



Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

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Dual Enrollment Stipend Report
Sec. E. 605.1 of the FY 2016 Appropriations Act
(No. 58 of the Acts of the 2015 General Assembly)

To: House and Senate Committees on Education and Appropriations
From: Marilyn Cargill, Vice President of Financial Aid Services and Research, VSAC *mc*
Date: February 5, 2016
Re: Dual Enrollment Stipend Report

Introduction and Background:

In 2014, a \$50,000 need-based stipend for dual enrollment and early college students was passed in the Legislative session in Section E.605.2 of the Appropriations Act. Needy Vermont students who meet the eligibility criteria receive a stipend to help offset the out-of-pocket expenses of books, fees, and/or transportation. The stipend program was designed during the summer of 2014 and was made available to students to help offset the out-of-pocket expenses in the fall of 2014. In the January 2015 report, VSAC recommended that the funding be renewed for the 2015-2016 academic year so we could gauge the true need of the program over the course of three semesters. The General Assembly agreed and appropriated \$50,000 for FY 2016. Section E.605.1 of the FY 2016 Big Bill reads as follows:

Sec. E.605.1 NEED-BASED STIPEND FOR DUAL ENROLLMENT AND EARLY COLLEGE STUDENTS

(a) The sum of \$50,000 shall be transferred to the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) as follows:

(1) \$25,000 from Sec. B.1100(a)(3)(C) (Next Generation funds appropriated for dual enrollment and need based stipend purposes).

(2) \$25,000 from Sec. E.504(a) (adult education and literacy funds appropriated for dual enrollment and need based stipend purposes).

(b) The sums transferred to VSAC in this section shall be used to fund a flat-rate, need-based stipend or voucher program for financially needy students enrolled in a dual enrollment course pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 944 or in early college pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 4011(e) to be used for the purchase of books, cost of transportation, and payment of fees. VSAC shall establish the criteria for program eligibility. Funds shall be granted to eligible students on a first-come, first-served basis until funds are depleted.

(c) VSAC shall report on the program to the House and Senate Committees on Education and on Appropriations on or before January 15, 2016.

Note that the source of the \$50,000 was revised; in FY 2015, all of the funding came from a transfer from the Next Generation Fund while in FY 16, half comes from that source and half from designated adult education and literacy funds transferred from the Agency of Education.

Policy Objectives

The policy objectives of the stipend program are to:

- ✓ Introduce a larger pool of Vermont high school students to a college experience;
- ✓ Increase attendance at Vermont colleges; and
- ✓ Ensure that dual enrollment and early college opportunities are available to all Vermont high school students including those from low and middle income families.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for the program's stipend, a student must:

- ✓ Be enrolled in a Dual Enrollment course or in the Early College program, with Dual Enrollment receiving preference;
- ✓ Be attending a Vermont high school or be home schooled in Vermont;
- ✓ Have completed the sophomore year in high school for Dual Enrollment or be in the senior year for Early College;
- ✓ Demonstrate financial need – i.e., must be verified by their high school dual enrollment designee as eligible for free and reduced hot lunch (F/RL). All students will be required to submit the application for free and reduced hot lunch unless already they have already been determined to be eligible by another state-accepted means such as students receiving benefits from TANF, 3SquaresVT, etc.; and
- ✓ Have confirmed books, fees, and/or transportation costs by their high school dual enrollment designee if attending a high school or if home schooled, self-reported.

Methodology

Eligibility for free and reduced hot lunch is the determination of “need” for students enrolled in the dual enrollment program. This definition of need combined with adding questions to the existing dual enrollment voucher application effectively removes any applications barriers that might prevent low income families from applying for the stipend. Verification of both need and out-of-pocket expenses for books, fees, and/or transportation is provided by the dual enrollment designee at each high school. Home schooled students do not have a separate verification process.

Students enrolled in Early College must complete the Vermont Grant application and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students who qualify for the Vermont State grant based on those applications are also considered eligible based on need for the stipend. Funds for students enrolled in Early College at disbursed at the time the college verifies enrollment.

The stipend remained at the \$150 level that was established in FY 2015. This allows us to fund 330 students.

Dual enrollment and Early College students have equal priority in being considered for this stipend.

Spending Outcomes

In FY 2015, 316 students received stipends, 277 students enrolled in Dual Enrollment programs and 39 students enrolled in Early College programs, for a total of \$47,400. The breakdown by semester is as follows; \$4,850 was disbursed in the fall semester to 59 students, \$27,450 was disbursed in the spring to 183 students and \$11,100 was disbursed in the summer to 74 students.

In FY 2016 to date we have disbursed \$19,950 to 133 students for the fall semester. This represents a 125.4% increase in spending. We are attributing this increase in spending to the timely availability (compared to the start-up year) of information in the high schools concerning the stipend that allowed low-income students to apply for fall courses. To date we have disbursed 131 students for spring semester for a total of \$39,600 and we currently have 24 students pending.

Conclusions

Students enroll for dual enrollment courses in the summer, fall, and spring. As we suggested last year in our report, the number of students who applied for the 2014 fall term was artificially low because the stipend program was not available until August, well after the time that students normally make decisions to take these classes.

Dual enrollment voucher applications have historically been higher in the spring semester than the fall and we are anticipating that will occur again this year which will expend all of the remaining funds in this program leaving very little or no funds available for FY 2016 summer classes that begin in May and June.

Recommendation

VSAC recommends that the General Assembly continue funding this program which is ensuring access for low and lower-middle income families to the dual enrollment courses. While it is clear that significantly more families were aware of the program this fall, it is not clear we are reaching all families. Given that it appears that these funds will run out this year (FY 2016) leaving some students unable to access the stipend, we would recommend that the funding level be increased by \$10,000 allowing an additional 66 low income students to have access to the stipend.