

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Maine Community College System & University of Maine System
Date: February 1, 2023
RE: Resolve, Directing the Public Higher Education Systems Coordinating Committee To Convene a Stakeholder Group To Study Equity in and Access to Early College Programs

Consistent with our commitment to expand postsecondary access and affordability for Maine students and as required by [Resolve Chapter 169](#), in 2022 the Maine Community College System (MCCS) and the University of Maine System (UMS), in consultation with both the Maine Independent Colleges Association (MICA) and the Department of Education (MDOE), convened a series of inclusive gatherings involving stakeholders who represented varied perspectives on early college in Maine. The links to a full list of stakeholder group members and all meeting minutes are imbedded as an appendix to this report.

All stakeholders overwhelmingly support early college opportunities and agree public early college in Maine is a valuable investment that provides critical opportunities for students to explore and adjust to college expectations while receiving support from both secondary and postsecondary institutions. According to UMS data, Maine students who participate in public early college are more likely to graduate from high school, attend and persist in college, have higher grade point averages, and are more likely to earn a degree or credential of value in a timely manner.

Through the series of meetings, the diverse stakeholder group agreed on a set of recommendations pertaining to three different areas: the Maine [Aspirations statute](#) (which is administered by MDOE and governs public early college provided through MCCS and UMS), the rules and reporting of Aspirations-funded activity in Maine, and the participating postsecondary and secondary institutions. A foundation for the group's work was [the Maine Early College Equity Report](#) (Equity Report), published in 2022. As detailed in that report (pg. 1-2. June 2022), MCCS and UMS have already collaborated to promote equitable access to early college opportunities by:

- Eliminating explicit course fees for early college students supported through the Aspirations program and utilizing open access materials when possible;
- Embracing open access placement based on multiple measures of student readiness;

- Funding and designing a shared MCCS/UMS online application system to simplify application and access for Maine students and their families. Maine is the only state in the nation with a universal early college application shared between the public university and community college system. This system also provides insight into course enrollment patterns to facilitate advising.

The stakeholder group acknowledges that the Aspirations program has exceeded available funding for each of the last five years. This is due to a variety of factors. First, demand at secondary schools has increased annually as MCCS and UMS have aligned their programs to ensure equitable access to early college opportunities, particularly for students who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education. Second, secondary schools utilize MCCS and UMS early college courses to provide the following: advanced coursework and curricula that are not otherwise available; college pathways to encourage those students who may not be considering a post-secondary option; and increased professional collaboration between secondary and postsecondary faculty. This budget shortfall, with implications for equitable access, will continue as MCCS and UMS continue to meet the increased needs of Maine’s high school students for the 2023-24 school year and beyond. The stakeholder group encouraged the Legislature to address this funding gap but focused its recommendations for this report on the topics detailed in the Resolve.

The primary recommendations are directly below, with findings and recommendations by resolve topic area to follow:

- Add a statement of intent to the existing statute to make clear a commitment to equity, such as, *“The Aspirations Program ensures that all Maine public school students have opportunities to explore or begin a post-secondary degree or certificate while still in high school. To help more Mainers achieve a credential of value, all stakeholders should work towards the goal that enrollment in these programs mirror student demographics at the state, regional and school-level.”*
- Fund the Aspirations program at a level that aligns with this intent.
- Remove the 10% cap on summer enrollment to ensure students have access to courses when their schedules allow.
- Remove the 6 credit per semester limit while upholding the annual 12 credit limit.
- Move some of the provisions of the statute and other aspects of program administration not currently codified into a more responsive memorandum of understanding between the MDOE and the participating postsecondary institutions (e.g., participation rules, establishing a standing advisory committee for the program, etc.).
- Review the Equity Report for more background, details, and specific recommendations.

1. Establishing a state standard for dual enrollment certification

The group agreed that adding standards and requirements would limit equity and access particularly in rural areas. One stakeholder noted, “If we are supposed to be focused on equity and access, it seems moving to state certification would limit access, not improve it.”

Secondary teacher certification is a separate process from faculty credentialing in higher education. According to the regional accreditor for colleges and universities in New England, each institution of higher education determines the “preparation and qualifications of all faculty and academic staff [as] appropriate to the nature of their assignments.” The accreditor also requires each accredited postsecondary institution to be responsible for the “selection, approval, professional development, and evaluation of faculty” whether on campus, online, or in concurrent enrollment settings. To learn more about this process, visit neche.org/resources/standards-for-accreditation.

