

Dual Enrollment

January 2015

It doesn't seem possible, but we are halfway through the 2014–15 academic year. The next weeks and months of school will pass rapidly and another year will be over before we know it.

This halfway point is an important time of decision for high school students as they consider their course of study and register for second semester courses. Students today have more educational choices and opportunities than students have ever had before. One of those is dual enrollment, which is available in Whitfield County Schools and either Dalton State College or Georgia Northwestern Technical College (GNTC).

Dual enrollment means that juniors and seniors in a Whitfield County high school can earn their diploma while earning college credit at the same time. This is an excellent way for students to get acquainted with college courses, gain valuable experiences, and explore career options. Dual enrollment gives a student an idea of what college coursework will be like, providing a college experience in the supportive environment of the high school.

Most adults change careers several times during their work years. These college courses can give students a closer look at careers and interests before committing to full-time study in an area. They also may be able to take a college course in a subject that is not offered at the high school level.

Whitfield County students have another advantage due to the fact that Georgia Northwestern Technical College is actually located on our Career Academy campus. They currently have one classroom building and are planning to build an additional two-story 80,000 square foot building on the property. This addition will include labs, enabling the college to expand its technical career offerings from five to ten or more additional career pathways. This will increase the number of dual enrollment courses available to our students. Our students can take half of their day's schedules at their home high schools and be transported by a Whitfield County School bus for courses at either the Career Academy or Georgia Northwestern. If enough students from a particular high school are interested in a college course, it may be taught on the campus of the home high school and eliminate the need to travel off campus. In some cases, college level courses may even be taught by one of our high school teachers.

It is easy to see how dual enrollment is beneficial to high-achieving students by enabling them to get a head start on their academic goals. It can be equally beneficial to students interested in technical careers who have average grade point averages. College credit earned from GNTC during high school will transfer to any two- or four-year school in the University System of Georgia. The credit can count toward technical certifications as well as a post-secondary educational institution's degree requirements. In some cases, students who are dual enrolled can graduate from high school with an associate degree in addition to their high school diploma. Students who choose a technical pathway can also graduate with certifications, preparing them for immediate employment upon graduation from high school.

In today's economy where many families are struggling to afford post-secondary education for their children, one of the greatest benefits of dual enrollment is that students can essentially take college courses for free. As the cost of college enrollment continues to increase, being able to take college courses without paying tuition is a huge cost savings for families.

Dual enrollment can be a win-win for the school system, parents, students, employers, and community. Students receive a quality education, parents save lots of money, and new businesses will want to locate and expand in Whitfield County because they can get a job-ready, trained workforce. All of this increases the local economy, provides more funding for the education of our students, and improves the quality of life for all citizens in Whitfield County.