

SECTOR COMMENT

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Public K-12 School Districts – US
Partnerships help schools lower costs, improve academic outcomes

Many K-12 school districts are turning to partnerships as a way to improve student and operational outcomes in the face of growing costs, a shortage of teachers and support staff, and increased competition. Specifically, districts are looking to career and technical education (CTE) centers and community colleges to share services and enhance instructional opportunities. The credit benefits range from reduced costs to increased graduation rates – a primary way [we evaluate education risk for K-12 school districts](#). Partnerships between institutions will likely grow in number and scope due to the benefits that they provide.

Cross-institutional partnerships will continue to reduce costs and improve graduation rates. One such partnership is that between CTE centers and K-12 school districts. While one of the primary purposes of CTE models is to provide technical training to high school (and sometimes postsecondary) students, most also provide shared services for the public K-12 school districts that send their students to them. For example, [New York State's](#) (Aa1 stable) 37 Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) can provide any education service that is needed by two or more school districts. These services include bus maintenance and transportation services, energy cooperatives, labor relations, school lunch coordination and administrative technology solutions and support¹.

[Canastota Central School District, NY](#) (A1) illustrates how CTE provider-led service sharing can benefit school districts. In fiscal 2022, the district saved \$979,000 by joining the Capital Region BOCES Pharmacy Purchasing Coalition, an initiative to reduce the cost of providing pharmaceutical benefits to school district employees. Moreover, in order to incentivize cost-sharing between municipalities, the state provided a full match of the amount that the district ultimately saved. Similar programs that enable cost-sharing for healthcare-related expenses, instructional and support services exist throughout the country, including “Intermediate Units” in [Pennsylvania](#) (Aa3 positive) and “Joint Councils” in [New Jersey](#) (A1 stable). These programs are especially advantageous as their costs rise because of inflation.

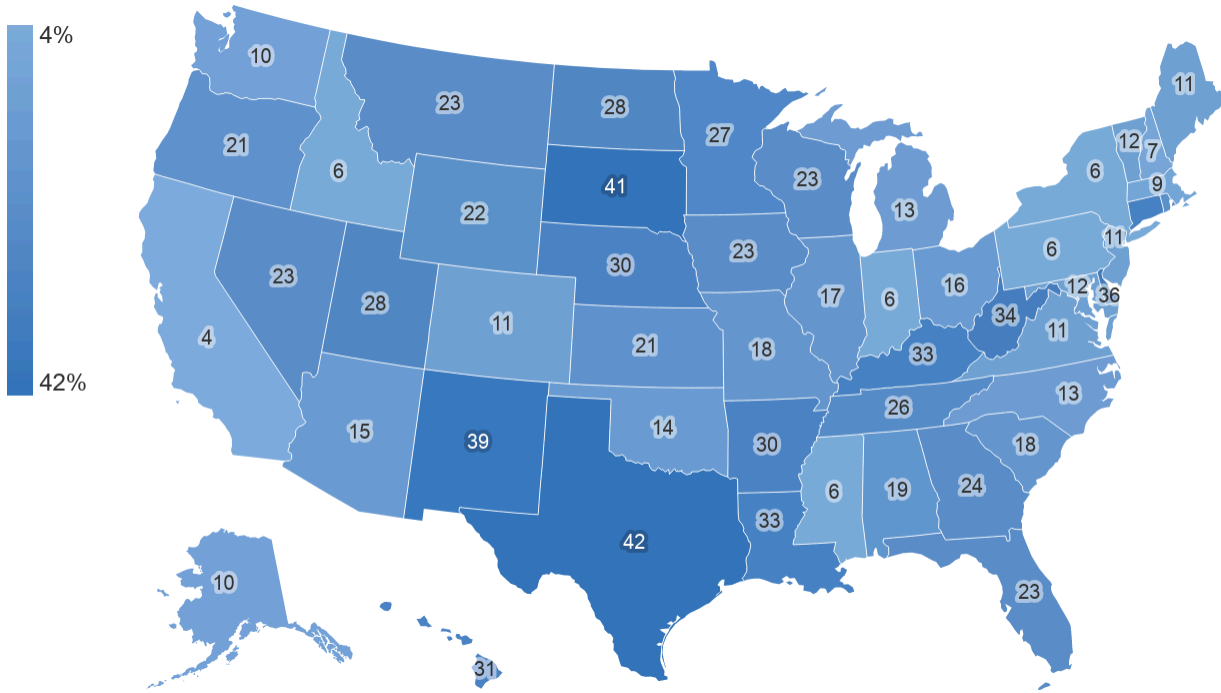
In addition to cost-sharing, collaboration academic has also proven beneficial. High school students that were dual-enrolled in CTE programs earned more college credits in high school, had higher rates of high-school graduation, and had greater levels of college enrollment following graduation than students who were not dual-enrolled, according to Brown University's Annenberg Institute². Specifically, graduation rates were 2% higher for dual-enrolled students.

