BRIDGING TWO WORLDS

The Evolving Landscape of High School Dual Enrollment in American Higher Education

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AACRAO also gratefully acknowledges the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University for bringing critical research perspective to this study. Their long-standing expertise in pathway development, credit mobility and equitable access to higher education strengthened the methodological approach and contextual analysis of institutional practices. CCRC's contributions helped ensure the findings reflect current practices and emerging innovations in the field.

Together, these organizations' complementary expertise enhanced the depth and applicability of this national benchmarking study, providing a comprehensive view of current HSDE implementation across diverse institutional contexts.

NACEP

The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) is at the intersection of college and high-school, advancing quality college courses for high school students. NACEP is the first and only national organization supporting **programs**, **practitioners**, and **policy** to advance quality concurrent and dual enrollment programs.

Ensuring Program Quality

NACEP works to ensure that dual enrollment programs give students more than rigorous coursework, they prepare them to succeed in college. Guided by NACEP's national quality standards, strong programs immerse students in the academics, expectations, systems, and practices that define college learning. They help students build the knowledge, skills, and confidence to meet higher-level academic demands, utilize college resources, and develop competencies to improve the transition from high school to college. Whether taught by a high school instructor or college faculty, these courses are anchored in strong partnerships between the high school and the college, with high school instructors supported by faculty liaisons who ensure alignment in content, assessment, and expectations. As the sole accreditor for the field, NACEP provides the structure and standards that make these elements work together, resulting in authentic, high-quality college experiences for students.

Supporting Practitioners and the Field

NACEP advances the field and supports our national network of secondary, postsecondary, state agency, and partner members by being the singular source for national best practices, professional learning, research, and advocacy. We share and advance knowledge through national, regional, and state-level convenings, federal policy seminars, topical webinars, published resources, and specialized technical assistance. Our workshops and conferences are the premier destination for practitioners, college officials, high school leaders, policymakers, and researchers interested in creating an effective bridge between high school and college.

Advancing Impactful Policy

NACEP believes that good policy supports good practice. We leverage our organizational and membership experience and expertise to advise and advance policy informed by research, evaluation, data, and the voice of the field. We work to advance informed and inclusive state and federal policy impacting concurrent and dual enrollment. We see evidence-informed policy work as critical to ensure program quality and improve equity in program access and learner engagement.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2024, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) conducted a comprehensive national benchmarking survey of high school dual enrollment (HSDE) practices at higher-education institutions in the United States. With expert input from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University, research examined current practices at 298 Title-IV degree-granting institutions. This represents a 16% response rate.

Findings reveal substantial growth in HSDE programs and overwhelming institutional confidence in their value. HSDE availability has increased markedly; **93% of responding institutions now offer these programs,** compared to 78% in 2016. **Ninety-eight percent** of institutions represented **accept HSDE credit in transfer,** demonstrating broad recognition of the academic validity of these credits.

Institutional perspectives on HSDE's impact are **strongly positive across multiple dimensions.** These perspectives include:

- **95% agree HSDE improves access to postsecondary courses**
- **93% believe it enhances college affordability**
- **90% indicate it expands curriculum access for high-school learners**
- **85% agree successful completion demonstrates college readiness**
- **81% view it as expanding their prospective learner pool**
- **71% believe it improves career options for learners**

Research reveals robust program implementation across various delivery modes. Ninety-seven percent of HSDE-offering institutions provide individual courses; 41% offer Early College High School (ECHS) programs. **Most institutions employ multiple delivery methods,** including on-site high-school instruction (93%), college-campus-based courses (77%) and online options (62% asynchronous, 39% synchronous).

Financial access remains a critical consideration. While **88% of institutions discount HSDE tuition; 75% offer discounts of 50% or more.** Fifty-one percent of respondents acknowledge institutional fees continue to create barriers for some learners.

Funding typically involves multiple sources, including higher-education institutions, families/learners, school districts, high schools and state funding.

Quality assurance is a priority; **96% of institutions have implemented formal measures to monitor program elements.** Institutions are increasingly integrating HSDE into broader academic pathways—55% incorporate courses into default high-school plans, and **69% map coursework directly to college degree plans.** Additionally, 59% of institutions offer credential pathways through HSDE, with options ranging from certificates to bachelor's degrees.

Respondents identified areas for additional work and opportunities for enhancement, particularly in learner-support services and equity initiatives. **Less than 50% of institutions analyze HSDE demographics to identify underrepresented groups.** Only about 33% have programs specifically designed for underrepresented learners.

These data demonstrate that HSDE has evolved into a mainstream educational practice, serving both as an educational pathway and a strategic enrollment tool. While institutions show strong commitment to these programs, continued attention to accessibility, equity and learner support are crucial for maximizing HSDE's potential impact on learner success.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) conducted a joint national benchmarking survey of high school dual enrollment (HSDE) practices. This research builds upon AACRAO's 2016 dual-enrollment study. Input from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University was also included.

For this study, high school dual enrollment refers to any program in which high-school learners earn transcripted college credit through a postsecondary institution. Programs may be known by various names, including dual enrollment, dual credit, concurrent enrollment, early college and other terms (Refer to *The Terminology of HSDE*, pg. 8). Research specifically focuses on programs in which:

- credit is transcribed by the institution of higher education (IHE)
- learners receive college credit; they may also earn high-school credit for the same course
- courses are taught on college campuses, at high schools, online or in hybrid formats
- credit may be awarded upon course completion, after high-school graduation, after completing a program series or upon enrolling at the credit-awarding institution

The study excluded credit-by-exam models, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB). Credit for Prior Learning, independent enrollment by high-school learners outside their regular curriculum as well as programs with unique transcribing practices, such as retroactive credit awards.

Findings from the responding Title-IV degree-granting institutions represent 48 states and the District of Columbia. The study examines current HSDE practices, including:

- program structures and delivery models
- learner eligibility and support services
- credit recognition and transfer treatment
- quality-assurance measures
- technology infrastructure and staffing
- strategic purposes and community impact

This report provides a complete analysis of institutional practices, including program structures, implementation models, learner-support services and operational considerations.Some survey data were previously highlighted in a focused Green Paper prepared for the Learning Evaluation and Recognition for the Next Generation (LEARN) Commission (Kilgore & Fink, 2025). That paper examines specific aspects of HSDE credit mobility to meet Commission timelines.

METHODOLOGY AND RESPONSE RATE

Understanding the scope and limitations of this research is essential to interpret data accurately. The survey was distributed to 1,912 Title-IV degree-granting institutions across the United States; 298 institutions responded, yielding a 16% response rate. This represents a smaller sample than AACRAO's 2016 dual-enrollment study, which had 388 responding institutions (Kilgore & Taylor, 2016).

Several important contextual factors should be considered when interpreting these data.

- The sample includes public and private, 2-year and 4-year institutions.
- Responding institutions may not represent all U.S. higher-education institutions.
- Institutions with established HSDE programs may have been more inclined to respond to the survey. This may have skewed results toward institutions with more developed HDSE practices and policies.
- The potential self-selection bias is particularly relevant when examining credit-mobility findings.
- The 98% acceptance rate of HSDE credits among survey respondents may reflect multiple phenomena, such as evolving institutional practices around credit mobility or respondents with more progressive credit-acceptance policies.
- Challenges with credit acceptance may be more prevalent among nonresponding institutions.

Not all questions were presented to each respondent. Survey logic directed participants to different questions based on previous responses. For example, institutions that did not offer HSDE were asked about barriers to offering these programs. Institutions with HSDE programs were asked to provide implementation details. As a result, the number of respondents varies across survey questions. These variations in sample size reflect both survey logic and the "I don't know/unsure" response option.

Readers should consider these contextual factors when applying findings to their own institutional context or making broader generalizations about HSDE practices across all U.S. higher-education institutions.

When applicable and appropriate, findings were incorporated from other sources to provide additional context and corroborating elements.

KEY FINDINGS

Program Growth and Adoption

High school dual enrollment availability has increased substantially; 93% of responding institutions offer HSDE programs, compared to 78% in 2016. Eighty percent of institutions report growth in HSDE courses and programs over the last three academic years. Ninety-eight percent of institutions accept HSDE credit in transfer, though 36% perceive difficulties with credit acceptance at other institutions.

15% increase in intuitions reporting offering HSDE

80% institutions report recent growth

98% institutions accept HSDE credit

Program Structure and Delivery

Among institutions offering HSDE, 97% provide individual courses while 41% offer Early College High School (ECHS) programs and 20% offer Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) programs.

The most common delivery method is on-site at high schools (93%), followed by courses on college campuses (77%) and online delivery (62% asynchronous, 39% synchronous). Approximately 34% use hybrid delivery models combining in-person and online instruction.

High School

93%

College

77%

Online Formats

62% Async

39% Sync

34% Hybrid

Academic Integration and Quality Assurance

Fifty-five percent of institutions integrate HSDE courses into default 9th-to-12th-grade course plans. Sixty-nine percent map HSDE coursework directly to college-degree plans. Nearly all institutions (96%) implement formal quality-assurance measures; most use institutional accreditation guidelines (64%) and internal quality standards (63%). The use of NACEP program quality standards is prevalent in institutional practice but only 30% of respondents reported they were NACEP-accredited.

Credentials and Pathways

Fifty-nine percent of institutions offer at least one credential pathway through HSDE. Among those:

- 91% offer pathways to associate degrees
- 85% offer certificate pathways
- 2.5% offer bachelor's-degree pathways

Financial Access and Support

Eighty-eight percent of institutions discount HSDE tuition, with 75% offering discounts of 50% or more. Despite discounting, 51% of respondents believe institutional fees remain a barrier for some learners. Multiple funding sources support HSDE programs, including:

- higher-education institutions
- families/learners
- school districts
- high schools
- state funding

Learner Support and Services

Eighty-four percent of institutions provide academic-support services, such as tutoring and writing centers. Eighty-five percent of institutions offer advising on an as-requested basis. About 35% assign dedicated advisors. Less than 50% of institutions analyze HSDE demographics to identify underrepresented groups. About 33% have programs specifically designed for underrepresented learners.

Institutional Implementation

Competition is significant; 90% of institutions report other institutions offer HSDE at the same high schools. Staffing patterns vary by delivery mode, with high-school instructors predominantly teaching at high schools (93%) and IHE faculty leading campus-based (96%) and online courses (96-97%). The majority of institutions employ multiple technological solutions to support HSDE, with only 33% using a single solution.

THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE OF HIGH SCHOOL DUAL ENROLLMENT

Connecting Systems to Benefit Learners

High school dual enrollment (HSDE) may be one of the more unique, complex programs in the field of education. HSDE programs join two spheres of education traditionally separated in time and space–high school and college. These programs are neither high school nor college. They are "both/and," essentially creating a new, shared space in education.

Secondary and postsecondary education are significantly different. Operationally, they have different funding structures, statutes, regulations and mechanisms for oversight and accrediting. Functionally, they have different objectives, pacing, priorities, business models, audiences, roles in society and more. Within the historic context of American education, they dwell in distinctly different niches. Secondary education is essentially free and compulsory. Postsecondary education is essentially optional and can have significant cost associated with it.

Culturally, the roles and expectations of learners differ. High-school learners are largely guided through their experience, with structured schedules, frequent progress checks, mandated attendance and support built into the fabric of the school day. Textbooks, learning materials and transportation are typically provided. Responsibility is shared, if not more or less held, by adults in the system with the onus shifting more to the student as graduation approaches.

In contrast, college learners are expected to operate with a high degree of independence. They are presumed to manage their time, know how to find and seek help when needed, navigate, new complex systems, procure their own learning materials and balance competing priorities, including adult responsibilities.

The cultural shift between high school and college is not just about increased academic rigor and complexity. Learners move from a system in which they are supported to one in which support options must be known or discovered and more actively and independently pursued. The differences between the two systems can be jarring, and the transition in a learner's education can be a challenging one.

HSDE programs work to merge the two systems and build bridges for learners to better prepare for, and navigate, the transition from high school to college. Rigorous coursework, paired with an authentic college experience offers learners a more comprehensive, informed

introduction to postsecondary education. These programs can advance a learner's academic ability, while also building college knowledge and college-going skills. When offered in a high school setting, programs are not just adding a college course into a high school classroom, they are working to stand up a whole college, or significant parts of one, in a high school setting.

NACEP is the national standard-bearer for HSDE-program quality. It sets standards, guides practice, informs policy and empowers the field to advance high-quality programs that bridge the structural, functional, cultural and academic divides between secondary and postsecondary education.

Policy and Practice in the Shared Space

The essential structural and functional elements for secondary and postsecondary education are well-defined in state and federal policy. These elements are further reinforced by higher-education's institutional and program accreditors and, for secondary education, accreditation, state licensing and authorization processes. System, state agency, district and institutional policies can add additional layers to these foundations. While the perimeters and rules on the secondary and postsecondary sides of HSDE are relatively clear, there is often limited and inconsistent policy for the shared space HSDE programs create.

Unlike other areas of secondary or postsecondary education, HSDE operates without a unifying national policy framework. In this fragmented landscape, NACEP's national program quality standards fill a critical gap, offering a common foundation for structuring, managing, and evaluating HSDE programs across diverse educational settings. In a field shaped by grassroots development and varied state policies, these standards serve as a consistent reference point for aligning practice and informing policy.

State policy on HSDE varies widely. Some states adopt prescriptive guidance, and others offer little or no guidance. Where policy exists, it is often piecemeal, addressing specific elements of program structure, function or funding. This pragmatic, incremental evolution mirrors the history of HSDE programs themselves, which began as local initiatives and gradually expanded within, and across, states.

Today's HSDE policies reflect decades of evolution, marking the shift from localized projects to statewide strategies. Current policy often reflects areas where states stepped in to add guidance, incentives, or to adjudicate disputes through statute.

State policy frequently exerts a strong influence on institutional practice. This report includes examples of policy impact, where relevant, to provide additional context for interpreting the research findings nationally and in various state contexts.

The Terminology of HSDE

The landscape of high school dual enrollment (HSDE) programs features many terms and implementation models. At the most basic level, HSDE allows high-school learners to take college courses and earn college credit while still in high school. Credits may apply to both high-school graduation and college-completion requirements (Kilgore & Fink, 2025).

The AACRAO and NACEP 2024 survey provided a clear definition to ensure consistent understanding among respondents. HSDE is "any program in which high-school learners earn transcripted postsecondary credit through a higher-education institution, potentially earning high-school credit for the same course." Appendix A.

HSDE programs have existed in various formats since the 1930s (Rutkauskas & Grant, 2023). The variation in terminology used to describe HSDE can be traced back to the grassroots evolution of these initiatives. Early HSDE programs were small, locally developed, and sporadically adopted, leading to variations in terminology that reflect local preferences and practices. When these programs were primarily local efforts, the specific terms used, and the fact that they varied, carried little consequence. Today, differences in terminology can present challenges for understanding and comparing programs across states and institutions.

The four most common terms used by states for HSDE include:

- dual enrollment (24 states)
- concurrent enrollment (15 states)
- dual credit (12 states)
- early college (6 states)

In some cases, states use multiple terms because they are associated with specific delivery models or other characteristics (Williams et al., 2024). Institutions also have a wide range of formal program names, with dual enrollment, dual credit and concurrent enrollment most frequently used. Institution-specific, branded names may also be used.

At the national level, the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) broadly defines dual enrollment as "high-school learners enrolled in college courses for credit, regardless of the delivery mode, location, instructor type or whether secondary credit is also offered."

The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) specifically defines concurrent enrollment "as a subset of dual enrollment in which courses are taught by college-approved high-school teachers in secondary-school settings."

Where and How HSDE Happens

Analysis of data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on participation and learner characteristics indicates 86% of HSDE takes place in a high-school setting (National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships [NACEP], n.d.-a). On average, 17% of learners travel to a college campus for their courses, while 8% participate online[1]. The number of learners taking online college courses is likely higher today, an interpretation supported by the findings of this survey as well as state reporting.

All HSDE programs create pathways for high-school learners to engage in college coursework. However, programs differ significantly in their specific goals, underlying structures and the "how and who" of program design and delivery. Breaking the wide array of HSDE program types into clear categories using defining characteristics, such as instructor type or course location, is challenging due to significant overlap in some characteristics across models.

Survey findings presented later in this paper show that many institutions deliver HSDE in multiple modalities, often using a mix of educators for instructional staffing. Not all high school-based courses are taught by high school teachers, and not all college-based courses are taught by college faculty; team teaching is also relatively common but varies by model (e.g., Figure 6).

One useful way to distinguish between HSDE programs is by examining the role they play in the overall high school design, particularly whether HSDE is central to the school's academic model or offered as an enhancement within a traditional setting.

Using this lens, HSDE appears across the national landscape in two primary ways:

- as an opportunity **added to a traditional high school** setting
- as a **core element of the high-school design** focused on accelerating learners toward college or career goals

HSDE Added to Traditional High-School Designs

Nationally, the majority of learners participate in HSDE as part of a traditional, comprehensive high school experience. When used in traditional high-school settings, HSDE is incorporated into the existing school structure, offering learners access to college coursework as an available academic option.

Programs allow learners to earn college credit along with their high-school requirements, without fundamentally altering the broader structure or mission of the high school. HSDE used in traditional high school settings typically operate as school-level strategies, primarily serving the students within that building.

[1] https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019176/index.asp The footnotes for this 2019 report state: indicate "Students could report having taken courses for postsecondary credit in multiple locations; therefore, percentages across locations sum to over 100 percent.

HSDE in Traditional High School Settings

High-School-Based Delivery

Most learners take their HSDE courses in a traditional high-school setting. Courses are typically taught by qualified high-school instructors who meet college-adjunct requirements. Some programs also use traveling college faculty, online college courses or team-teaching models. Learners are generally enrolled with high-school peers.

College-Based Delivery

A smaller share of HSDE learners travel to college campuses or take courses online alongside regularly enrolled non-HSDE learners. Participation in campus-based, in-person courses is often heavily influenced by geography and scheduling. Learners enroll in standard college sections with college peers and are typically taught by college faculty.

Online college courses used for high school dual enrollment can be delivered in any setting so it is included in both models described above.

HSDE in Accelerated High-School Designs

Acceleration models such as Early Colleges, Middle Colleges, and Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) embed HSDE within a specifically designed high school model. Acceleration models are generally organized around defined college or career outcomes for participants. These programs follow a structured plan, typically spanning four to six years, that integrates high-school coursework with opportunities to earn college credits and/or career credentials. Acceleration models typically operate as district-level strategies, drawing learners from across multiple schools.

Schools designed for learner acceleration use clearly defined, sequenced learner pathways to meet specific HSDE credit targets, typically ranging from 12 college credits to a full associate degree, typically at no cost to the learner (College in High School Alliance, n.d.). These programs may be based at a high school, college, or other school district location and use a mix of instructional staff, including qualified high school teachers, college faculty, and industry professionals.

The high level of structure required to achieve program goals often brings added considerations, including dedicated instructional space, sustained funding beyond initial launch, sequenced course pathways, and sufficient staffing to coordinate and maintain alignment.

Of the more than 23,500 public high schools in the United States, about 1,200 are structured as Early or Middle College High Schools and roughly 300 are P-TECH programs (Airtable, n.d.; American Institutes for Research, n.d.; National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.; Pathways in Technology Early College High School [P-TECH], n.d.). This illustrates the

relatively limited footprint of full-school-design acceleration models nationwide which may reflect the level of planning, resources, and collaboration required. School-within-a-school designs can help mitigate common barriers by offering more flexible use of space, lower overall costs, and the ability to integrate college coursework without fully restructuring the high school.

Acceleration models are often distinguished by whether they focus on college or career, as well as by the location and other elements of program design.

HSDE in Acceleration High School Designs

College-Acceleration Models

Early and Middle College High School programs are designed to help learners earn college credit or an associate degree by the time they graduate from high school. These models generally feature structured pathways with credit benchmarks and often focus on expanding access for historically underrepresented learners.

Career-Acceleration Models

Career-focused models, such as P-TECH programs, typically combine HSDE with work-based learning experiences and industry credentials. These programs prepare learners for careers in specific industries, integrating college coursework with professional training, mentorship and work experience.

Career Academies, Magnet Schools, and Charter Schools may align with or differ from these models.

Merging of Models

Many features found in acceleration models have become common in traditional high-school designs using HSDE. For example, many programs in traditional high-school settings set credit-attainment targets, offer structured multiyear pathways, incorporate work-based learning and industry credentials, and create specialized cohorts for targeted learner populations. Similarly, school-within-a-school Early College High School models address some of the space and resource challenges associated with full school redesign. This blend of approaches is occasionally driven by state policy but often reflects local program innovation and adaptation as schools and colleges work to expand and strengthen HSDE opportunities.

Whether incorporated into traditional high school design or embedded within redesigned high schools using acceleration models, HSDE is an adaptable strategy for preparing learners for success beyond high school.

Postsecondary Access and Success Strategy

Geography remains a strong determinant of whether and where a learner pursues postsecondary education. About one in six high school seniors lack access to a two- or four-year college, with the proportion significantly higher in rural and frontier areas where limited access to high-speed internet further compounds barriers to online learning (Wozniak, 2018).

Distance can play an important role in shaping learners' postsecondary decisions. For high-school learners seeking early college access, practical constraints, such as travel time, transportation availability and school schedules, limit the opportunities available to them.

In this context, high-school-based and online HSDE is uniquely positioned to expand access. When done right, programs introduce learners to academic content as well as the broader skills and processes needed for successful college transition. They also provide institutions with an opportunity to engage learners who may not have previously considered postsecondary education.

Several decades of research have analyzed different aspects of HSDE and its impact on learners, institutions, and state systems (An & Taylor, 2019). In 2022, a committee of more than 30 researchers, policymakers, and practitioners conducted a comprehensive review of existing studies to propose a national research agenda to guide future inquiry in the field (Taylor et al., 2022). This effort resulted in a detailed catalog of research findings for HSDE, organizing decades of research into key thematic areas. The review highlighted a broad array of findings that support the overall positive impact of HSDE on learner outcomes, including high school graduation, college access, credit accumulation, credit mobility, and degree attainment. Subsequent studies have expanded understanding across a range of topics, including students' reported experiences in dual enrollment and longer-term outcomes related to persistence, transfer, and credential completion.

