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National report praises Idaho's Advanced Opportunities program

(BOISE) – The State Department of Education's Advanced Opportunities Program, which helps students get a jump start toward college and career, offers a worthy example for "state policymakers seeking ways to improve the quality of high school instruction and expand postsecondary access and attainment," according to recent report from the Manhattan Institute.

The report, "[How Idaho is Reshaping High Schools by Empowering Students](#)," focuses on Idaho's program that provides \$4,125 for each student in middle and high school to use for college credit via dual enrollment classes at the current rate of \$75 per credit. The funds also can be used to cover the cost of overload courses, advanced placement exams and workforce training.

Most states now have laws to enable dual enrollment, but "Idaho's Advanced Opportunities program has been particularly successful," the report states.

"Idaho's Advanced Opportunities program is one of the brightest lights of our K-12 education system, and it's wonderful to receive more confirmation of that success through this in-depth report from the Manhattan Institute," Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said. "Thanks to a strategic investment by state leaders, more than 29,000 Idaho high school students earned college credits last year – in some cases enough to earn an associate's degree before high school graduation."

"Students from low-income families have the same opportunity to take college-level courses as their higher-income peers, reducing the amount of time and money it takes to earn a degree," Superintendent Ybarra said. "This is a major help to Idaho families and moves our students closer to fulfilling their dreams for college and careers."

Based on the regular per-credit tuition rates of colleges and universities, Idaho students and their families saved more than \$84 million in 2019-20 by taking dual credit courses paid by Advanced Opportunities. At \$75 per credit, the state's expenditure was more than \$17.3 million – about \$67 million less than the full cost would be for those college credits.

The Idaho Legislature approved the current Advanced Opportunities program in 2016, and that fiscal year Idaho was already rated third in the nation for dual credit enrollment

Idaho has been a national leader in offering dual enrollment, according to the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships. Enrollment in dual credit courses has skyrocketed, from 16,264 courses taken in 2015-16 to 70,395 in 2018-19.

Manhattan Institute report author Max Eden interviewed staff at four Idaho school districts – Boise, Minidoka, Emmett and Vallivue – about how the availability of Advanced Opportunities has changed their schools, including increased college and career counseling services. The report also found:

- Advanced Opportunities, in partnership with the Idaho Digital Learning Alliance, “has leveled the playing field for rural students in terms of courses they can take.”
- Last year’s expansion of Advanced Opportunities to include career and technical education (CTE) has increased the number of students taking professional certification exams.
- “Idaho is the only state that puts money for dual enrollment directly in students’ hands.” Other states reimburse colleges, increase funding to high schools, or provide partial or full reimbursement to students.

Author Eden visited in March to interview lawmakers and officials from school districts and colleges. On its website, the [Manhattan Institute](#) describes itself as “a leading free-market think tank focusing on economic growth, education” and other domestic policy.

For more information on Idaho’s program, check out the [Advanced Opportunities web page](#).

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Attached: A pdf of the Manhattan Institute report.