

Support for HB22-1002 Fifth Year High School Concurrent Enrollment

My name is Adnan Syed, and I currently live in Denver and enrolled at the University of Colorado School of Medicine as a first-year medical student. However, I would not be where I am in my educational journey without the concurrent enrollment program at my high school.

I grew up in Pueblo, CO, and attended Dolores Huerta Preparatory High from 2011-2015, while their concurrent enrollment program was still developing. My parents heard about how this program would allow me to earn college credit in high school for free and even offer a credit towards textbooks; they knew this would be an opportunity to not pass up, especially because they could not afford these courses and materials otherwise. Along with a bolstered education at minimal cost, I also gained more maturity throughout the program.

Being in a college environment means following a different set of expectations including holding yourself accountable in your education, which I discovered is a vital lesson to learn early. Taking college courses encouraged me to take my studies more seriously, develop effective study habits and reach out to professors when I felt I was struggling. Taking my education into my own hands was such an empowering feeling and allowed me to mature sooner, which I felt better prepared me for college once I graduated high school.

Moreover, interacting with individuals different from myself allowed me to get a better sense of the importance of diversity and inclusion beyond higher education. Many of the people in my college courses were studying for their second or third career, and hearing about their lives outside of school helped me perceive a world beyond the classroom. An example is how some students would commute from outlying towns to attend class and would talk about different barriers they experienced due to this distance, including limited access to healthcare. At that point, I didn't know many people faced different barriers preventing them from obtaining the care they need, and these accounts were one of my motivators towards my goal for when I become a physician: to bring quality medical care to populations that lack access.

Concurrent enrollment is an incredible program that sets students up for success beyond high school both academically and personally. The financial benefit of obtaining college credits that can be applied to a future degree combined with the personal development from taking courses with adults as peers make this program especially beneficial for all students.

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My name is Anton Ortega, my pronouns are he/him. I am 27 and born and raised in Pueblo, Colorado. I graduated from Dolores Huerta Preparatory High School in 2013. During my sophomore year of high school, I participated in what was referred to as the early college program. As a 15/16 year old student at the time, I don't feel like the program was structured in a way that could possibly prepare someone my age for the potential repercussions of that experience. I don't remember needing parental approval, or being provided any oversight or guidance when it came to the admission process and requirements. I went in blind and I was beyond my depth.

Obviously, it's wonderful that programs like this exist, and I'm so thankful for it, but at the time, I was very naive, and being that the "screening" process was fairly simple (I did have to test into the program), I viewed it as mostly recreational. I did not select courses that met the general educational requirements to graduate, yet they were still made available to me. Coming out on the other end of it, I now realize there were a lot more variables than I initially apprehended. I received a failing grade for one of my college courses at the end of the semester, so I dropped out of the program, then I spent the next two years of high school making up for it.

I had to take multiple sophomore courses to account for the missing credits in order to walk. My last year of high school ever, separated from my senior classmates. All the while, I had over a thousand dollar bill leering over my head, with no budget system, no programs, absolutely no resources in place to help me pay it off in time to graduate. I spent most of my youth stressing about money.

To this day, I feel like my outlook on my finances, and more specifically, higher education has been seriously tainted by my experience. I have since taken a few college classes, but I now have this internalized resentment towards school due to the fear of being penalized for failure. I now see school as a risk not worth taking. From a high school student's perspective, particularly those who don't work or who come from low income families, there are far too many conditions to justify ever taking advantage of an early college program as it currently stands. It relies solely on a student's ability to "perform," not to achieve, and if you don't, you slip through the cracks.

And that's why it is so incredibly important to me that you vote YES on HB22-1002, and reduce barriers to open enrollment and give other students the chance to have a different experience than I did.

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Hello, my name is Liza Shokhrin and I am currently pursuing my Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at the University of Colorado Denver. Before beginning my higher education journey, I was lucky enough to have completed a number of concurrent enrollment courses at my high school that have allowed me to have the opportunity to graduate with my Bachelor's degree in three and a half years rather than in the standard four years. Although I am incredibly thankful for the courses I was able to take, the only concurrent enrollment courses that were offered at my high school were Business courses, which was not necessarily a specialty I wanted to pursue in the future. I took advantage of the few concurrent enrollment classes offered at my high school, but I was not able to further explore classes in other fields that could have helped me decide what I want to do in the future at an earlier age. I decided to pursue further education at the University of Colorado Denver, which is for the most part a commuter school, meaning I would give up the traditional "college experience" due to the cost of tuition at other schools and I would continue to live at home with my family. If I had more opportunities during my high school career to fulfill more college credits and reduce the cost of my college education, I would have been able to go to a college where I could live on campus and afford to have the full "college experience". The credits that I received in high school are an extreme help for my journey of continuing my education and going to graduate school because it helped me save a lot of money.

