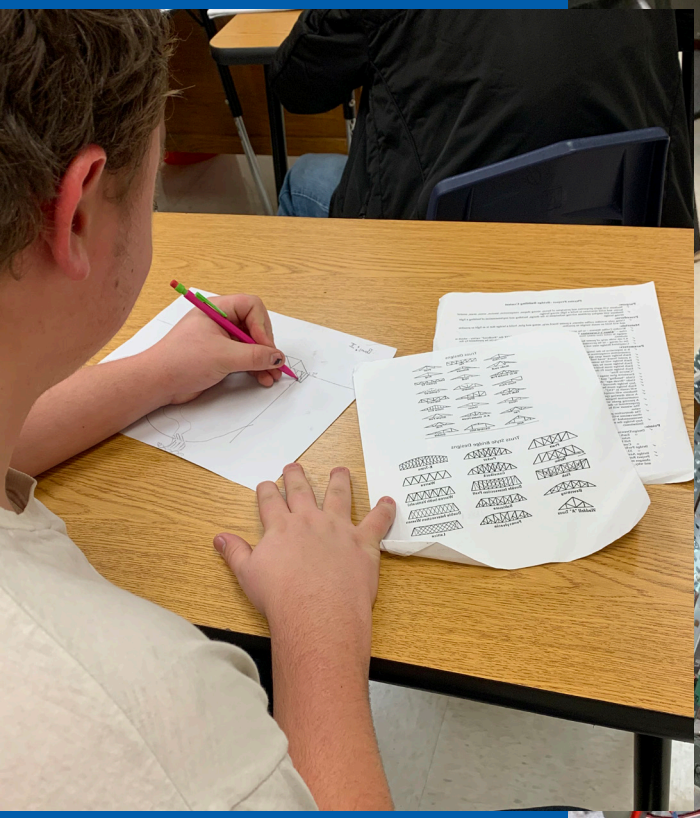


# ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES **PROGRAM EVALUATION** 2020

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
IDAHO POLICY INSTITUTE

# ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM EVALUATION 2020

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the Legislature commissioned an evaluation of the Advanced Opportunities (AO) Program (Idaho Code § 33-4601 – 4602). This evaluation considers the AO Program's use of funds as well as program design and effectiveness. Data for the evaluation came from three primary sources: enrollment and spending data collected by the Idaho State Department of Education, an online survey of 133 AO personnel, and in-depth interviews with eight AO staff across the state. Major findings of this report are summarized below:

Use of Funds

- Idaho spent $19.2 million to fund AO courses in school year (SY) 2018-19, up from $4 million in SY 2015-16.
- 37,268 Idaho students used AO funding in SY 2018-19, up from 15,294 students in SY 2015-16.
- Dual credit courses account for 72 percent of total AO funding.
- Overload courses accounted for 7.4 percent of AO funding, while AP, CTE, CLEP and IB exams made up 8 percent.

Program Design

- Almost all local education agencies (LEAs) across the state offer dual credit courses to their students.
- AP exams are only taken in 34 percent of LEAs across the state and rural areas are much less likely to offer AP exams.
- AO staff report dual credit courses and CTE exams as priorities for the expansion AO offerings in their schools because of their high demand.
- There is significant overlap between the AO Program and College and Career Advising and Mentoring but the extent of overlap varies by LEA.

Program Effectiveness

- The AO Program's financial support provides equitable access to AO courses statewide, increases student confidence and college preparedness and individualizes learning.
- The AO Program struggles with the importance of career preparation and an overemphasis on college attendance.
- The state should continue to streamline enrollment and administrative processes across dual credit institutions and AO programs.

Ongoing evaluation and data collection are essential to better understand how the AO Program affects Idaho students. Participation in advanced coursework has increased significantly across the state, yet the effects of this increase on go-on rates and degree completion are unknown. Future evaluations would benefit from student performance data including final grades and exam scores for AO funded courses as well as post-secondary achievement metrics.

# BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The Advanced Opportunities (AO) program was first implemented in SY 2011-12. The program was expanded further in the 2014, 2015, and 2016 legislative sessions. The final expansion of the program in 2016 fully funded AO programs for students rather than subsidizing the costs. This dramatic change is evident between SY 2015-16 and SY 2016-17 throughout the report. The State now authorizes up to $4,125 for each student in grades 7-12 to pay for dual credit and overload courses as well as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) and Career Technical Education (CTE) exams. The goal is to provide students with the opportunity to begin their college degree or career training in high school at no cost.

*Dual credit courses* allow students to earn college credits that can also be applied to their high school transcripts. These courses are taken in high schools with a traditional class format, online through higher education institutions or on-campus at higher education institutions.

*Overload courses* are high school level courses taken in addition to a student's regular course load. These courses are taken online, in the summer or outside school hours. Students generally take these courses to get ahead in their high school progress and make room for more dual credit courses.

*AP courses* are taken online or at high schools in a traditional class format. At the end of the academic year, students take an exam provided by The College Board. Students must take this exam physically, not online. If students perform well on this exam, colleges and universities award students with college-credit for the course. IB courses are similar to AP courses, however, they are not available to every student throughout the state. Students must be enrolled in a school implementing IB curriculum. The end of year IB exams are provided by the IB program and again, cannot be taken online.

*CLEP exams* are offered by The College Board and designed for students who have the required knowledge to pass the equivalent college course. Generally, these students have acquired this knowledge in non-traditional ways such as personal research or employment experience.

*CTE exams* are based on knowledge students learned from one or more courses relevant to the subject. These exams often provide students with a professional certification (i.e. CNA license).[1] The courses taken to prepare for these exams are offered to students as dual credit or traditional high school courses. Not all CTE courses or exams use AO funding, but a growing number of students use AO funding to pay for dual credit CTE courses or CTE certification exams.[2]

The Idaho Distance Learning Alliance (IDLA) is referenced throughout this report. IDLA is not a type of AO program nor is it a school. Rather, it is a medium for students across the state to access dual credit, AP, and overload courses. These courses are tracked by the school the student is enrolled in, not IDLA (See Appendix A for further descriptions of all types of AO offerings).

