

# Running Start Access

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## Background

In 2023, [Substitute House Bill \(SHB\) 1316](#) established, “(1) Every school district must allow eligible students described in subsection (2) of this section to participate in the Running Start program” ([RCW 28A.600.310](#)). Considering the legislature’s investment in increasing the Annual Average FTE (AAFTE) limitation from 1.20 to 1.40 and the directive that OSPI’s rules “shall be written to encourage the maximum use of the program and shall not narrow or limit the enrollment options” ([RCW 28A.600.390](#)), this statement must be taken at face value.

This resource will provide districts with guidance about practices that have been identified as barriers to or discouragement of Running Start participation. While many of these topics are addressed in the [Running Start Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#) document collaboratively developed by OSPI and its higher education partners, recent legislative priorities related to supporting dual credit equity, expansion, and notification necessitates that we ensure understanding about current state laws and rules related to Running Start access.

## Mandated Access to Running Start

Pursuant to [RCW 28A.600.310\(1\)](#), all eligible students must be granted access to take college courses through the Running Start program. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) receiving basic education funding for students in grades 10–12, including choice schools, online academies, state-tribal education compact schools (STECs), and skill centers, are directly responsible for managing and reporting their students’ Running Start enrollment. The increase to a 1.40 AAFTE was intended, in large part, to increase flexibility for students to enroll in both high school and college courses and make high school diploma and college credential or degree completion equally attainable. Therefore, neither a district nor school may refuse to provide access to Running Start in any term (including summer) nor deny eligible students the right to enroll in their college of choice, regardless of the LEA’s size, classification, or unique curriculum. As eligible students may enroll through any participating institution of higher education (IHE) or access online courses, local agreements are not required, and students may not be prevented from enrolling because there is not an agreement in place with a specific college.

## Selective Approval and Denial of Re-enrollment for Struggling Students

Schools may not prevent an eligible student ([RCW 28A.600.310\(2\)](#)) from enrolling in Running Start based upon their high school performance if they have been admitted to the college or prohibit a student from re-enrolling due to poor performance in Running Start. Determinations of college readiness for Running Start purposes are the responsibility of the IHE ([RCW 28A.600.310\(4\)](#)), and multiple reports indicate that over 95% of Running Start students pass their courses (84% with an A or a B in 2023–24). If LEAs have concerns about college admissions



standards or their students' academic performance, they should address communication and student support strategies proactively and constructively with the college's Running Start Coordinator. While it is understandably challenging to see students struggle and re-enroll in Running Start, prohibiting them from retaking classes to improve their college transcript will have a long-lasting adverse impact on their college aspirations and persistence.

## **Courseload or Term Restrictions**

LEAs cannot condition students' participation in Running Start on full- or part-time status nor *require* them to start the program in the fall term. If a student is eligible by grade level, has been accepted by the college, and has available FTE, they must be permitted to participate in the Running Start program in whatever term and for as many credits as is reasonable for them from a workload and scheduling perspective. Students who choose to enroll mid-year should also be granted partial credit for the high school coursework completed to date. To require full-time status or prohibit mid-year enrollment is especially restrictive for students who have academic, family, or personal conflicts or would simply prefer to ease into the program and prove to themselves that they are ready for college-level coursework before committing to more. Such practices disproportionately impact students already underrepresented in dual credit programs, including those experiencing poverty, in foster care, and with 504 plans or an individualized education program (IEP).

## **Running Start Enrollment Verification Form (RSEVF) Deadlines**

As addressed in multiple Running Start FAQ responses, high schools may not prohibit students from enrolling in Running Start by imposing strict deadlines for RSEVF completion or other steps to enrollment. While it is reasonable and understandable to establish "soft" deadlines for enrollment and master schedule planning purposes, eligible students must be permitted to register for Running Start courses in accordance with *college* timelines and procedures. LEAs may strongly encourage RSEVF completion before course registration for the upcoming term, but students' plans and goals change, and school/district deadlines should not supersede those of the college. LEAs should work closely with their partner college(s) to understand their enrollment procedures and deadlines and collaborate with them to establish mutually beneficial and flexible counseling and RSEVF completion timelines at the high school level.

## **High School Honors and Activities**

Regardless of their level of participation in the program, Running Start students should not be restricted from participating in high school activities (especially graduation ceremonies) or unreasonably disadvantaged in consideration for honors or awards. Graduation honors may include clearly communicated and broadly applicable criteria such as school leadership that are understandably more challenging for Running Start students to meet, but they should not be disqualifying factors. Likewise, academic honors should not include criteria that are not relevant to a student's academic performance or accomplishments (e.g. a requirement to take a specific number of courses at the high school). Running Start students are basic education students first

and foremost and should not be penalized for seeking to advance their academic pursuits. Policies that discourage participation or diminish recognition of Running Start students' academic success are inequitable and can negatively impact students' opportunities to obtain scholarships and engage in further education after high school.

## **Grade Weight**

LEAs that have adopted weighted grading scales should not exclude Running Start grades from their locally determined formulas. Running Start is college-level coursework delivered on a college campus by college faculty and should be weighted accordingly. In no district should any other course type (e.g. Advanced Placement or CiHS) be considered more rigorous and valued more highly than a Running Start course. In relation to the previous section, refusal to weight Running Start grades appropriately could impact students' class rankings and eligibility for high school honors. In a highly competitive postsecondary landscape, this can have far-reaching consequences for college admissions, scholarships, and financial aid.

## **Information and Assistance**

For general questions regarding all dual credit programs at the secondary level, please contact Tim McClain, OSPI Dual Credit Program Supervisor, at 201-341-2955 or email [tim.mcclain@k12.wa.us](mailto:tim.mcclain@k12.wa.us).

For fiscal and enrollment reporting questions, contact Becky McLean, OSPI Enrollment Reporting Program Manager, at 360-725-6306 or email [becky.mclean@k12.wa.us](mailto:becky.mclean@k12.wa.us).

For CEDARS questions, contact Student Information using the [AskSI@k12.wa.us](mailto:AskSI@k12.wa.us) email inbox. The OSPI TTY number is 360-664-3631.

To receive email updates on dual credit and related topics, sign up for OSPI's Dual Credit Updates GovDelivery listserv by visiting the [OSPI website](#) and selecting "Dual Credit Updates" under the "General Topics" drop-down menu.