenses. Staff also observed seniors who were requesting to graduate early or leaving early from school every day because of what it known as “the lost opportunity for the senior year” (National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001).

Based on this information we began discussions with the community college to help the school division that would provide a program that would address these concerns.

The D-squared Model

From the outset selected staff members of Patrick Henry Community College and the school division had identified several characteristics the program should have. The program must have:

- a structured curriculum modeled after a normal college schedule
- the ability to transfer most or all of the credits to Virginia’s college institutions.
- foreign language
- public speaking
- art or health
- meet high school state and local requirements, and
- flexible enough to meet future expansion if practical.

The result of the meetings produced a program in which a student may earn a high school diploma and an associate’s degree in general studies that will be able to transfer to colleges. D-

squared offered several advantages to student. One advantage was obvious – it saved parents money. In presentations, a tuition comparison was developed. The comparison is below:

A second advantage was that students were able to qualify for various scholarships which an associate's degree was the minimum requirement. One university in Virginia, Liberty University, which is the largest private college in Virginia offers the following: If the student is transferring in with 60+ hours or an Associate's Degree, the academic scholarship is based on the college GPA only and ranges from \$1,000 to \$4,000 annually for up to four years (Liberty University, 2010).

Results and Conclusions

The D-squared was started in the fall of 2008. It is a two year program with the Class of 2010 having the first opportunity to earn their diplomas and college degrees. The Patrick County High School Class of 2010 was followed and studied to determine the success of the program. In a class of 180 students, 28 of them also earned an associate's degree, or 15.6% of the entire class. Of those who earned the degree, all but one got into their first choice college, and the one got into her second choice. And they all are going to a four-year college. Out of the eligible students in the Class of 2010, 93% indicated they are attending college (statistics excludes special diplomas).

Overall in just two years, the program has had a significant impact on the education of students in Patrick County. Enrollment in the program has been steady, relevant to the class enrollment. Future plans include expansion to include career-technical programs and other majors.

Works Consulted

Catron, Rhonda, The Virginia Plan for Dual Enrollment: A Historical Perspective, *Inquiry*, Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 1998, 13-21

<http://www.liberty.edu/financeadmin/financialaid/index.cfm?PID=298>
Liberty University.

National Commission on the High School Senior Year, The Lost Opportunity of Senior Year: Finding a Better Way, January 2001.