

# Effective Practices in Online Dual Enrollment: Spotlight North Carolina

Dual enrollment is defined as high school students taking college credits that count toward a diploma and degree. Higher education institutions partner with K-12 school districts to offer higher-level course work for dual credit. As a result, it's no surprise that schools typically target high-achieving students for inclusion. After all, the results are easy to see in the form of motivated students accelerating degree completion.

But there's clearly room for expansion. While dual enrollment programs are growing nationally – more than half of all American colleges and universities now enroll high school students for college credit – today's dual enrollment programs are not reaching the greater risk students who are critical to increasing high school and college graduation rates. These students include economically or socially disadvantaged learners; would-be first-generation college students; and academically-advanced students whose needs are not being met by current academic structures.

*The culture of cooperation and adoption of a dual approach – emphasizing both academic achievement and college accessibility – is worthy of replication throughout the country.*

Stephen Goldsmith  
Director of Innovations in American Government Awards, Harvard Kennedy School of Government

North Carolina is one state where effective practices in online dual enrollment are making a real difference. In fact, North Carolina has been identified as one of eight cutting-edge states that are designing and implementing statewide dual enrollment policies. In the process, they are widening the range of high school students attaining college credit from strictly the gifted and talented. This report surveys the online dual enrollment landscape in North Carolina, highlights key factors that fostered North Carolina's success and breaks down critical roles.

## Learn and Earn

North Carolina launched Learn and Earn in 2004 as a collaborative solution spearheaded by Governor Easley, with the support of North Carolina's General Assembly, community college system, State Board of Education and local school districts. The goal of Learn and Earn was to increase the number of high school graduates in North Carolina and better prepare them for the demands of the 21st century global economy. It's based on the idea that students with more advanced levels of education will benefit economically in the future – the more a student learns, the more he or she will earn.

“To compete in the global economy of today, higher education is becoming increasingly necessary,” says Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in American Government Awards at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. “Learn and Earn engages both public and private partners in efforts to ensure educational opportunity for North Carolina students. The culture of cooperation and adoption of a dual approach—emphasizing both academic achievement and college accessibility—is worthy of replication throughout the country.”

“By providing students free college while they are in high school and making a four-year degree more affordable, Learn and Earn gives children the opportunity to reach their full potential and helps North Carolina build the most skilled workforce in the nation,” says former Governor Mike Easley.

## Learn and Earn Online (LEO)

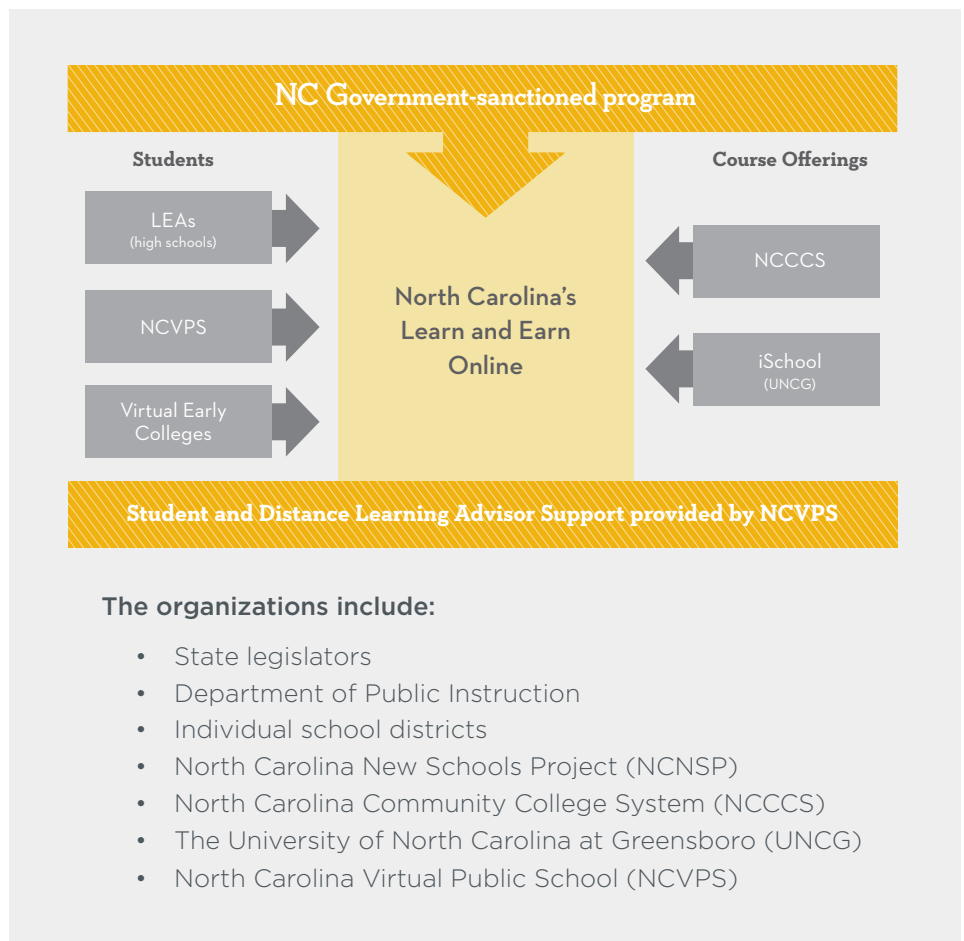
The state also recognized a need to provide rural school districts with dual enrollment opportunities and/or early college high school partnerships. With this in mind, North Carolina started Learn and Earn Online (LEO) in 2008 as part of the broader Learn and Earn initiative. Today, Learn and Earn Online brings dual credit opportunities to students across the state and transcends traditional limitations of geography and demography.