# METHODOLOGY

Three methods of data analysis were used in this report: analysis of enrollment and spending data, an online survey of AO staff and in-depth interviews with AO staff.

- A dataset from the State Department of Education provided enrollment and spending data statewide, as well as student enrollment in the AO program at the LEA level. The dataset did not include student performance data or any data regarding courses or exams taken by students in Idaho not paid for with AO funding.
- A survey was created to understand how students are counseled regarding AO, as well as AO staff perceptions on the successes and challenges of the program.[3] The survey was distributed via email to 211 AO staff[4] in high schools across the state. The survey was active for roughly two weeks[5] and 133 responses were collected from respondents representing alternative (11%), charter (9%), magnet (2%), online (4%) and traditional public (74%) schools.
- A set of interview questions was developed to gather more in-depth perceptions of select survey respondents. Requests for in-depth interviews were sent via email to 30 AO staff. Interviews were conducted over the phone with AO staff at eight schools from all six education regions across the state. Two of the interviews were with representatives from charter schools, one virtual and one brick-and-mortar. All other interviews were done with representatives from traditional public schools.

Although the survey and interviews collected data from a wide range of schools, the data is not considered representative. Interview and open-ended survey responses provide insight into program design and effectiveness. Responses were coded independently by two researchers according to common themes across responses, these themes were used to create a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis. A SWOT analysis is a business-oriented research tool that provides a way to prioritize internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) elements that impact the ability of a program to be successful. Weaknesses and threats should be treated as areas needing support rather than programmatic failures.

Measuring the overall success of the AO program is limited due to several constraints in the data available for this study. Dual credit performance is measured by the institutions providing the courses as well as the schools. However, disparities in course identification make it difficult to match course information. Student performance on AP and CLEP exams is reported to the Office of the State Board of Education (OSBE) and the State Department of Education by The College Board. Performance on IB and CTE certification exams is reported to the schools but are not required to be reported at the state level. Once a student graduates, tracking their performance and progress is limited for students who do not attend one of Idaho's public postsecondary institutions and it is challenging to identify the courses on their transcripts paid for with AO funds. Efforts are being made by OSBE to improve data collection, but presently only anecdotal responses from interviews are used to describe student success in the program.

The remainder of this report is divided into three elements of evaluation: use of funds, program design and program effectiveness.

# USE OF FUNDS

This section breaks down how AO funds were used statewide from SY 2015-16 to SY 2018-19. This data from the AO portal was provided by the State Department of Education. AO staff in each LEA submit requests for each course or exam taken and this data reflects all of the requests that were approved by the State. The data only reflects enrollment in courses or exams and does not include completion or passing rates for any type of AO course or exam. The funds for this program are used to enroll students in dual credit and overload courses as well as pay for CLEP, CTE certification, IB and AP exams. These numbers are used to understand the actual funds distributed to eligible students. The subjects of the courses being paid for by the State provides insight into how students are using funds to prepare for post-graduation. Trends are also broken down by region and locale type.

## STATEWIDE AO PARTICIPATION AND SPENDING

The State's increased investment in the AO Program in the 2016 legislative session resulted in a widespread increase in student participation. Statewide participation in AO increased by 144 percent over the last four school years, as shown in Table 1. In the SY 2015-16, 15,294 Idaho students used AO funds, but that number more than doubled last year to 37,268 students. As shown in Table 2, the state spent just over $4 million on AO in SY 2015-16. That number leapt to more than $19.2 million for SY 2018-19. AO participation rates and spending levels saw the largest increases in SY 2016-17 and SY 2017-18, while increases were more modest in SY 2018-19.

### TABLE 1: STATEWIDE PARTICIPATION IN AO PROGRAM

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total AO Participation | 15,294 | 26,734 | 35,766 | 37,268 |
| Dual Credit Courses | 11,640 | 21,221 | 25,574 | 27,832 |
| Overload Courses | 907 | 4,845 | 6,904 | 9,072 |
| Exams (AP/IB/CLEP/CTE) | 3,668 | 5,459 | 11,420 | 10,757 |
| Out-of-District Tuition | 2,011 | 1,898 | 6,541 | 6,524 |
| Early Graduation - District Funding | NA | NA | 210 | 234 |
| Early Graduation - Student Scholarship | NA | NA | 61 | 75 |

Total participation includes each individual student that used AO funds by school year. In subsequent rows, each student is counted for each type of course or exam for which they accessed AO funds.

### TABLE 2: STATEWIDE AO SPENDING

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total AO Spending | $4,055,554 | $11,715,363 | $17,478,021 | $19,277,859 |
| Dual Credit Courses | $3,037,508 | $9,807,017 | $12,226,124 | $13,903,250 |
| Overload Courses | $91,410 | $709,234 | $1,126,124 | $1,425,479 |
| Exams (AP/IB/CLEP/CTE) | $529,036 | $861,812 | $1,912,761 | $1,535,109 |
| Out-of-District Tuition | $397,600 | $337,300 | $1,758,450 | $1,870,350 |
| Early Graduation - District Funding | NA | NA | $350,471 | $414,120 |
| Early Graduation - Student Scholarship | NA | NA | $104,090 | $129,552 |

## DUAL CREDIT PARTICIPATION AND SPENDING

Statewide participation in dual credit courses increased from 11,640 students in SY 2015-16 to 27,832 students in SY 2018-19 (Table 1). Last year, Idaho students took 70,395 dual credit courses (Table 3).

### TABLE 3: STATEWIDE ENROLLMENT IN AO COURSES AND EXAMS

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dual Credit Courses | 16,264 | 50,224 | 60,807 | 70,395 |
| Overload Courses | 1,228 | 7,432 | 10,642 | 13,908 |
| AP Exams | 6,240 | 12,697 | 13,303 | 13,429 |
| IB Exams | 293 | 469 | 582 | 549 |

The average number of dual credit courses taken by each participating student nearly doubled in the last four school years, from an average of 4.25 credits per student in SY 2015-16 to an average of 7.72 credits in SY 2018-19. Dual credit costs account for the largest portion of the AO funding used each year. As shown in Table 2, LEAs spent $13.9 million on dual credit courses, which made up 72 percent of all AO funds spent statewide.