Complementing peer-reviewed research is state analysis and reporting. While not all states or systems consistently report on HSDE, the structure and scope of state datasets often add more nuanced, contextualized insights (e.g., DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Henneberger et al., 2020; Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2021; Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2020; Klopfenstein et al., 2020; State of Georgia, 2019; Troutman et al., 2018).

Taken in aggregate, decades of investigation and analysis find that, in comparison to their non-HSDE peers, HDSE participants are more likely to graduate high school, enroll in college, enroll in college directly after high school graduation, persist in college, complete a degree, and often have better workforce outcomes and earnings (Henneberger et al., 2020; Klopfenstein et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2022; Velasco et al. 2024; What Works Clearinghouse, 2016). A growing body of research also finds that the effects of participation are stronger for groups

typically underrepresented in higher education such as low-income, Black/African American, and Latinx/Hispanic learners as well as for learners with lower prior academic achievement (An & Taylor, 2019; Henneberger et al., 2020; Lee & Villarreal, 2022; Taylor et al., 2022; Troutman et al., 2018)

As HSDE opportunities have expanded to reach and engage a more diverse range of learners, a holistic approach to program quality has become even more important.

Findings from the Field

While peer-reviewed research often focuses on why HSDE works by examining student outcomes and underlying mechanisms, NACEP brings decades of experience reviewing program practices and documentation, offering field-based insights into how it works on the ground. This practical knowledge underscores the critical role of holistic program quality in preparing learners for college, not just through academic rigor, but through the intentional integration of college expectations, structures, and supports.

Academic rigor alone does not define program quality. Quality emerges from the integration of rigorous coursework with authentic college experiences and meaningful support that prepares a learner for postsecondary success. NACEP's National Standards for Program Quality provide a framework for institutions committed to delivering these essential elements (NACEP, n.d.-b).

Learners in high-quality HSDE programs experience enrollment and registration processes, placement and prerequisite requirements, academic deadlines, often tuition obligations (even when reduced) and the creation of a college transcript. They also have access to support services, such as advising, tutoring and academic resources, with opportunities to interact directly with college staff and institutional systems. Through these experiences, learners gain early exposure to the "hidden curriculum" of higher education (timelines, policies, terminology, institutional norms). Importantly, for many learners, these experiences occur within the high school setting.

HSDE National Participation and Growth

Understanding HSDE participation and growth in a comprehensive way requires drawing on multiple data sources from across both K-12 and higher education. This AACRAO/NACEP collaborative research provides new insights into areas of HSDE practice that have not been captured elsewhere. Throughout this report, findings from national datasets are referenced, where relevant, to provide additional context for interpreting survey results and to highlight areas where this research adds new information to the field.

The U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is a primary source for national postsecondary education data and trends. Until the 2022-23 academic year, HSDE learners were not separately identified in IPEDS enrollment datasets. The 2022-23 academic year was the first national, full academic-year estimate of dual-enrollment participation in the United States.

While the finalized IPEDS data are not yet available, analysis of the preliminary data released show high school dual enrollment is no longer an emerging trend. It is now a notable part of the U.S. higher-education landscape (NACEP, 2025a).

Some key data points from the preliminary IPEDS data for the 2022-2023 academic year, include the following (NACEP, 2025a):

- nearly 2.5 million learners participated in HSDE
- 61% of Title-IV, degree-granting post-secondary institutions in the United States offered HSDE; 42% enrolled 100 or more learners
- high-school learner enrollments represent about 12% of the overall U.S. undergraduate enrollment but constitute 21% of community-college enrollments
- among institutions offering HSDE:
    - 72% of learners enrolled through public 2-year/community colleges
    - 18% through public 4-year institutions
    - 8% through independent not-for profit institutions
    - 2% at other institution types
- 54% of institutions reported 500 or fewer high-school enrollments; 19 institutions reported 10,000 or more learners

Other datasets offer additional perspectives on access and participation. According to the *NCES National Teacher and Principal Survey*, 89% of public high schools reported offering HSDE opportunities (NCES, 2019). Other research by NCES on data from the most recent *High School Longitudinal Study (HSLS:09)* indicates that nationally, 34% of high-school learners participated in HSDE, a 10% increase from the participation rate reported in 2010 (Shivji & Wilson, 2019).

State-reported HSDE participation data reveal several states where learner participation substantially exceeds the national average of 34% (NACEP, n.d.-a). Indiana, Iowa, Idaho, and Minnesota report state-level participation rates ranging from 9 to 24 percentage points above the national average (IN 58%, IA 57%, ID 57%, MN 43%).

While national participation rates offer valuable insight, examining the patterns of growth over time provides a deeper understanding of HSDE's expanding role in American education.

Measuring long-term growth in national HSDE participation presents a challenge, requiring the use of learner age (under 18) as a proxy to identify HSDE students within overall undergraduate enrollment data. Though indirect, this approach provides the best available national view of HSDE trends prior to the 2022–23 IPEDS reporting change.

The most comprehensive view of year-over-year changes in HSDE participation is provided by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) through its data dashboard showing fall undergraduate enrollment trends by sector (Fink, 2024) [2].

Reviewing fall-enrollment data reveals accelerating growth in fall HSDE participation rates (Figure 1). Between 1999 and 2023, dual-enrollment participation increased from just under 400,000 learners to over 1.9 million,[3] a nearly fivefold increase. Sustained growth over this period likely reflects a combination of increased state investment, expanded policy support and greater public awareness of HSDE.

The most significant recent gains in HSDE participation occurred between 2021 and 2023, possibly driven by several converging post-pandemic shifts. Colleges expanded online offerings, broadening access for students, while many states and institutions waived or relaxed traditional eligibility criteria such as standardized test requirements due to disrupted testing. Although placement tests often remained required for gateway math and writing courses, broader course access was allowed through state waivers and the growing use of multiple measures for placement; an approach had been gaining traction before the pandemic, especially in community colleges (Ganga, 2019). These combined shifts expanded HSDE eligibility at a time when national attention was growing and learners were actively seeking diverse education options.

The growth in participation underscores the increasing role of HSDE in the higher-education ecosystem. However, even as overall participation has expanded rapidly, important gaps remain in who has access to HSDE opportunities, highlighting the need to look more closely at patterns of which learners are represented within this growth.

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[2] CCRC dashboard using IPEDS fall enrollment data with under age 18 as a proxy for HSDE students. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/john.fink/viz/UndergraduateEnrollmentTrendsbySector/Summary

[3] **Note:** Fall enrollment estimates differ from full academic year data. The discrepancy reflects a change in reporting methods. National numbers based on fall semester data use student age as a proxy to estimate HSDE participation, whereas full-year IPEDS data (first collected in the 2022–23 academic year) provide an actual count of students enrolled in HSDE. Long-term trend analysis continues to rely on the age-based proxy due to limited historical data. A discussion of these IPEDS reporting changes can be found here. https://www.nacep.org/press-room/the-future-of-dual-enrollment-starts-now/

Figure 1: **Estimated Fall Enrollment in HSDE, 1999-2023, Based on Learner Age**

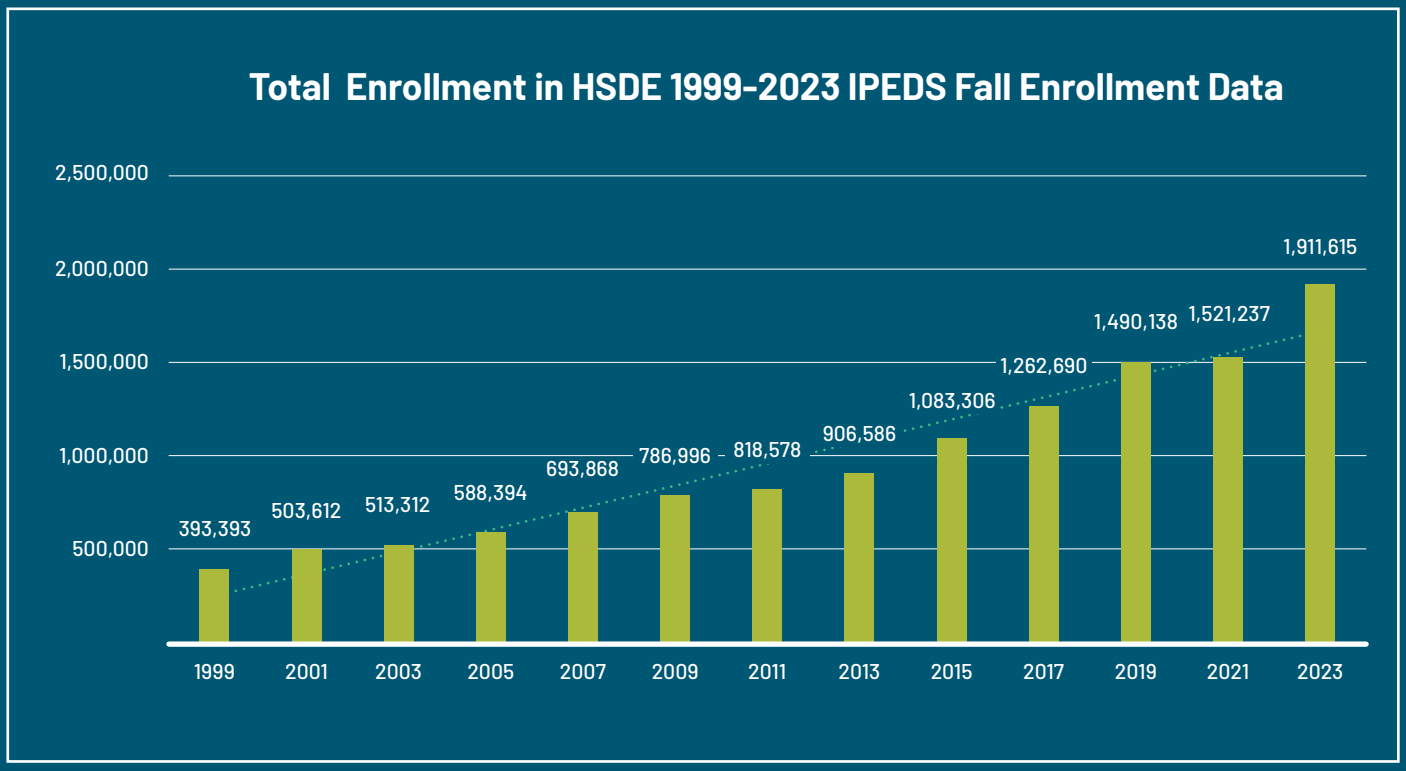


Figure 1: Estimated year over year participation in HSDE based on IPEDS fall enrollment data. Source: (Fink, 2024)

HSDE Participation Gaps

Analysis of national enrollment data from the 2022-23 IPEDS dataset by the CCRC shows that characteristics of HSDE learners do not fully represent the broader K-12 or undergraduate populations by race/ethnicity or gender (Fink, 2024). Within the nearly 2.5 million HSDE enrollments, 57% were women and 43% were men. In contrast, NCES estimates the U.S. public high-school population is essentially evenly split between male (50.1%) and female (49.9%) learners.

Racial and ethnic disparities were also evident in CCRC's IPEDS findings. Black and Hispanic learners were underrepresented among HSDE participants compared to their share of the K-12 population, with gaps of -7% and -9% respectively. White learners were overrepresented, comprising 52% of HSDE enrollments compared to 44% of the K-12 learner population. The data also showed a relatively high percentage of learners with unknown race/ethnicity reported, introducing some uncertainty into the full demographic picture.

Earlier national studies show similar patterns. A 2019 study from the National Center for Education Statistics found notable participation gaps. Thirty-eight percent of White high-school learners had taken HSDE courses by graduation, compared to rates that were 11 percentage points lower for Black learners and 8 points lower for Hispanic learners (Shivji & Wilson, 2019).

CCRC analysis of 2017-18 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) data found significant underrepresentation not only among Black and Hispanic learners, but English-language learners (ELL) and learners with disabilities (Fink, 2025-b). Participation gaps ranged from -4.1% for ELL to -8.8% for learners with disabilities.

Although HSDE is widely available, student-level access is often shaped by by school characteristics and geography, with gaps following predictable patterns. High-poverty, urban, small and specialized high schools are less likely to offer HSDE opportunities (NACEP, n.d.-a; Spencer & Maldonado, 2021).

A 2018 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that 57% of urban high schools offered HSDE opportunities, compared to 67% of suburban high schools and 77% of town/rural high schools (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2018). High-poverty high schools are 19% less likely to offer HSDE, compared to low-poverty high schools (GAO, 2018). The GAO report also indicated smaller schools (serving 200 or fewer learners) were 32% less likely to offer HSDE than larger schools (serving more than 1,000 learners). School type mattered as well. Seventy-six percent of traditional comprehensive schools and 72% of magnet schools offered HSDE options. Fewer charter (40%), alternative (20%) and special-education (34%) schools provided access.

Other research assessing institutional factors impacting access to HSDE have noted Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), including Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), are less likely to provide HSDE (Spencer & Maldonado, 2021). IPEDS data also reveal that public 2-year institutions and larger 4-year institutions are more likely to offer HSDE (NACEP, 2025a; Spencer & Maldonado, 2021).

Today's participation patterns reflect the lingering echoes of HSDE's origins as a strategy for a narrow group of learners. However, the field is undergoing a significant shift, with growing recognition that high school dual enrollment can, and must, serve a more diverse range of learners.

From Equity Barrier to Equity Builder

Historically, HSDE programs were designed for high-achieving learners. Programs were often framed as a strategy to curb "senioritis" by offering advanced coursework to college-bound seniors (Rutkauskas & Grant, 2023). Program documents from the late 1950's describe HSDE as a mechanism for "superior students," with access often determined by GPA, standardized-test scores, class rank or all three. These early gatekeeping measures reinforced inequities, limiting participation to learners who were typically already on a college-bound trajectory.

Beginning in the mid-2000s, high school dual enrollment began shifting toward a more inclusive view of who could—and should—participate in HSDE programs. This shift aligned with several key developments in the field. During this period, Early College High School (ECHS) models saw increased investment and expansion, reinforcing the idea that college coursework could be accessible to a broader population of high school learners. At the same time, the overt inclusion of HSDE in Perkins IV elevated the profile of these programs within the community college sector. In states where policy was silent on participation criteria, institutions had new flexibility to broaden access and reimagine eligibility. Research also began to study the benefits of HSDE for learners traditionally underrepresented in higher education, starting a national conversation about broadening learner access and improving equitable participation, a conversation that continues today.

The interplay between research and practice has begun to shift the narrative about HSDE. This shift has created new opportunities to develop more intentional strategies to reach, engage, support, and enroll underserved groups in higher education.

Learner Perspectives: Why They Choose HSDE

The decision to enroll in HSDE is shaped by many factors, and high school learner motivations are as diverse as those of any college-going population. Recent work continues to elevate the role of learner motivations, expanding efforts to get a broader understanding of learner experience beyond snapshots of program-specific research.

The Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) piloted the first Dual Enrollment Survey of Student Experience (DESSE) in 2022. DESSE is a national survey designed to capture and better understand factors shaping learners' HSDE experiences and increase insight into participants' post-high school choices (Center for Community College Student Engagement, n.d.). To date, the survey has been piloted twice with nearly 20 institutions and has been field tested with 41. National survey administration begins in early 2026. As the survey is deployed with more states and institutions, the findings will offer an expanded

picture of the HSDE experience, providing insight from a wider array of students, institutions, and geographic contexts.

Initial DESSE data reveal considerable variation in students' experiences with HSDE, shaped by multiple factors: differing motivations for participation, inconsistent support structures from both high school and college staff, and disparities in students' sense of connection to their HSDE provider. Study findings also reveal important variations in both the experiences and perceived value of HSDE among groups such as first-generation learners and across different racial and language backgrounds (Adkins et al., 2025).

Early findings also highlight the most common reasons learners participate in HSDE (Adkins and García, 2023). These include:

- 64% take HSDE courses to get a head start on college coursework
- 16% enroll to save money on college tuition
- 15% seek exposure to new academic content beyond what is offered at their high school
- 5% participate to experience what it is like to be a college learner

Understanding learner motivations has the potential to fundamentally shape how programs are designed to serve learners' interests and goals. While DESSE offers multi-state insight into these motivations, a 2023 study by the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) provides a system perspective on how learner intent influences post-high school behavior.

Drawing on student survey data, KCTCS identified distinct use cases for HSDE participation and found that students' postsecondary choices were closely tied to their original goals for enrolling (NACEP, 2025-b). Understanding learner motivations allowed KCTCS to better interpret patterns in their enrollment data and make more intentional, informed decisions about program strategy. Identifying use cases for HSDE participation helped clarify that learners engage for a range of reasons, and that effective program design depends on understanding and responding to that diversity.

Insights into learner motivation underscore the multifaceted value of HSDE as an accessible entry point into higher education to support academic exploration, affordability, and potential early momentum toward a degree.

The Institutional Interests for HSDE

Higher-education institutions engage in HSDE for various reasons and are often influenced by state policy as well as institutional mission and enrollment strategies.

In some states, public institutions are required to offer HSDE opportunities, while others provide funding incentives or, conversely, disincentives (Kaput et al., 2025). Beyond policy mandates, institutions recognize HSDE as a strategic tool for meaningful community engagement, learner recruitment and workforce development.

Measuring postsecondary outcomes for HSDE participants has been of particular interest to stakeholders in the HSDE field. Researchers have approached the topic in a variety of ways (Taylor et al., 2022). Though more research is needed in this area, emerging evidence suggests that HSDE can serve as a meaningful outreach and enrollment strategy for institutions. Some studies indicate that former HSDE learners are more likely to continue their education at the same institution where they took courses compared to their nonparticipating peers (Pretlow et al., 2021). This reinforces the potential of HSDE not only as a tool for early postsecondary access and success, but also as a pathway for sustained learner engagement and potentially matriculation.

A recent report from CCRC provides descriptive analysis of longitudinal outcomes for HSDE participants (Velasco et al., 2024). Key findings from the report include the following.

- Eighty-one percent of dual-enrollment learners went to college in the first year after high school, compared to 70% of learners overall.
- Fifty-one percent went to 4-year institutions, and 30% went to community colleges.
- Dual-enrollment learners who enrolled in college in the first year after high school completed college credentials at higher rates than nondual-enrollment learners who entered college soon after high school.
- Overall, thirty-six percent of dual-enrollment learners who enrolled in college within the first year after high school completed a bachelor's degree in 4 years, but only 28% of limited-income, 29% of Black and 25% of Hispanic dual enrollees did so.
- HSDE participants who enrolled in college within the first year after high school were 2% percentage points more likely to complete a bachelor's degree than non-HSDE college learners. This difference is larger for some learner groups: limited-income (+8 percentage points), Hispanic (+7 percentage points) and Black (+11 percentage points).

Beyond learner outcomes and recruitment, HSDE fosters valuable collaboration between secondary and postsecondary institutions. HSDE programs can serve as conduits for information sharing and help facilitate cross-sector discussions on connected

topics, such as math pathways, college and career readiness indicators, curricular alignment, and instructional strategies. This benefits high-school and college educators as well as the learners they serve. By aligning curricula, discussing instructional practices, and engaging in learner-focused collaboration, HSDE builds formal structures for connection and collaboration to disrupt the silos that often exist between K-12 and higher education.

Bridging the Gap Between HSDE and College Enrollment

A central goal of HSDE is to better prepare and support learners in making a smooth and successful transition to college after high school. NACEP research on programs with strong rates of HSDE learner reenrollment after high school highlights the importance of integrating high school dual enrollment into a campus-wide strategy rather than treating it as an isolated initiative.

Institutions with high rates of reenrollment among HSDE learners emphasize the importance of intentional strategies to support post-high school enrollment. These strategies include the following elements.

- Engage with the student population to be served in order to better assess their plans and priorities after high school.
- Craft value statements that resonate with various populations.
- Provide advising, degree and transition resources and planning for HSDE learners.
- Create targeted outreach as well as ongoing communication and engagement for learners.
- Treat HSDE learners as part of the broader college-learner body rather than separate, temporary participants.

Challenges in Sustaining HSDE

Policy and infrastructure gaps have emerged as HSDE has grown in scope nationally because the underlying systems were not designed for the shared space created by HSDE. . Program structures, funding models and institutional practices vary widely across states, creating disparities in access and inconsistent program quality. In some states, robust state funding ensures broad access and participation. In others, participation costs are shouldered by learners, school districts or colleges. These uneven conditions can impact learner access and may strain institutional capacity, including secondary and postsecondary staffing, advising and the administrative support essential for maintaining and expanding HSDE opportunities.

Findings from the *2024 NACEP Salary and Staffing Survey* reinforce concerns about program staffing (Williams & Johnson, Forthcoming). Survey results show HSDE professionals are often serving large numbers of learners across expanding networks of high-school partners. However, many programs report being under-resourced, particularly relative to the proportion of institutional enrollment

from HSDE learners, which can range from minimal to 50% or more (NACEP, 2025-a).

HSDE program staffing models vary but typically follow either a centralized or distributed structure. The majority of programs report using a centralized program staffing model with dedicated HSDE personnel serving in defined roles. A smaller proportion operate under a distributed model, sharing responsibilities across multiple departments, often anchored by a lead coordinator.

HSDE Staffing Models

Centralized models employ dedicated HSDE personnel with distinct responsibilities, such as program coordination, faculty-liaison management, partnership development or enrollment oversight. This practice promotes consistency and quality through specialized expertise.

Distributed models embed HSDE responsibilities into broader institutional roles, connecting HSDE learners to standard campus offices, such as admissions, advising and registration. This practice often requires greater coordination to ensure HSDE learners receive consistent support but offers the benefit of broad campus involvement in the work.

Centralized Program Staffing Model

Distributed Program Staffing Model

Other key findings from the *2024 Salary and Staffing Survey* include the following.

