***WHITE PAPER***

**Concurrent Enrollment Comprehensive Plan for Program Sustainability and for Instructors Meeting Minimum Faculty Qualifications**

**Executive Summary**

The collaborative partnerships between the colleges and universities of Minnesota State and secondary schools and school districts have doubled concurrent student enrollment over the last decade (from 10,672 in 2005 to 21,260 students in 2014). Because of the opportunities and value that concurrent enrollment provides to students and families in terms of access and pathways to postsecondary education, affordability of postsecondary education, and educational equity for diverse student populations, Minnesota State is committed to supporting high-quality concurrent enrollment opportunities for all Minnesota students.

A Minnesota State systemwide review of concurrent enrollment program costs indicates that most programs are not covering their direct costs, jeopardizing the long-term sustainability of high quality programs. In addition, a systemwide review of concurrent enrollment instructor credentials indicates that 76% of current instructors do not meet the minimum faculty qualifications required by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

Education Minnesota, the Minnesota State College Faculty (MSCF), the Inter-Organization Faculty (IFO), and Minnesota State have joined together to move forward a comprehensive plan to support the vitality of high-quality concurrent enrollment programs and to assist concurrent enrollment instructors in meeting minimum faculty qualification requirements.

***Elements of the Action Plan:***

* Create processes that support concurrent enrollment instructors to meet the credentialing standards by the anticipated HLC extension timeline (by 2022). These include a credentialing review process, professional development plans, and processes for recognizing a master of education degree.
* Create pathways to support concurrent enrollment instructors to meet the minimum faculty requirement standards, including pathways that offer graduate-level, discipline-specific courses; offer graduate-level credit for prior learning opportunities where it is appropriate and possible; and offer master of education degree programs that allow for 18 credits of course options in the discipline.
* Provide opportunities to award graduate-level credit to high school teachers who elect to demonstrate graduate-level learning and experience through a portfolio evaluation process in order to meet some or all of the graduate-level, discipline-specific credentialing requirements in this manner.
* Offer the option for concurrent enrollment instructors and college or university faculty members to team-teach concurrent enrollment courses. The team-teaching approach could be used as a bridge or transition for concurrent enrollment instructors working on meeting credentials or as a viable option that is used in unique circumstances.
* Work collaboratively with other stakeholders and organizations to create processes and approaches to support concurrent enrollment instructors in meeting the minimum faculty qualification on an ongoing and sustainable basis.
* Work with the State of Minnesota to seek options and resources to support the long-term sustainability of concurrent enrollment programs and to support concurrent enrollment instructors in meeting the minimum faculty qualification standards.

This action plan allows for all current and new concurrent enrollment instructors to be included. All concurrent enrollment instructors who are teaching before the anticipated HLC extension implementation timeline of 2022 will have the respective number of years to complete their professional development plan and meet the minimum faculty qualifications.

**Comprehensive Plan**

**Overview**

The colleges and universities of Minnesota State have a long history of offering dual credit opportunities, which includes any situation where a high school student enrolls in college courses and earns both college and high school credit for successfully completing the course. Concurrent enrollment, sometimes referred to as college in the schools, is a pathway that provides opportunities for students to earn dual credit by enrolling in college courses on a high school campus or online. Through a contractual agreement between the postsecondary institution and the school district, these courses are taught by qualified high school teachers who deliver the college curriculum and are mentored by college or university faculty.

In recent years, legislation has increased access to concurrent enrollment programs for high school students. Collaborations between postsecondary and secondary partners has also contributed to the growth of the programs throughout the state. Across Minnesota State, concurrent enrollment has increased by 99 percent since 2005, doubling from 10,672 in 2005 to 21,260 students in 2014. Minnesota State enrolls 84 percent of all concurrent enrollment students across the state and 33 colleges and universities of Minnesota State currently offer concurrent enrollment programs.

Minnesota State values concurrent enrollment as a dual credit option for high school students because it increases access and pathways to postsecondary education, increases affordability of postsecondary education, and enhances equity in education for all. Minnesota State is committed to supporting high-quality concurrent enrollment opportunities for all Minnesota students.