The state-funded LEO program enables public high school students to earn free online college credit and allows qualified non-public high school students to do the same for only the cost of textbooks and supplies. The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), through iSchool, provide the college courses.

Full-time Equivalent (FTE), a measure of student enrollment, and a per student technology fee are used to determine how higher education institutions are paid. High schools continue to receive the same funding they would if a student was not enrolled in LEO. As a result, post-secondary institutions have an incentive for increasing student enrollment, and their secondary counterparts are not penalized.

Textbooks for students taking LEO courses from community colleges are paid for by the Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The LEAs receive a grant that funds the cost of books. Once the grant money is depleted, it is up to the LEAs to pay for the books. Textbooks for students taking LEO courses from UNCG's iSchool are paid for by iSchool.

Though the North Carolina government set the stage for LEO through its legislation, the day-to-day success of the program came from the focus of all those involved and their willingness to partner with each other. A number of organizations actively work together in a coordinated, meaningful way to break down the silos between them and make LEO a success.



## Encouraging Participation: Montgomery County Public Schools

The 115 school districts in the state of North Carolina are the primary feeders to LEO, and Montgomery County, a smaller, rural county, is one example. “LEO levels the playing field for our students,” says Montgomery County’s Superintendent, Dr. Donna Peters. “And we are doing it with tremendous success as demonstrated by our passing rates averaging 93% for the past three semesters and being the number two district for LEO enrollment in the state. Seeing the general student population succeed in rigorous LEO courses demonstrates student potential to the in-classroom teachers as well, and, in many cases, encourages teachers to make their high school courses more rigorous.

“The role of a superintendent today is that of a change agent and a leader,” shares Dr. Donna Peters, superintendent of Montgomery County Schools. “It is my job to prepare our students for the 21st century by encouraging our district to think beyond the traditional approach - and LEO is a big part of this solution.”

## Overcoming Obstacles

The personal commitment and partnership between Montgomery County School District’s Coordinator for Distance Learning Programs and Montgomery Community College’s Vice President of Student Services is vital to the success of LEO in Montgomery County. This partnership enables the district and community college to find solutions to issues such as calendaring and getting textbooks on time. High schools and colleges operate different calendars, which is a challenge to successful dual enrollment partnerships because high schools generally start a couple of weeks later than colleges. To overcome this, Montgomery County Community College delays the start date for dual enrolled students to match the high schools’ while keeping the end date the same as their regular college calendar. The high schools also faced the problem of not getting the LEO course texts on time so they work with the college to ensure that all reading materials for the first few days are online.

## Encouraging Participation

Montgomery County spent a lot of time educating the schools, students, parents and the community on the benefits of LEO. Beth Blake, coordinator for distance learning programs, is focused on increasing the district’s LEO enrollment by ensuring there is a strong distance learning advisor (DLA) at each high school to actively recruit students, get information out to parents and present at community events. “This is a true public relations campaign focused on increasing the community’s understanding of LEO,” observes Blake.



*LEO levels the playing field for our students.*

Dr. Donna Peters  
Superintendent,  
Montgomery County  
Public Schools



## Student Support

Critical to the success of LEO is a liaison among all the entities involved—principals, DLAs, community colleges, the iSchool—to facilitate face-to-face communication on daily operations. “In order to make this work, those involved need to know that someone is ready to help them fix issues and facilitate communication amongst the groups so that they can remain focused on doing their job supporting the students,” says Blake.