Recommendation:

At this time, establishing a state standard for certification might decrease access. As detailed in the Equity Report, participating institutions are encouraged to explore alternative course modality and delivery models to ensure students access to opportunities across the state.

2. Improving access to navigational support for high school students

There were two interpretations of the term “navigational support” by the stakeholder group. One was “navigation” in terms of broader availability and accessibility of options, eligibility, and opportunities (#1) and one was “navigation” in terms of advising (#2).

#1 “Options and Opportunities”

This is one recommendation of the Equity Report (see pg. 15).

MDOE, MCCA and UMS, each have separate websites, but they are not necessarily connected nor consistent. Moving forward, the participating institutions and the MDOE should make sure consistent, understandable information about the program is accessible.

#2 “Advising”

This is also one recommendation of the Equity Report (see pg. 15-16).

Advising can take many forms. MCCA and UMS are both currently working to build and promote more career or exploration pathways through early college so that students, parents and secondary school staff have more information about choosing courses with purpose.

Requiring advising when students accumulate a certain number of credits would further help students make more informed choices, connect more students to tangible college opportunities, and set a common expectation for MCCA and UMS early college advising.

All parties agree that ongoing professional development for school counselors should also be part of this approach.

Recommendation:

Participating institutions should continue to offer educational materials and advising on how courses apply to program and transfer and continue to build and promote early college pathways. All involved parties should ensure all information about these opportunities is accessible and consistent.

3. Increasing how and when public colleges accept credits taken through early college programs

MCCS and UMS accept all early college credits awarded by both systems and there is also a comprehensive general education block transfer agreement between the two systems. Once beyond the public state systems, however, credit transfer and applicability are determined solely by the receiving postsecondary institution. Even within the MCCS and UMS, each academic program is unique and has distinct requirements. It may be that a given early college course does not fit into the program into which a student chooses to matriculate. In that case, the course may not transfer as credit towards an academic program but will instead count towards general education requirements.

The best practice is to advise students and provide them with information to help inform their course selection process. As MCCS and UMS continue to build early college pathways, students and schools will have more available guidance for course selection.

Recommendation:

Participating institutions should continue to offer educational materials to students, parents and school counselors related to how courses may apply to programs and potential transfer and continue developing intentional pathways.

4. How the cap of 10% of the total funding available to the department for postsecondary education that may be used for high school students to take a postsecondary course during the summer term pursuant to Title 20-A, section 4776 limits equitable access for students

For many students, summer may be the only time they can take early college courses due to commitments during the school year including sports and other extracurriculars, work, or assisting their families with childcare. The reason for the current 10% cap in State statute was unclear to participants in the stakeholder group, or MCCS and UMS. Given this, there was widespread agreement among stakeholders that the cap should be removed.

Recommendation:

Remove the 10% credit cap on summer activity to promote equitable access.

5. The eligible student population who may access early college courses and who receives or should receive priority for limited spots

Additional eligibility limits may exacerbate access barriers and conflict with the existing intent of statute and the recommendations of both this stakeholder group and the Equity Report. That said, Aspirations funding shortfalls have impacted the ability of MCCS and UMS to promote early college programming. As the public systems intentionally open access to welcome those historically underserved by higher education, the gap between student demand and available funding will increase.

Recommendation:

Adopt a statement of intent for the Aspirations program and address program funding shortfalls.

6. The cost of textbooks or access codes for online textbooks, licensing fees or other costs for course materials

Secondary schools already provide textbooks for the concurrent enrollment courses which are taught by college-approved high school and CTE teachers. About 60% of early college courses offered through MCCS and UMS are concurrent enrollment courses. Textbooks or required materials are the students' responsibility in most traditional postsecondary on-campus or online courses. Many districts have assumed responsibility for both supporting students who have financial need (through either district or grant funding), and local schools are best able to identify which students have the greatest need. Colleges and universities also work towards having open educational resources, or textless courses, lending libraries and/or additional funding for students who have textbook needs. After learning more about the past and current budget shortfalls for the program, one stakeholder asked, "There is already a gap in funding to meet the demand for the number of credits allotted per students. How would the state provide for textbooks in addition to credits?"

Recommendation:

Maine needs to first address program funding tuition shortfalls before considering an additional fund for textbooks or other funds. MCCS and UMS and their secondary school partners should continue expanding usage of open educational resources.