**Background of Program Costs**

A Minnesota State systemwide review of concurrent enrollment program costs found that colleges and universities had varying pricing structures in place, causing confusion with secondary partners and competition between institutions. Additionally, the review indicated that most programs were not covering their direct costs, jeopardizing the long-term sustainability of high quality programs. The review led to recommendations of new pricing structures for the colleges and universities of Minnesota State, requiring a uniform price for courses offered through colleges and a uniform price for courses offered through the universities. The pricing structures would be phased in starting in fiscal year 2018 and would be in place in three years for the universities and in five years for the colleges.

It is important that the costs of concurrent enrollment programs are covered. If program costs are not covered, the following are possible implications for concurrent enrollment programs that lack sustainable resources:

* Maintenance of concurrent enrollment courses subsidized by a college or university general fund, impacting college or university resource allocation in other areas.
* Reduced offerings of concurrent enrollment courses due to lack of resources on campuses to cover program costs.
* Reduced capacity to provide concurrent enrollment programs that have consistent, high quality, NACEP-accredited processes and practices.

**Background of HLC Minimum Faculty Qualifications**

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Criteria for Accreditation and the Assumed Practices define the quality standards that all member postsecondary institutions must satisfy to achieve and maintain HLC accreditation in 19 states, including Minnesota. After a multi-year review process, the HLC approved new Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices in 2013, reinforcing criteria on faculty qualifications — expectations that have been in existence for over a decade. These criteria strengthened the expectation that the institution provides high quality education and clarified that all instructors are appropriately qualified, including those in dual credit, contractual, and consortia programs. In 2012-2013, the HLC also conducted a national study on dual enrollment programs and state policy practices, including a focus specifically on concurrent enrollment[[1]](#footnote-1).

The HLC approved clarifications to Assumed Practices in June 2015 to ensure academic quality by requiring that the qualifications it set for faculty members who deliver college content be met. These qualifications focused on credentials with the requirement that instructors possess an academic degree relevant to what they are teaching and at least one level above the level at which they teach, except in programs for terminal degrees or when equivalent experience is established. For faculty members teaching undergraduate-level courses in general education disciplines, the faculty member must hold a master’s degree or higher in the discipline or subfield in which he or she is teaching. If a faculty member holds a master’s degree or higher in a discipline or subfield other than that in which he or she is teaching, that faculty member should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach. A faculty member teaching courses in career technical education programs should hold a bachelor’s degree in the field and/or a combination of education, training, and tested experience. In addition, the HLC expects that postsecondary institutions assure that “the faculty members teaching dual credit courses hold the same minimal qualifications as the faculty teaching on its own campus”[[2]](#footnote-2).

The HLC had originally set an implementation date of September 1, 2017, in which institutions would be evaluated against the revised Assumed Practices in their reaffirmation reviews. However, the HLC decided to allow institutions with concurrent enrollment programs to apply for an extension that, if approved, could defer the implementation date up to 2022.

A Minnesota State systemwide review in Spring 2016 of concurrent enrollment instructor credentials indicates that of the over 1400 concurrent enrollment instructors, 76% of current instructors do not meet the minimum faculty qualifications required by the HLC and need anywhere between one to 18 graduate-level credits in the discipline in which they teach. As stated in the Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership 2016 report[[3]](#footnote-3), both secondary and postsecondary institutions have identified the following possible implications for concurrent enrollment programs in Minnesota as a result of the recently clarified HLC faculty qualification guidelines:

* Significant challenge to credential concurrent enrollment instructors within the identified timeline without an extension.
* Reduced offerings of concurrent enrollment courses due to a lack of concurrent enrollment instructors meeting the faculty qualifications required.
* Reduced offerings of concurrent enrollment courses due to a lack of incentive and financial resources for concurrent enrollment instructors to attain additional credentials.

**Action Plan for Minnesota State Concurrent Enrollment Programs**

Education Minnesota, MSCF, IFO and Minnesota State have joined together to move forward a comprehensive plan to support the vitality of high-quality concurrent enrollment programs and to assist concurrent enrollment instructors in meeting minimum faculty qualification requirements.