## OVERLOAD COURSE PARTICIPATION AND SPENDING

AO funding gives more Idaho students the ability to get ahead in their education. Between SY 2015-16 and SY 2018-19, the number of students taking overload courses increased from 907 students to 9,072 students (Table 1). As shown in Table 3, 13,908 overload courses were taken. The average number of overload courses taken by participating students was 1.53 courses in SY 2018-19.

Spending on overload courses increased in recent years, but still only accounts for 7.4 percent of AO funds statewide. In SY 2018-19, districts spent just over $1.4 million on overload courses (Table 2).

## EXAM PARTICIPATION AND SPENDING

Students can use AO funds to pay for various types of college level competency exams, including AP, IB, CLEP and CTE exams. The number of these exams taken more than doubled since SY 2015-16. In SY 2018-19, 10,757 Idaho students took exams, up from 3,668 students in SY 2015-16 (Table 1). However, unlike dual credit and overload courses, the

number of students taking exams decreased slightly from SY 2017-18 to SY 2018-19 (Table 1). This may indicate that more students choose to take dual credit courses rather than exams.

As shown in Table 2, spending on exams nearly tripled from just over a half million dollars in SY 2015-16 to over $1.5 million in SY 2018-19. Spending on exams comprises nearly 8 percent of total AO spending.

In SY 2018-19, 13,429 AP exams were paid for using AO funds (Table 3). The number of AP exams is up from 6,240 in SY 2015-16, but down slightly from SY 2017-18. The number of statewide IB exams taken increased from 293 in SY 2015-16 to 549 in SY 2018-19 (Table 3). Only three Idaho schools participate in the IB program. Each are nontraditional schools, including two charters and one magnet school.

## OUT-OF-DISTRICT PARTICIPATION AND SPENDING

Students can use AO funds to cover out-of-district tuition for dual credit courses at Idaho's community colleges. Idaho students who live outside a community college district are required to pay an additional $50 per credit up to $500 (Idaho Code 33-2110B). Community colleges receive funding through property taxes in their counties, including Ada and Canyon Counties (College of Western Idaho), Twin Falls and Jerome Counties (College of Southern Idaho), Kootenai County (North Idaho College) and Bonneville County (College of Eastern Idaho). Students who live outside these counties qualify as out-of-district.

As shown in Table 1, the number of students using AO funds for out-of-district tuition increased from 2,011 in SY 2015-16 to 6,524 in SY 2018-19. In SY 2015-16, the state spent $397,600 on out-of-district tuition and increased to $1,870,350 in SY 2018-19 (Table 2). The increased funding used for out-of-district tuition indicates that many Idaho students in "rural" and "town" districts are taking advantage of increased access to dual credit courses at community colleges.

## EARLY GRADUATION PARTICIPATION AND SPENDING

When students graduate from high school early, AO funds can be distributed to LEAs and students as scholarships. Districts receive AO funds equal to 35 percent of the student's average daily attendance (ADA) funds that would be received if the student were still attending high school. Additionally, the same amount is available as scholarship money to students who graduate early and attend a public college or university in Idaho. Both the LEA and the student must apply to receive this money.

In SY 2018-19, funding for 234 students graduating early was distributed to LEAs and 75 students received early graduation scholarships (Table 1). LEA funding for students graduating early totaled $414,120 and funds for early graduation scholarships totaled $129,552 in SY 2018-19 (Table 2). The use of AO funds for early graduation provides continued support for LEAs whose students graduate early, as well as eases the financial burden for early graduating students attending public post secondary institutions in Idaho.

## STATEWIDE AO PARTICIPATION BY GRADE

The proportion of students enrolling in AO courses in each grade increased due to the State's increased investment in the AO Program. The most notable increase in participation is among 10th grade students. In SY 2015-16, less than one percent of 10th grade students used AO funds, but that number jumped to 36.7 percent last year (Table 4). Ninth grade students saw major increases as well, from below one percent enrolled in SY 2015-16 to nearly 16 percent in SY 2018-19

**TABLE 4: STATEWIDE AO STUDENT PARTICIPATION BY GRADE**

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7th Grade | 190(0.8%) | 288(1.2%) | 330(1.4%) | 282(1.2%) |
| 8th Grade | 283(1.3%) | 667(2.9%) | 785(3.3%) | 803(3.3%) |
| 9th Grade | 184(0.8%) | 1,738(7.5%) | 3,049(12.9%) | 3,845(15.9%) |
| 10th Grade | 176(0.8%) | 5,227(22.9%) | 8,258(35.8%) | 8,646(36.7%) |
| 11th Grade | 7,215(33.8%) | 9,442(43.2%) | 13,891(62.2%) | 12,572(55.6%) |
| 12th Grade | 7,298(36.1%) | 9,751(46.3%) | 13,717(63.7%) | 12,554(57.5%) |

Student participation in grades 11 and 12 increased proportionately from about one third of students participating in SY 2015-16 to more than half of students participating in SY 2018-19 (Table 4). SY 2017-18 saw the highest enrollment rates among grades 11 and 12, with both classes at over 60 percent enrollment. However, both grades saw a dip in enrollment in SY 2018-19. The reason for the lower enrollment for 11th and 12th graders is unknown, but is potentially due to other external factors or differences in class cohorts. One possibility is that the availability of AO funding in earlier grades results in students taking AO courses earlier in their academic career. These students then might decide to wait on higher education credits or decide not to attend college.

## AO COURSES BY SUBJECT

There is a wide range of AO courses taken by Idaho students, as illustrated in Table 5. English was the most common subject, making up 11.7 percent of courses taken. Math courses were the second most frequent (10.9%) followed closely by science courses (10.6%). The results of the survey and interviews indicate that some districts encourage both general education and elective courses, while others promote general education courses over electives. Determining whether a specific course counts as a general education course is difficult because the data provided from the AO portal does not include information regarding general education versus elective courses.