Student support for LEO in the Montgomery County high schools is focused on preparing the student for an online college course. This is accomplished by facilitating technological proficiency and equipping students with the study skills, time management tools and subject matter support they need.

## Data Flow and Technological Infrastructure

When the Montgomery County School District decided to invest in LEO, the staff methodically inventoried their existing technology and compared it against published technology requirements for secondary partners. The technology requirements are public, so school districts know what technological infrastructure they need to foster an effective and efficient online dual enrollment student experience. To meet those requirements, Montgomery County School District used budget dollars augmented by a state technology grant to make a significant investment in computer labs, networks and wireless technology.

Getting the equipment and networking ready was only one piece; working with the higher education institutions to give the high school DLAs access to student grades was another. Montgomery County School District solved this problem by giving DLAs the role of “Teacher Assistant” within the course. This allows the DLAs to log into the course at their convenience and review student grades on at least a weekly basis. Furthermore, iSchool employs a standard practice of sending student grades to the DLA every two weeks and e-mails the DLA an immediate notice if any student’s grade falls to a C or below.

## Delivering Virtual Solutions: Course Providers in North Carolina

### North Carolina Community College System

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) is one of two providers of the LEO college courses. 55 of the 58 community colleges participated in LEO between Fall 2005 and Spring 2007 – enrolling a total of 2,200 students in LEO over that period. Student enrollment in LEO is growing. In fact, the program experienced 108% enrollment growth since its inception.

*This is a true public relations campaign focused on increasing the community’s understanding of LEO.*

Beth Blake  
Coordinator for  
Distance Learning  
Programs, Montgomery  
County Public Schools

NCCCS centrally manages all course content through their college course library for each of the community colleges as a means of ensuring consistency in teaching and learning throughout the system. Aside from this course uniformity, the North Carolina community colleges operate mostly independently. They often work individually with local high school DLAs on admissions and student information sharing. NCCCS also relies largely on the high schools to market available LEO courses. Any marketing done at the community college level is done on an individual school basis.

## Encouraging Participation

Each community college involved in LEO collaborates with their local school district to determine the best ways to work together to encourage student participation. This localized outreach ensures that the specific needs of each school district can be closely met. But the spectrum of involvement by each of the 55 community colleges varies. As cited above, one of the top partnerships is between Montgomery County Community College and Montgomery County School District. In that scenario, the community college and school district are active partners, leading to compromises and collaboration that better serve Montgomery County students.

## Student Support

NCCCS schools believe in supporting every student in order to encourage their success. That said, LEO students receive the same level of support as matriculating community college students. “NCCCS treats their high school students as they would any other online college student. No dumbing down, no hand holding, same academic value,” states Antonio Jordan, director of Joint High School Partnership Programs Academic and Student Services at NCCCS. “When students are registering, they are made aware that these are college courses and they are expected to compete just like adult students.”

## Data Flow and Technological Infrastructure

Bill Randall is NCCCS’s associate vice president for learning technology and he recognizes that technological infrastructure is imperative to the success of LEO. Dr. Randall is actively involved in state-initiated commissions such as the eLearning commission ([www.elearningnc.gov](http://www.elearningnc.gov)) that brings together representatives from various segments across the state to identify the resources required to make programs like LEO work. “One of our recommendations is a ubiquitous K-20 network across the state that enables everyone to collaborate across geographic lines and puts everyone on a level playing field,” he says.

“One of our recommendations is a ubiquitous K-20 network across the state that enables everyone to collaborate across geographic lines and puts everyone on a level playing field.”

Dr. Bill Randall  
Associate, Vice President  
for Learning Technology,  
NCCCS

## iSchool at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro

iSchool is the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's (UNCG) virtual solution to bring online college classes to high school juniors and seniors and has approximately 5,800 enrolled high schools students. All iSchool students must take their courses in a lab at their high school with a facilitator present. iSchool measures its success by the number of enrolled students and the percentage of students passing the courses. To this end, iSchool stresses both marketing and student support.

### Encouraging Participation

To ensure the high schools receive the support needed to effectively participate in LEO, iSchool reaches out to all high school DLAs and guidance counselors via phone and mail to review offerings. Twice a year, iSchool also offers free training sessions at six regional locations for any administrator or DLA interested in learning more about the benefits of LEO. This training includes working through the operational pieces of offering and supporting the program.