In designing this plan, the following shared goals and principles were identified:

* The concurrent enrollment opportunities for high school students to earn college credit for college-level courses before they graduate is deeply valued because these opportunities maximize individual achievement at the pace that makes sense for the student; increase affordability of postsecondary education; increase pathways to postsecondary; and enhance educational equity.
* The quality of college courses is upheld through the quality of the instructors, the content and outcomes of the courses, and the capabilities of students who complete the courses. This quality is expected regardless of whether the course is offered as concurrent enrollment or provided by a college or university.
* The minimum faculty qualification standards for faculty members teaching college and university courses are the same regardless of whether the course is taught by a high school teacher as concurrent enrollment or taught by a college or university instructor. Concurrent enrollment instructors and college or university faculty members teaching the same course must meet the same HLC minimum faculty qualifications.
* Uniform models in place across Minnesota State colleges and universities on concurrent enrollment faculty qualification standards, pathways to achieving those faculty credentials, and program pricing ensure consistent and high quality programs.
* To provide high-quality concurrent enrollment programs across the state, resources are needed to help concurrent enrollment instructors meet minimum faculty qualifications and to cover concurrent enrollment program costs.

The following is an action plan for addressing concurrent enrollment instructor minimum faculty qualifications and ensuring sustainable, high-quality concurrent enrollment programs.

***Element #1 of the Action Plan***

Because Education Minnesota, MSCF, IFO, and Minnesota State stand by the minimum faculty qualification standards set by the HLC, Minnesota State will create processes that support concurrent enrollment instructors to meet the credentialing standards by the anticipated HLC extension timeline (by 2022). Examples of processes that would be implemented at the colleges and universities of Minnesota State with concurrent enrollment programs:

* Concurrent enrollment instructor qualifications are reviewed by the partnering Minnesota State campus. Based on the results of the review, concurrent enrollment instructors are informed of any additional standards that need to be met and available options to meet the requirements (i.e., degree requirement and/or graduate-level course(s) requirement).
* Concurrent enrollment instructors develop a professional development (PD) plan that outlines the steps and timeline for the instructor to meet minimum faculty qualifications. Similar to expectations for college or university faculty members, concurrent enrollment instructors are expected to make progress throughout the specified timeline, and if the minimum faculty qualifications are met within the allowable timeframe determined by the HLC, the concurrent enrollment instructor may continue to teach the concurrent enrollment course(s).
* The HLC Determining Qualified Faculty March 2016 guideline[[4]](#footnote-4) includes a section that recognizes that dual credit faculty members who have obtained a master of education degree but not a master’s degree in a discipline may have academic preparation to satisfy HLC’s expectations. HLC stated that “the curricula of graduate degrees in the field of Education, when inclusive of graduate-level content in the discipline and methods courses that are specifically for the teaching of that discipline, satisfy HLC’s dual credit faculty expectations.” Concurrent enrollment instructors with a master of education degree with 18 credits in the discipline will have satisfied the minimum faculty qualifications within the specified discipline (a master of education with 18 credits in the discipline is already acceptable under Minnesota State’s college faculty credentialing policy and procedure).

* All current and new concurrent enrollment instructors are included in this action plan. All concurrent enrollment instructors who are teaching before the anticipated HLC extension implementation timeline of 2022 would have the respective number of years to complete their PD plan and meet the minimum faculty qualifications.

***Element #2 of the Action Plan***

Minnesota State will create pathways to support concurrent enrollment instructors to meet the minimum faculty requirement standards. Minnesota State universities have committed to developing graduate level pathways in formats that are compatible with working professionals to support concurrent enrollment instructors to attain the credentials required. Minnesota State will provide support to university faculty and graduate programs to offer these pathways. Examples of pathways that would be implemented by Minnesota State to support concurrent enrollment instructors:

