

## MEMO ONE

# Guiding Pathways: Dual Credit Paves the Way

The City of San Antonio has been a regional leader in the on-going support and creation of educational initiatives.<sup>1</sup> While these programs continue to help thousands of young people every year, the San Antonio Metropolitan area still continues to be rated one of the most economically segregated cities in the country and has the largest percentage of people in poverty. UP Partnership (UP), one of San Antonio's largest education nonprofits has bridged city support with education expertise to develop educational networks aimed at closing college achievement gaps for the area's most vulnerable students.

As K12 and Higher Education institutions continue to increase collaboration in order to improve college going and completing rate, the call for more coordination between systems became a glaring need. To respond to this call, UP and the Regional 20 Educational Service Center (Region 20) developed a comprehensive initiative, Guiding Pathways, to address inequities in dual credit participation in six predominantly Latinx school districts across the region.

Guiding Pathways was grounded in two theoretical frameworks, collective impact and Academic Vertical Alignment Training and Renewal (AVATAR).<sup>2</sup> The focus was on addressing two major issues facing students on their postsecondary attainment journeys: accessibility and alignment.

## Background

Once meant for higher-achieving students to access more challenging courses, Dual Credit education has now evolved into a mechanism to increase exposure to higher education courses for all students. In 2011, four out of five high schools offered at least one Dual Credit course.<sup>3</sup> Research shows that Dual Credit courses increase four year graduation rates, percentages of students applying to post-secondary schools, and percentages of students being accepted into post-secondary schools.<sup>4</sup> However, as quantity has increased quality has not always followed suit, as the academic preparation of Dual Credit students in high school declined while their dual credit passage rate increased.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, Dual Credit participation still shows a stark Racial and Ethnic gap with white students participating at nearly double the rate of students of color.<sup>6</sup>

## Policy Review

Several pieces of state legislation have spurred the growth and the expansion of Dual Credit and solidified their importance for students across the state:

- HB 5 (2013): Established comprehensive curriculum and graduation requirements for all students. Required K12 systems, higher education institutions, and workforce leaders to collaborate to establish curricula. Served as a catalyst for vertical alignment across the P-16 pipeline. Students were required to choose their college path via endorsement upon entry into high school.
- HB 505 (2015): Prohibited the state from restricting access to Dual Credit courses to only 11th and 12th grade students as well as the number of Dual-Credit semester credit hours high school students could take. Since HB 505's enactment, over half of institutional partnership have delivered dual credit education to 9th and 10th grade students.
- HB 3 (2019): One of the largest school finance pieces of legislation passed without an impending legal threat from federal courts. Largely focused on increasing financial stability of public schools and providing tax relief for property owners, HB 3 also created the College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) outcomes bonus. This bonus provides funding to incentivize and reward districts who graduate students that reached either a college, career, or military readiness threshold (such as reaching a set Texas Success Initiative score on the SAT, ACT, or TSIA and receiving an industry-based certification).

## Laying the Groundwork

*Accessibility-* In meetings prior to the Guiding Pathways project, Dual Credit enrollment and achievement for students of color continued to be elevated as a concern. Campuses with high numbers of economically disadvantaged students had

numerous Dual Credit challenges:

- Logistical challenges of students attending Dual Credit courses off campus
- Students not understanding course content and obtaining necessary texts
- Understanding how credits may transfer
- Campuses needing continued assistance with communicating the Dual Credit information to students and families.

*Alignment-* Bexar County has a similar higher education attainment rate to the rest of the state. However, when comparing educational attainment by race/ethnicity, Blacks and Hispanics earned a postsecondary degree at nearly half the rate of Whites.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, while high school graduation rates have increased in Bexar County, postsecondary enrollment has decreased. This signaled a need for discussions dedicated to accessibility and alignment. Once educators were able to share professional development space to discuss curricular expectations, assumptions about curricular requirements or grading expectations became immediately apparent. By creating Vertical Alignment Teams (VAT), educators had needed time and space to compare syllabi, course requirements, and evaluation expectations.

## Recommendations

It is vital for educational communities to create strong alliances to ensure the educational success of all students, therefore initial recommendations are listed below:

- 1. Through an Educational Service Center (like Region 20) and/or Backbone non-profit (like UP Partnership), recruit educational**

## **leaders early and often to review and analyze educational data for the region.**

Essential to the creation of robust VAT teams, UP leveraged the relationships of all team members to recruit a group of core, committed team members. Those relationships yielded the strongest levels of commitment and participation – resulting in mutually beneficial learning for secondary and postsecondary partners. The earlier communities can recruit active and engaged leaders, the stronger the project will remain.

Regional support organizations, like UP Partnership and Region 20, were able to provide needed structure to plan, monitor, and adjust all aspects of project implementation to ensure the success of the collective project. The regional support organizations can operate at a high level to guide strategy and vision as well as on-the-ground to facilitate conversations with partners and community. Additionally, regional organizations can start critical conversations between participating practitioners by reviewing applicable datasets to uncover root causes contributing to local challenges like inequity in enrollment or low-percentage of course completion.

## **2. Create space for K12 and Higher Education practitioners to routinely collaborate to unpack assumptions and create shared goals for curricular alignment.**

As educational leaders commit to ongoing support and engagement, policymakers (through state-level appropriations), backbone nonprofits, or education service centers must ensure that K12 and Higher Education institutions have the resources

necessary for practitioners to share space for collaboration. Vital to the success of strengthening the Dual Credit pathway is robust communication between types of institutions.

To ensure this takes place, education institutions should invest early in vertical alignment teams. This can be done through funding substitutes and giving teachers time to collaborate with colleagues, college staff, or business partners. Additionally, education institutions, whether through state-level funding or grants, should dedicate resources to invest early in college readiness resources for high school students, such as mock assessments and family oriented presentations.

## **3. Establish commitment requirements from all participating members of VATs via MOU or interorganizational agreements. All participating organizations must agree to regularly participate in planning, implementation, and evaluation.**

Commitment should come from the organizations leadership and should be regularly evaluated both internally within the organizations and externally to the regional backbone organization.

Policymakers and state-level agencies can play a key role as the catalyst for these ongoing conversations. Policymakers with strong convening power can ask community leaders to participate and engage regularly and actively. State-level agencies have the ability to empower local leaders with necessary data to review and analyze.

## Index

<sup>1</sup> Examples include: San Antonio Education Partnership founded in 1989; Cafe College founded in 2006; Pre-K 4 SA enacted in 2012

<sup>2</sup> Collective Impact to address the barriers faced by students in accessing high-quality dual credit courses and Academic Vertical Alignment Training and Renewal (AVATAR) to establish robust relationships between participation institutions to create strong curricular and operational alignment.

<sup>3</sup> [60x30 Dual Interim Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Villarreal, Policy Brief: The Effects of Dual-Credit on Postsecondary Student Outcomes](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Thomson, Dual Enrollment's Expansion: Cause for Concern](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Miller et al, Dual-Credit Education Programs in Texas](#)

<sup>7</sup> [SA2020, Education Brief](#)