7. Any recommendations of the State's public higher education and dual enrollment stakeholder group and its report on statewide dual enrollment equity in policy, expected to be published in April of 2022

The stakeholder group gave primacy to a small number of recommendations from the Equity Report. For example, as written, the statute requires postsecondary institutions to bill students for any credits that exceed the 6 credit limit per semester, even if these students still remained within the 12 credit cap for the school year. Students enroll in the fall for yearlong concurrent enrollment courses taken at their high schools or CTEs. In addition, lab science courses are 4 credits each. As such, students commonly enroll in 7 or 8 credits in the fall, and few, if any, in the spring. If students were billed for these excess credits, many would drop their courses.

Recommendations:

1. Remove the 6 credit per semester cap and instead determine annual and/or lifetime credit caps in alignment with intent, access and funding. Because consensus could not be reached on the right number of annual or lifetime credits, MCCS and UMS recommend the current 12 credit annual limit be maintained.
2. Determine the intent for the Aspirations program and then establish goals and expectations for equitable participation.
3. Align data and reporting so that the State and local schools can assess participation, success and progress towards program goals.
4. Encourage college advising and career pathway progression.

8. Any other areas that affect equity in and access to early college programs in the State.

National and regional research outcomes affirm that students who participate in early college courses are more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in college and complete college-level programs. Our State-funded early college opportunities can continue to contribute to Maine's efforts to increase both college matriculation rates and the percentage of Maine residents who hold a credential of value, consistent with Maine's statutory 60% attainment goal, if participation aligns with state and local demographics. Ensuring access to these opportunities, therefore, connects to a number of other state goals.

As detailed on the first page of this report and in the Equity Report (pg. 1-2), MCCS and UMS have already taken many steps together to improve student access. However, secondary schools also have a significant role in equity and access. The Equity Report (pg. 11) encourages districts and schools to review their early college policies to identify barriers and encourage access. Each high school determines their own eligibility policies, as well as how credits and college grades will be applied to a student's transcript. There is wide variation in the state, and some school policies discourage early college participation (for example, if credits or grades are not included on the high school transcript, or if early college courses do not count towards graduation requirements). This creates a disparity in program equity. MDOE, MCCS and UMS agree this an area for further sharing best practices through professional development and outreach opportunities.

Appendix

[Maine Early College Report \(June 2022\)](#)

[Membership of the stakeholder group](#)

[Combined minutes of all LD 1880 meetings](#)

Recommended Statute Revisions

§4771. Eligible institution and, semester and academic year; defined

As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, "eligible institution" means the institutions of the University of Maine System, the Maine Community College System and the Maine Maritime Academy. "Semester" means the fall, spring or summer term of an academic year. The academic year begins with the summer semester and includes summer, fall, and spring semesters.

2007, c. 240, Pt. VVV, §1 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW). 2003, c. 20, §002 (AMD). 2003, c. 20, §004 (AFF). 2007, c. 240, Pt. VVV, §1 (AMD).

§4772. Postsecondary courses; student eligibility

A secondary school student may be eligible to receive state subsidy for postsecondary courses, as specified in section 4775, if the following requirements are satisfied: [1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW).]

1. Availability. The eligible institution has space available for the secondary school student;

[1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW) .]

~~**2. Academic standing.** Unless granted a waiver by the eligible institution, the student is maintaining a minimum secondary school grade point average of at least 3.0 on a scale of 4.0, or the equivalent of a "B" average, as determined by the school unit;~~

[2005, c. 519, Pt. XX, §1 (AMD) .]

2. Course prerequisites. The eligible institution has determined that the student has satisfactorily completed all course prerequisites;

[1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW) .]

3. School approval. The school unit approves;

[2005, c. 519, Pt. XX, §2 (AMD) .]

4. Parental or Guardian approval. The student's parent or guardian approves; and

[2005, c. 519, Pt. XX, §2 (AMD) .]

~~**6. Recommendation.** The student has received a recommendation to take a postsecondary course or courses at an eligible institution from the student's school administration or one of the student's secondary school teachers following an assessment of the student by the school administration.~~

5. Summer semester. Students may enroll in summer classes if they are entering their sophomore, junior, or senior year of high school.

[2005, c. 519, Pt. XX, §3 (NEW) .]
SECTION HISTORY
1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW). 2005, c. 519, §§XX1-3 (AMD).