* Minnesota State universities will collaborate to offer graduate-level, discipline-specific courses that are in delivery modes that address the needs of working professionals, such as online courses, cohort programs, summer models, weekend models, compressed schedules, etc.
* Minnesota State universities will collaborate to offer options for credit for prior learning where it is appropriate and possible. Credit for prior learning recognizes learning from non-credit and experiential settings and when documented in meeting competencies of existing courses, graduate-level credit may be awarded.
  + To support Minnesota State universities’ credit for prior learning options, the universities will gather faculty members by discipline (i.e., start with six key disciplines that concurrent enrollment instructors teach in high volume) to create streamlined programming, processes, and expectations across the system.
* Minnesota State universities will collaborate to offer master of education or master of curriculum and instruction programs that allow for the opportunity to earn 18 graduate-level, discipline-specific credits within the master’s degree.

***Element #3 of the Action Plan***

The HLC Determining Qualified Faculty March 2016 guideline[[5]](#footnote-5) includes a section on tested experience, stating: “Tested experience may substitute for an earned credential or portions thereof. Assumed Practice B.2. allows an institution to determine that a faculty member is qualified based on experience that the institution determines is equivalent to the degree it would otherwise require for a faculty position. This experience should be *tested experience* in that it includes a breadth and depth of experience outside of the classroom in real-world situations relevant to the discipline in which the faculty member would be teaching.”

Minnesota State universities will provide opportunities to award graduate-level credit to high school teachers who elect to demonstrate graduate-level learning and experience through a portfolio evaluation process in order to meet some or all of the graduate-level, discipline-specific credentialing requirements in this manner. Tested experience, thus, would be recognized through processes that award graduate-level credit from Minnesota State universities’ graduate programs. This allows concurrent enrollment instructors not only the ability to demonstrate their breadth and depth of experiences and expertise, but also the ability to receive academic credit in recognition of learning from non-credit or experiential settings.

***Element #4 of the Action Plan***

Minnesota State will offer a team-teaching approach as an option for concurrent enrollment instructors to be able to teach concurrent enrollment courses. This option allows for concurrent enrollment instructors who do not meet the credentialing standards due to extenuating reasons (e.g., teaching in multiple fields) to be able to team-teach with college/university faculty members who meet minimum qualifications. In the team-teaching model, the high school teacher would maintain his/her full-time load and the college/university faculty member would be compensated for the proportion of team-teaching. The team-teaching approach could be used as a bridge or transition for concurrent enrollment instructors working on meeting credentials or as a viable option that is used in unique circumstances.

***Element #5 of the Action Plan***

Education Minnesota, MSCF, IFO, and Minnesota State will work collaboratively with other stakeholders and organizations to create processes and approaches to support concurrent enrollment instructors in meeting the minimum faculty qualification on an ongoing and sustainable basis. Examples of processes and approaches that would be supported by collaborative efforts:

* Communicate with undergraduate students pursuing teaching licensure and high school teachers considering the pursuit of graduate education, encouraging them to pursue master’s degrees in their respective discipline as a viable and valuable option, especially if they will teach or teach in high schools that offer concurrent enrollment.
* For local school districts and their faculty unions: build into local contract language that encourages high school teachers pursuing master’s degrees in the discipline as a viable and valuable option, especially if the school district will offer or offers concurrent enrollment programs.
* Advocate to postsecondary and secondary partners PSEO as another option in addition to concurrent enrollment and support state options to finance PSEO differently in the future to make it a more viable option.

***Element #6 of the Action Plan***

Education Minnesota, MSCF, IFO, and Minnesota State will work with the state of Minnesota to seek options and resources to support concurrent enrollment instructors in meeting the minimum faculty qualification standards and to support concurrent enrollment programs. Examples of options and resources that are needed:

* Support for local discussions between school districts and their faculty unions to provide incentives for high school teachers to complete the required graduate degree or courses, enabling them to meet minimum qualifications to teach concurrent enrollment courses. Examples include items such as lifetime payment, step or lane increase, or other types of incentives. There also needs to be different kinds of support or incentives for high school teachers in different circumstances (i.e., those starting to pursue a master’s degree, those with a master’s degree already, or those at the top of the salary scale).
* Support resources to assist concurrent enrollment instructors in obtaining graduate degrees or courses to meet the minimum faculty qualifications. This resource support could include assistance with tuition and fees, stipends, and loan forgiveness.
* Support resources for postsecondary institutions and school districts/high schools to cover direct costs of offering concurrent enrollment courses. Recognizing that Minnesota State needs to move away from the current model where many concurrent enrollment program costs are not being covered, resources should include the costs of covering programs so that programs can be sustained in the future.