## TABLE 5: AO COURSE ENROLLMENT BY SUBJECT

| | Courses Taken (FY 2016-2019) | % of Total |
|---|---|---|
| Arts | 928 | 4.9% |
| Basic Computer Skills | 274 | 1.4% |
| Business | 414 | 2.2% |
| Communication | 737 | 3.9% |
| Computer Science | 1,311 | 6.9% |
| Criminal Justice | 178 | 0.9% |
| CTE | 288 | 1.5% |
| Engineering | 169 | 0.9% |
| English | 2,220 | 11.7% |
| Health Science | 1,164 | 6.1% |
| History | 1,712 | 9.0% |
| Humanities | 655 | 3.5% |
| Language | 1,185 | 6.2% |
| Math | 2,076 | 10.9% |
| Pathways to Success | 313 | 1.6% |
| Physical Education | 703 | 3.7% |
| Science | 2,021 | 10.6% |
| Social Science | 997 | 5.3% |
| Other | 1,633 | 8.6% |
| Total Courses Taken | 18,978 | 100% |

Course subject percentages are estimates. AO courses are self-reported to the AO portal by AO staff in LEAs. Therefore, the consistency of reporting course numbers and titles is unknown. The State is developing changes to the AO portal to correct for possible inconsistency of reporting.

## REGIONAL AO PARTICIPATION

AO enrollment increased in all Idaho education regions, as well as virtual LEAs which serve students in multiple regions. Table 6 shows the number of dual credit courses in each region over the last four years. Region 3 had the largest increase in enrollment, with five times more dual credit courses offered in SY 2018-19 compared to SY 2015-16. Region 1 saw the number of dual credit courses increase more than four times over the last four years. Dual credit enrollment in Regions 4, 5 and 6, as well as virtual schools, more than tripled since SY 2015-16. Region 2 saw the least amount of growth with just under three times the number of dual credits courses in SY 2018-19 than in SY 2015-16.

## TABLE 6: DUAL CREDIT COURSES TAKEN BY EDUCATION REGION

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Region 1 | 1,902 | 4,711 | 7,009 | 8,483 |
| Region 2 | 1,082 | 2,387 | 2,576 | 2,928 |
| Region 3 | 6,922 | 26,327 | 30,884 | 35,441 |
| Region 4 | 2,185 | 5,390 | 6,827 | 8,016 |
| Region 5 | 1,653 | 4,450 | 5,097 | 6,040 |
| Region 6 | 2,242 | 6,345 | 7,510 | 8,490 |
| Virtual LEAs | 278 | 614 | 904 | 997 |

Table 7 shows regional trends in overload course enrollment. Enrollment in overload courses increased the most in Region 3, with 325 courses taken in SY 2015-16 compared to 7,295 taken in SY 2018-19. Region 4 also experienced a large increase in overload courses with more than 13 times more courses in SY 2018-19 than in SY 2015-16. The number of overload courses in Regions 5 and 6 increased more than eightfold between SY 2015-16 and SY 2018-19. Regions 1 and 2, as well as virtual schools, had the lowest rates of growth of overload courses, but nonetheless experienced large increases in overload course enrollment. These trends show that the AO program has a large impact on students' ability to enroll in overload courses across the state.

### TABLE 7: OVERLOAD COURSES TAKEN BY EDUCATION REGION

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Region 1 | 290 | 1,077 | 1,084 | 1,002 |
| Region 2 | 60 | 277 | 340 | 289 |
| Region 3 | 325 | 2,896 | 5,131 | 7,295 |
| Region 4 | 137 | 1,010 | 1,468 | 1,841 |
| Region 5 | 89 | 300 | 378 | 773 |
| Region 6 | 251 | 1,735 | 1,992 | 2,440 |
| Virtual LEAs | 76 | 137 | 249 | 268 |

Table 8 shows the regional trends in AP exams taken from SY 2015-16 and SY 2018-19. The growth of the AP program was more modest than dual credit or overload course enrollment. Region 2 had the most growth in AP exams taken, with an increase of nearly 300 percent from SY 2015-16 to SY 2018-19. The number of AP exams taken in Regions 4 and 5 nearly tripled. In Regions 1 and 3, the number of AP exams doubled. Region 6 and virtual schools had the least growth in AP exams with 44 percent and 13 percent growth respectively from SY 2015-16 to SY 2018-19.

### TABLE 8: AP EXAMS TAKEN BY EDUCATION REGION

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Region 1 | 485 | 1,216 | 1,177 | 968 |
| Region 2 | 122 | 419 | 454 | 480 |
| Region 3 | 4,101 | 8,103 | 8,636 | 8,829 |
| Region 4 | 385 | 788 | 985 | 1,058 |
| Region 5 | 296 | 698 | 740 | 872 |
| Region 6 | 843 | 1,461 | 1,301 | 1,213 |
| Virtual LEAs | 8 | 12 | 10 | 9 |

Although it is difficult to know exactly why rates of AP exams did not increase as much as dual credit or overload courses, students may be opting for dual credit courses over AP exams. It could also be an issue of access in rural areas.

## AO PARTICIPATION BY LOCALE TYPE

The report uses four locale categories created by NCES: city, suburban, town and rural. Virtual LEAs are considered a unique category since these LEAs serve students in various locales. Table 9 illustrates the trends in dual credit courses taken in different types of LEAs. Suburban LEAs exhibited the most growth in dual credit courses, seeing an increase from 4,302 in SY 2015-16 to 26,031 in SY 2018-19. The number of dual credit courses taken in city districts was more than four times higher in SY 2018-19 than in SY 2015-16. Town and rural districts also had growth in dual credit enrollment, with rates of dual credit courses increasing by 3.5 times over the last four school years.