§4772 A. Student eligibility; exception

~~A secondary school student who does not meet the requirements of section 4772, subsection 2 is eligible under this chapter if that student: [1999, c. 495, §1 (NEW).]~~

~~**1. Enrolled as junior.** Is enrolled in grade 11 or higher in the student's school unit;
[RR 1999, c. 1, §25 (COR) .]~~

~~**2. Recommendation.** Has received a recommendation to take a postsecondary course or courses at an eligible institution from the student's school administration or from a teacher at the student's school following an assessment of the student by the school administration; and
[2005, c. 519, Pt. XX, §4 (AMD) .]~~

~~**3. Approval.** Has been approved for participation in a course or courses by an eligible institution.
[1999, c. 495, §1 (NEW) .]~~

SECTION HISTORY
~~RR 1999, c. 1, §25 (COR). 1999, c. 495, §1 (NEW). 2005, c. 519, §XX4 (AMD).~~

§4772-B. Students receiving homeschool instruction

A student is eligible to receive a state subsidy for postsecondary courses, as specified in section 4775, if the student is receiving home instruction in a program that meets the requirements of section 5001-A, subsection 3, paragraph A, subparagraph (4) and the eligible institution: [2013, c. 400, §1 (NEW) .]

1. Space available. Has space available for the student;
[2013, c. 400, §1 (NEW) .]

2. Course prerequisites. Has determined that the student has satisfactorily completed all course prerequisites; and
[2013, c. 400, §1 (NEW) .]

3. Academic fitness. Reviews all requested evidence of the student's academic fitness and gives its approval for the student to take the requested course or courses.
[2013, c. 400, §1 (NEW) .]

A student who meets the requirements of this section is eligible to participate in postsecondary courses at an eligible institution under this section, subject to the requirements and conditions of sections 4774 to 4776. Notwithstanding section 15672, subsection 32, a student described in this section is considered to be a subsidizable pupil for purposes of receiving the subsidy provided in this chapter. [2013, c. 400, §1 (NEW) .]

SECTION HISTORY

§4773. Dissemination of information

School administrative units shall provide general information concerning postsecondary education options available to parents or guardians, and students. [PL 1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW).]

§4774. Credits

1. High school credit. A school administrative unit shall recognize post-secondary courses by recognizing courses on a high school transcript when possible.

[1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW) .]

2. Postsecondary credit. The eligible institution shall grant full credit to any student who successfully completes a course at the eligible institution under this chapter. The course must apply to graduation requirements at the eligible institution in which it was taken.-or be transferable to another eligible institution.

[1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW) .]

SECTION HISTORY

1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW).

§4775. Payment; appropriations

Until the 2018-2019 school year, the department shall pay 50% of the in-state tuition for the first 6 credit hours taken each semester by a student at an eligible institution and up to 12 credit hours per academic year. The eligible institution may not make any additional tuition charges for the course but may impose fees and charges, other than tuition, that are ordinarily imposed on students not covered by this chapter. Funds appropriated to the department to carry out the purposes of this chapter must be in addition to the customary and ongoing amounts appropriated for general purpose aid for local schools. [PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. C, §8 (AMD).]

Beginning with the 2018-2019 school year, the department shall reimburse each eligible institution the cost of in-state tuition up to the maximum rate, calculated as follows: 50% of the average in-state tuition rate for the highest and lowest in-state tuition rates established by the University of Maine System for eligible institutions within the system for ~~the first 6 credit hours taken each semester by a student at an eligible institution~~ and up to 12 credit hours per academic year. The eligible institution may not make any additional tuition charges for the course but may impose fees and charges, other than tuition, that are ordinarily imposed on students not covered by this chapter. Funds appropriated to the department to carry out the purposes of this chapter must be in addition to the customary and ongoing amounts appropriated for general purpose aid for local schools. [PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. C, §8 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1997, c. 758, §2 (NEW). PL 2013, c. 368, Pt. C, §2 (AMD). PL 2017, c. 284, Pt. C, §8 (AMD).

~~Not more than 10% of the total funding available to the department for postsecondary education, either through a direct appropriation for postsecondary education under this chapter or as part of the ongoing funds included in the appropriation for general purpose aid for local schools, may be used for secondary students to take a postsecondary course during the summer term.~~ [2007, c. 240, Pt. VVV, §2 (NEW).]