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# Dual enrollment launches college journey



Kendra Gossel is taking a dual-enrollment freshman English composition class at Red Mountain High School in Mesa.

Tom Tingle/The Republic

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**Tempe Union High School District:** This year, 2,376 students are enrolled in dual-enrollment classes through Rio Salado Community College. Eighteen of

By Kerry Fehr, Cathryn Creno and Luci Scott  
The Republic | azcentral.com  
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As college costs skyrocket, thousands of Southeast Valley high-school students are saving Mom and Dad big bucks by earning college credit through dual-enrollment courses.

Some high-school students this month will even graduate with enough college credits to earn an associate degree from a Maricopa Community College District institution. Many, however, say they will eschew the associate degree and instead apply their credits toward a bachelor's degree at a four-year college or university.

"An AA degree is not as meaningful to these students as a bachelor's degree," said Gerald Slemmer, principal of Red Mountain High School in Mesa.

Mesa, Chandler, Gilbert, Tempe and Ahwatukee students earn college and high-school credit simultaneously in accredited classes, taught by certified high-school faculty on the familiar surroundings of their high-school campus.

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them have enough hours to graduate with an associate degree along with a high-school diploma this month, but 17 of them instead are applying their college credits toward a bachelor's degree at a four-year school.

**Gilbert Public Schools:** As of this spring, 1,210 students are dual enrolled at Chandler-Gilbert Community College.

**Higley Unified School District:** This year, 189 students are dual enrolled at Chandler-Gilbert Community College.

Source: Chandler, Tempe, Gilbert and Higley school districts and Chandler-Gilbert Community College.

High-school instructors must undergo special training to receive certification to teach classes for college credit. All 10 colleges in the Maricopa Community Colleges system and the state's four-year universities honor dual-credit hours taken at accredited Valley high schools taught by certified teachers.

Students pay for dual-enrollment courses, but the savings is significant over the credit-hour pricing at a state university. Dual-enrollment tuition through the Maricopa Community Colleges system is a relative bargain at \$76 per credit hour compared with \$135 to a maximum of \$945 at Arizona State University. And because students might be as much as halfway to a bachelor's degree when they leave high school, the savings for their families compounds. Time and money are saved.

Maricopa Community College District officials have not yet compiled data for the current academic year, but in 2011-12 there were 34,022 dual enrollments in the district, up from 32,637 in 2010-11 and 29,972 in 2009-2010.

Dual enrollment is no easy "A," although most students in dual-enrollment classes, because they are serious students, earns A's or B's.

High-school senior Kendra Gossel, among those in Mesa Public Schools earning credit for college coursework, took a college-level chemistry class as a sophomore for which she received dual credit. This year, she took dual-enrollment English 101 and English 102.

"Dual-enrollment classes are much harder than even AP (advanced-placement) classes," she said. "They are fast-paced and they expect a lot of you."

Gossel, an 18-year-old Mesa resident, plans to major in English at the University of Arizona in the fall and said she likes the challenge of college-level classes. She noted that students are treated like college students and given freedom to decide which topics to write about in class.

In Gilbert Public Schools, Angelo Skyhawk Wyaco will graduate this month from Mesquite High with a high-school diploma and an Associate of Arts degree in general studies from Chandler-Gilbert Community College.

"It was a little bit hard, but once I got into the flow of it, it became easier," said Angelo, who entered the dual-enrollment program in the fall of his junior year. "Some nights, I had to stay up late and work on project, sometimes like 2 or 3 a.m."

Despite the hard work, it was worth it, he said.

This fall, Angelo plans to work toward a bachelor's degree in business from Northern Arizona University with the goal of working in international business. Angelo, president of Mesquite's Japanese Club, enjoys traveling and this summer will vacation in Japan. He studied Japanese language all four years in high school.

"It was really fun to do," said Angelo, looking back on dual enrollment. "I highly encourage it."

His mother, Barbie Williams, marvels at how he got a big head start on college and how the program saved his family thousands of dollars.

"With him knocking out the first years of general electives for college, it's a huge money saver," Williams said. "He spent plenty of late nights in his room studying. He's a very hard worker, very determined."

She's glad that before he gets to NAU, he already has some college experience so he knows what to expect for class structure, how to find study groups, how to look for financial aid and how to talk to a counselor to form a class schedule.

"The entire program helped him to grow," she said. "It won't be such a shocker for him once he's at a four-year university."

And he already has a well-developed work ethic. He worked part time at Wendy's.

Students in the Chandler Unified School District are earning more college credits though dual enrollment than ever. This academic year, students earned 13,375 credit hours, up from 11,161 in 2012 and 7,768 in 2011, according to Matt Strom, the district's director of research and accountability.

That includes 5,198 hours accumulated in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) courses. An additional 3,232 hours were accumulated in foreign languages, including Spanish, German, French, Chinese, and American Sign Language.

And the number of dual credits earned by CUSD students is expected to grow. CUSD is teaming with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University to allow high-school students to take college-level courses for college

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credit starting in the fall.

In Tempe Union High School District, 2,376 students are enrolled in dual-enrollment classes through Rio Salado Community College, spokeswoman Linda Littell said. Although 18 students could have graduated with an associate degree as well as a high-school diploma this month, most are applying their college credits earned in high school to a bachelor's degree.

The exception is Adrien Nichols, 17, a senior at Desert Vista High in Ahwatukee. She has been accepted to Arizona State University, where she plans to study print journalism at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism.

She will get an associate degree from Rio Salado Community College along with her high-school diploma.

"It was actually pretty easy," Adrien said. "I took a few extra hours my senior year. This year, it was hard sometimes but I got it done."



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