- The median NACEP-member-program serves 1,800 learners, partners with 15-40 high schools, and operate with an average of three full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members.
- Fifty-five percent of member programs report having three or fewer staff.
- Nineteen percent of programs report being a "program of one" reflecting one or fewer staff FTE.
- Nearly 50% of HSDE offices experience staff turnover.
- Approximately 50% of HSDE professionals employed by a higher education institution also have prior experence in secondary education.
- Many HSDE professionals report a lack of institutional recognition for the complex, strategic importance of their work.

Together, the findings of this report and NACEP's analysis of HSDE program administration as a professional field highlight the need for appropriate investment in staffing and support infrastructure. By examining how programs are structured and supported, institutions can better align their models with the scale, complexity, and promise of HSDE.

The Future of HSDE

High school dual enrollment has grown from a localized innovation to an increasingly visible part of education, reshaping pathways to postsecondary access and success for millions of students annually. This growth comes with challenges. Wide variation in practices, funding models, staffing capacity, and more underscores the complexity of today's HSDE landscape.

The potential of HSDE is clear. It can be a powerful tool for advancing equity, supporting college and career readiness and strengthening an institution's connection to its communities. Tapping into that potential means looking beyond growth alone. Programs that improve postsecondary learner access and success will not be those that grow most, but those that reach learners with purpose and intent. This approach helps ensure that HSDE remains a transformative, learner-centered bridge between secondary and postsecondary education.

AACRAO AND NACEP 2024 HSDE SURVEY RESULTS

HSDE Program Types and Course Offerings

The findings of this survey show an increase in the number of postsecondary institutions offering HSDE since the original 2016 survey. The percentage of responding institutions offering HSDE increased from 78% in 2016 to 93% in 2024. Only 7% of responding institutions do not currently offer HSDE. Five percent have no plans to implement such programs, and 2% are considering future implementation.

Among institutions that offer HSDE, the structure of offerings varies:

- 97% provide individual courses
- 41% offer Early College High School (ECHS) programs
- 20% offer Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) models

The types of courses offered also reflect a range of course content areas:

- 99% offer general education courses
- 66% provide career and technical education (CTE) courses, including health-related and education-focused programs
- 45% offer a course series aligned with specific majors

Eight percent of of responding institutions offer a diverse range of additional dual-enrollment options beyond general education and career and technical education (CTE) courses. These include major-specific introductory courses, college success/learning strategies classes and specialized programs leading to degrees or certificates. Many institutions allow HSDE learners to take courses for which they meet the prerequisites, although some require additional approval for nongeneral-education courses.

Institutional Motivations for Offering HSDE Programs and Individual Course Selections

Why institutions offer HSDE and the courses they choose to deliver reflects a complex mix of mission, market, and mandate. HSDE programs often serve broad strategic goals such as enrollment, community engagement, and access, while individual course selections are shaped by specific curricular needs and institutional priorities.

Survey findings provide insight into how colleges structure their HSDE programs and make decisions about which courses to offer. At the program level, institutions reported a variety of motivations for establishing HSDE programs. Figures 2 and 3. Strategic enrollment and revenue goals drive many programs, with institutions using HSDE to create recruitment pipelines and boost enrollment. Community service forms another major motivation, as institutions respond to local educational needs, particularly in rural areas and underserved communities. Postsecondary access and affordability considerations also lead institutions to offer HSDE. Respondents also reported HSDE mandates in state or system policy, the inclusion of HSDE in state accountability structures, as well as financial incentives as a motivations for offering HSDE.

State policy frequently plays a role in whether an institution offers HSDE. A 2022, 50-state-state comparison of state dual-enrollment policies by the Education Commission of the States (ECS) indicated 15 states require all 2-year and 4-year institutions to participate (ECS, 2022-b; Jamieson et al., 2022). An additional 23 states had some policy language about institution types that must participate in in HSDE.

Figure 2: **Strategic and/or Compliance Purposes Served by HSDE (all that apply)**

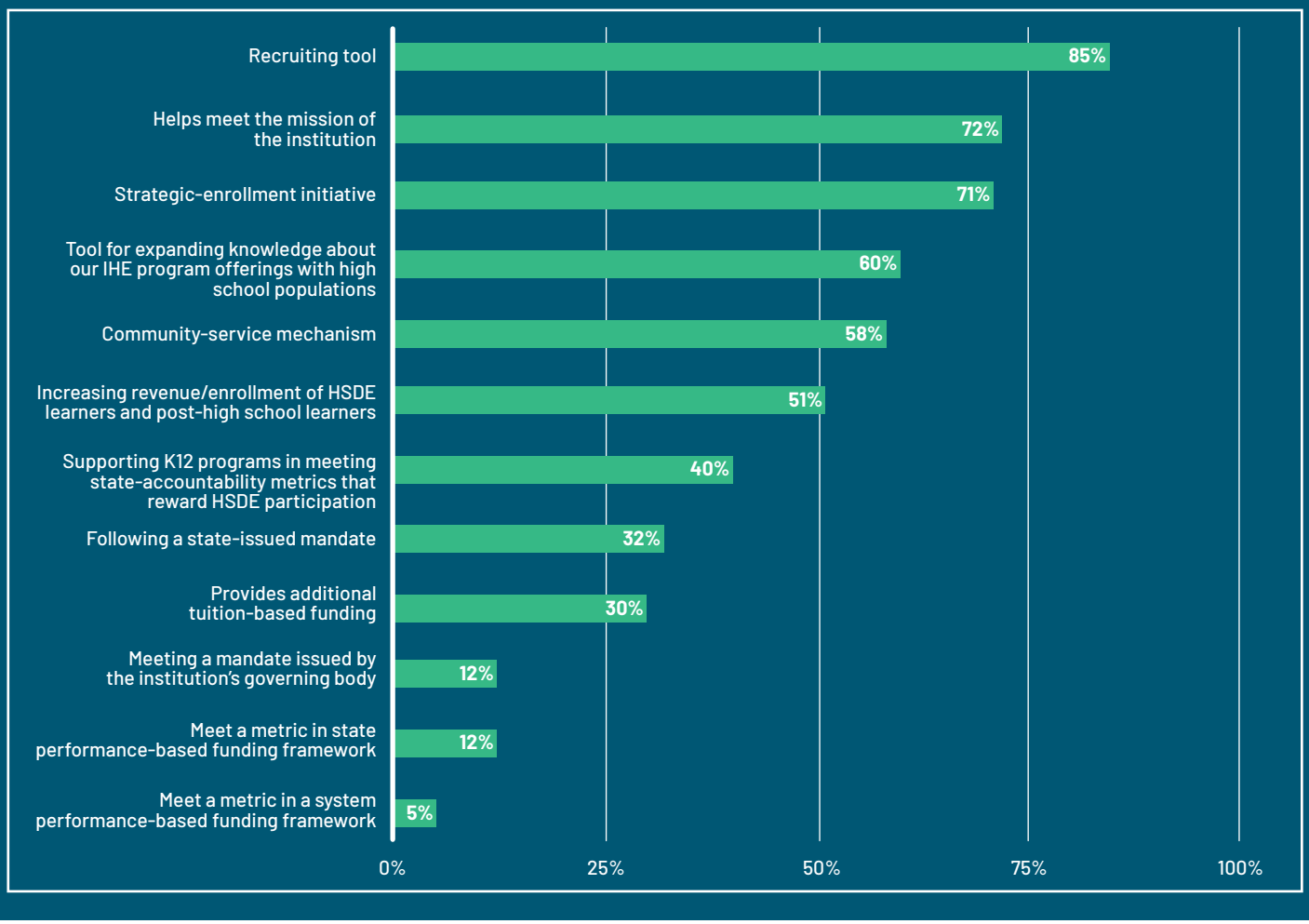
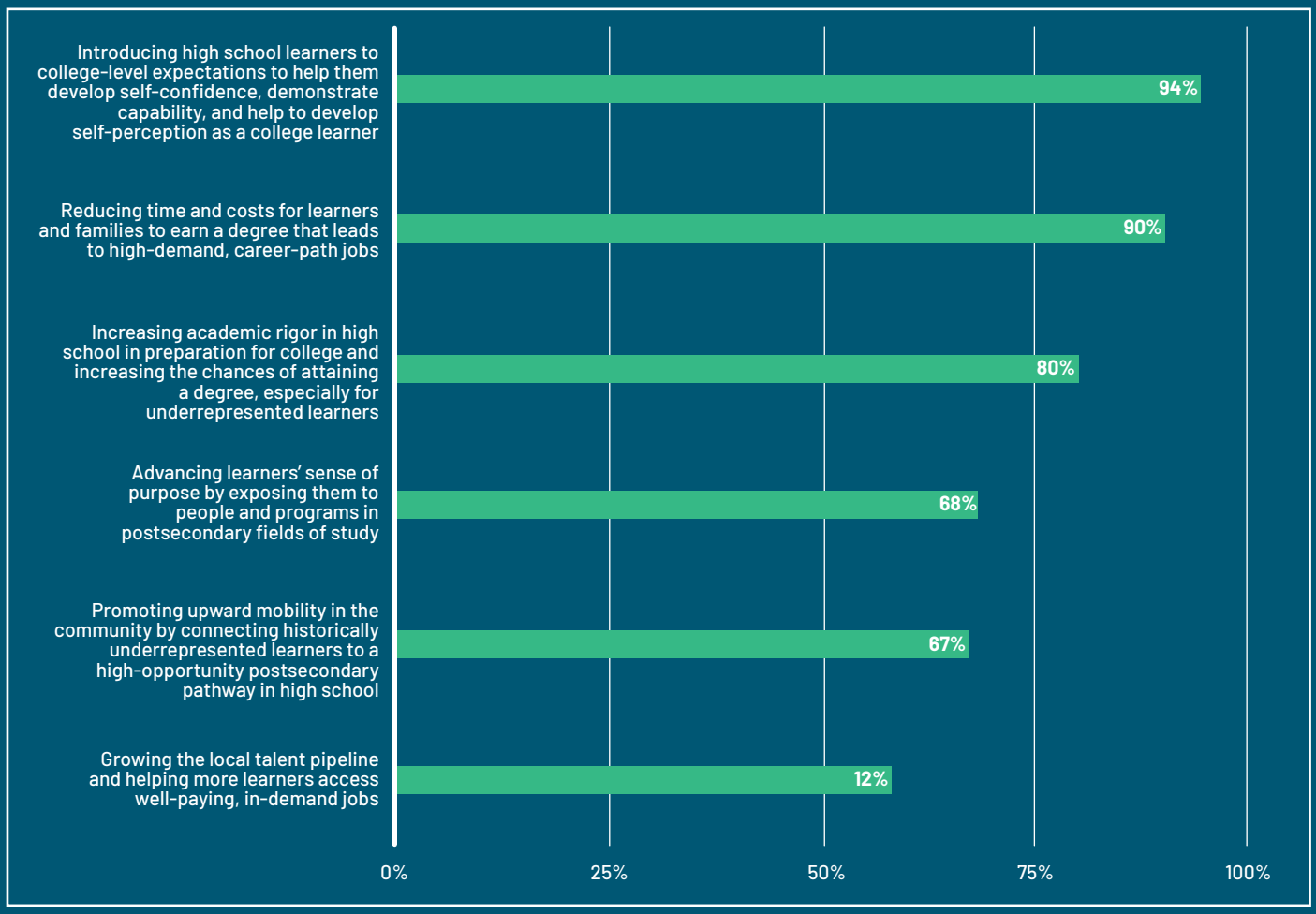


Figure 3: **Learner and Community Impact Purposes Served by HDSE (all that apply)**



The individual course selections offered by an institution for HSDE reflects broader institutional goals as well as practical implementation considerations.

Credit transfer and enabling learner degree progress was cited by respondents as an important driver of course offerings, with institutions prioritizing general education courses to increase credit mobility and applicability. Meeting local needs also shapes course selection as respondents reported course offerings tied to high school requests and workforce development demands via CTE programs. Course offerings are also influenced by practical factors, including instructor qualifications, classroom capacity, and faculty interest.

A 2020 report by the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) found similar themes (WICHE, 2020). Factors indicated as important in that study included faculty input, transfer value, career exploration potential, and the availability of qualified high school teachers.

These complementary program-level and course-level decisions reflect how institutions structure HSDE to serve institutional strategic goals and learner academic needs, as well as balancing the needs of the community and workforce.

Motivators for New HSDE Offerings

Adding new HSDE offerings is driven by several factors. According to respondents:

- 95% report adding offerings in response to requests from K-12 districts or high schools
- 56% indicate faculty input and proactive partnership development play a role
- 22% stated legislative mandates influence the addition of new HSDE options
- 3% add offerings at the directive of their governing body
- 10% report new HSDE offerings are influenced by other factors such as collaborations, workforce agencies, learner/family requests, administrative planning and grant opportunities

Several institutions noted that program expansion includes formal evaluation processes involving memoranda of understanding (MOUs), benchmarks, and ongoing stakeholder engagement through articulation events and professional development.

Awarding Credentials to High-School Learners

Postsecondary institutions demonstrate a strong commitment to multiple-credential pathways through HSDE. The majority of respondents (59%) offered one or more credential during the 2023-2024 academic year. Among institutions providing postsecondary credential opportunities, learners can earn various awards upon graduation.

Specifically, institutions reported the following:

- 91% offer pathways to an associate degree that can be completed before, or upon, high-school graduation
- 85% offer certificate pathways
- 2.5% offer bachelor's-degree pathways

The 2024 survey data suggest significant growth in the number of institutions offering structured HSDE pathways that lead to postsecondary credentials. Table 1. Variations in survey-question wording limit direct comparisons between the 2016 AACRAO and 2024 AACRAO/NACEP surveys; however, trend data suggests an expansion in credential-pathway options available to HSDE learners. In 2016, only 25% of institutions reported offering this dual credential option; by 2024, that number had more than doubled to 53%. Table 1 illustrates this pattern with a notable increase in programs offering pathways to an associates degree (53%) or certificate (49%), including the simultaneous completion of a high school diploma and a credential.

Program design may explain the apparent increase in institutions reporting the use of structured pathways to credential attainment. Notably, 41% of respondents reported offering Early College High School (ECHS) programs and 20% reported P-TECH models, both designed to culminate in a postsecondary credential by high school graduation. ECHS and P-TECH programs, therefore, presumably have credential attainment built into their program design.

The increase in institutions reporting credential offerings for HSDE in this survey could reflect other goals or environmental factors. Many institutions desire robust engagement with HSDE learners to strengthen the case for completion, either during high school or shortly thereafter. Research[4] by NACEP investigating institutional practices that support the transition from HSDE to post-high school re-enrollment found that offering defined pathways and helping learners easily track their progress strengthened the value proposition of completing a degree or credential at the same college where the student earned credit while in high school.

The effort to build the value of HSDE courses for learners through pathways may have also been shaped by federal policy, particularly the particularly in CTE coursework. The *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006* (Perkins IV) was the first version of the Perkins Act to explicitly mention dual enrollment. While earlier versions (1984 and 1998) focused on vocational education and "tech-prep" programs, Perkins IV (2006) introduced more explicit language supporting seamless transitions between high school and postsecondary education, which included dual enrollment as a mechanism to facilitate that transition.

[4] Forthcoming NACEP publication: From Access to Enrollment: Making a Compelling Case for Matriculation

Table 1: **Comparison of HSDE Practices at U.S. Postsecondary Institutions (2010, 2016, 2024)**

	2010 (Marken et al., 2013)	**2016** (Kilgore & Taylor, 2016)	**2024**
Number of institutions surveyed	**1,536**	**388**	**298**
Offer at least one HSDE course and/or program	**46%**	**78%**	**93%**
Accept HSDE credit earned at another institution in transfer	**N/A**	**86%**	**98%**
HSDE pathway to simultaneous high-school diploma and bachelor's degree	**N/A**	**2%****	**1%***
HSDE pathway to simultaneous high-school diploma and associate degree	**N/A**	**25%****	**53%***
HSDE pathway to simultaneous high-school diploma and certificate	**N/A**	**19%****	**49%***

(Sources: Marken et al., 2013; Kilgore & Taylor, 2016)
* 59% of respondents offer one or more credentials; 41% provide none. Values in this column reflect a percentage of the total responses, not a percentage of those that offer one or more credentials. The survey question was "Which of the following credentials may be awarded to high school learners before or upon graduation from high school? (all that apply). "None of the above" was an exclusive response choice.
** Of the institutions that reported awarding this credential to at least one HSDE learner during the 2015-2016 academic year. The survey question was, "Did your institution award the following to any high school students in your dual enrollment program?" "None" was not a response choice.

Competition in HSDE-Course and Program Offerings

Survey responses indicate competition between institutions offering HSDE programs at the same high schools is common. Ninety percent of institutions report that other institutions of higher education also offer HSDE options at the same high school where they operate. Among those facing competition, 57% indicate other institutions offer some of the same HSDE courses and/or programs.

School staff supporting HSDE programs also report working with multiple institutions. A survey of 500 high-school counselors and administrators found 68% of respondents partner with two or more institutions; 18% report they have partnerships with five or more (Parchment, 2024).

Overlap in offerings is most prominent in general education courses, with 92% of institutions reporting competition in this area. Survey findings also revealed that 30% of responding institutions navigate competition from other institutions in CTE programs. Smaller percentages reported competition in major-specific course sequences (16%), ECHS (16%) and P-TECH programs (4%).

High schools often benefit from partnering with multiple institutions, expanding postsecondary options for learners. Understandably, learners cite challenges navigating different enrollment deadlines, fee structures, degree pathways and transcript requests across institutions.

Colleges and universities may face challenges in states where higher-education systems operate under inconsistent rules for instructor qualifications, tuition, reimbursement rates, or other key requirements, leaving institutions competing on uneven terms. To address these challenges, several states and system offices have established policies to moderate or constrain competition. These include policies or guidance addressing the type of institution that may offer HSDE, defining geographic service areas, and establishing right-of-first-refusal provisions. Other policy approaches create consistency between institutions by creating standardized HSDE-teacher qualifications and setting statewide tuition rates or caps.

Respondents with specialized programs, such as ECHS and P-TECHs, were less likely to report provider overlap as these models are typically designed to work with a single postsecondary institution.

Barriers to Offering High School Dual Enrollment

A complex landscape of challenges faces institutions implementing and sustaining HSDE programs. Figure 4. Ninety-five percent of respondents report encountering at least one barrier to offering HSDE; 5% experience no barriers.

The most prevalent challenges cluster around three key areas:

- faculty qualifications
- financial considerations
- institutional coordination

Staffing emerges as the dominant concern. Institutions struggle to find appropriately credentialed instructors and secure faculty support. Financial barriers manifest across multiple stakeholders, affecting institutions, school districts and learners/families. The coordination challenges span internal factors, such as institutional culture and staff expertise, and external relationships, such as building K-12 partnerships and managing competition with other HSDE providers. Figure 4.

Additional nuanced barriers exist beyond the structured categories. These include systems-level challenges, such as complex state-reporting requirements, technical challenges with learner-records management and misalignment between K-12 and higher-education schedules and processes.

Some institutions face unique regional challenges, such as transportation issues for learners or restrictions on out-of-state partnerships. Several respondents also highlight competition-related concerns, including variations in credentialing expectations between HSDE programs within the same state and challenges with proprietary institutions offering HSDE locally. Internal staffing constraints were also cited by respondents, including the administrative burden of coordinating HSDE programs across multiple offices and managing growth with limited personnel.

Qualified HSDE Instructors

Finding high school teachers with the right degrees and experience to serve as what is essentially a high school-based adjunct is a well-known, long discussed challenge for the field (Zinth, Williams, Perry & Parks., 2022). Several states, system offices and institutions have grappled with improving the supply of high-school teachers that meet campus qualifications. *Building a Concurrent Enrollment Teacher Pipeline: Opportunities, Challenges, and Lessons* provides detailed information explaining origins of challenges and a survey of efforts established and underway to develop solutions for general-education and CTE courses (Zinth, Williams, Perry & Parks., 2022).

