

Bill aids access to dual enrollment courses

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A bill advancing in the Legislature aims to improve access to dual enrollment classes for high school students. These courses allow students to earn college credit while still in high school. (Photo courtesy of Phoenix College)

A bill moving through the Legislature looks to improve access to dual enrollment courses for high

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classes but offer credit along with a grade at the end of the course.

In Arizona, community colleges, including Mesa Community College, and state universities like Arizona State University offer dual enrollment courses to high school students. For dual enrollment courses, teachers must be accredited in their class. Many teachers of dual enrollment courses either have a Ph.D. or a master's degree in that subject.

Sen. Steve Kaiser, R-Phoenix, says there are "two barriers" to dual enrollment in the state. He said that there is a shortage of accredited teachers. Kaiser said the second barrier to dual enrollment courses is student fees. Most classes are three credit hours, and fees are charged per credit hour. Kaiser said fees can pile up to hundreds of dollars for just one or two courses.



Sen. Steve Kaiser, R-Phoenix

"That can be limiting for a lot of students," Kaiser said.

Senate Bill 1717, sponsored by Kaiser, would set aside more than \$20 million of the state budget to make changes to the state's dual enrollment programs. That funding would be given to the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) to use for a dual enrollment incentive, development and student programs.

The bill sets aside \$5 million for the dual enrollment incentive program. This program would give a \$300-\$450 bonus to school districts for each passing grade in a dual enrollment course. The \$450 bonus would go to school districts with more than half of their student body on the free or reduced-price lunch program and the \$300 would go to school districts with the opposite student body makeup.

The dual enrollment development program would incentivize teachers themselves. According to the bill, a \$1,000 bonus will be awarded to any teacher who passes a student in their dual enrollment

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“These teachers are going out of their way to get additional training, to be able to teach this and then they’re going to be also teaching this which is additional work, so they should be rewarded and incentivized for that,” Kaiser said.

Marisol Garcia, president of the Arizona Education Association, said that she opposes that part of the bill because she says teaching is a team effort, and no one teacher should be rewarded for a student’s overall success. She said it is a values-based opposition to the proposed incentive program.

“When they put a car together, they don’t give a bonus to the person that puts you know, makes the key fit, right and oh, it turns on, you get a bonus, like everyone played a role in making sure that that car was safe and built,” Garcia said.

She said she would also like to see an investment in programs that educate teachers and allow them to get proper credentials to teach dual enrollment courses.

“Let’s make sure that every educator is aware that there are these programs, and if there are schools and school districts that don’t have these programs, let’s invest in the program,” Garcia said.

The bill also includes the creation of the \$15 million Dual Enrollment Student Fund. That money would allow ADE to reimburse students up to \$50 per credit hour for earning a C or better in a dual enrollment class. A student can receive up to \$300 in reimbursement in grades nine and 10 and can receive up to \$600 in dual enrollment reimbursement in grades 11 and 12. The student also must have a grade-point average of above 2.5 to receive the reimbursement.

A study from the Helios Education Foundation found inequities in dual enrollment access in Arizona. The study also revealed that students who take dual enrollment courses are more likely to graduate college than not. Joseph O’Reilly, project lead of the study and director of the Decision Center for Educational Excellence at Arizona State University, said this effect was more noticeable on students

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than comparable students ... so it had a bigger impact on students who are low income.”

The study said students who took dual enrollment classes were more than two times as likely to go to college, and 1.2 times as likely to persist in college. The study says inequities in the dual enrollment program can be attributed to a lack of a “systemic policy to help students and their families pay for dual enrollment classes,” along with there being no standard for eligibility in the state, with many schools relying on college readiness exams like the SAT or ACT. The study said that is a significant barrier for students who have not taken those exams yet or cannot afford to do so.

However, O’Reilly said those students were less likely to take dual enrollment classes. He also said schools in rural areas were slightly more likely to have low-income students and rural area community colleges have been “stepping up” to offer dual enrollment opportunities to students.

Kaiser said the current “status quo” is students must pay full student fees, and they can be a heavy burden because students pay per credit hour. He said he thinks the scholarship aspect of his bill will help create a more equitable atmosphere.

Garcia said she has seen students use money from outside organizations to pay for the fees, and she said dual enrollment programs are “a great way” to invest in students. She said this is not the first time a bill related to improving dual enrollment access has been introduced, but she said this is the first time people are “actually taking it seriously.”

“I think this bill will really help to ... create more equity, just based on the scholarship aspect of it,” Kaiser said.

SB1717 was heard on the House floor on March 23 after being held on March 14.

Tags: Arizona Department of Education, community colleges, Helios Education Foundation

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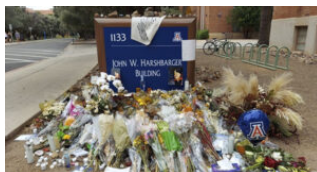


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