Schools and students have taken note. From 2020 to 2022, the number of high-school students enrolled in at least one CTE course increased by 9%, compared with 1.2% for total high-school enrollment nationwide. And by 2022, the percentage of high-school students enrolled in programs where they were taking two or more CTE courses ranged from 4% in [California](#) (Aa2 negative) to 42% in [Texas](#) (Aaa stable) (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1

Enrollment in at least two CTE courses ranges from 4% to 42%

Percent of high-school students enrolled in at least two CTE programs by state



Sources: Perkins Collaborate Research Network, National Center for Education Statistics and Moody's Ratings

There is evidence that enrolling more students in CTE programs improves their long-term income trajectory³ and benefits local economies in need of skilled labor apprentices⁴, amplifying the credit benefits of K-12 school districts partnering with institutions that offer CTE programs.

Dual enrollment of high-school students in community colleges is another type of cross-institutional partnership that will likely continue to grow, because of evidence of improved academic performance. One program linking high schools and community colleges is the [New York City](#) (Aa2 stable) Department of Education's Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-Tech). A study by the Institute of Education Services⁵ on the academic performance of students enrolled in a P-Tech school found that 42% of P-Tech students had passed the Regents English language arts exam with a score qualifying them for enrollment in [City University of New York](#) (CUNY, Aa2 stable) courses after two years. That compares with 25% for those enrolled in non-P-Tech high schools.

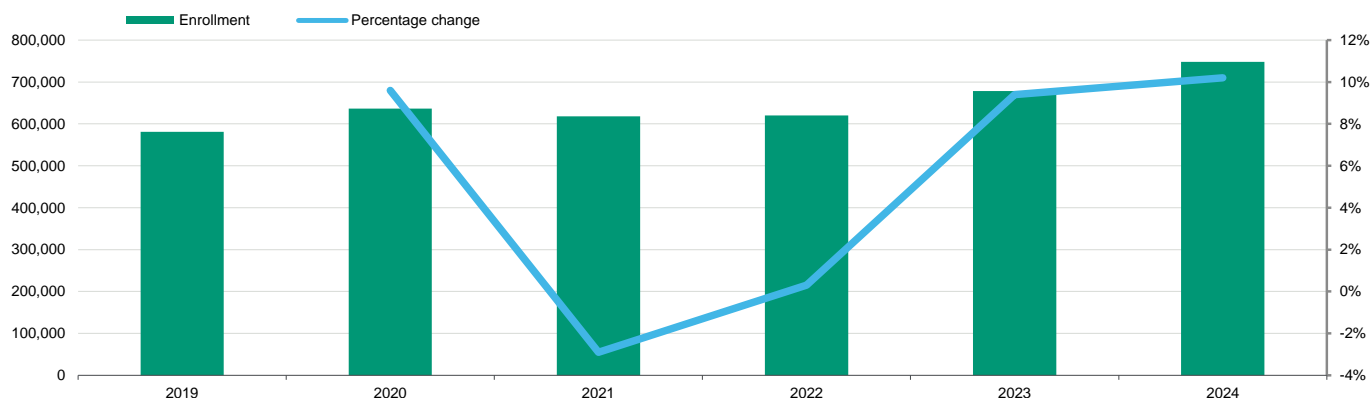
These dual-enrolled students are better equipped to enter the workforce after they graduate high school and are more likely to go on to complete a four year degree, which helps contribute to New York City's comparatively high educational attainment: 41% of city residents have a bachelors degree or higher. The success of programs like P-Tech exemplify why the number of students dual-enrolled in high school and community colleges has grown over the past five years (see Exhibit 2).

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Exhibit 2

Dual enrollment in high school and community colleges has accelerated

Dual enrollment by year and annual percentage change



Sources: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and Moody's Ratings

Other examples of successful K-12 school district-community college partnerships include one between Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) and [Washoe County School District, NV](#) (Aa3 stable). The school district has a high school on TMCC's campus and in 2019, the district reported that students who were dual-enrolled had a 94% graduation rate, compared with 84% for non-dual enrolled students⁶.

Sometimes, partnerships extend to bachelor's degree-granting institutions. For instance, the partnership between [Miami-Dade County School District, FL](#) (Aa3 stable) and Miami Dade College (MDC) offers on-site pre-college advisers to 90% of high-school students across the district's 97 high schools⁷. The service represents a significant savings for the school district since it does not need to cover the cost of pre-college advisers. Moreover, to the benefit of MDC, the program has reportedly led to a 12% increase in the number of students registering for courses.

Some states are recognizing these benefits and providing additional funding to school districts that partner with other institutions. In 2017, Texas implemented legislation⁸ that provides incentives for school districts to partner with various educational institutions, including institutions of higher education. These incentives include an increase in state funding for the partnering district, providing a revenue incentive in addition to the potential academic and cost-saving advantages.

Endnotes

1 [BOCES Services](#)

2 [CTE-Focused Dual Enrollment: Participation and Outcomes](#), Brown University, December 2022

3 [Bridging the Skills Gap: Career and Technical Education in High School](#), US Department of Education, September 2019

4 [Community partnerships essential to help CTE programs benefit local economies](#), K-12 Dive, December 2022

5 [Dual Enrollment Impacts from the Evaluation of New York City's P-TECH 9-14 Schools](#), Institute of Education Services, April 2022

6 [Colleges, school districts collaborate on CTE](#), Community College Daily, March 2019

7 [Miami Dade College Shark Path](#), Level Up Coalition

8 [Texas Partnerships \(SB 1882\)](#), Texas Education Agency

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