### TABLE 9: DUAL CREDIT COURSES TAKEN BY LOCALE TYPE

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| City | 2,421 | 7,693 | 8,888 | 10,670 |
| Suburb | 4,302 | 18,360 | 22,179 | 26,031 |
| Town | 4,529 | 11,150 | 13,512 | 15,842 |
| Rural | 4,734 | 12,407 | 15,324 | 16,855 |
| Virtual | 278 | 614 | 904 | 997 |

Table 10 demonstrates the trends in overload courses taken in different types of LEAs. Each category of LEA saw growth in overload course enrollment from SY 2015-16 to SY 2018-19. Suburban districts had the most growth, increasing from only 166 overload courses in SY 2015-16 to 3,922 in SY 2018-19. City and town districts increased their overload courses by 14 and 10 times over the same period. Rural and virtual LEAs had the slowest growth, with overload course enrollment increasing approximately seven-fold and four-fold, respectively.

### TABLE 10: OVERLOAD COURSES TAKEN BY LOCALE TYPE

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| City | 234 | 1,738 | 2,836 | 3,343 |
| Suburb | 166 | 1,830 | 2,401 | 3,922 |
| Town | 360 | 2,009 | 2,742 | 3,450 |
| Rural | 392 | 1,718 | 2,414 | 2,925 |
| Virtual | 76 | 137 | 249 | 268 |

Table 11 shows the trends in AP exams taken in different types of LEAs. The AP program has not grown as much as other programs across types of LEAs. Town LEAs had the largest increase in AP exams taken from SY 2015-16 to SY 2018-19. The number of AP exams taken in suburban and rural districts grew slightly faster than AP exams in city LEAs. Virtual LEAs had the least amount of growth with only a 13 percent increase in AP exams from SY 2015-16 to SY 2018-19. However, unlike dual credit and overload course growth, the growth in AP exams is not broadly distributed across LEAs. Approximately half of the growth in the rural category is concentrated in one LEA. It appears that despite efforts to increase access through IDLA, access to AP exams is limited in most rural areas.

**TABLE 11: AP EXAMS TAKEN BY LOCALE TYPE**

| | SY 15-16 | SY 16-17 | SY 17-18 | SY 18-19 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| City | 3,756 | 7,036 | 7,201 | 7,398 |
| Suburb | 1,214 | 3,079 | 3,108 | 2,812 |
| Town | 588 | 1,352 | 1,651 | 1,671 |
| Rural | 674 | 1,218 | 1,333 | 1,539 |
| Virtual | 8 | 12 | 10 | 9 |

# PROGRAM DESIGN

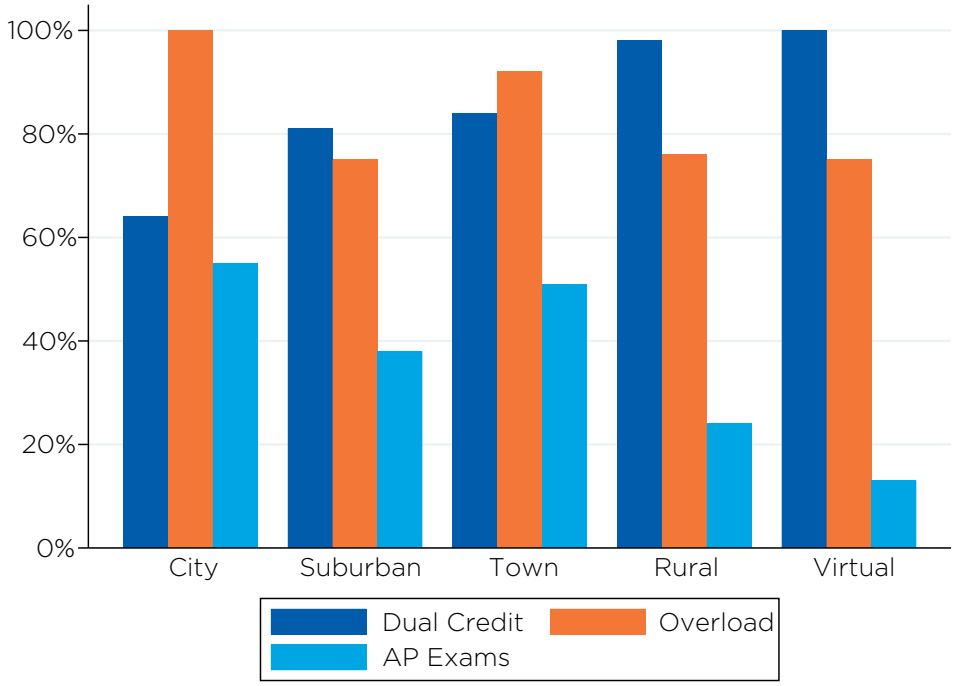
This section reports the ways the AO program are structured by individual LEAs. LEAs may choose to offer any combination of dual credit, AP, IB, CTE and overload courses and exams and assign current staff with any program-responsibilities or hire new staff if funds allow. Data from the State Department of Education were used to determine which types of AO programs are available across the state. Interview and survey data provide evidence of policies, practices and people that influence the amount and type of AO programs offered. This section includes details regarding how students learn about their options and the assistance received when making their choices.

Statewide, dual credit courses are the most common expense of the AO program. Of the 37,268 students who participated in the AO Program in SY 2018-19, 75 percent enrolled in at least one dual credit course. Only 29 percent of participating students used funding to pay for AP exams, 24 percent for overload courses, and one percent for IB exams. Data regarding CTE specific exam funding was not provided in the dataset from the State, however, 66 percent of schools surveyed reported students using AO funds for CTE programs (both courses and exams).

Dual credit courses are offered at 90 percent of all LEAs in the state, overload courses are available at 81 percent, AP exams are offered at 34 percent of LEAs and only two percent of LEAs provide IB exam options to students. Figures 1 and 2 show the breakdown by locale type and education region. IB exam participation is not included in these figures because IB exams are available at only three LEAs across the state.

Figure 1 shows that rural areas and virtual schools are much less likely to offer overload courses or have students take AP exams. Although the reason for this disparity is unknown, possible explanations include a lack of qualified teachers or student demand as well as access to dual credit courses.