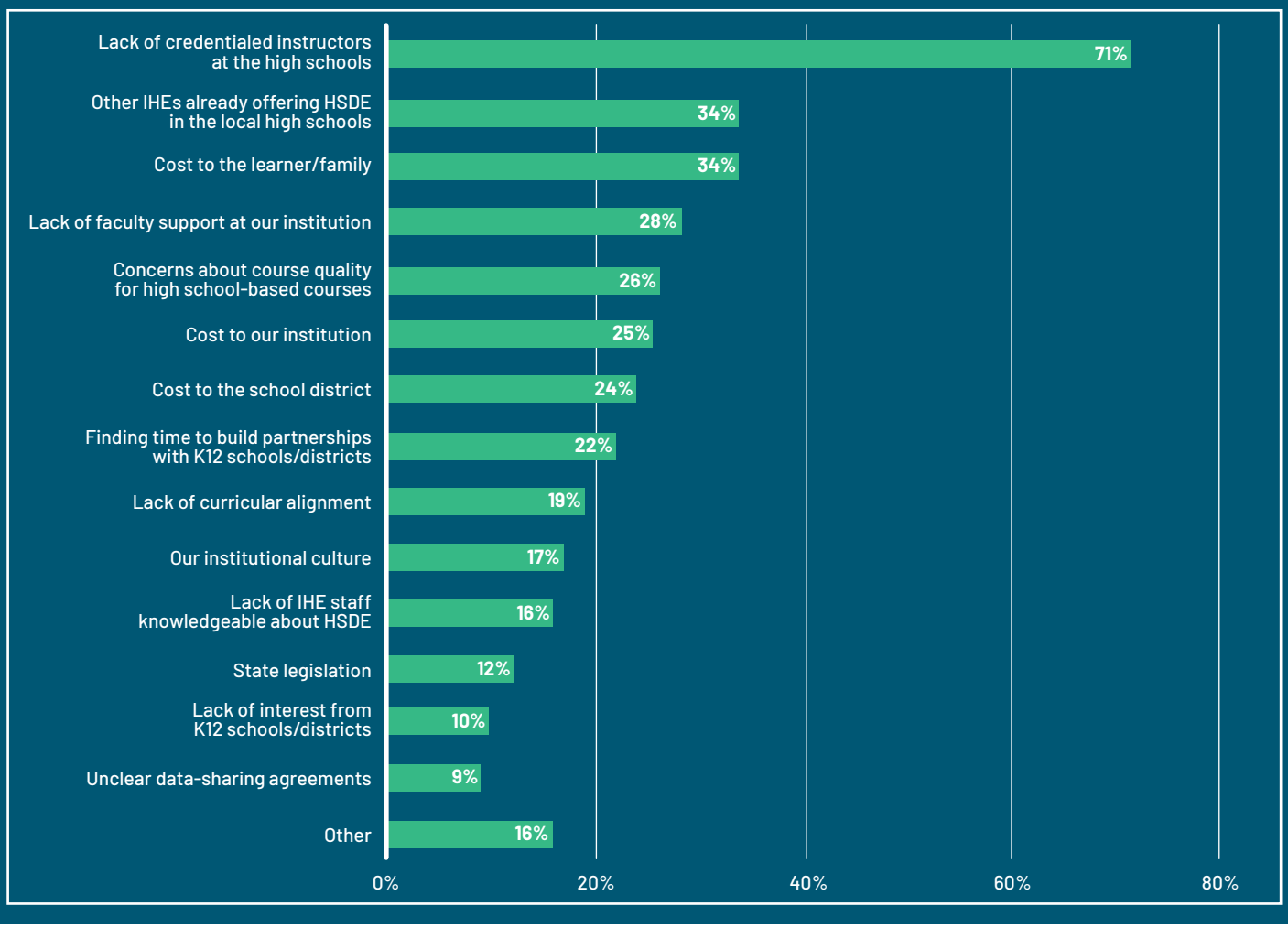
The challenges in expanding in-person access to HSDE stem in part from the different ways instructors are prepared for high-school versus college instruction. High-school teacher training includes pedagogy, developmental psychology, instructional design, learning differentiation and classroom management. College

faculty preparation emphasizes disciplinary expertise and research/writing/scholarship. These foundational differences in preparation tend to keep the two professions distinct, making those who can successfully bridge the roles of high-school teacher and college faculty uniquely positioned to add value across both contexts.

Although it varies by institutional accreditor, high-school teachers delivering college courses are generally expected to meet the same qualifications as adjunct faculty at the partnering postsecondary institution. This typically includes holding a master's degree in the subject area or a master's degree in a related field, with additional graduate credit hours in the discipline. The number of additional graduate credits varies; 18 is most common, but in some cases institutions have discretion to set their own criteria. In some states, a Master of Education may be acceptable to meet the master's requirement, provided the instructor also has sufficient graduate coursework in the subject area and is reviewed and approved by the relevant faculty.

Some states have additional guidance or use state statutes to set requirements that reflect accreditor policy or state priorities. The ECS 50-state dual-enrollment policy comparison provides a look at the variations in state policy (Education Commission of the States, 2019).

Figure 4: **Barriers to Offering HSDE (all that apply)**



Program Staffing

As HSDE programs expand, many institutions struggle to scale staffing and infrastructure at a pace that matches program growth. This creates capacity challenges that can impact program quality and sustainability. Research conducted by NACEP consistently identifies staffing and capacity as the leading program pain points among its members.

NACEP's ongoing research, including its *2023 Salary Survey* and the forthcoming *2024 Salary and Staffing Survey*, provides critical insights into the characteristics and professional work environment of the HSDE field (NACEP, 2023). Survey findings from the upcoming 2024 report reveal that HSDE programs are rarely staffed at levels that reflect their operational complexity and demands. Regardless of program size or the number of partner high schools, 55% of programs report having three or fewer dedicated staff. Nineteen percent of NACEP respondents indicated that they are a "program of one" with some managing as many as 2,000 learners annually, often across dozens of partner high schools.

Coordinating high-school-based HSDE programs entails significant, ongoing collaboration with multiple K-12 partners on a semesterly and annual basis. Staffing challenges are a persistent challenge for HSDE programs, particularly when surveying staff working within programs. As the field continues to grow, and states seek implementation and impact at scale, a thorough understanding by policymakers of the real work entailed is essential.

The 5% of institutions reporting no barriers to HSDE implementation represent an important subset worthy of further study. Understanding how these institutions have successfully navigated common challenges could provide valuable insights into effective strategies, resource allocation, structural decisions and impactful elements of the policy landscape. Their success may offer scalable solutions, helping other IHEs strengthen their partnerships to better support HSDE learners.

Considered in aggregate, the findings from this research and others' suggest that while individual barriers like credentialed instructor availability, staffing, and costs remain significant, institutions often face multiple, interconnected challenges that require comprehensive solutions. The complexity of these barriers reinforces the need for systematic approaches that address both institutional and external partnership, rather than piecemeal solutions to individual challenges.

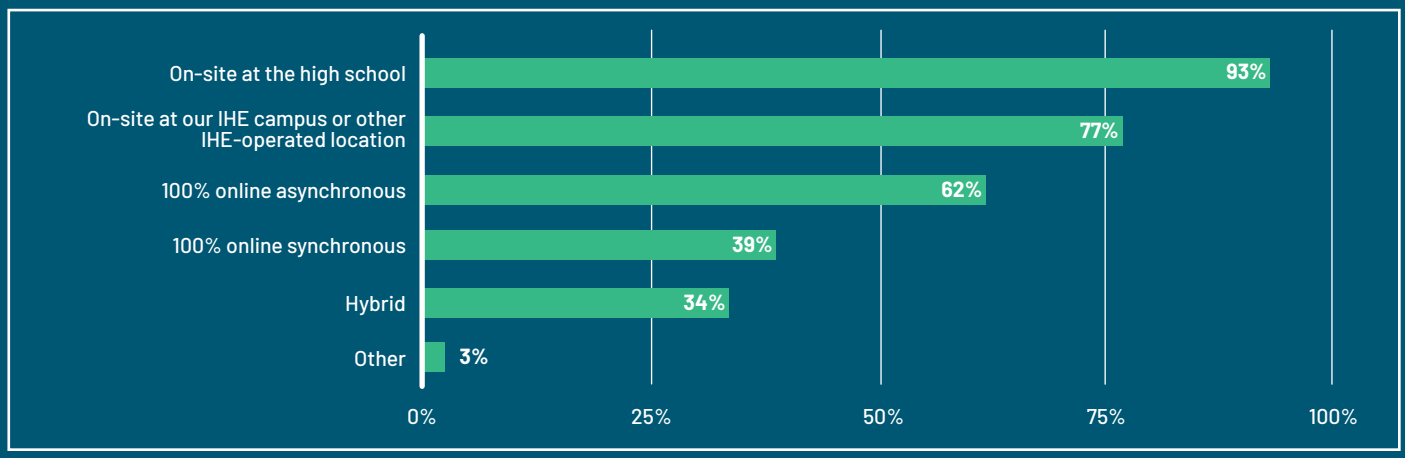
Instructional and Instructor Models for HSDE

The instructional landscape of HSDE is highly heterogeneous, often shaped by the need to adapt to local contexts, resources, and learner populations. Institutions employ multiple modalities and a mix of instructor types to deliver HSDE courses, often using several approaches simultaneously.

Delivery Modalities

The most common delivery method is on-site at a high school (93%), followed by courses taught on a college campus or other institutionally-operated operated location (77%). Online delivery is also prevalent; 62% of respondents offer asynchronous online courses, 39% provide synchronous options, and 34% utilize hybrid online courses with HSDE learners. Figure 5.

Figure 5: **Course Delivery Modalities for HSDE (all that apply)**



Hybrid and Online Instructional Models

Institutions report adopting online models to address specific operational challenges, including accommodating different academic calendars between high schools and colleges, serving geographically distant schools and maximizing access through third-party learning-management systems.

Thirty-four percent of institutions report using hybrid delivery models for HSDE. Hybrid options offer a practical solution to address challenges in finding qualified high-school instructors to ensure reliable course availability for learners. Hybrid approaches take several distinct forms. The most common approach blends traditional in-person instruction with online components within individual courses using various ratios of online-to-in-person instruction. Some establish structured weekly patterns, such as alternating between classroom and virtual sessions.

Laboratory sciences present unique challenges that have led to specialized hybrid solutions. Some institutions pair online lectures with in-person laboratory sessions. Others coordinate between faculty delivering online content and high-school faculty supervising hands-on laboratory work. This approach has proven effective for courses requiring significant practical components, such as nursing and other health-science programs.

Some institutions have implemented more flexible delivery options, including HyFlex models that allow learners to choose daily between in-person or online attendance. This often combines synchronous and asynchronous online elements, enabling multicampus coordination to allow learners from different high schools to participate in shared courses.

Sixty-two percent of respondents indicated the use of asynchronous courses for HSDE learners. The flexibility of asynchronous learning can vastly expand access to HSDE and subvert scheduling challenges but also introduces new risks for high-school learners which merit thoughtful consideration and planning (Fink & Jenkins, 2025).

Programs using, or exploring the use of, online college courses with high school learners should build an intentional approach to ensure learners receive structured support and robust engagement. *Online, On Purpose: A Framework for Building Impactful Dual Enrollment Experiences Through Online College Courses* provides valuable guidance for high-school and college partners committed to quality and learner success when using online college courses as part of HSDE (Williams, 2025).

The framework outlines five essential elements to support the selection of high-quality providers, foster collaboration, utilize the right instructional model, ensure academic and non-academic support, and build student and parent engagement.

Instructional Staffing Patterns Across Delivery Modalities

Prior to this study, the field lacked national data on who specifically instructs HSDE courses.

This benchmarking study offers new data about instructional staffing in HSDE programs. Previously, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 86% of HSDE courses took place in high school settings, either at the learner's "home" high school or another school site (Shivji & Wilson, 2019). The popular assumption was that location correlated with instructor type: college faculty delivering courses offered at the college or online and high school teachers delivering the high school-based courses. This assumption aligned with state and institution reporting but, until now, remained unstudied at the national level.

Respondents were asked about the distribution of instructional responsibilities by course location, including high

school-based, institution-based, and online formats. Ninety-one percent of respondents reported that they track and can provide data on the ratio of high school to college faculty teaching HSDE courses. This AACRAO/NACEP survey confirms that instructor type frequently corresponds with program modality but also reveals that institutions use a mix of instructional approaches depending on the location and context.

College faculty are the primary instructors for courses taught on college campuses, accounting for 96% of instructional staff, with high school teachers (8%) and team teaching (2%) used significantly less frequently. They also lead the vast majority of online courses covering instruction for 96% of synchronous and 97% of asynchronous formats. Hybrid courses follow a similar pattern, with 89% taught by faculty, but they also show the highest incidence of team teaching at 17%. Figure 6.

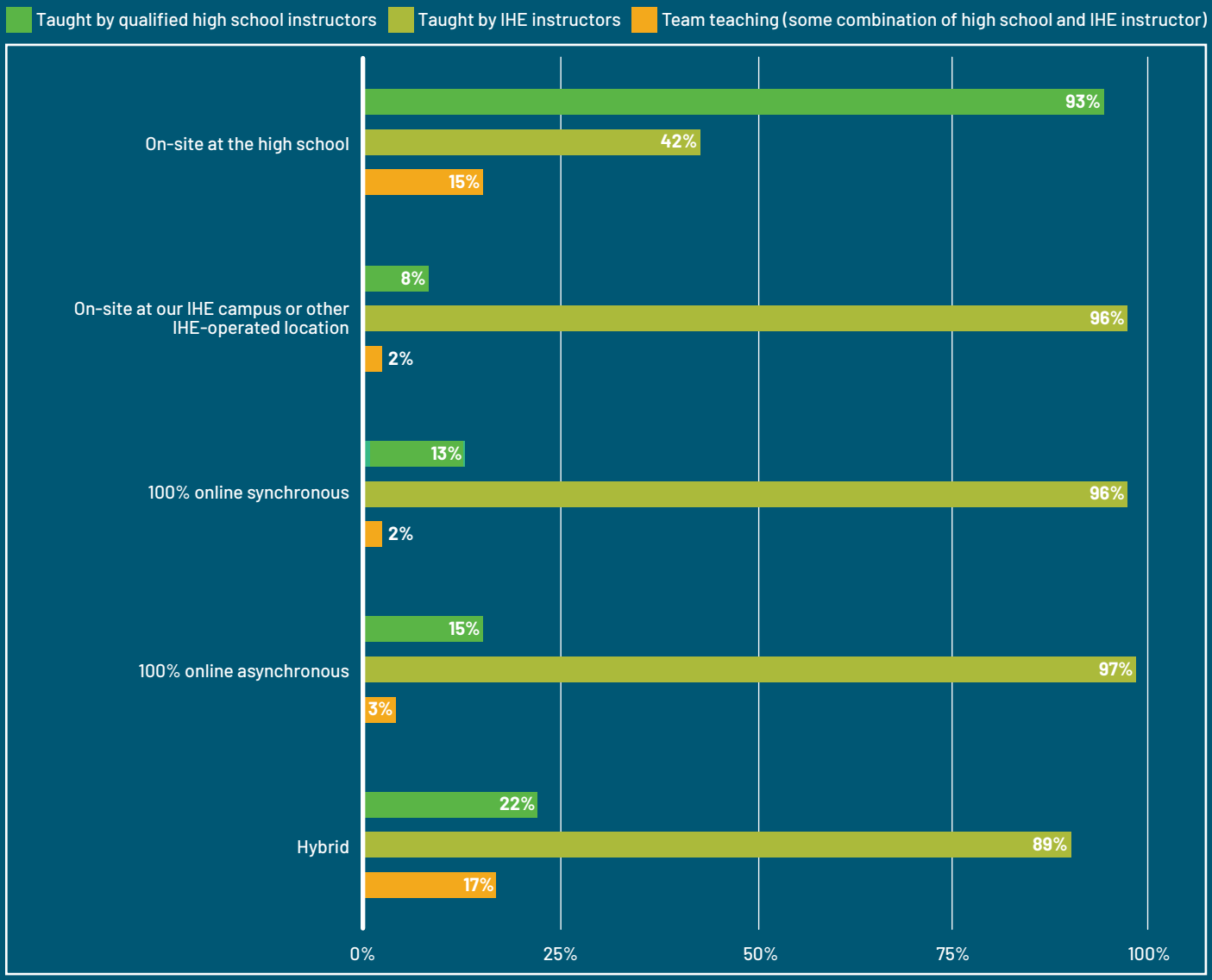
In high school settings, qualified high school instructors are the predominant teachers, delivering 93% of HSDE courses. However, a notable share of programs also employ college faculty (42%) or use team-teaching models (15%) in these settings. These findings demonstrate meaningful variation in instructional staffing across delivery modes, as illustrated in Figure 6.

This widespread use of high school instructors has important, often overlooked, implications. By partnering with colleges to deliver rigorous, credit-bearing college courses through qualified high school teachers, institutions can establish a college presence in essentially every high school in the country. This model presents a practical and scalable strategy for expanding access to post-secondary education and increasing college exposure for all learners.

Quality assurance in these settings is essential and is a core focus of the work of NACEP and particularly NACEP- programmatic accreditation. In NACEP-accredited programs, college faculty liaisons play a key role in ensuring instructional comparability and academic rigor. A faculty liaison's responsibilities typically include initial training, annual discipline-specific professional development, course oversight, and ongoing support for HSDE instructors. Liaisons also help instructors stay aligned with course expectations, assessments, grading standards, and syllabus requirements. At many institutions, they are also responsible for reviewing instructor credentials to ensure alignment with institutional, state, and accreditor requirements.

Overall, instructional staffing patterns reflect not only course quality considerations but also institutional resources, faculty availability, and the logistical needs of coordinating HSDE programs across diverse settings.

Figure 6: **Instructor Type Used for Each HSDE Delivery Method (all that apply)**



Collaboration and Team-Teaching Models

Some institutions reported using team-teaching approaches where faculty deliver college-level content while high-school teachers provide additional support or cover state-required curriculum elements. While team teaching may be uncommon across all modalities (2-17%), it appears most frequently in hybrid-delivery models (17%) and courses taught at high-school locations (15%).

Programs that award both high school and college credit for the same course may need to satisfy credentialing requirements from both secondary and postsecondary systems. While most states do not formally require this dual

compliance, some have adopted policies that explicitly address it. For example, Montana and Nebraska have enacted such requirements (Education Commission of the States, 2022-c). In Montana, college faculty must hold a Class 8 Dual Credit Post-Secondary Faculty Educator Licensure to offer both high school and college credit for a course (Montana Secretary of State, n.d.). Nebraska requires college faculty to apply for and posses a "post-secondary teaching permit" if instructing courses accepted by the state's secondary education system for high school credit (Nebraska Department of Education, 2024).

Even in states without formal policy, similar expectations may be applied in practice through local agreements or institutional interpretations. A well-structured team-teaching model can help institutions meet both sets of requirements by ensuring that all instructors hold the appropriate credentials needed for their respective sectors to award credit.

Some responding institutions indicated that partnership structures are shaped by whether high school instructors meet the credentialing standards required by the college or its accreditor. Institutions report that high school teachers who hold full faculty-level credentials tend to operate with greater autonomy, while those with partial or no credentials work under closer supervision by college faculty. It is important to note that not all federally recognized institutional accreditors allow this practice. Further, it falls outside NACEP accreditation standards.

NACEP does not stipulate the specific qualifications a high school instructor must possess to serve as an HSDE instructor. The faculty standard regarding qualifications (F1) stipulate that all instructors be approved by the appropriate academic or faculty leadership and that the qualifications used to vet an HSDE instructor adhere to institutional policies and procedures, which are presumably in compliance with the institutional/regional accreditor's standards (NACEP, 2022).

The various modalities used by institutions for HSDE delivery reflect a balance between practical considerations, such as faculty availability, institutional resources and coordination needs, and the requirements for instructor qualifications and quality assurance across delivery contexts.

HSDE Course Integration with Academic Planning

Survey responses indicate substantial integration of HSDE coursework into both secondary and postsecondary academic planning. Among the 165 institutions that responded to the question, 55% report HSDE courses are incorporated into default 9th-to-12th-grade course plans, suggesting that HSDE opportunities are becoming increasingly available to all learners, rather than being limited to only academically advanced learners. This broader access aligns with national trends toward expanding HSDE participation beyond traditionally high-achieving learners.

Additionally, 69% of institutions map HSDE coursework directly to degree plans, indicating intentional alignment between HSDE and college-completion pathways. Institutions may strategically position HSDE as a structured pathway to postsecondary credentials, rather than just a collection of isolated course offerings.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is fundamental to maintaining academic standards in HSDE programs. Mechanisms needed to ensure course quality vary by program and instructor type, as well as instructional setting. HSDE opportunities taught by high-school instructors in high-school settings demand more robust implementation structures and oversight than courses delivered by college faculty on campus. Results of this survey reveal institutions understand the importance of ensuring the integrity of the credits they transcribe for learners through HSDE activities.

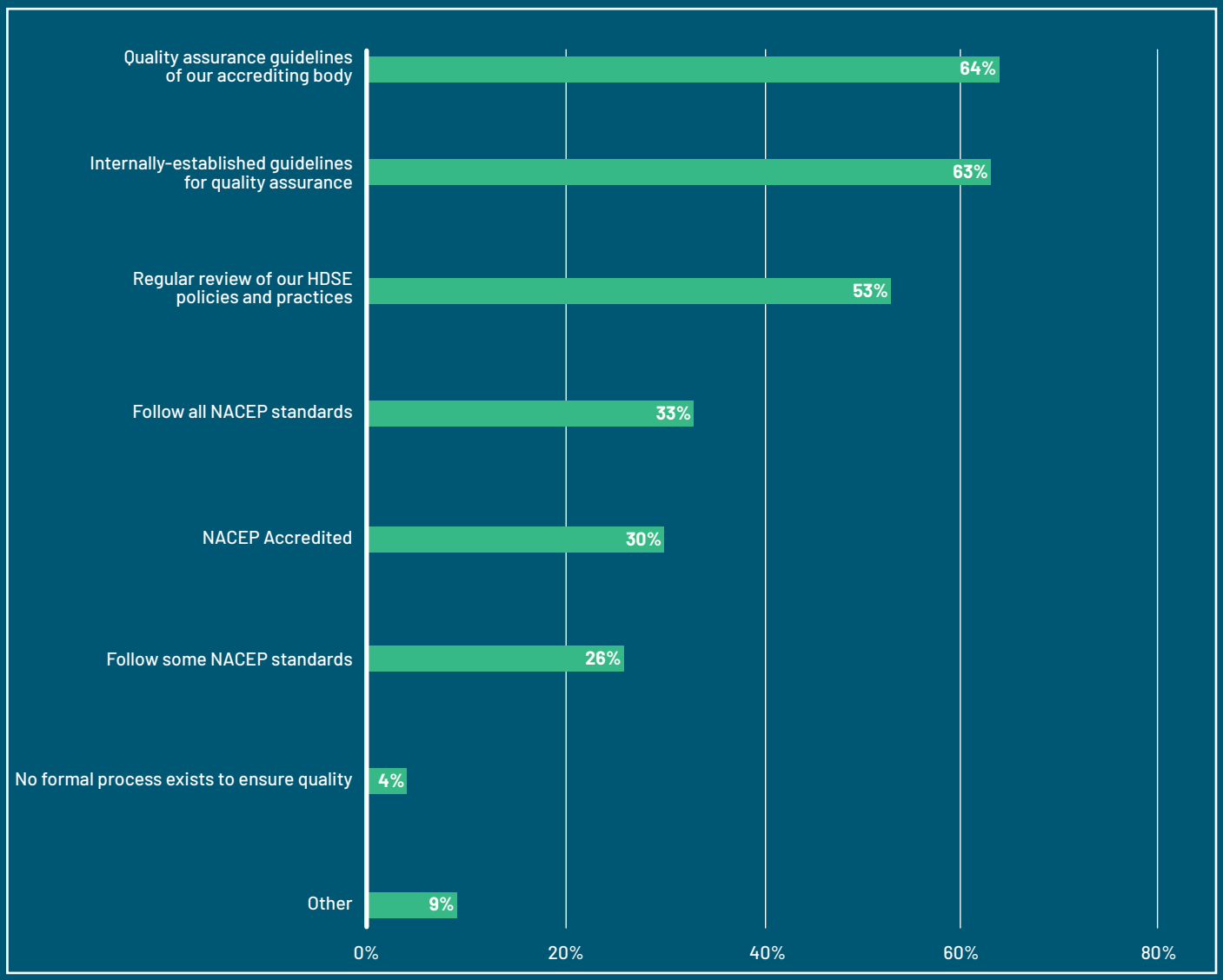
Ninety-six percent of institutions implement at least one formal quality-assurance measure. Figure 7. The most common mechanisms used align HSDE practices with institutional accreditation guidelines (64%) and internally established quality guidelines (63%). Regular review of HSDE policies and practices is also widespread; 53% of institutions report this as part of their quality-assurance process.

