

College Credit Opportunities: An Overview of AP and Concurrent Enrollment (CE)

Why should you consider taking classes with college-level content and expectations in high school? To help prepare for the academic demands of higher education! Choosing challenging courses in high school can make a huge impact on your path to college. This overview explains two main ways students can earn college credit early: Advanced Placement (AP) and Concurrent Enrollment (CE). Success in either program will strengthen a college application by demonstrating a student's ability to handle challenging coursework. Students are encouraged to choose courses that are of interest to them and that are manageable with the rest of their course load and activities schedule.

Feature	Advanced Placement (AP)	Concurrent Enrollment (CE)
What it is	A standardized, college-level curriculum taught in high school.	An actual college course delivered in the high school setting, typically taught by high school staff.
The Standard	Administered by the non-profit College Board, which ensures a nationally standardized curriculum that all participating high schools must follow.	Run through a partnership between your high school and a specific local college or university. The curriculum is college-level but can vary based on the specific partner institution.
Location/ Instructor	Taught on the high school campus by high school teachers; curriculum is standardized nationally by the College Board.	Taught on the high school campus by specially-qualified high school teachers who have been credentialed by the partner college. (Note: CE is often called "College in the Schools" if offered through the University of Minnesota).

Earning Credit: AP Exam vs. Course Grade: How Credit is Earned

Program	Advanced Placement (AP)	Concurrent Enrollment (CE)
Credit Mechanism	Credit depends on a single exam score. The exam is once per year in May. Students must score at least a 3 for a chance at college credit.	Credit depends on course performance (earning a passing grade, typically a D or better).
Credit Record	No college GPA is established from the course itself. Credit is granted by each college's registrar based on their policy after they review the exam score.	Establishes a college GPA with the partnering institution. Credit is awarded upon successful completion and is recorded on a college transcript. Poor performance in these courses can put a student on academic probation at the college level.

Financial Costs

- Concurrent Enrollment (CE): The course and the credits are free to students (with the exception of optional additional certifications).
- Advanced Placement (AP): The course itself is free, but there is a fee for the comprehensive AP Exam (fee waivers available if you qualify for Educational Benefits)

Financial Aid and Long-Term Implications: Hidden Benefits of Early College Credits

Benefit	Description
Savings & Placement	A high score/grade can allow a student to skip introductory courses and enroll directly into higher-level coursework, saving time and potentially tuition.
Degree Flexibility	Earning credits early can allow the student to graduate early, double major, minor, or study abroad without delaying graduation.
Confidence	Success in these rigorous courses builds confidence and proves readiness for the college workload.

The Academic Experience: Workload and Prerequisites

Both AP and CE courses involve a significantly heavier workload than standard high school classes.

Program	Advanced Placement (AP)	Concurrent Enrollment (CE)
Focus	Full-year commitment focused on preparing for that single, comprehensive exam in May.	Most modeled directly on a college schedule; often faster-paced, covering a full college syllabus in a single high school semester
Pace/Pressure	Sustained, high-intensity pace with pressure tending to build toward the end of the course as the exam date approaches.	Workload is generally spread out more evenly through the term with greater focus on college-style assignments (e.g., research papers, multiple exams).
Skills Needed	Emphasis on deep content coverage and extensive practice for the exam format (e.g., timed essays).	Requires students to develop strong time management skills earlier due to the distribution of assignments and the impact of the final course grade.

Prerequisites - depend on the course; students should refer to the [TRHS Academic Planning guide](#) for specifics.

Accommodations - students with a 504/IEP work with the partnering institution to determine accommodations

Impact on College Admissions and Transferability

Admissions Value

AP Courses: Admissions offices view success in AP courses as an excellent way to demonstrate standardized rigor and subject mastery against a nationally recognized benchmark.

CE Courses: Taking CE courses is valued as an excellent way to show concrete college readiness by providing an official college transcript with an actual college GPA.

Transferring the Credit

No credit transfer is guaranteed. Colleges have the final say, so you should always check the college's website or the registrar's office to determine if AP or CE credits will be accepted by the receiving institution.

Transfer Outcomes: Not All Credit is Created Equal

1. Direct Equivalent: Credit fulfills a specific required course (e.g., AP Calculus AB is sometimes a replacement for Calculus 1).
2. Elective Credit: Credit counts toward total degree hours but doesn't fulfill a specific requirement.
3. No Credit: The college may only use the course for placement or not accept it at all.

A Note on PSEO (Postsecondary Enrollment Options)

The Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program, which is specifically a Minnesota state-funded program, is distinct from both AP and CE, and is not included in the table below.

Immersion Factor: PSEO students leave the high school campus to take classes at a college or university campus or online directly alongside full-time college students. These courses are always taught by college faculty/professors.

Cost: PSEO is tuition-free, and the state typically covers the cost of required textbooks and fees, making it the most comprehensive cost-saving option.

Flexibility: PSEO offers a broader selection of courses but requires significant schedule rearrangement and travel, making it challenging for students heavily involved in high school activities .

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