## FIGURE 1: PERCENT OF LEAS PARTICIPATING IN AO PROGRAMS BY LOCALE TYPE

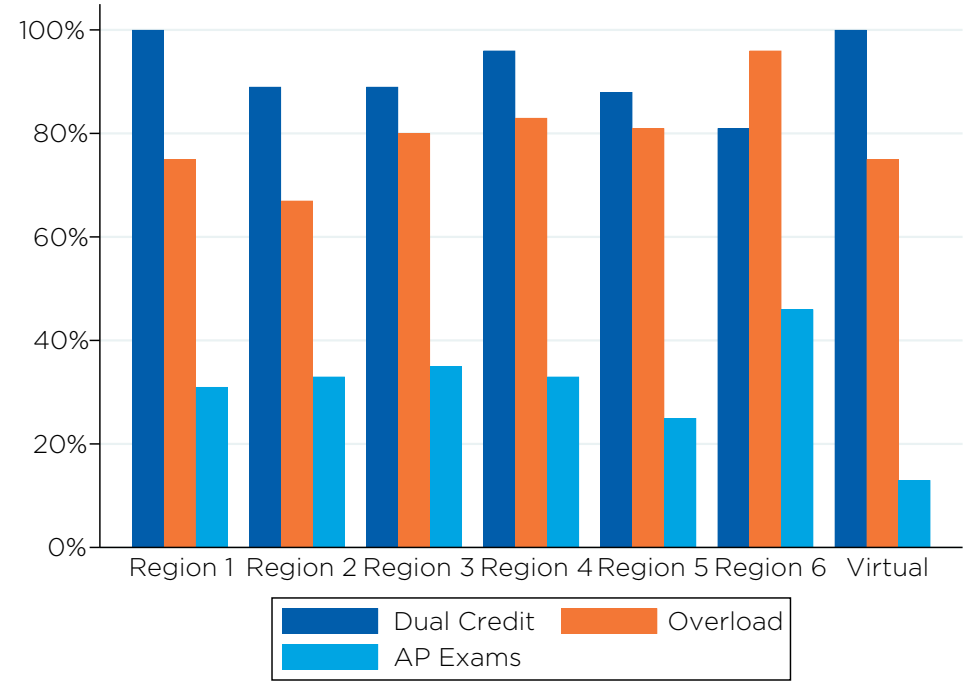



### LOCALE LEA COUNT

| | |
|---|---|
| City | 11 |
| Suburban | 16 |
| Town | 37 |
| Rural | 82 |
| Virtual | 8 |

Figure 2 explains course and exam offerings by region. LEAs in Region 5 and virtual charter schools tend to offer less AP courses compared to other regions. More Region 6 LEAs request funding for AP exams than other regions but significantly less funding for dual credit courses. Regional differences could be explained by community support or differences in access for each type of AO program.

## FIGURE 2: PERCENT OF LEAS PARTICIPATING IN AO PROGRAMS BY REGION




### REGION LEA COUNT

| | |
|---|---|
| Region 1 | 16 |
| Region 2 | 18 |
| Region 3 | 46 |
| Region 4 | 24 |
| Region 5 | 16 |
| Region 6 | 26 |
| Virtual | 8 |

Survey respondents reported they are most likely to add more general education dual credit courses and CTE courses and exam opportunities to their school. Some respondents relayed that students in their schools were more interested in dual credit courses than AP courses because the dual credit system is more forgiving of student performance, describing AP exams as high-stakes and all or nothing experiences.

The programs offered in a school are limited by the ability of the school to hire teachers qualified to teach the courses. 56 percent of survey respondents stated this as a problem at their school. Specifically, science and math dual credit courses are difficult to staff. Schools with this problem are often unable to offer as many courses in a classroom format and may supplement with online courses, or sometimes courses taught via video broadcast. Remote access learning is not as simple for AP exams. In areas without teachers qualified to teach AP courses, students may learn the content online but have to travel to another school to take the exam.

Collaboration with other schools or districts is another strategy used for increasing course offerings. 49 percent of survey respondents reported having a collaborative AO relationship with schools or districts in their area. One interview respondent described a multi-district consortium in their area for a CTE program that allowed students to be bussed across districts to attend their desired courses. For example, if a student in one district wanted to take a welding class and their school did not have the capacity to provide a welding class, the student could attend a welding class at a high school in another district.

Students are counseled to enroll in available AO courses throughout their schooling. Although the survey results indicated that students don't generally receive AO-specific counseling in middle school, interview respondents reported that students are made aware of the AO program while designing their eighth-grade learning plans. This allows students to make plans that prepare them for AO courses in high school.

Students are also informed about AO options through counselor and teacher recommendations, word-of-mouth, course catalogs, school counseling websites and presentations given to students and parents throughout their high school career. Counseling regarding enrollment most often happens with students in grades 10-12. Interview respondents described this process as taking place with either AO staff, college and career advisors, or academic counselors. Students meet with the counselor and decide which courses best fit their goals after graduation.

Students are not always able to enroll in their chosen courses. For example, higher education institutions and many high schools have GPA requirements for students to enroll in dual credit courses. However, most respondents indicated that exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis if counselors feel the student is prepared despite their past performance. In addition, interview respondents all reported that if a counselor does not feel like a student is prepared for the seriousness of AO courses, they may recommend a student not enroll. Some LEAs allow students to enroll in classes for a short trial period, giving students the option to explore the rigor of a course while retaining the option to drop it without penalty.

AO counseling differs by school. Some interview respondents said that students in their schools are encouraged to take general education courses over electives to increase the amount of credits that transfer toward degree progress. Other respondents said students are encouraged to take elective courses to provide students an opportunity to experiment with different degree paths and assist them in choosing what path to pursue after high school. Regardless of how students are counseled, respondents said final enrollment decisions are ultimately made by the student and their parents.

The courses available to students at a school are influenced by several decision-makers. When asked to rank the relative influence of these decision-makers, survey respondents ranked principals as having the most influence, followed by teachers and counselors. Parents and students were ranked as having the least amount of influence. Superintendent influence was split, with half of respondents believing they had the most influence in courses offered in their school and half believing they had the least amount of influence. Respondants indicated increased CTE and dual-credit opportunities were courses parents and students requested to be offered by the school. Many respondants indicated schools plan to offer more of these courses in the future. This connection is either due to respondents being aware of parent preference or parent preference coincidentally aligning with school priorities.