State policy can exert a strong influence on local practice, including quality assurance. The October 2024 release of NACEP's preliminary findings from a 50-state-scan of policy in *Equity Starts with Quality: The Essential Role of State Policy in Shaping the Future of Dual Enrollment*, shows many HSDE quality-assurance policies in state statue or other binding policy (Williams et al., 2024).

State policies governing HSDE are largely designed to preserve the academic integrity of college courses delivered in high-school environments. Most policies focus on maintaining faculty qualifications for high-school instructors and ensuring parity in learner participation criteria, such as placment test scores,

prerequisite coursework, course rigor, content, learning outcomes and assessments. While these foundations provide an important baseline for academic credibility and credit mobility, they fall short of addressing the full student experience. High school–based learners also need access to intentional academic and non-academic supports, including tutoring, advising, and transition planning, areas where NACEP standards raise the bar.

Figure 7: **Components of Quality Assurance for HSDE** **(all that apply)**



NACEP Standards and Institutional Engagement

NACEP sets national quality standards for both high school-based and college-provided-faculty models of HSDE programs. Institutional knowledge of and engagement with these standards varies significantly. Thirty-three percent of institutions report following all NACEP standards, while 26% follow some NACEP standards. However, only 30% of responding institutions are NACEP accredited, suggesting a gap between institutions that value and use the organization's quality framework and those that have pursued formal program accreditation.

NACEP Standards cover key characteristics of six essential elements of program quality: Partnership, Faculty, Curriculum, Assessment, Student Support, and Program Evaluation (NACEP, n.d.-b). These standards provide important standardization of practices within the most prevalent models of HSDE. The use of these national standards helps ensure that programs across varied contexts offer learners a comparable level of overall program quality.

Only 136 programs nationally are NACEP-accredited, with five holding dual endorsement for both the high school-based and the college-provided faculty models. Twenty-three states have NACEP accredited programs, with the largest concentration of accredited programs in the handful of states that require or incentivize NACEP accreditation.

A 2021 survey of statute and binding policy found that ten states require, incentivize, or otherwise encourage NACEP accreditation for all high-school based HSDE programs. Six other states embed NACEP quality standards in state or system policy. An additional 13 states include parts of NACEP standards in state or system policy.

Despite growing policy support for NACEP accreditation, awareness of the standards at the institutional level varies considerably. Forty percent of respondents report being either "extremely familiar" (24%) or "very familiar" (16%) with NACEP standards. A larger portion (59%) indicates limited awareness. Twenty-three percent are "not familiar at all" with the standards, while 19% are only "slightly familiar." The remaining 17% report moderate familiarity.

NACEP's National Footprint

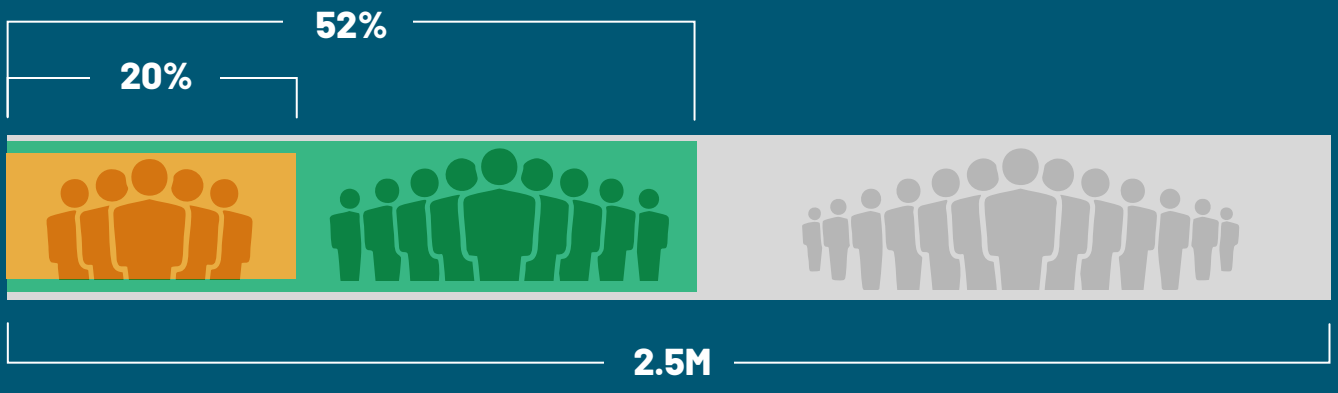
NACEP serves as the national benchmark for quality HSDE programs, with a substantial and expanding presence in programs nationwide. Of the nearly 2.5 million HSDE learners reported in the preliminary 2022-23 IPEDS data, 52% were served by institutions connected to NACEP through membership and 20% participated in one of the 134 programs accredited by NACEP that academic year. This reach reflects NACEP's significant influence in the field and underscores ongoing opportunities to expand the adoption of quality-driven approaches nationwide.

Nationally, 20% of of high school student enrollments from the 2022-23 academic year were through a high-quality program accredited by NACEP. Earning NACEP accreditation requires programs to undergo a rigorous outside review by a panel of peer institutions and demonstrate they have consistently met the mark of quality practice.

500,000 Enrolled in NACEP-Accredited Programs

More than half (52%) of the high school enrollments were through a college or high school connected to national best practices and quality standards as part of the NACEP community.

1,300,000 Enrolled in NACEP-Member Programs



Quality-Assurance Practices and Implementation

Institutional quality-assurance efforts span multiple dimensions, from program administration to learner support. See Appendix C for a full list of quality assurance practices provided to survey respondents. The most widely adopted practices focus on establishing and maintaining partnerships. Eighty-eight percent of institutions report regular communication with high-school partners and formal written agreements outlining roles and responsibilities. Academic-quality measures are also heavily emphasized; 85% of institutions ensure high-school instructors meet institutional teaching qualifications. Eighty-one percent maintain curriculum consistency between high-school and college courses.

Support services and operational standards feature prominently in institutional quality assurance frameworks, including:

- provide access to learning resources (78%)
- verify course prerequisites (78%)
- use standardized syllabi (77%)
- maintain consistent registration processes (75%)
- maintain grading standards (75%)

Orientation (52%) and annual professional development for high school instructors (53%) are less commonly implemented.

Institutions recognize the importance of quality assurance in HSDE programs. However, there is considerable variation in how it is approached. The relatively low rate of NACEP accreditation, combined with limited familiarity with NACEP's National Standards for Program Quality, points to opportunities for greater standardization and alignment of practices around time-tested quality-assurance practices in use across the field.

Learner-Related Practice and Policy

Learner Eligibility

Learner eligibility for HSDE is shaped by multiple components and determined through the involvement of various stakeholders. Eligibility requirements are often multilayered, combining institutional policies, state guidelines and local school-district standards.

The 2022 Education Commission of the States 50-state comparison of dual-enrollment policy indicates 40 states have state-wide eligibility requirements regulating participation (Jamieson et al., 2022). Common metrics used by states include benchmarks such as high-school GPA, grade level, age, scores on assessment tools and high-school counselor/teacher/administrative recommendations or approval.

Policy comparisons indicate that several states have multiple require-

ments for learner participation, most often grade and/or age, in addition to an academic requirement, such as GPA, a placement score or similar entrance benchmark (ECS, 2022-a). Immediately preceding the pandemic, the use of multiple measures to assess readiness was a practice that was expanding in HSDE. The pandemic drove several states toward waiving these standing requirements between 2020 and 2022. Few[5] have reverted to the former metrics.

Depending on the state and its higher-education system, institutional requirements may be added to a state's requirements. This may complicate learner-participation criteria because it can vary by partner institution, subject area or course.

This benchmarking survey asked respondents about several aspects of eligibility determination, including the roles of different stakeholders, specific academic requirements, grade-level restrictions and the use of standardized testing. Survey respondents represent 48 different states. Regardless of the

Gatekeeping or Course Sequencing?

High school grade-level restrictions (i.e., limiting participation to juniors and seniors) often reflect the logic of sequential learning rather than overt gatekeeping. As of 2019, 23 states limited dual enrollment eligibility to juniors and seniors, sometimes with exceptions for younger students in career and technical education or gifted programs (ECS, 2019). Welding illustrates this sequencing clearly. Students must begin with shop and equipment safety and develop basic welding and fabrication skills before advancing to college-level work. At that stage, they are expected to handle costly materials, weld in difficult positions where safety and precision are critical, and produce joints whose structural integrity may determine whether equipment and lives are secure. The same principle applies in academic subjects. Mathematics typically progresses from Algebra I to Geometry to Algebra II and beyond, and students cannot meaningfully apply or extend concepts in advanced courses without first mastering the foundational ones.

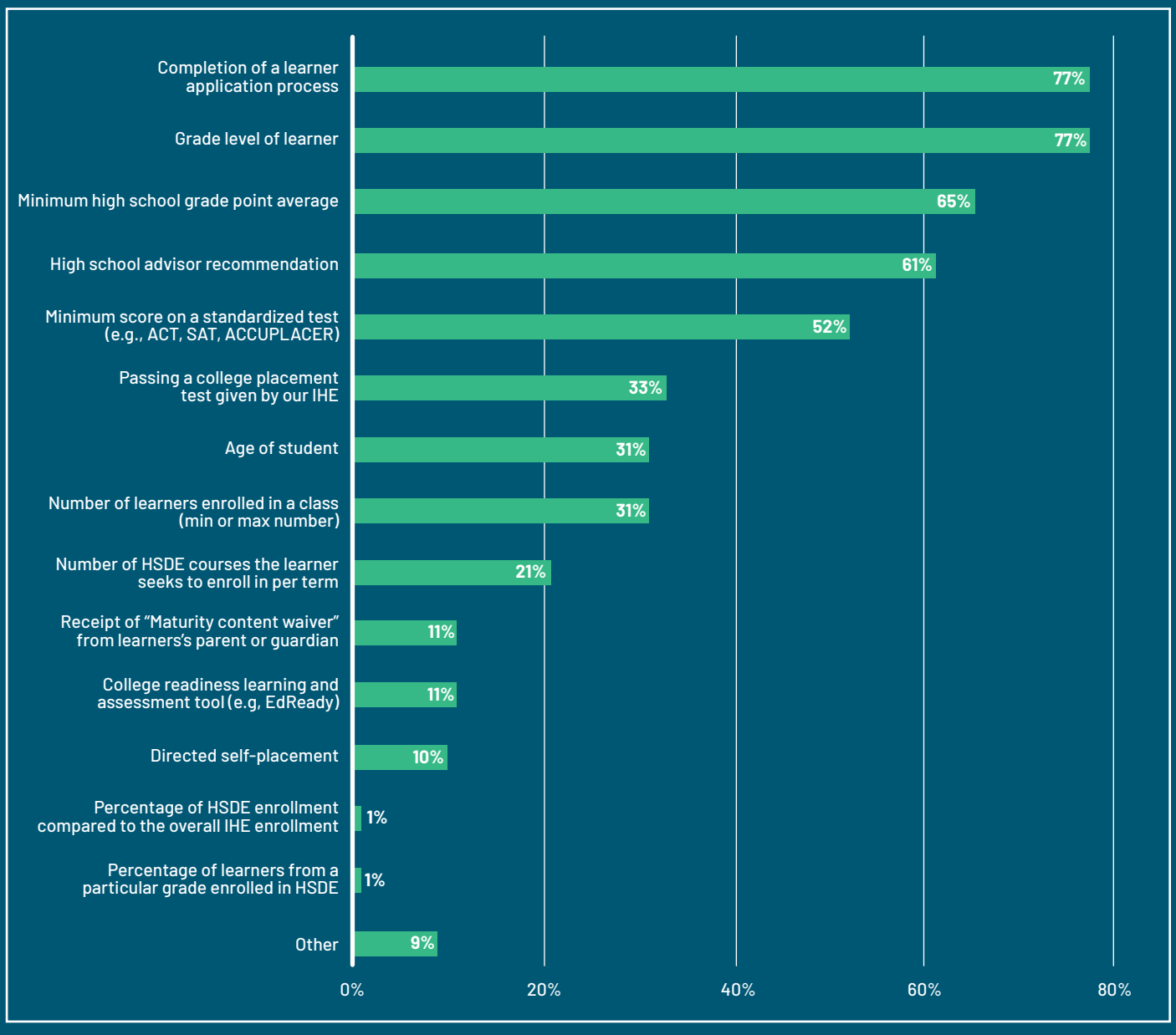
In other curricular areas, coursework is less sequential, and students may be able to participate earlier in high school. Many states recognize this through exceptions into their grade-level requirements.

Grade-level restrictions are often less about denying opportunity and more about ensuring that students enter college courses at the point where they are best prepared to advance their knowledge beyond high school.

[5] At this time, only three states with policy monitored by NACEP have removed these waivers.

underlying policy context, survey data reveal institutions primarily rely on two key requirements for HSDE eligibility: completion of a learner-application process and grade-level requirements. Figure 8. Both are required by more than 75% of responding institutions. Given that one of the defining characteristics of HSDE is transcripted college credit, which requires a student enrollment record, the prevalence of requiring an application of some form is essentially foundational. Academic performance measures are also significant factors; about 66% of respondents require a minimum high-school GPA and over 50% require standardized-test scores. High-school advisor recommendations also play an important role and are required by 61% of institutions.

Figure 8: **Learner-Eligibility Variables** (all that apply)



Beyond the eligibility requirements offered as response choices in the survey, 9% of institutions reported several additional criteria including parental/guardian approval processes, specific course prerequisites, and teacher/counselor recommendations for learner readiness. Some institutions also noted the use of innovative program waivers from the state, placement based on PSAT scores or high school course grades, and state residency requirements as part of their eligibility determination process.

The variety of eligibility requirements suggests a multifaceted approach to assessing college readiness. Combining placement tests, high-school GPA, coursework and other indicators ensure learners are prepared for college-level work.

Participation Criteria, Placement & Prohibitions

There is much discussion in the HSDE community about appropriate participation criteria. The discussions often center around the appropriateness of using an institution's standard participation criteria or adding additional elements to participate. For public 4-year institutions it is common to hold HSDE students to the same entry criteria as matriculated students. In some cases, additional criteria are required, based on the rationale that students gaining early access to college coursework should demonstrate readiness beyond what is required of traditional, post-high school learners. Open access institutions, such as community colleges, occasionally add additional criteria but the majority apply the same open-door policies to HSDE students as they do to other learners.

In either institutional context, courses such as gateway math, writing and other core transfer offerings typically require all learners to meet the same prerequisites or placement benchmarks. These may include achieving minimum scores on standardized assessments, such as the ACT, SAT, ACCUPLACER, state-developed placement tests, college readiness tools (EdReady), or demonstrating readiness through high-school GPA or coursework under multiple-measures policies.

According to the ECS 50-State Comparison, 31 states prohibit the use of remedial/developmental education courses in HSDE, 7 allow it, and 48 are silent in policy for some or all modalities (ECS, 2022-d). The expansion of corequisite support models has drawn interest from HSDE programs. It remains to be seen if this trend in higher education will permeate into HSDE programing.

Learner Expenses Associated with HSDE

For many learners, participating in HSDE means navigating not just college academic expectations but also college costs. These costs include typical higher education expenses like tuition, fees, textbooks, and other instructional materials, though HSDE learners often avoid broader college-related costs like housing, meal plans, and some campus fees. Additional costs for the learner may depend on the course location. For example, learners attending classes on a college campus may incur transportation and meal costs that are typically covered or subsidized in a high school setting.

Survey responses reveal that tuition rates charged to the learner, or to the school district or state on their behalf, are typically lower than those for non-HSDE learners. Among responding institutions, 88% discount tuition for HSDE learners; 75% offer discounts of 50% or more[6]. Some institutions charge different tuition rates based on course location and some states have different reimbursement levels for on-college-campus versus high-school-based HSDE.

The Price of Participation

There is no nationally standardized approach for determining which HSDE participation expenses are the responsibility of the learner. Learners participating in a program may be required to cover all associated costs, a discounted amount, only certain expenses, or no costs whatsoever. Variations in the costs borne by learners reflect a complex mix of tuition discounting strategies, shared funding responsibilities, state requirements, supplemental funding, and institutional contributions.

The expenses a learner is responsible for may be set in state or system policy or may be determined locally through agreements between the secondary and postsecondary partners. Consequently, expenses paid be the learner or their family can vary based on multiple factors, including the type of institution (e.g., public or private, 2-year or 4-year), the course subject (general education or career and technical education, and whether the course is state-approved), the instructor's affiliation (high school or college faculty), or the course location (on a college campus, online or at the high school; in state/out-of-state). A learner taking multiple courses across different subjects, settings, and institutions may therefore encounter a different cost structure for each course.

[6] 144 institutions responded to this question

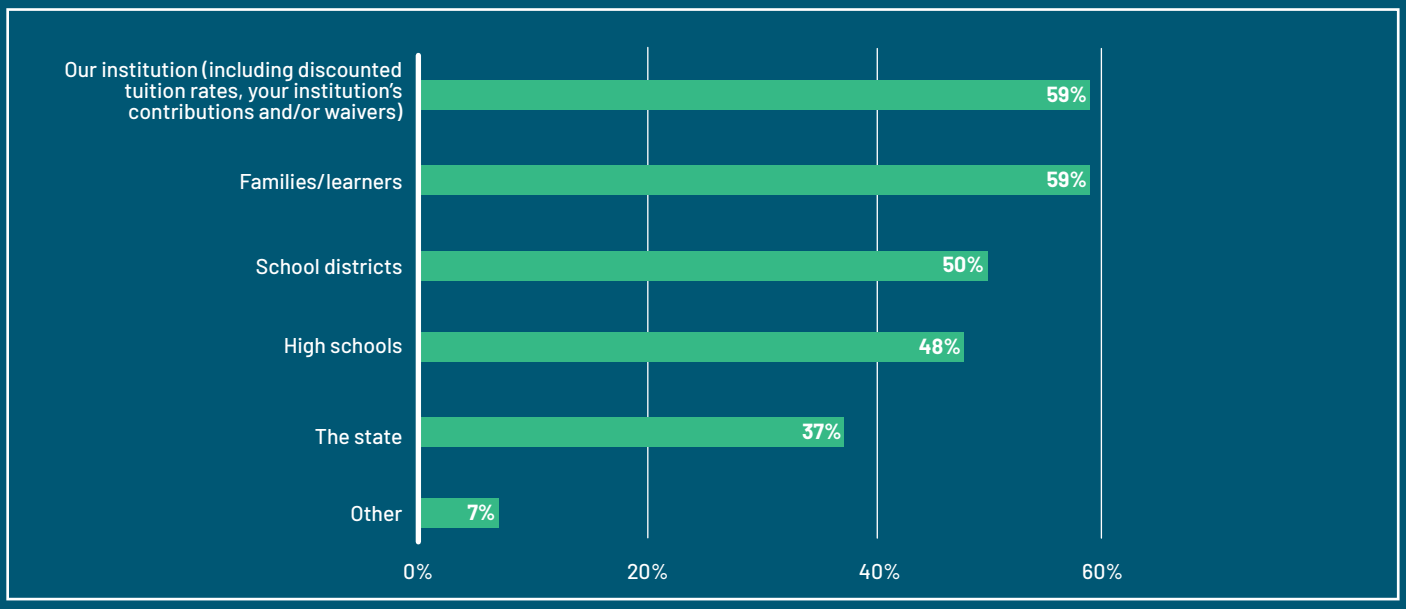
The use of high school staff and facilities is a common rationale for reduced HSDE tuition, reflected in both institutional decision-making and in some state funding formulas. Research on HSDE cost models at the institutional level is limited but existing analyses tend to treat the use of a high school instructor as factor as a relevant consideration in program cost structures (Taylor et al., 2022; Belfield et al., 2022).

Some states and programs allow HSDE learners to participate in college-based or online courses so long as they do not displace regular matriculated students (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2016; Montana University System, 2023). Discounted tuition is often justified by filling otherwise empty seats, allowing colleges to recover some costs without displacing degree-seeking students.

Despite tuition discounting and other cost-offset measures, 51% of survey respondents perceive institutional fees as a barrier for some high-school learners' participation; 32% disagree and 17% neither agree nor disagree. Steps required to demonstrate financial need and reluctance to participate are also perceived as barriers. This raises important considerations about program access, especially for learners from limited-income backgrounds.

Respondents shared that HSDE program costs are most often paid by the learner or covered by the higher-education institution (59% each), but respondents also cited school districts (50%), high schools (48%) and state funding (37%) as contributing. Additional funding comes from grants, foundations and private partnerships. Figure 9.

Figure 9: **HSDE Expenses Funding Sources**



Course Material Costs: Varies by Policy and Partnership

Textbooks and course materials are a key area where the course location, state and institutional state policy impact how non-tuition expenses are handled. In some states, policies promote consistency; in others, they allow for considerable local variation and negotiation (ECS, 2019). For example, one school district may provide college textbooks for high school-based courses that occur during the regular school day using high school staff and resources. Another district using the same high school-based model may consider textbooks the learner's responsibility, while a different district may negotiate with the partnering college to provide all course materials. This variation can exist even within a single institution's partnerships, as some colleges engage in all three approaches depending on the district involved.

