

Dual Credit Opportunities in Alberta

Issue

There is a need for the continuance of provincial investment in Dual Credit Opportunities for high school and post-secondary students to assist their transition from secondary to post-secondary education.

Background

The current Provincial Dual Credit Strategy Fund was approved and awarded by the Government of Alberta in 2014 for a three-year pilot project. To date there has been sixty dual credit projects in the province, twenty-four of which were approved within the last round of approvals. This pilot project funding follows a number of similarly funded projects that have been supported by government over a number of years. Dual credit funding also included targeted funding for post-secondary institutions to build capacity, establish partnerships among schools and business, and explore structures for delivery. The University of Lethbridge and the Lethbridge College were each awarded funding for the purpose of creating these educational opportunities for high school students.

In the current round of Dual Credit project funding, the University of Lethbridge utilized the first year to work with a high school in Lethbridge and collaboratively align two first year University level courses with Alberta Education requirements for approval as locally developed courses. Now in its second year, the University of Lethbridge is the first university in the province to offer Liberal Education 1000 (Liberal Education 35 on High School transcript) and Supply Chain Management 1850 (Systems and Supply Chains 35 on high school transcript) to students at the Lethbridge Collegiate Institute. Students earn credits towards completion of their high school diploma and these courses are also credited on the University of Lethbridge transcript as three full post-secondary credits for each course that are eligible for transfer to other Canadian post-secondary institutions as per the Pan Canadian Protocol on University Transfer. Current industry partnerships are firmly established with WestJet providing practical application opportunities for students in Liberal Education, and Haul All providing those opportunities for students in Supply Change Management. Although provided with some funding at a provincial level, Lethbridge Collegiate Institute, Lethbridge School District #51 and the University of Lethbridge have invested significant resources beyond the grant to launch the current program.

Lethbridge College has established educational partnerships with the Lethbridge Public Schools, Holy Spirit School Division, Horizon School Division, Palliser School Division, Westwind School Division and the Kainai High School on the Blood Reserve. In a previous round of dual credit pilot projects, Lethbridge College offered a five-month Health Care Aide Program to assist students in grades 11 and 12 to complete college requirements for the Health Care Aide Diploma. The Health Care Aide Program has a Quality Assurance Team that studies strengths and areas for improvement within the program, and functions as a sounding board for the program. The College also works closely with Kainai High School to provide post-secondary credits applied within the field of Law Enforcement. Within this context, the school districts and the College work collaboratively to place college practicum students in appropriate school settings.

The Provincial Dual Credit Strategy Implementation Evaluation prepared for Alberta Education following the pilot program provided strong indicators for expanding the program to improve student enthusiasm, confidence and excitement about moving on to post-secondary studies:

Table 2-1: Stakeholder Survey – Impact of Dual Credit on Learner Retention and Completion Rates

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Not applicable
To what extent do you agree that the Strategy...						
Increased learner retention and completion rates of high school programs	0%	2%	16%	30%	40%	12%
Thinking about students, to what extent do you agree that the following were benefits of the Strategy...						
Providing students with more knowledge related to their dual credit opportunity topic area	0%	0%	9%	41%	47%	3%
Allowing students to take a greater variety of courses in high school	0%	0%	4%	34%	58%	3%
Keeping students interested in high school	0%	1%	4%	34%	56%	4%

n=93, Stakeholder Survey Questions F1, F8

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There are significant benefits to providing stable and continuous funding through the Dual Credit Strategy Fund.

The province has identified transition of high school students to post-secondary programs a priority and we strongly support government in the belief that we can all work together to provide quality opportunities that prepare students for successful transition. The transition rate in the Lethbridge area is as follows: 35.2 % in the fall of 2013 and 41.2 % within four years of graduation. The Dual Credit Program encourages high school students to extend their education into Alberta universities and colleges with the goal of encouraging growth in transition rates overall. We anticipate that this initiative will have long term positive social and business benefits for the province.

Industry partners are supporting high school students and engaging them to complete post-secondary education that is tailored to their particular industry. Students are exposed to the practical application of post-secondary studies by seeing different employment opportunities associated with the particular program, training or skill. The Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce continues to take an active role in promoting Dual Credit opportunities that link students/adults and post-secondary institutions and local businesses in Southern Alberta.

There is absolutely no competition between universities and colleges as these two post-secondary tracks attract different students. A dual credit structure provides excellent opportunities for colleges and universities to work collaboratively with school divisions to effectively create attractive opportunities to students.

Presently, Alberta Education and Alberta Advanced Education are involved in the funding/approval processes. The Dual Credit Program is an opportunity for these two ministries to work collaboratively to implement a strategic and aligned process that provides increased post-secondary incentives and opportunities to high school students and young adults who wish to extend their qualifications. Truly a cross-ministry initiative, effectiveness can be enhanced with the involvement of the Ministries of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, Human Services, and Innovation.

⁶ Provincial Dual Credit Strategy Implementation Evaluation prepared by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. for Alberta Education. June 2017. <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3693610/pdcs-implementation-evaluation-report.pdf>

The College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) is currently working collaboratively with school divisions and post-secondary institutions to study the advantages, the effectiveness and the possibilities within the Dual Credit program. It will take longer than three years to complete a proper longitudinal study that has the potential to produce data that supports the future of a program with this level of educational and business cooperation and integration.

The feedback regarding the benefits to youth as reported across a number of dual credit pilot projects is consistent and resoundingly positive. There is increased engagement of students in exploring education pathways, students are inspired and motivated to move forward with their education and have been able to experience firsthand both the academic context and real-world application with the business partners.

The Provincial Dual Credit Program is presently providing meaningful dialogue and collaboration between Alberta Education, Alberta Advanced Education, Alberta Labour, Alberta Human Services, CASS, school divisions, post-secondary institutions and Alberta businesses.

The Alberta Chamber of Commerce is strongly supportive of stable, continuous, stand-alone funding for the Provincial Dual Credit Strategy Fund. The province has piloted these experiences for a number of years and given the demonstrated success, it is time to build a framework and provide a seamless structure ensuring the growth and continuance of this program.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends the Government of Alberta:

1. Allocate a long-term funding structure to the Dual Credit Program for students transitioning from high school to post-secondary studies; and
2. Direct the Ministry of Education to explore broadening the post-secondary studies available to high school students under the dual credit program.