Even though I am extremely grateful for the concurrent enrollment opportunities I received, I believe that the way the program was structured did not allow all students to get the full benefits from it. The only way I found out about the concurrent enrollment business classes was because I decided to take an Introduction to Business course my freshman year of high school. I have many friends from high school who did not even know about the concurrent enrollment courses until after they graduated. By providing more concurrent enrollment courses and making them more easily accessible, many students who might not have the means to pursue a higher education would be able to cut the costs and get their degree through the program.

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My name is Nicole Spitler, I am a current online student at Tulane University pursuing a Master's in Social Work. During my senior year of high school, I was fortunate enough to be dual enrolled in a community college in which I was able to begin to accumulate credits toward my higher education degree. This experience served to help me financially as I came from a lower socioeconomic family in which I was the fourth child to attend higher education. This meant that my family did not have the means to pay for my education.

Although I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to begin college early and have it funded by the government, I did not receive full benefits from this program. I was strongly considering pursuing concurrent enrollment during my junior year of high school as well. However, my school counselor recommended that I not start the program till my senior year which I ultimately choose to forgo due to this. Additionally, during my senior year of high school I chose to only take five courses (15 credits) throughout the entire year which satisfied the requirements for high school. Looking back on this I found out that I could have taken 10 courses and received a total of 30 credits for my senior year. These extra credits along with the extra 30 credits I could have received for junior year would have served to put me at a huge advantage.

I am now 25 years old and pursuing my master's in social work. Although I know that I am privileged to be able to pursue a masters degree this experience has come with significant hurdles. In finishing up my undergraduate degree I ended up losing my financial aid as I had too many credits from changing majors. Due to this I had to take out significant amounts of loans. These loans were in conjunction with the loans I took out during all years of undergraduate to cover my living expenses. Finally, now in graduate school I find myself taking out the full amount of loans and still working two jobs which coincides with a required unpaid internship and full course load. With two semesters left of graduate school I already have over \$100,000 in loans from undergraduate and graduate along with being significantly overworked, burnout, and stressed to my fullest.

I sincerely believe that if I had been given the opportunity to take advantage of the full benefits of the concurrent enrollment program during high school I would be in a much better position. That extra year and a half of college credit would have allowed me to save on the cost of attendance and living expenses along with allowing me to graduate sooner. If HB22-1002 had been implemented when I was in highschool, I may have graduated with significantly less debt and been able to graduate two years earlier allowing me to enter the workforce and be a contributing member of society. That's why today, I am asking you to vote YES on Fifth Year High School Concurrent Enrollment.

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My name is Valeria Briceno with Young Invincibles. I am a 25-year-old immigrant from Mexico. When my family migrated to the US 24 years ago, my parents came intending to achieve the American dream. With this goal, my parents instilled in us assiduous attributes to attain this dream.

When my family first came to the US, they made the difficult decision of leaving their family and small home to a country unknown to them. Within the next 10 years, my parents were able to take us from living paycheck to paycheck and living in a small two-bedroom apartment, to owning their own home and being able to give us the luxuries of life that they were unable to afford as children. Growing up in poverty, my parents wanted us to have the splendors they were not able to have like toys, new clothes, and the ability to participate in after-school activities. Knowing the lifestyle my parents grew up in and seeing them work so hard to make sure that we could have more than just a simple life has always given me such pride in their work. With the admiration I have for my parents, my drive to make sure their sacrifices do not go in vain has pushed me to make them proud.

A very important part of making them proud was taking my education seriously and striving to obtain an education that would lead to a successful career. The opportunity presented to me to enroll in the Early College Program with my school established very helpful building blocks. Not only did it provide us the opportunity of completing the basic needing for a bachelor's for free, but also exposed us to the environment that made us feel like adults and the world outside of school.

My personal experience was an amazing one. It allowed us to accelerate our ability to complete our bachelor's degree once we left high school and also gave me the ability to learn from not only professors who were experts in their field, but also from other students as well. Students from different backgrounds, ages, genders, etc. Each one with life advice for what to prepare for and knowledge we don't get taught in high school.

Another very important advantage to this program is the fact that I was able to graduate with little to no student loans because the majority of my degree was covered through the program. Now at 25 own with my bills, it is one less thing to stress about and gives me the ability to focus on giving back to the community that helped me succeed.

I thank the program that gave me the ability to graduate with a double major by the time I was 20 and the ability to work for the government by the time I was 21. If every young adult was allowed I was given to participate in this program, it will help prepare the coming generations to succeed in their education and also in life.