For courses offered on a college campus, textbook costs would typically fall to the learner unless state policy requires the institution to provide the text, as in Minnesota, or leaves the responsibility to local negotiation between the high school and college, as seen in Idaho, Iowa, and other states (ECS, 2019; Zinth, 2022).

Among the 37% of institutions receiving state funding to address HSDE program expenses, the relationship between state and institutional contributions varies as much as what is covered, what is capped, and what costs a college may be required by the state to absorb[7].

Reported State Funding Contributions:

- partial tuition coverage through per-credit-hour reimbursements
- credit limits on state coverage
- scholarship/grant programs based on learner eligibility
- gap funding or scholarships
- additional support for underserved populations

Reported Institution of Higher Education Contributions:

- tuition discounts or waivers beyond state funding
- coverage of textbooks, lab materials and course-specific fees

The various ways HSDE expenses are delegated to the various stakeholders in the partnership, including the learner, is a microcosm of the complexity of HSDE state funding. Comparative reviews of the wide variation in state policy approaches to HSDE (Williams et al., 2024) and specifically state funding approaches for dual enrollment (Kaput et al., 2025; Zinth, Perry, & Williams, 2019; Zinth, Perry, & Williams, 2025) show the complexity of the policy landscape. The findings in this report are similarly diverse, reflecting the patchwork of approaches in state, system, and institutional policy.

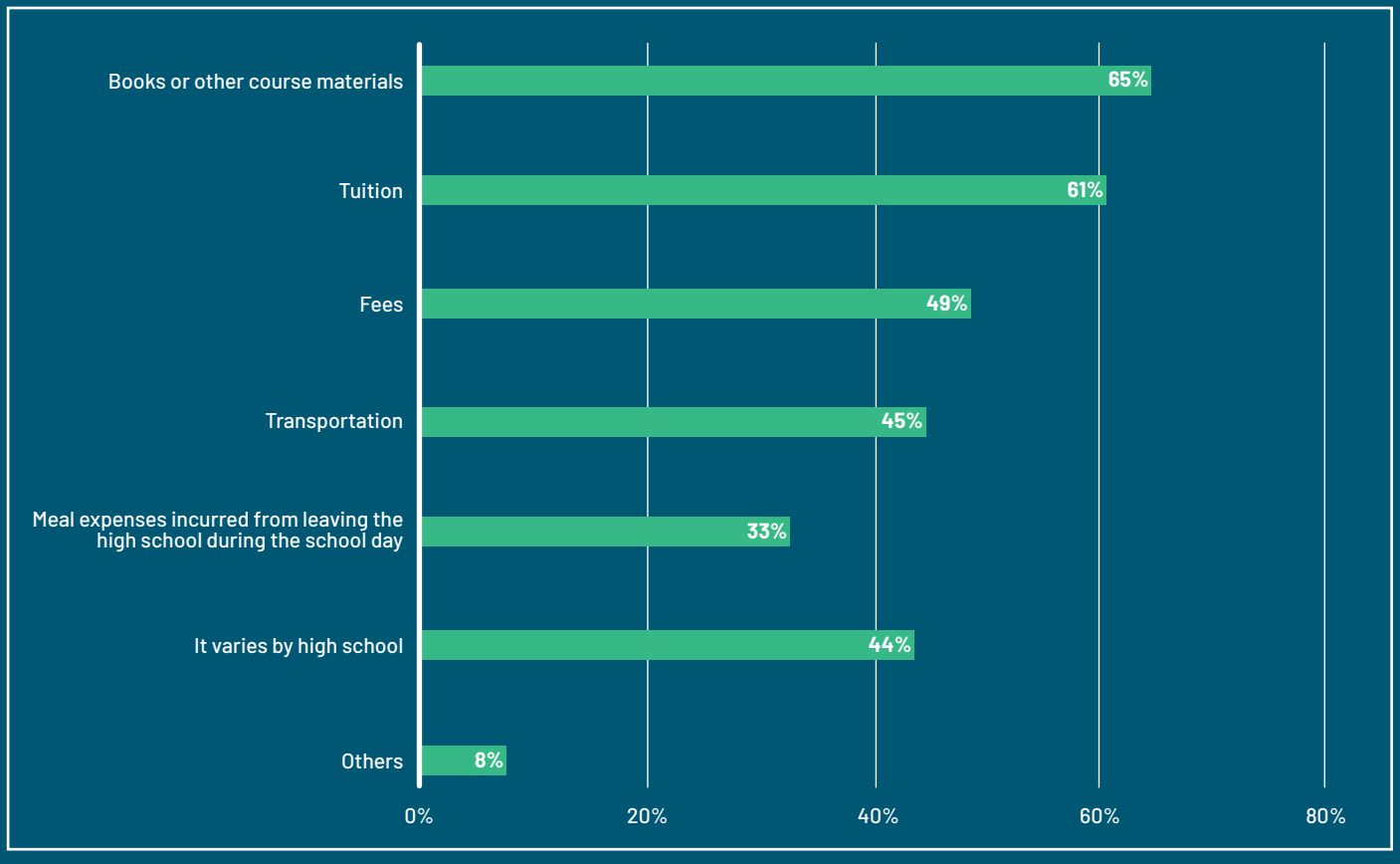
[7] Some states require the IHE to waive some, or all, costs and do not backfill any missed revenue or costs incurred.

Fifty-nine percent of learners incur costs to participate in HSDE. Out-of-pocket expenses paid by learners or their families include books and course materials (65%), tuition (61%), institutional fees (49%), and, for college-based courses, transportation (45%) and meals (33%). Figure 10.

Offering HSDE at no cost to the majority of learners participating in a program (for 80% or more of participants) is a common practice at responding institutions, with 48% of survey respondents reporting this approach. Twenty-nine percent of respondents indicate that some HSDE participants (but less than 80%) pay no costs, while 23% indicate that all HSDE learners pay to participate.

Survey results suggest that a significant proportion of HSDE learners participate at no cost, and that certain learner groups and program models are more likely to result in no-cost participation (i.e. ECHS and P-TECH structures). Survey findings also indicate that public institutions are significantly more likely than other institution types to offer HSDE opportunities at no cost to learners, likely reflecting the role of public education funding and appropriations in cost structures.

Figure 10: **Learner- or Family-Based Costs Associated with HSDE (all that apply)**



Behind the scenes of HSDE programs lies a complex web of tuition discounts, cost-sharing models, and financial policies that result in significant differences in what learners pay from one institution to the next. Survey data suggest that while institutions have developed diverse funding approaches to support HSDE programs, the financial structure varies widely across institutions and covering costs relies on a patchwork of contributions from multiple sources.

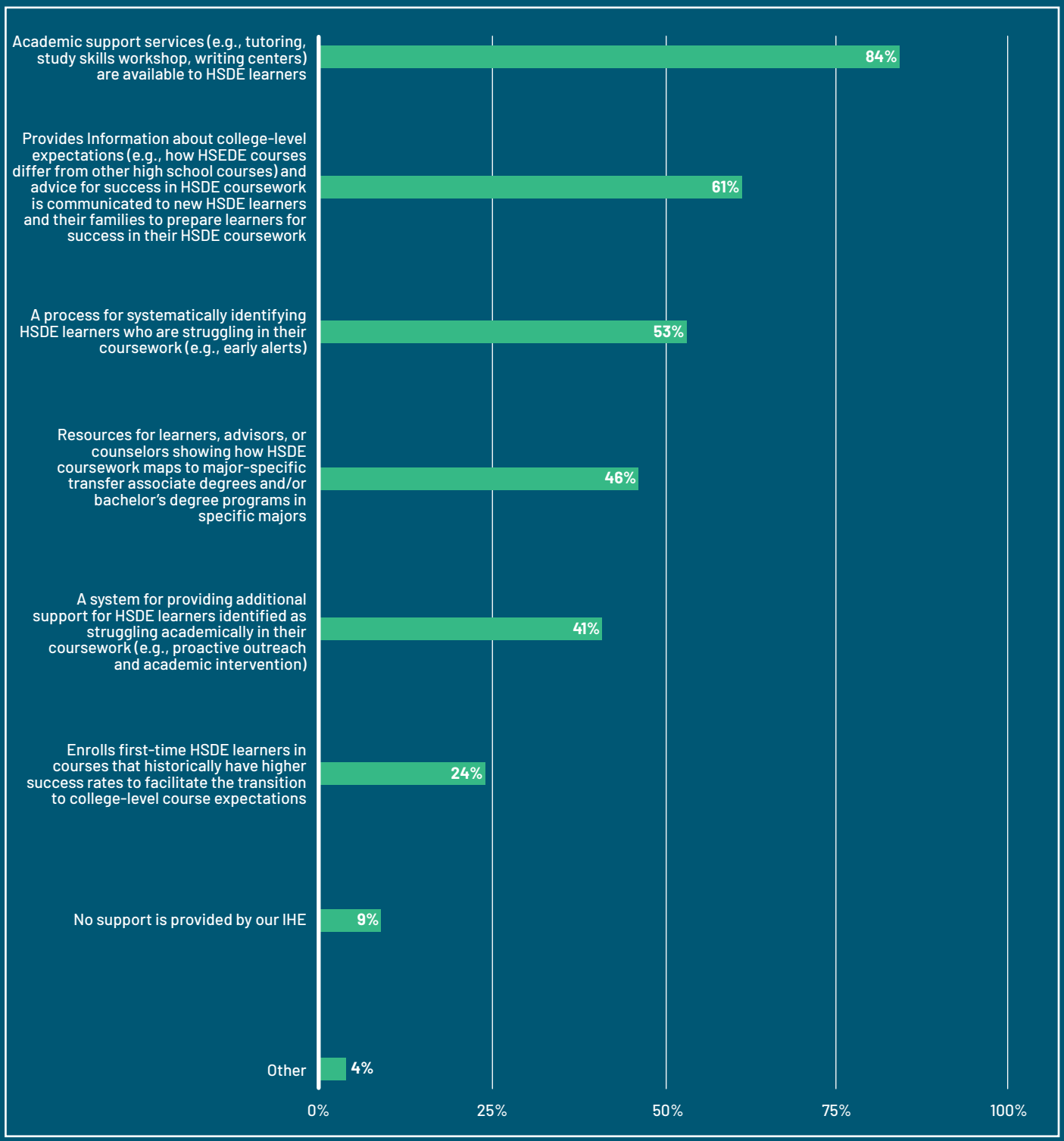
Learner Navigation and Support Services

Strong navigation and learner support services are essential to success in higher education; helping learners access resources, overcome barriers, and stay on track to reach their academic and career goals. Assessing the typical supports provided to HSDE learner is particularly important because program practice and delivery modalities vary widely, creating the potential for uneven access to services.

Recognizing this variation, 2024 AACRAO/NACEP survey questions examine how institutions provide academic support, advising services and career-exploration opportunities for HSDE learners. Questions focused on the types of academic support available, advising models and requirements, advisor contact, career-exploration and methods for communicating HSDE opportunities to learners.

Institutions generally provide robust academic support for HSDE learners; 84% offer resources, such as tutoring, study-skills workshops and writing centers. Figure 11. Most institutions also take proactive steps to support learner success, with 61% communicating college-level expectations to HSDE learners and their families, and 53% implementing early alert systems to identify struggling learners. Nine percent of respondents report providing no support services for HSDE learners enrolled with their institution.

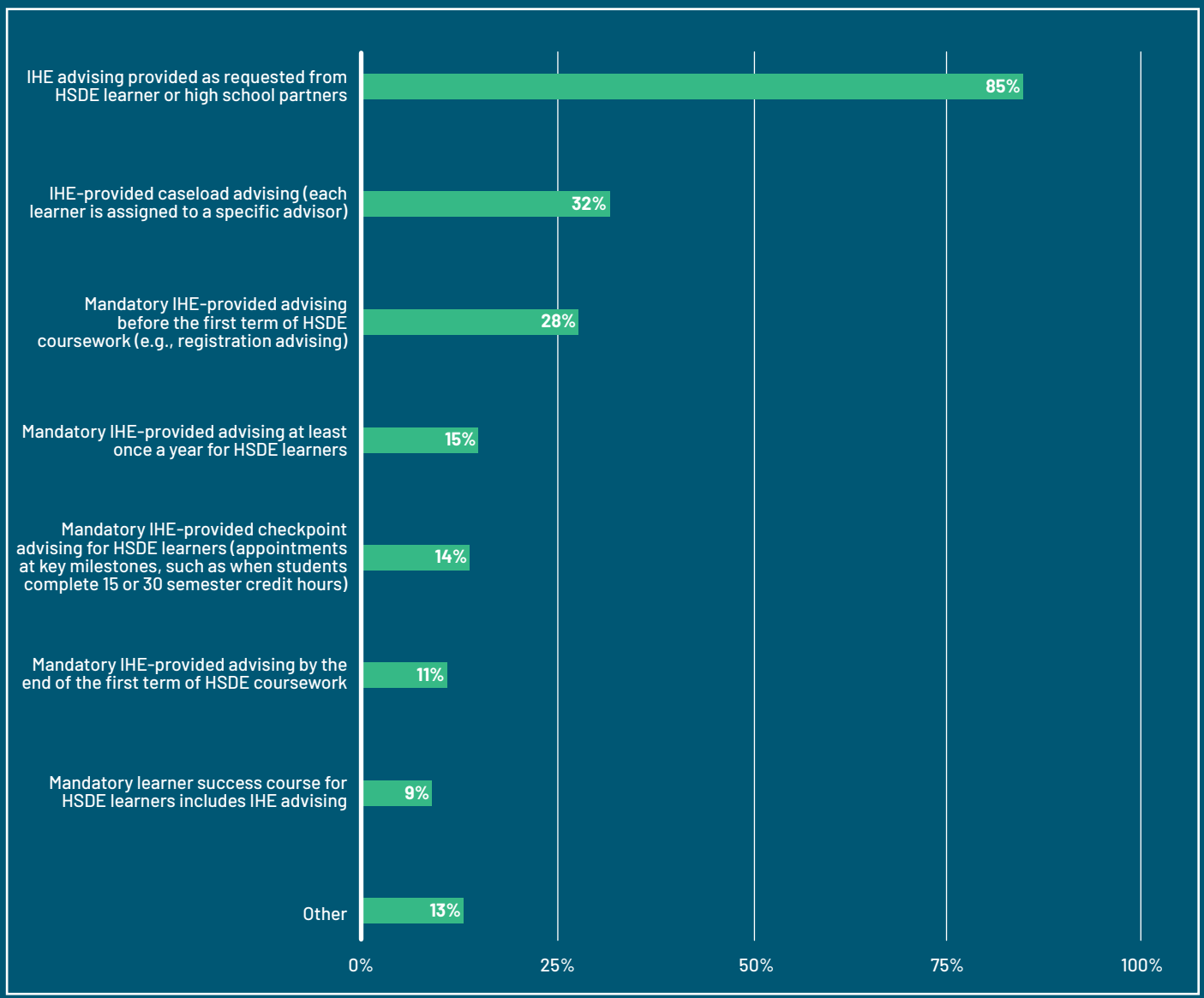
Figure 11: **Academic-Support Services Available to HSDE Learners** (all that apply)



Eighty-five percent of institutions provide HSDE advising on an as-requested basis from learners or high-school partners. Figure 12. However, structured advising approaches are less common. Thirty-three percent assign HSDE learners to specific advisors through caseload advising; 28% require mandatory advising before the first term.

More intensive advising interventions, such as mandatory annual meetings, milestone checkpoints and mandatory end-of-first-term advising requirements, are implemented by fewer than 15% of institutions. Nine percent of respondents incorporate advising into mandatory learner-success courses for HSDE learners.

Figure 12: **Advising Resources for HSDE Learners (all that apply)**



Open ended responses submitted by the 13% selecting "other" reveal several distinct approaches. These include:

- location-based advising, such as mandatory for on-campus courses but not for high-school-site courses
- embedded advisors at high-school locations, with regularly scheduled availability
- specialized advising for specific programs or pathways, such as ECHS, PTECH, and degree pathways
- varied frequency of required advising, such as every term, every 6 weeks, before first semester
- self-service tools and resources, such as guided-pathways documents, career-assessment tools
- alternative delivery methods, such as information sessions, workshops, coaching
- training and support for high-school counselors to provide basic advising

Several institutions noted capacity limitations or the self-identified need to expand their advising services for HSDE learners. This is a common area of aspiration reported to NACEP by programs across the nation. Advising is consistently one of the most well-attended conference tracks at NACEP events.

Learner Awareness

High-school learners are most often made aware of the HSDE options by their counselor (92%). However, other communication methods are used by the high school and the partner institution to promote HSDE opportunities to learners. Respondent answers include:

- high-school faculty is a source of HSDE information (78%)
- high-school advisors provide information (72%)
- HSDE information is included on the partner institution's webpage (71%)
- learners hear about HSDE from other learners (56%)
- the partner institution communicates directly with high-school learners about HSDE (48%)
- K-12 outreach staff communicates directly with high-school learners (39%)
- information is included in the high-school handbook (35%)
- the partner institution's offers HSDE information sessions regularly (35%)
- social-media posts (33%)

Learner awareness is another area where state policy has an important impact on how a participant learns about HSDE. A 50-State policy comparison indicates that 39 states require all eligible students/parents to be notified of the HSDE program (ECS, 2022-e).

Special Population Focus for HSDE

The survey examined institutional practices around analyzing and serving underrepresented learner populations in HSDE programs. Forty-four percent of responding institutions report analyzing the demographics of their HSDE learners to compare them to the overall K-12 learner population within their partner districts to identify underrepresented groups. Thirty-five percent indicate having HSDE programs specifically geared toward underrepresented learners.

Institutions employ various outreach strategies to encourage HSDE participation among underrepresented learners. Sixty-three percent conduct direct outreach to parents and families from underrepresented communities to build awareness about HSDE opportunities. Additionally, 58% conduct outreach to Title-1 schools or those with larger numbers of underrepresented learners, such as rural schools and primarily minority-serving schools. Other strategies include outreach to middle-school learners and families (44%), use of multilingual promotional materials (35%) and engagement with community-based organizations (32%). Only 1% of institutions report making no specific outreach efforts.

Additional outreach approaches include:

- creating dedicated staff positions
- developing partnerships with schools serving underrepresented populations
- implementing peer-mentor programs
- conducting targeted outreach to rural communities and specific populations, such as deaf and hard-of-hearing learners

HSDE Admission, Registration and Transcript Practices

The admitting, registering, and recording HSDE credit processes vary across institutions, reflecting different approaches to managing this growing learner population.

This section examines when and how institutions award HSDE credit, their student information system coding practices, and their approaches to transcript documentation. The data reveal both common practices and notable variations in how institutions handle these administrative aspects of HSDE.

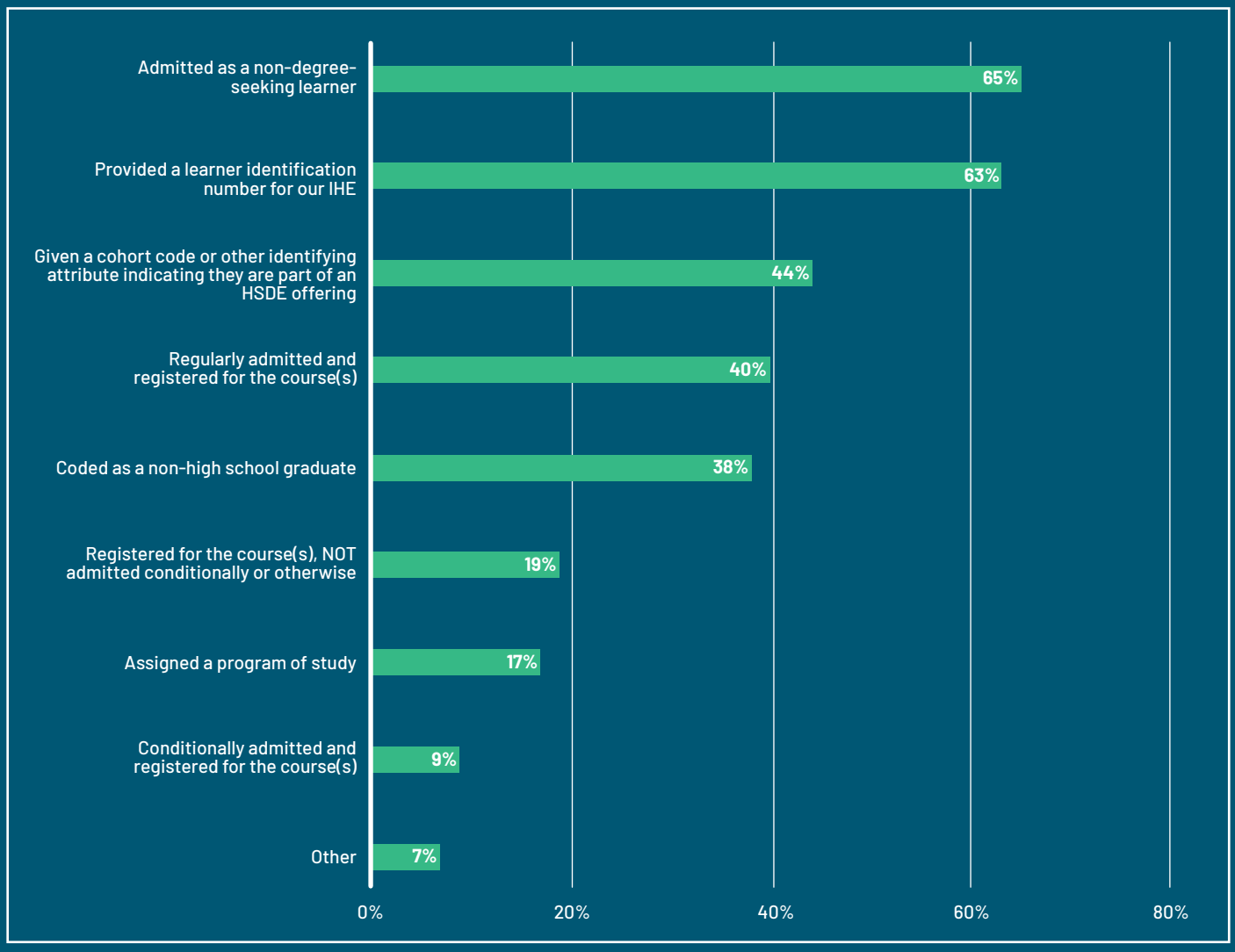
According to all respondents, credit is awarded upon completion of each HSDE course. The survey included other options that were not selected by any institutions: awarding credit upon enrollment at the awarding institution after high school graduation, upon completion of a dual enrollment program, or through other specified methods.