**Conclusion**

Education Minnesota, MSCF, IFO and Minnesota State are partnered to move forward this comprehensive plan. Our collaboration illustrates that secondary and postsecondary are both invested in concurrent enrollment and we will continue to work collaboratively to support high-quality, sustainable concurrent enrollment programs across Minnesota.

**This action plan allows for all current and new concurrent enrollment instructors to be included in the HLC timeline.** Given that the current Minnesota secondary teaching licensure requirements do not align with the HLC minimum faculty qualifications standards, allowing for new concurrent enrollment instructors to complete their professional development plan for credentialing while they are teaching concurrent enrollment courses will maintain and protect high-quality concurrent enrollment programs.

This action plan **supports uniform practices and processes** across concurrent enrollment programs at the colleges and universities of Minnesota State. Uniform practices and processes, where appropriate, allow for more consistency, transparency, and accountability across the system and in the partnerships between postsecondary and secondary partners.

This plan also **recognizes that various regions of the state have varying needs**. Minnesota State campuses and school districts in greater Minnesota regions, for example, have shortages in hiring licensed high school teachers, much less high school teachers that meet the minimum faculty qualifications to be able to teach concurrent enrollment courses. This plan supports uniform practices and also allows for addressing unique circumstances.

In addition, this action plan **ensures that high-quality, financially sustainable concurrent enrollment programs will be maintained and supportedfor years to come**. Concurrent enrollment programs that cover their costs will benefit both postsecondary and secondary partners, ensuring that: clear, transparent pricing adds accountability and stability to the Minnesota State concurrent enrollment system; uniform pricing structures among Minnesota State colleges and universities provide consistency and predictability for postsecondary institutions and K12 partners; and pricing structures that cover costs allow for the consistent delivery of high quality programs.

In conclusion, this action plan supports the sustainability of high-quality concurrent enrollment programs across Minnesota and supports concurrent enrollment instructors in meeting the HLC minimum faculty qualifications. This plan ensures that college and university faculty and high school concurrent enrollment instructors meet the same HLC standards for minimum faculty qualifications. The plan also ensures that there is stronger alignment between K-12 and higher education. In addition, with the proper resources, concurrent enrollment instructors will meet minimum faculty qualifications by HLC’s anticipated timeline, and concurrent enrollment programs will have high quality, long-term vitality.

1. Borden, V. M. H., Taylor, J. L., Park, E., and Seiler, D. J. (2013). Dual Credit in U.S. Higher Education: A Study of State Policy and Quality Assurance Practices. Higher Learning Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Higher Learning Commission Guidelines for Institutions and Peer Reviews: Determining Qualified Faculty through HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices. Retrieved from <https://www.hlcommission.org/Document-Library/determining-qualified-faculty.html> (p.4) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 2016 Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership Report to the Legislature. Retrieved from http://www.mnp20.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. HLC Determining Qualified Faculty through HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices Guidelines, March 2016, p.5. Retrieved from: <https://www.hlcommission.org/Document-Library/determining-qualified-faculty.html?highlight=WyJmYWN1bHR5IiwicXVhbGlmaWNhdGlvbnMiLCJmYWN1bHR5IHF1YWxpZmljYXRpb25zIl0>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. HLC Determining Qualified Faculty through HLC’s Criteria for Accreditation and Assumed Practices Guidelines, March 2016, p.6. Retrieved from: <https://www.hlcommission.org/Document-Library/determining-qualified-faculty.html?highlight=WyJmYWN1bHR5IiwicXVhbGlmaWNhdGlvbnMiLCJmYWN1bHR5IHF1YWxpZmljYXRpb25zIl0>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)