Survey and interview respondents did not feel their dual credit affiliate institutions influenced the availability of courses offered in schools. Many schools affiliate with multiple institutions to maximize the amount and type of courses available to their students. For example, some schools might contract with one institution for general education courses but with another for CTE courses. Many did report that having to work with so many institutions is complex and adds to counselor workload. Higher education institutions have different finals schedules, protocols for enrolling, teacher requirements and payment systems. These differences can confuse teachers, parents and students.

The type of faculty and staff positions hired for AO programs varies. Out of 133 responses, 78.8 percent indicated their school has counselors designated to help with AO. Most of these counselors (95%) were reported to have responsibilities not related to the program as well. Most interview respondents and some survey respondents described the workload associated with the program as being overwhelming, often stating that those who work with AO should have no other responsibilities. Both survey (86%) and interview respondents said that AO tasks tend to overlap with College and Career Advising and Mentoring Program tasks. However, the separation of these programs through separate staff within schools helps both programs be more efficient.

# PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

This section analyzes the effectiveness of the AO program with a SWOT analysis using data from the survey and interviews of AO staff statewide. SWOT analyses are commonly used in the business sector to help organizations understand and prioritize the internal strengths and weaknesses as well as the external opportunities and threats of a program. In this analysis, internal factors are those that schools or LEAs can control, and external factors are beyond school control but are potentially controllable at the state level. Weaknesses and threats should be treated as areas needing support or restructuring rather than programmatic failures.

**FIGURE 3: SWOT ANALYSIS**

## S STRENGTHS

FINANCIAL SUPPORT: Both survey and interview respondents reported the AO program benefits students financially. More low-income and minority students are able to enroll in dual credit courses or take exams because of AO funding. The funding also allows students who were previously only able to fund one exam or course to increase their participation in AO programs. Respondents indicated that these students would not have these opportunities without AO funding.

INCREASED CONFIDENCE: All interview respondents observed increased confidence among students who participate in AO. Taking AO courses makes the idea of going to college seem possible to students. The process of enrolling for classes, learning the rigor required and communicating with actual college professors (for students taking courses online or at a college campus) helps students feel prepared for college. Respondents observed that increased confidence leads to more students enrolling at postsecondary institutions after high school.

INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING: Most respondents reported that students meet with a counselor each year to discuss goals for after high school, and AO allows students to take classes that apply to these learning goals while still in high school. For instance, high school students can receive a CNA certificate or complete an associates degree. Rural respondents benefit from AO funding and programs because it increases access to college level coursework, giving students more options for individualized learning.

## WEAKNESSES

PUSH FOR COLLEGE: Respondents reported that pushing college level programs can be detrimental to unprepared students. These students could be ready for college after high school but taking the classes in high school could be a negative experience and potentially make them opposed to going on in the future.

FUTURE IMPACT: Students do not always understand the consequences of failing dual credit courses. Respondents reported that many students do not treat the program seriously, insisting to take the courses or exams, not caring if they are ready or how they perform. Poor performance damages their GPA on college transcripts and impacts their future ability to get accepted to a university and receive financial aid.

CAREER PREPARATION: The perception across the state is that the purpose of AO is to push students toward the traditional college route and away from skilled professions, although AO provides funding for CTE courses and certification exams. Changing this perception could potentially change the types of courses and exams paid for by AO funding across the state and increase the number of students taking advantage of the AO program.

## OPPORTUNITIES

STREAMLINING PROCESSES: Many respondents suggested that AO rules and processes could be streamlined across institutions. Eighty-six percent of survey respondents indicated they worked with two or more institutions to provide AO in their schools. In addition to these relationships, students have access to more institutions through IDLA. CTE, CLEP, and AP exams also require different application and financial processes as well. Discrepancies among processes leads to extra work and confusion among teachers, students and counselors.

REDUCING BURDEN: AO staff described heavy workloads stemming from their AO responsibilities, specifically the amount of paperwork required. Actions currently being taken at the state level to reduce paperwork will also reduce errors in reporting. Many respondents were also frustrated they are not adequately compensated financially for their workload.

PROGRAM EXPANSION: A few respondents indicated that students who do not use or use minimal AO funding in high school should be allowed a portion of that funding for college or technical programs after graduation in the form of a scholarship regardless of financial background. Respondents felt this could benefit middle-income students who do not feel prepared for college level rigor in high school but still choose to go on post-graduation and do not qualify to receive traditional financial aid.

### THREATS

LIMITED INSTRUCTORS: More than half of survey and interview respondents reported issues in hiring teachers that are qualified to teach AO courses. The two most difficult subjects to staff are science and math. The availability of these teachers influences a school's ability to offer AO courses. This is especially a problem in rural, charter and alternative schools.

PERFORMANCE DATA: Success of the AO program cannot truly be measured until the success of students can be compared with enrollment data. Currently, the state is working on a way to collect these data in a central location, which would improve future evaluation.

POSTSECONDARY TRACKING: Evaluation could be strengthened by understanding how students perform in college and their careers after high school graduation. This could provide insight into the ability of AO to improve student college performance, shorten the time to degree and type of jobs acquired with their certifications earned. This level of evaluation would be intensive, but informative.

# CONCLUSION

Participation in the AO program increased dramatically since SY 2015-16. In SY 2016-17, the state began covering up to $4,125 for 7-12 graders taking dual credit and overload courses, as well as AP, IB, CLEP and CTE exams. Funding for the AO program increased to $19.2 million in SY 2018-19 from $4 million in SY 2015-16. Increased funding improved access to AO courses by alleviating the financial burden for students and enabling LEAs to expand AO course offerings.

The majority of students participating in AO use the funds to pay for dual credit enrollment. Enrollment in overload courses increased statewide, as well as in every education region and locale type, enabling more students to get ahead in their secondary education. All education regions and locale types experienced growth in exams using AO funds, although the growth of exams was more modest than dual credit or overload courses. Rural LEAs are less likely than other types of LEAs to offer AP courses to their students.