All HSDE learners are added to the institution's student information system (SIS). While coding practices vary across institutions, the most common approaches include admitting learners

as non-degree seeking (65%), assigning learner identification numbers (63%), and using cohort codes or other HSDE-specific attributes (44%) for tracking purposes. Figure 13. Less than half of institutions regularly admit and register these learners, with varied approaches to managing their admission and enrollment status. Other coding practices include using special HSDE section numbers, identifying learners as "bridge" or "guest" learners, and applying program-specific codes or terms like "dual credit" or "DE."

The responsibility for creating HSDE learner records in the SIS varies across institutions. Admissions offices most commonly manage this task (32%), followed by registrar's offices (25%). In some cases, learners create their own records through standard application processes (20%). The remaining institutions handle this responsibility through dedicated HSDE administrative units (10%), HSDE lead staff (8%), or other institutional staff/learner combinations (6%).

Figure 13: **HDSE Learners in the Student Information System (all that apply)**



Ninety-five percent of institutions do not record HSDE courses and/or programs differently on a learner's transcript than the equivalent non-HSDE course or program. Examples of how these practices differ from the other 5% include the following.

- There is a slight difference in how a learner is identified as an early college learner, but the transcript is the same as the IHE.
- The institution makes it clear courses were offered in the high school.
- The institution uses unique section numbering systems to indicate HSDE sections.

Responsibility for course registration of HSDE learners follows various institutional models and duties may be distributed across multiple administrative units. Registrar's offices handle course registration most frequently (28%), while dedicated HSDE units manage the process (23%). Some institutions empower learners to self-register (14%). HSDE lead staff (13%) and admissions staff (6%) oversee registration at a small portion of responding institutions. A small percentage of institutions (3%) delegate registration authority to high school staff. The remaining institutions (13%) report other registration arrangements, reflecting the diverse approaches institutions take to managing HSDE course enrollment. Among those with other registration arrangements, registration often involves a collaborative process between multiple institutional units rather than a single responsible party, such as continuing education, career and counseling services, academic advisors and high-school liaisons. Some institutions employ a hybrid model in which learners may self-register but require verification or approval from HSDE staff, advisors or counselors before registration is finalized. The actual registration process frequently involves coordination between specialized HSDE units, admissions staff, high-school staff and registrars' offices.

Fifty percent of institutions register HSDE learners before a class starts. Another 25% register after a class starts but before the institution's enrollment snapshot. Among the 25% who selected either "other" or "it varies," cited that registration timing varies, based on course location, instructor type and institutional partnerships.

For responding institutions, learners taking courses on a college campus or with college faculty must register before classes begin. Those taking courses at high schools or with high-school instructors may have extended registration windows that can stretch several weeks into the term but close before the enrollment census date. This is often an awkward but practical solution to the significant misalignment between high-school and college calendars.

Some institutions struggle to process all registrations before classes start due to staffing limitations, high enrollment volumes and delays in receiving registration materials from partner

high schools. Others have developed specialized registration timelines to accommodate different academic calendars (semester, trimester, block) and program types but aim to complete registration by their institutional census or snapshot date.

Staffing is a frequent pain point and barrier to increasing program access. The number of staff available to support HSDE at an institution varies by institution size. Table 2.

Table 2: **Institution Size to HSDE FTE Staff**

	Size of Institution					
Staff Size	Under 1,000	1,000 - 2,499	2,500 - 4,999	5,000 - 9,999	10,000 - 19,999	20,000+
Less than 1 FTE	29%	23%	14%	7%	11%	0%
1 FTE	24%	16%	23%	14%	11%	0%
2-4 FTE	29%	41%	27%	50%	33%	40%
5-7 FTE	12%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%
8-10 FTE	0%	7%	18%	0%	0%	40%
More than 10 FTE	6%	9%	14%	29%	44%	20%

Staffing levels for HSDE vary widely by institution size, with smaller institutions (< 2,500) often operating with one or fewer FTE, midsized institutions (2,500–9,999) most likely to staff at moderate levels of 2–4 FTE, and larger institutions (10,000+) showing both heavier investment and greater variability. For example, nearly half of institutions enrolling 10,000–19,999 students report more than 10 FTE, while the largest institutions (20,000+) are split between lean models (2–4 FTE), moderate models (8–10 FTE), and higher-investment staffing above 10 FTE.

It is important to note, however, that survey language may not have captured a full picture of staffing approaches. Respondents may have counted only dedicated HSDE staff (centralized staff model) or may have included staff from other

departments who support HSDE as part of broader roles (a distributed staffing model).

This distinction is explored more directly in NACEP's research on staffing patterns based on program size and number of high school partners.

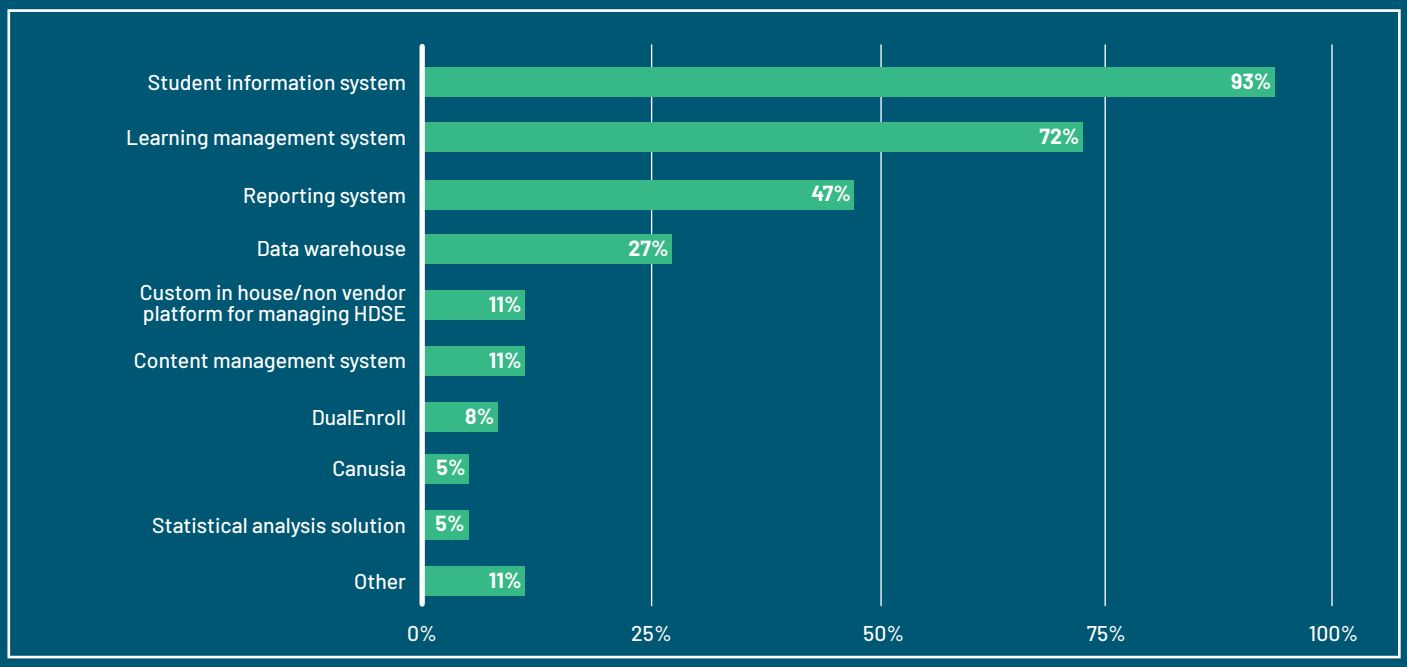
Technology

Technology underpins nearly every aspect of the modern campus experience; it is unsurprising that 99% of institutions report using one or more digital solutions to support HSDE. Figure 14. About 33% of institutions use only one solution, while the remainder use two or more. Student Information Systems (SIS) and Learning Management Systems (LMS) stand out as the most widely adopted tools, with 93% and 72% of institutions using them, respectively.

This widespread use of digital tools marks a notable shift for a program that has historically operated on the margins, often with staff using manual processes for activities like enrollment, communication, and recordkeeping.

Survey findings suggest that HSDE learners are now more fully integrated into core campus systems, likely signaling the program's growing institutional presence and the practicality of leveraging existing infrastructure. Among the 11% of institutions that selecting "other" technology solutions, some report using customer relationship management (CRM) platforms, while others still rely on Excel or Google Sheets.

Figure 14: **Technology Used to Support HSDE (all that apply)**



Treatment of HSDE Credit Awarded at Another Institution

The treatment of HSDE credit by receiving institutions is a critical component of credit mobility in higher education and important to students and parents making decisions, to the institutions standing behind the credit they transcribe, and to state leaders directing policy and investment.

Ninety-eight percent of responding institutions reported they accept HSDE credit, a notable increase from the 2016 landscape survey which found 86% of respondents accepted credit earned at another institution for transfer. Table 1. Yet misperceptions are common: 36% of responding institutions believe credit acceptance by other institutions remains an issue for HSDE students. This perception is especially striking given evidence from this survey of the widespread use of quality assurance practices and the involvement of college faculty across instructional locations.

Credit transfer is a well-documented challenge across American higher education, and HSDE learners, as a subset of this population, encounter these same structural barriers, often compounded by additional skepticism toward credits earned prior to high school graduation. This section examines both the widespread patterns of recognition and the points where challenges remain, helping move the conversation beyond perception to the reality of program practice.

Perceptions Versus Reality in HSDE-Credit Mobility

HSDE credit is widely accepted, yet a notable disconnect exists between perceptions and reality regarding HSDE-credit acceptance among institutions. While 36% of survey respondents believe there are difficulties with other institutions accepting HSDE credit, the survey data reveals a different picture. Six institutions (2%) report not accepting HSDE credit in transfer. This significant gap between perception (36% believing there are difficulties) and practice (98% accepting credit) suggests historical concerns about HSDE-credit acceptance may persist in institutional mindsets, despite current widespread acceptance practices.

Analysis of open-ended responses provides insight into why this perception gap exists. The most commonly cited issues include:

- skepticism about course rigor and quality, particularly for courses taught at high schools by high-school teachers, rather than on college campuses by college faculty
- institutional policies that restrict acceptance based on instructor credentials or delivery location, such as not accepting courses taught at high schools
- private and selective institutions being more likely to have restrictive acceptance policies
- requirements for additional documentation, like syllabi to verify course equivalency
- concerns about "double-dipping" when credits are used for both high-school graduation and college credit
- regional variations in faculty-qualification requirements
- limitations on the number of HSDE credits accepted or restrictions on specific subject areas

Transfer-Credit Acceptance and Evaluation

HSDE-credit mobility has become widely accepted in higher education, surpassing acceptance rates for other forms of credit recognition. Ninety-eight percent of responding institutions accept HSDE credit awarded by other institutions when standard transfer conditions are met. Credit for prior learning (CPL) has significantly lower acceptance rates.

Most institutions evaluate HSDE credits using the same criteria applied to traditional transfer credit. However, a small percentage apply additional conditions for accepting HSDE transfer credit. These institutions only accept HSDE credits that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- taught by college or university faculty
- awarded by a college or university and not used to meet high-school requirements
- awarded by NACEP-accredited HSDE programs
- taught on a college or university campus

Transcript-Credit-Recording Practices

Survey data reveal widespread standardization in how institutions record HSDE credit; 96% report identical transcript practices for HSDE and traditional transfer credit. This integration into standard transfer processes brings benefits and challenges. It streamlines credit processing, but it also means HSDE credit encounters the same systemic barriers found in traditional transfer processes. These barriers include:

- variations in credit applicability versus transferability
- institutional differences in grade requirements
- course-equivalency determination processes
- technology limitations in credit evaluation
- communication gaps in transfer processes

HSDE transfer-credit-recording methods include the following:

- a specific course with letter grades as transfer credit (57%)
- a specific course with a pass-fail grade (27%)
- CPL, with the number of credit hours earned and no specific course information (6%)
- a specific course with a pass-fail grade as institutional credit (3%)
- practice varies based on several factors (2%)
- employ other methods not listed in the survey (13%)

Among the 13% of institutions reporting "other" transcript practices, most employ standardized transfer notations that exclude GPA calculations. These practices vary in detail level, from simple credit-earned notations to comprehensive course-equivalency documentation. Data indicates that even when using alternative recording methods, institutions generally maintain consistency with their traditional transfer-credit practices.

Identifying HSDE Credit on Incoming Transcripts

The process of identifying HSDE credit on incoming transcripts can present challenges for institutions. How a sending institution transcripts HSDE credit can impact if, and how, a receiving institution recognizes that credit in transfer. Only 5% of institutions record HSDE courses and/or programs differently on a learner's transcript than the equivalent non-HSDE course or program.

Respondents were asked to identify if their incoming transcript-evaluation practices include trying to identify if any credit was earned through an HSDE program. If so, what were the methods used to make that distinction? Below are the key themes identified in the open-ended responses, organized from most to least frequently noted, followed by analysis.

- No Differentiation/Treated Same as Regular Transfer Credit–The majority of institutions report they do not seek to distinguish HSDE courses from other transfer credits; they treat all transfer credit the same, regardless of when or how it was earned.
- High School Graduation Date/Timing–In addition to open ended responses including comments about using the high school graduation date, 39% of institutions identify HSDE courses by comparing when the credit was earned relative to the learner's high-school graduation date. Credits earned before graduation are assumed to be HSDE. This practice may lead to misidentification because high-school learners can also enroll independently in college courses that are not part of HSDE programs or the high-school curriculum.
- Don't Track/Unable to Identify–Several institutions indicate they have no systematic way to identify whether transfer credit originated as HSDE; they do not track this information.
- Rely on Sending Institution's Transcript–Institutions only identify HSDE credit if it is specifically noted on the incoming transcript from the credit-granting institution.

HSDE Enrollment Trends and Credit-Mobility Patterns

The data below examines HSDE from multiple perspectives, including historical growth patterns, proportion of total institutional enrollment and credit-mobility volumes between institutions.

Growth of Course and Program Data

Eighty percent of institutions report that the number of courses and/or programs available through HSDE has increased in the last three academic years. While 17% of respondents report static offerings, 4% reported decreased options and 1% lacked three years of data. These findings align with national data about the expansion of HDSE in nearly every sector of higher education.

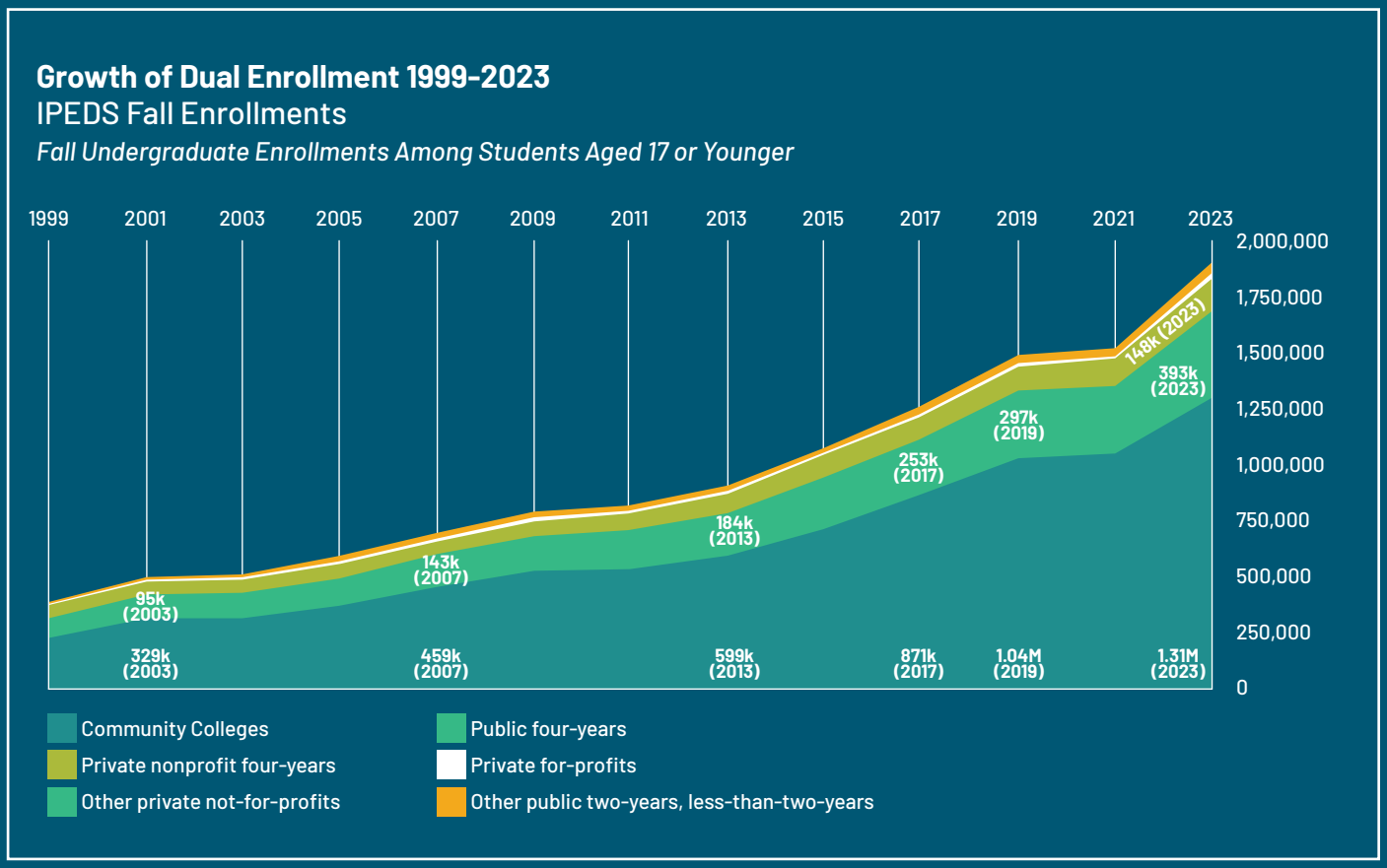
High school dual enrollment has a significant presence in higher education enrollment now constituting an estimated 12% of all undergraduate enrollment in the 2022-23 academic year (NACEP, 2025-a).

The program spans all higher education sectors, with community colleges leading and other institution types engaged to differing degrees across states.

Before the 2022-23 academic year, the first year IPEDS specifically required HSDE enrollment reporting, participation was estimated through the analysis of IPEDS and National Student Clearinghouse enrollment data using age 17 or younger as a proxy (Williams, 2024).

While both datasets show that 2-year/community colleges have experienced much of the overall growth and participation, that growth has not come at the expense of other institution types. Figure 15.

Figure 15: **Undergraduate Enrollment Trends by Sector**



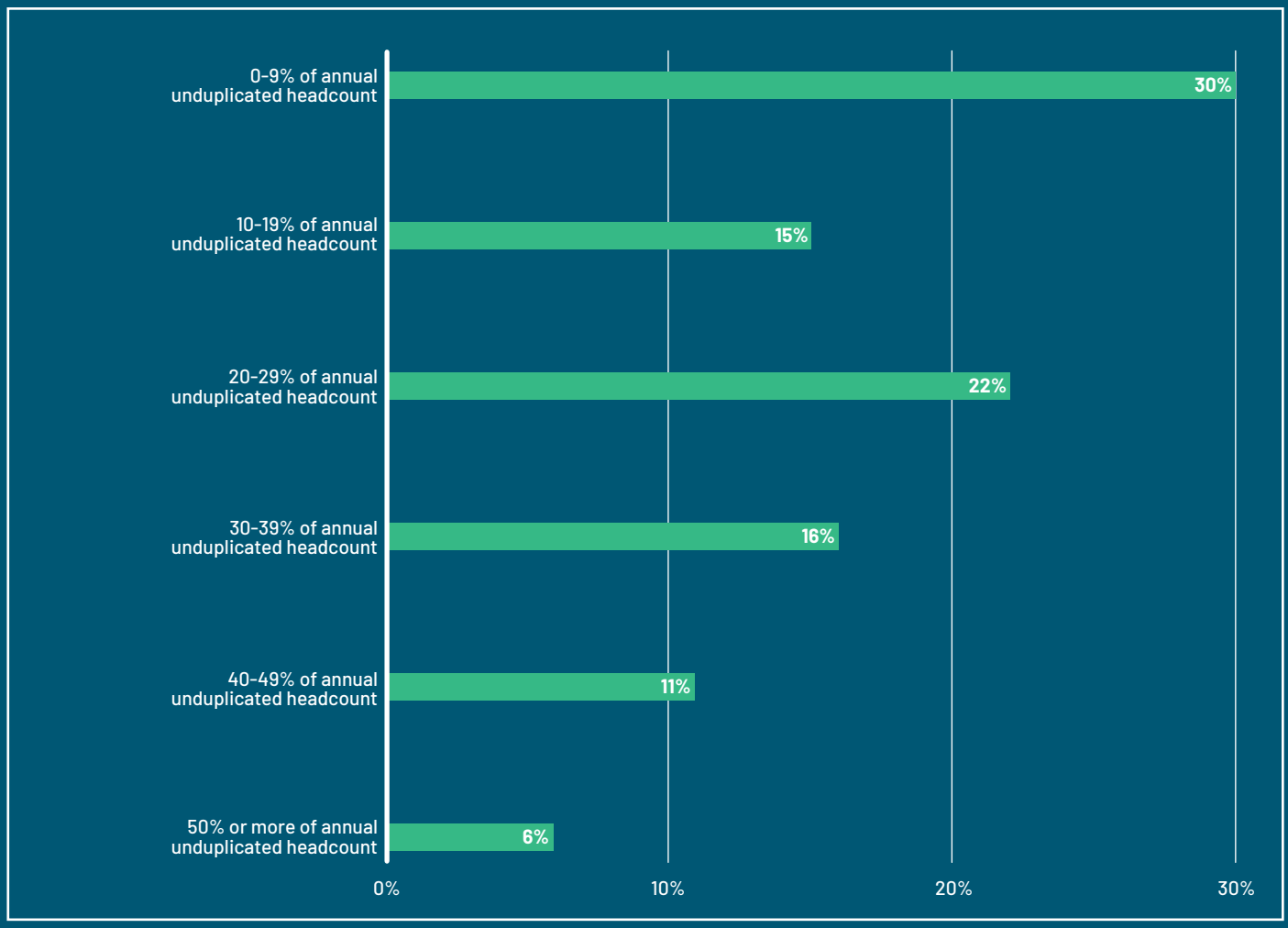
Modified from CCRC analysis of IPEDS fall enrollment using learner age (under 18) as a proxy for HSDE enrollment (Fink, 2025-a)

HSDE Enrollment as a Percentage of Total Enrollment

Survey data indicates that the proportion of overall institutional enrollment from HSDE is highly variable. As with many things in HSDE, institutional decisions often have a strong impact on the program characteristics. For many institutions surveyed, HSDE represents a small percentage of annual enrollment. However, for a minority of respondents, it represents 40% or more of the institution's annual enrollment.