### Student Support

UNCG believes that all online learners need frequent feedback and that iSchool students need additional system-level support, as opposed to NCCCS' decentralized approach to student assistance. In turn, all UNCG online courses—which are the same for traditional college students and iSchool students—are imbedded with frequent assessments to ensure a variety of data points that provide a picture of student performance. Taking this one step further, iSchool is piloting a mentoring program where each mentor follows the path of 11 or 12 students and communicates with them via IM, phone and other methods to help guide them through successful completion of the course.

### Data Flow and Technological Infrastructure

iSchool coordinates with the school DLA, guidance counselor or school designee to ensure that course progress and grade information is shared every two weeks. This way, the counselor can monitor progress and help ensure student success.

"The results prove our methods are working," shares Dr. Scott Brewster, director of online learning and development at UNCG's iSchool. "In Fall 2009, 94% of iSchool students passed their courses and 86% earned transferrable credit. Furthermore, students in the iSchool program perform favorably as compared to traditional on-campus UNCG students taking the same courses."

“

*In Fall 2009, 94% of iSchool students passed their courses and 86% earned transferrable credit.*

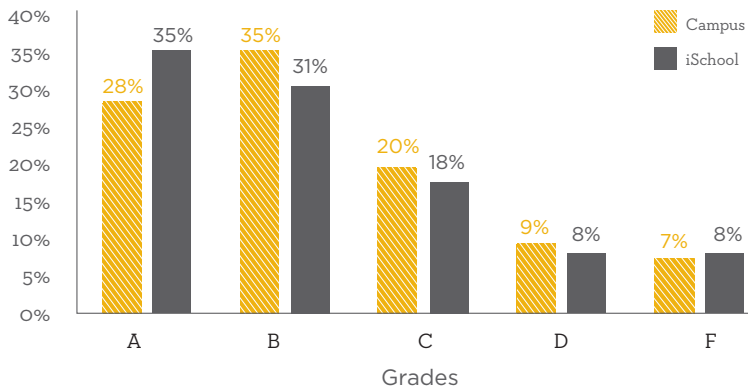
*Dr. Scott Brewster  
Director of Online Learning and Development,  
UNCG iSchool*

”

“98% of NCNSP’s virtual students taking college courses are passing with a C or better, thereby earning them college credit.”

Pauline Younts,  
Program Director,  
NCNSP

**Comparison of 2008-09 UNCG Campus Grades to iSchool Grades**



### Expanding Opportunities State-Wide: North Carolina New Schools Project

The North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) targets first-generation college students and underrepresented student groups. To attract and reach these students, many of whom reside in rural areas of the state, NCNSP created virtual early college high schools to complement its 70 brick-and-mortar early colleges. North Carolina has established the greatest number of early college high schools nationally – and the LEO program makes it possible to extend the initiative even further.

The virtual early college high schools are structured so that a student will graduate with either an associate’s degree or two years of transferrable college credit within four or five years. While one of NCNSP’s virtual early college high schools is fully online; the remaining five are a mix of face-to-face high school classes and virtual courses. Students at the fully virtual early college high school attend a brick-and-mortar institution, but take all of their college courses online.

Most virtual early college high schools employ high school teachers to teach freshmen and sophomore core classes and prepare students for virtual college courses. Students take higher-level elective classes, such as foreign languages, through North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) and college-level courses through LEO. Economies of scale in staffing online electives and college-level courses eliminate the challenges of finding expert faculty in rural parts of the state.

“To achieve NCNSP’s goal of graduating all students so they are ready for college and a career, we had to think outside the box in order to reach students throughout the state,” states Pauline Younts, program director with the North Carolina New Schools Project. “Virtual early colleges are key to achieving this – and it is working. The most recent numbers show that 98% of NCNSP’s virtual students taking college courses are passing with a C or better, thereby earning them college credit.”

## Encouraging Participation

NCNSP focuses on increasing enrollments of first-generation college-goers and minorities by sending early college counselors to middle schools to educate guidance counselors and interview potential students. They also hold events such as open houses and community and parent meetings to make sure the information reaches every family.

## Student Support

One of the most critical support roles at virtual early colleges is the lab facilitator – the person in the computer lab with the students as they work. This facilitator ensures students are on track with their assignments and getting positive results by augmenting the support the students get directly from their teachers. “Many of these students have never taken an online course, so you have to teach them how to be a virtual student as well as how to be a college student,” says Younts.