Overall, the program succeeded at expanding access to advanced coursework for many Idaho students, but struggles to balance career readiness with college preparation. The design of the program varies across LEAs, some have staff hired to specifically work with AO but most have staff assigned to AO who have other responsibilities. Further

streamlining the processes and procedures of the AO program across postsecondary institutions and LEAs could increase access even more and ease the workload of AO staff statewide.

The success of the program is difficult to measure without knowing how students perform in courses and on exams as well as data about their subsequent college experiences. Ongoing evaluation and improved data collection are essential to measure the overall success of the AO program. The AO program is in its infancy, but the data collected from the State, the online survey and AO staff interviews reveal that the AO program has become an integral component of secondary education in Idaho.

# APPENDIX A: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

## Advanced Placement (AP) Courses

"College-level courses that prepare students through advanced and rigorous curriculum. At the end of the year, students take an AP exam and received a score between 0-5. Depending on the score, a college/university may waive a requirement or grant credit for a parallel course. In most cases, a score of 3 is considered to be a passing score; in more competitive circumstances, (i.e., Ivy League or private schools) students must earn a 4 or 5."[6]

## Career Technical Education (CTE)

Career Technical Education funding can be used to enroll in classes, as well as payments to take certification exams. CTE courses can be dual credit.[7]

## Dual Credit Courses

"Across the state of Idaho, there are a number of colleges and universities that offer dual credit (also known as concurrent credit). Typically, this means that a high school teacher is credentialed through a college/university as adjunct faculty and raises the rigor of a high school class to mirror the college curriculum. Each college/university is regionally accredited and will have a unique admissions and registration process.

When enrolling in a dual credit course, there may be additional costs that are not covered by Fast Forward funds, such as books, lab fees, etc. It is important to keep track of the institution through which students receive dual credit. Upon enrolling in a postsecondary institution, they will be required to provide official transcripts in order for these credits to count towards their degree."[8]

## Early Graduation Scholarship

"Early Graduation Scholarships are available for high school students who graduate at least one full year early. These scholarships are equal to 35% of the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for a given school year. This equates to roughly $1,500.

Scholarships can be used at Idaho public postsecondary institutions. The awarded amount will double for students who graduate two years early and will triple for students who graduate three years early. If a student elects not to attend a college or university immediately after high school, they will have apply within two years of their high school graduation to utilize the scholarship before it expires."[9]

## International Baccalaureate (IB) Courses

IB is a K-12 curriculum that focuses on inquiry and logic. AO funding is used to pay for IB exams. The credits that are earned from passing these exams are internationally recognized.

## Overload Courses

"An overload course is a high school level course that is taken in excess of the student's regular school day. These courses are offered online, during the summertime, and before/after school. In the event that student incurs a cost for such courses, the Fast Forward program can pay up to $225 for the cost of the course. Overload courses must be above and beyond the full course load offered by the student's local school."[10]

## Idaho Distance Learning Alliance (IDLA)

IDLA is an online collaborative of 115 school districts that provides online courses for students in the State of Idaho. These courses can be courses that fulfill high school graduation requirements, AP, Dual Credit, or CTE courses. IDLA was created and is funded by the Idaho State Legislature.[11]

## National Center for Education Statistics Locales (NCES)

- City is defined as "territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city"
- Suburb is defined as "territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area"
- Town is defined as "territory inside an urban cluster"
- Rural is defined as "Census-defined rural territory"

NCES further subdivides these categories—City and Suburb are subdivided by Large, Midsize and Small, while Town and Rural are subdivided by Fringe, Distant and Remote. To simplify analysis, only the four overriding categories were used.

# ENDNOTES

1 List of AO funding approved AP/CTE/CLEP/IB exams is found here: https://www.sde.idaho.gov/student-engagement/advanced-ops/shared/AO-Approved-Exams-and-Costs.pdf

2 Further descriptions of courses and exams approved for AO funding can be found in OSBE Board Policies III.Y.2 or https://boardofed.idaho.gov/board-policies-rules/board-policies/higher-education-affairs-section-iii/iii-y-advanced-opportunities/

3 The survey and interview questions were approved by Boise State's Office of Research Compliance, which ensures that all federal requirements for ethical research are maintained at Boise State University. Contact the Office of Research Compliance with any questions: orc@boisestate.edu – Protocol Number: 000-SB19-189

4 Surveyed AO staff and personnel includes AO coordinators, college and career mentors, high school counselors, registrars or, in the case of small charter and alternative schools, principals. No teachers were interviewed or surveyed for this report.

5 The online survey was administered through Qualtrics Survey Software. The survey was open to respondents from November 5, 2019 to November 24, 2019.

6 More information about AP exams is found here: https://www.sde.idaho.gov/student-engagement/advanced-ops/files/getting-started/program/2018-2019-Advanced-Opportunities-Booklet.pdf

7 More information about CTE courses and exams is found here: https://www.sde.idaho.gov/student-engagement/advanced-ops/

8 More information about dual credit courses is found here: https://www.sde.idaho.gov/student-engagement/advanced-ops/files/getting-started/program/2018-2019-Advanced-Opportunities-Booklet.pdf

9 More information about Early Graduation Scholarships is found here: https://www.sde.idaho.gov/student-engagement/advanced-ops/files/getting-started/program/2018-2019-Advanced-Opportunities-Booklet.pdf

10 More information about overload courses is found here: https://www.sde.idaho.gov/student-engagement/advanced-ops/

11 More information about IDLA is found here: https://www.idahodigitallearning.org/about-us/

This report was prepared by Idaho Policy Institute at Boise State University and commissioned by the Idaho Office of the State Board of Education.

ipi.boisestate.edu

**REPORT AUTHORS**

MCALLISTER HALL, Graduate Resesarch Assistant
BENJAMIN LARSEN, PhD, Research Associate
GABE OSTERHOUT, Research Associate
LANTZ MCGINNIS-BROWN, Research Associate
VANESSA CROSSGROVE FRY, PhD, Research Director

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY
IDAHO POLICY INSTITUTE