Self-reported data from survey respondents also align with institutional trends identified by NACEP's analysis of the preliminary 2022–23 IPEDS dataset, as presented in *Dual Enrollment by the Numbers: IPEDS Insights Report* (NACEP, 2025-a). The convergence of findings across disparate data sources is tempting for comparison, although beyond the scope of this study.

Figure 16: **Undergraduate Enrollment from HSDE**

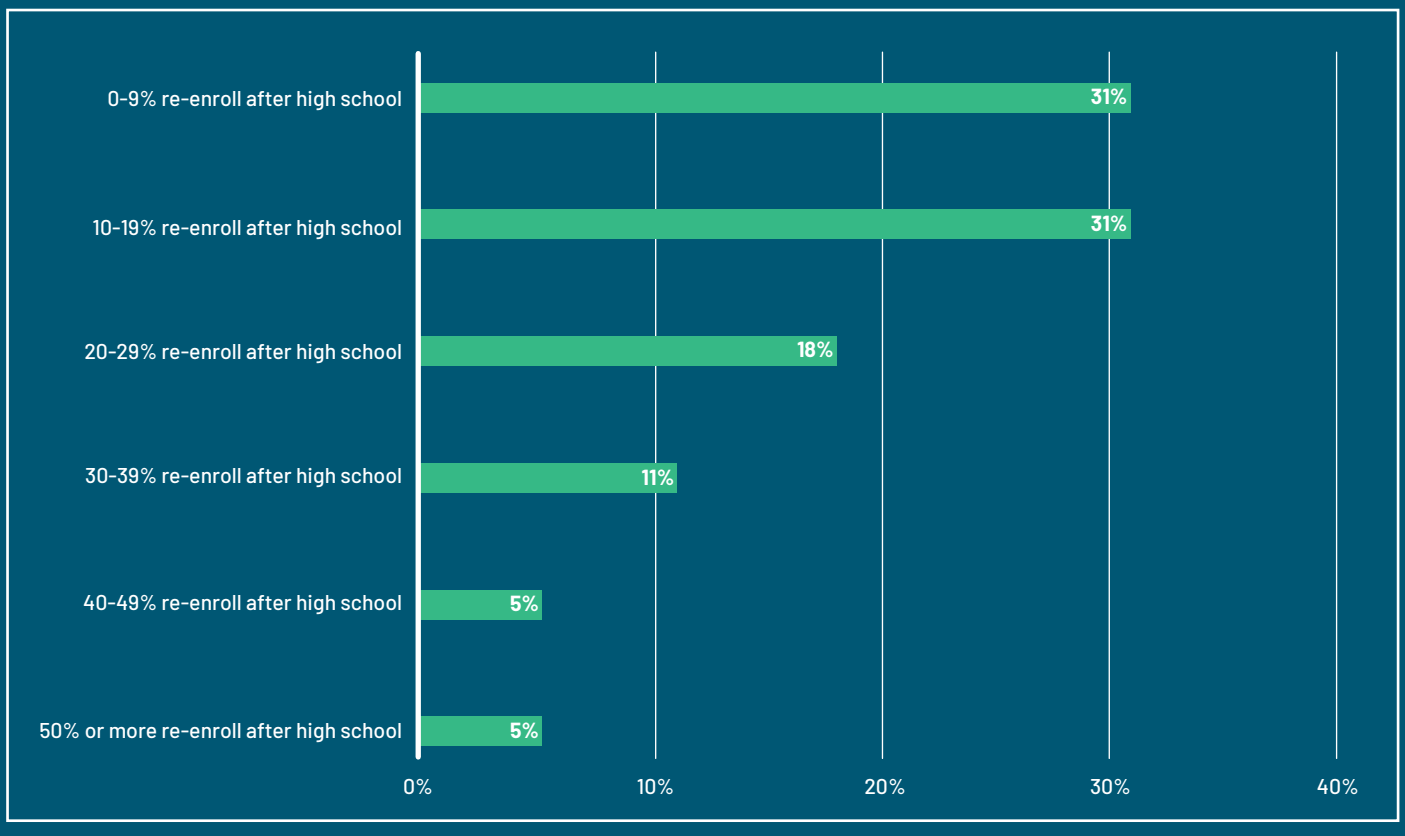


HSDE Participation and Matriculation at the Providing Institution

As HSDE becomes a more persistent and prominent part of the higher education landscape, institutions are increasingly shifting focus from simply providing access to ensuring impact, both for students and the institution.

Respondents were asked to describe quantitatively and qualitatively the relationship between HSDE-learner enrollment and subsequent matriculation at their institution after high-school graduation. Figure 17. Sixty-two percent of institutions indicated rates of re-enrollment below 20%, the remaining 39% of respondents indicated larger percentages of HSDE learners reenrolled with the institution.

Figure 17: **Percentage of HSDE Learners Who Re-enroll After High-School Graduation**



Institutional-level data offers a granular view of former HSDE learner post-high school activities allowing institutions to examine trends in HSDE re-enrollment. While there are not yet national benchmarks for the typical rates of re-enrollment of HSDE learners, it is an area of much interest to institutions and researchers and monitored by both.

Analysis of different national datasets examine re-enrollment through transcript review, offering a look at broad patterns across large student populations (Fink et al., 2017; Pretlow et al., 2021; Velasco, Fink, Bedoya, & Jenkins, 2024; Velasco, Fink, Bedoya-Guevara, Jenkins, & LaViolet, 2024). Reporting from state- and system-level datasets provide more nuanced, context-specific insights into enrollment patterns and learner outcomes (Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 2021; Klopfenstein et al., 2020; State of Georgia, n.d.).

Analysis of open-ended responses provided by respondents to the 2024 AACRAO/NACEP survey reveals several key themes about the role of HSDE in institutional recruitment and enrollment. These include the following.

- Many institutions report higher retention and graduation rates among HSDE learners, compared to the general learner population.
- Several respondents indicate more intentional recruitment strategies could improve matriculation rates citing staffing constraints or lack of coordinated effort between HSDE programs and admissions offices as current limitations.
- Some institutions, particularly community colleges, note that HSDE learners frequently transfer to 4-year universities, rather than enrolling at the HSDE-providing institution. They view this as a successful outcome that aligns with their access-focused mission.
- A few institutions explicitly frame HSDE as a community service, rather than a recruitment tool.
- A few report HSDE has minimal, or no, positive impact on recruitment and enrollment. Some explicitly state it "does us no good at all" or is "not an effective recruitment strategy."

Institutional responses also suggest HSDE participation positively influences college readiness and learner confidence, findings also backed by research (Taylor et al., 2022). Several institutions report reduced anxiety and increased preparedness among HSDE learners who continue to postsecondary education potentially emphasizing the program's role in helping learners develop a college-learner identity (Karp, 2012; Karp, 2015).

Responses also highlight varying institutional approaches to tracking and analyzing HSDE outcomes. Some institutions have robust data on success rates, while others are just beginning to examine these metrics systematically.

HSDE Credit Volume from Other Institutions

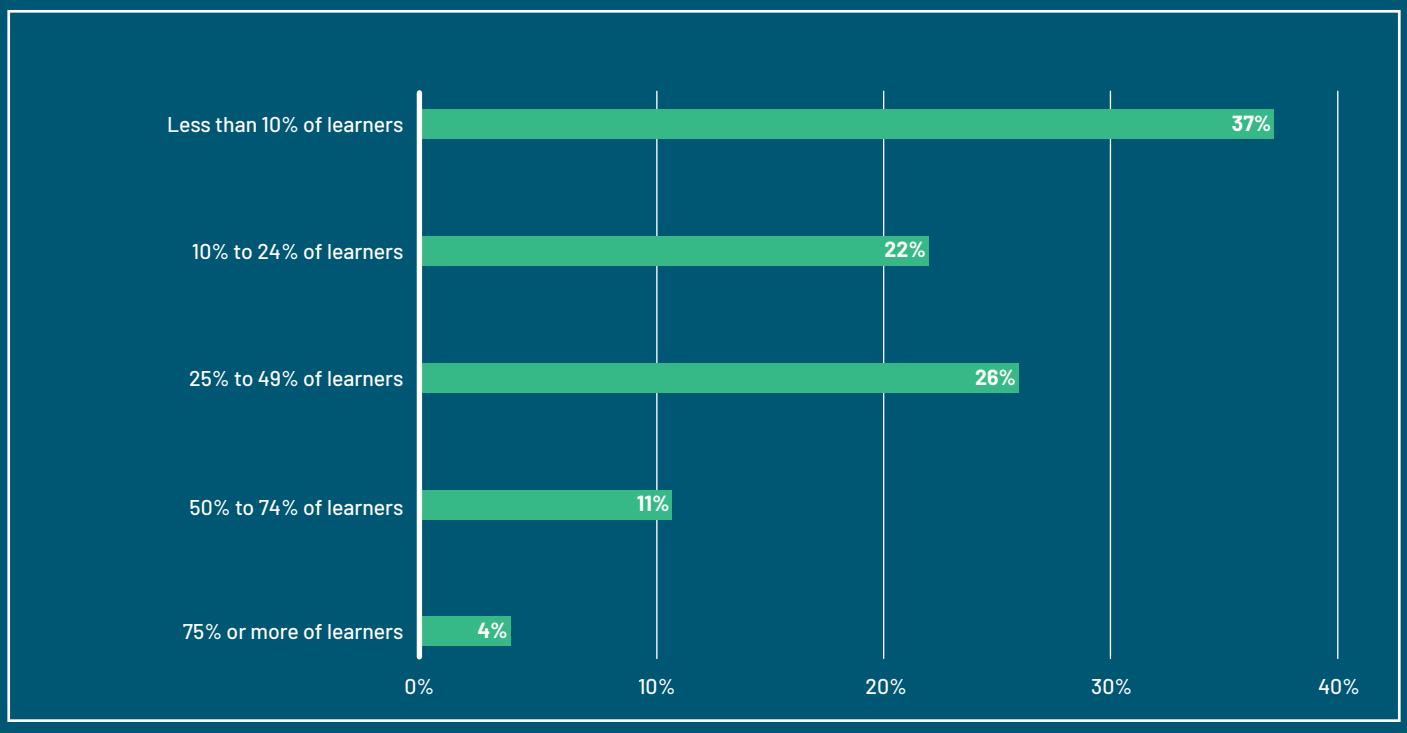
For college-bound learners, the ability to transfer credits successfully is often a key motivation for participating in high school dual enrollment. Credit portability is an important consideration for HSDE learners as many do not initially continue at the institution where they earned their early credits.

As HSDE participation has expanded, states and institutions have also increased their focus on improving credit portability. While these two developments have evolved independently, the combination of broader access to HSDE and greater focus on improving credit transfer has created meaningful benefits for learners.

The findings in this survey indicate most campuses have significant numbers of former HSDE learners within their learner populations. Figure 18.

While 37% of respondents report former HSDE learners make up less than 10% of their learners, nearly 63% report higher percentages. Even institutions that do not offer HSDE programs recognize the importance of understanding this growing population; many former HSDE learners arrive having earned college credits elsewhere.

Figure 18: **Estimated Percentage of Learners with HSDE Credit Earned at Another Institution**

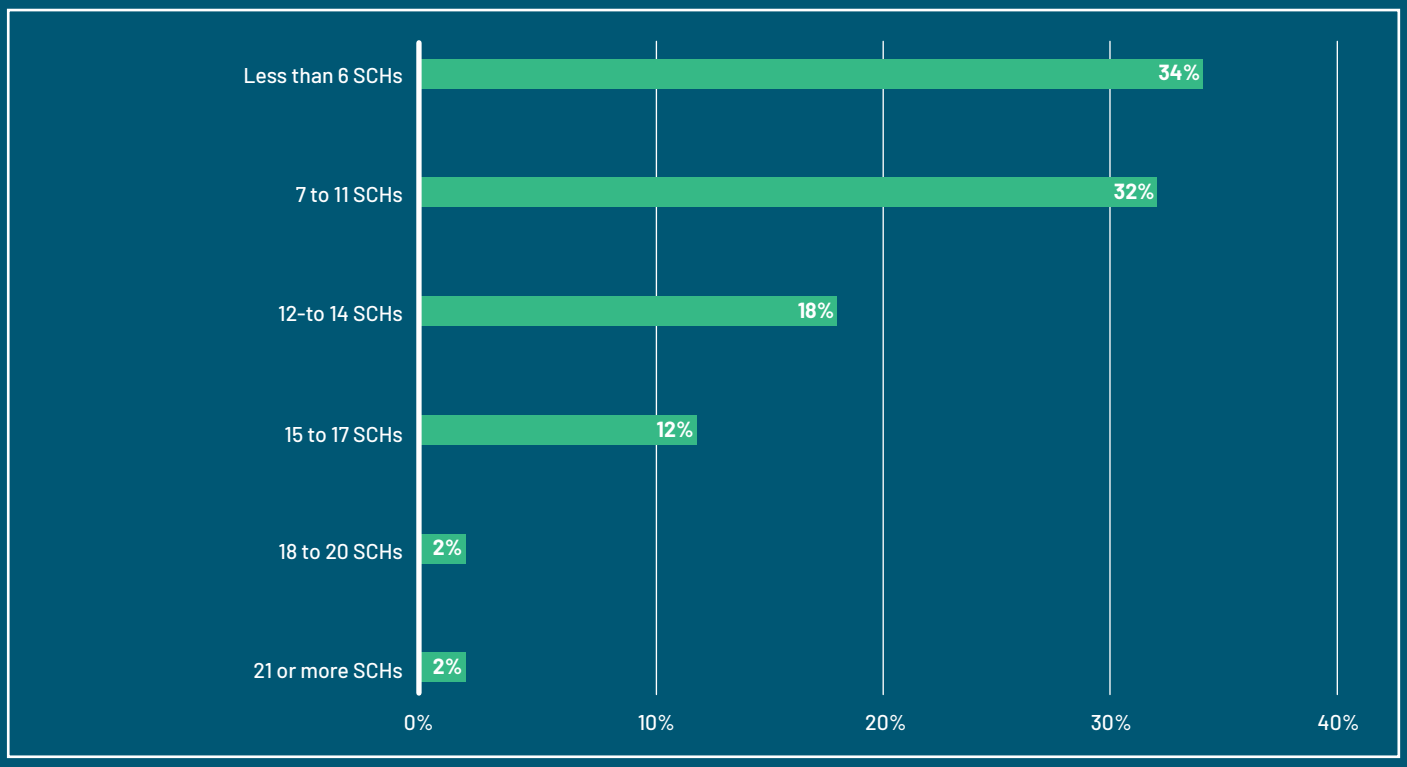


Respondents were asked to estimate the average number of HSDE semester-credit hours recorded on an incoming learner's transcript, regardless of whether the credit was accepted in transfer or applied to a program requirement at the current institution.

The majority of former HSDE learners enter college with less than a semester of credit. According to survey results, 66% had fewer than 12 semester credit hours. Of these learners, 34% brought less than 6 credits and 32% brought in 7 to 11 credits. Figure 19.

The findings from this survey connect to an ongoing discussion in the field around the number of courses or credits that have the greatest impact on learner postsecondary success. Researchers have explored different measures, such as total credits earned or specific course-taking patterns, to find points at which returns may diminish (An & Taylor, 2019). Determining a universal threshold is complex and likely impossible given the various learner use cases for these programs. However, research suggests between 6 and 12 credits are the most impactful for improving postsecondary access and success and taking just one course can significantly increase the likelihood of completing college (An & Taylor, 2019; Mellons et al. 2022).

Figure 19: **Estimated Average Number of HSDE Semester-Credit Hours Earned at Another Institution and Recorded on a Learner's Incoming Transcript**



It is important to note that high school dual enrollment can support many learner objectives. However, true acceleration focuses specifically on helping a learner complete a degree faster, at a lower cost. Achieving this type of acceleration requires a high level of program structure, including intentional course sequencing, clearly defined degree pathways and strong advising.

Survey findings indicate that most HSDE learners enter college with fewer than 12 credits, suggesting that few programs are currently structured for acceleration. This may reflect limited access to highly accelerated models like Early College High Schools, or it may indicate that many programs are designed with different goals in mind, such as promoting early college exposure and readiness. Credit accumulation may also be shaped by state-level funding structures, learner or program cost considerations, or a range of other factors that influence program design and delivery. Subtleties that once again underscore the complexity of the national HSDE landscape.

HSDE is not simply a mechanism for learners to accumulate credits early; it challenges education to rethink the boundaries and transitions learners navigate, as well as how access, readiness, and the boundaries of postsecondary education are defined.

SUMMING IT UP

The 2024 benchmark data reveal HSDE is a well-established, increasingly integrated component of American higher education. Ninety-three percent of institutions offer HSDE programs, and 98% accept HSDE credit in transfer. Most institutions employ multiple delivery methods and offer courses both at high schools and on college campuses. They are also expanding access to online and hybrid formats to increase accessibility.

Research demonstrates widespread institutional confidence in HSDE's academic value and strategic importance. Quality assurance is a clear priority; 96% of institutions have implemented formal measures. Additionally, institutions are moving beyond viewing HSDE as just early college credit. More than 66% map HSDE coursework directly to degree plans, and 59% offer structured credential pathways, ranging from certificates to associate degrees.

HSDE has become a mainstream educational practice; continued attention to accessibility, equity and learner support is crucial for maximizing its potential impact on learner success. Significant opportunities remain for enhancing HSDE programs. While 88% of institutions discount tuition, 51% report fees continue to create barriers for some learners. Less than 50% of institutions analyze HSDE demographics to identify

underrepresented groups. Only 33% have programs specifically designed for underrepresented learners.

The complexity of HSDE implementation, from staffing and quality assurance to technology infrastructure and learner support, indicates successful programs require systematic approaches addressing both institutional capacity and external partnerships. As HSDE continues to expand, institutions will need to balance growth with quality while working to ensure these opportunities are accessible to all learners who could benefit from them.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY DEFINITION FOR HIGH SCHOOL DUAL ENROLLMENT

The survey definition for HSDE encompassed the terms:

- Dual enrollment
- Dual credit
- Concurrent enrollment/ concurrent credit
- Early College
- Early Postsecondary Enrollment Opportunities
- Joint enrollment
- Whole-school models, like ECHS and Middle College High School
- Career-focused models, like P-TECH
- "Fifth-Year Programs" extending high school with college coursework

Programs not included in this benchmark:

- credit by exam models, such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate
- credit-for-prior-learning models
- high-school learners who enroll in postsecondary classes independently of their high-school education, outside their regular high school schedule
- any model that has "unique" transcribing practices, such as credit upon request through local or state-wide articulated credit agreements (a formal agreement between a high school and an IHE that allows high school coursework to be accepted for credit at the college after high-school graduation
- credit only by request only, approaches that retroactively transcribe courses upon request or after paying an additional fee, such as ASU Universal Learner Courses

Key Points

1. Credit Earning–Credit is transcribed by the institution of higher education (IHE):

- high-school learners receive college credit
- learners may also earn high-school credit for the same course

2. Credit Timing–The timing of recording credit to the IHE transcript may occur:

- immediately upon course completion
- after high-school graduation
- after the completion of a series of courses
- after enrollment at the IHE that offered the HSDE course or program

3. Course Locations–HSDE courses may be taught:

- on a college campus
- at a high school
- at another location
- online
- in a hybrid format

APPENDIX B: OTHER TERMS TO DESCRIBE HSDE

- Academic Partnership
- Alpha Program
- College Acceleration Program (CAP)
- College Credit Plus (CCP)
- College in High School
- College Now!
- Collegian
- Collegiate Academy Program
- CTE Dual Credit
- Dual & Concurrent Enrollment
- Dual Credit through Advance College Project
- Dual Credit, Early College High School and Ptech
- Early Enrollment
- Early University Programs
- High School Initiative
- High School Programs
- High School Scholars
- Level Up-Dual Enrollment
- Non-degree high school participant
- Porter Scholars, Early College Credit
- Pre-College
- PSEO - Postsecondary Enrollment Options. This is language coming from our state department of education
- Running Start or College in the High School
- UConn Early College Experience (ECE)

APPENDIX C: QUALITY-ASSURANCE PRACTICES (ALL THAT APPLY)

APPENDIX C: QUALITY-ASSURANCE PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

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