## Data Flow and Technological Infrastructure

The virtual early colleges use a simple method for monitoring student grades and performance: the lab facilitator asks each student to open their electronic gradebook so the facilitator can see their progress and open a conversation for improvement strategies. In addition, the lab facilitator is in contact with the teacher of the course via e-mail and phone, so the two are united in their support of the student.

## Providing a Robust Support Network: North Carolina Virtual Public School

Two critical components to LEO’s success are professional development in online teaching and world-class student support. As the support arm of LEO, the North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) leads the state in both areas. It’s the entry portal for e-learning students in North Carolina, and NCVPS.org is the hub for North Carolina’s robust network of student and family support. By connecting students to counseling, assistance and teachers in the LEO program, NCVPS forms the bridge between P-12 learning and P-20 online education for North Carolina residents.

*NCVPS forms the bridge between P-12 learning and P-20 online education for North Carolina residents.*

*We embrace the idea that all students can learn online.*

Dr. Bryan Setser  
Executive Director, NCVPS

NCVPS trains 759 DLAs across the state so they have the tools, knowledge and confidence to appropriately support virtual students through Web sites like the Virtual Learning Consultant site at [www.thevlc.org](http://www.thevlc.org). The Virtual Learning Consultant site includes examples of student orientations and handbook information, DLA reference guides, and peer examples. And when necessary, NCVPS representatives travel to schools for face-to-face training, especially when new schools are ramping up. Additionally, NCVPS provides all students helpdesk support and maintains the LEO Web site.

NCVPS also manages the Web sites that facilitate and support LEO. In managing the infrastructure and content on the LEO, GoLive Web and Virtual Learning Consultant sites, NCVPS takes the lead on educating the state on LEO, including how high school educators can most effectively support the program and how students and parents can reap its benefits.

“We need to encourage educators to change by getting early adopters on board and show their peers real success,” says Dr. Bryan Setser, executive director of the North Carolina Virtual Public School and Learn and Earn Online. “We embrace the idea that all students can learn online. Now it’s the issue of the participation gap – getting all school districts to recognize the high student demand for programs like LEO and then getting them to participate. Once the participation is there, we will provide the support to help them be successful.”

## Conclusion

When traditionally separated interest groups come together to benefit the student, a constituency often sidelined in the education debate, there is potential for real education change. Together, we can find ways to make the system more responsive to the student, rather than simply asking the student to be more responsive to the system. Delivering dual enrollment classes online is an under-explored and low-cost way to do just that.

Dual enrollment holds great promise for increasing college access, readiness and completion for all students. Demand for dual enrollment, while minimal today, is widely expected to increase rapidly. There is no doubt that online dual enrollment will be part of this transition and has the potential to quickly surpass existing models as more and more students become eligible to demonstrate mastery of both high school and college work simultaneously. But it’s critical to keep in mind that many dual enrollment programs simply do not reach at-risk students – an issue that must be addressed if we are to improve student progression.

As seen in the case of the state of North Carolina, increasing student participation in an online dual enrollment program is not only required for continued state funding, but a key to any program's overall success. That's why staff are educated and trained on community outreach, school districts encourage student enrollment, and steps are taken to ensure student success. While methods may differ across stakeholders, encouraging participation is a must.

Online dual enrollment students also require strong student support services to help online learners succeed. These include teachers reaching out via phone and virtual office hours; distance learning advisors and guidance counselors monitoring student progress and success; and a help desk for technological issues.

Lastly, as evidenced by North Carolina's success, online dual enrollment students should have the ability to move virtually and seamlessly between a variety of institutions – high schools, LEO programs, and the college(s) providing the courses. While behind-the-scenes data flow amongst groups is challenging, North Carolina's has a long-term plan in the form of one ubiquitous network. But in the short term, schools and institutions can partner together to overcome obstacles and collectively improve student progression.

## About The Blackboard Institute

The Blackboard Institute draws from Blackboard's global community to surface and share actionable, practice-driven guidance on how education institutions are leveraging technology to build better education experiences.

*Increasing student participation in an online dual enrollment program is not only required for continued state funding, but key to any program's overall success.*

---

blackboardinstitute.com • 650 Massachusetts Avenue, NW 6th Floor Washington, DC 20001 • 1.800.424.9299

Copyright © 1997-2011. Blackboard Inc. All rights reserved. Blackboard, the Blackboard logo, Blackboard Connect, Connect-ED, Behind the Blackboard, and Connect-ED are trademarks or registered trademarks of Blackboard Inc. or its subsidiaries in the United States and/or other countries. Blackboard products and services may be covered U.S. Patent 7,816,878.



Blackboard

---