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Dual Enrollment Boosts College Success But Gaps Remain

New Report Includes First National and State-by-State Breakdowns of Dual Enrollment Students' Access and Success

New York, October 15, 2024 — Each year, nearly 2.5 million high school students take dual enrollment college courses, which are now offered at 90% of public high schools across the country. A new report from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College, Columbia University, documents higher rates of college-going and completion for dual enrollment students relative to students who don't participate in dual enrollment. The report also finds that dual enrollment students' outcomes vary greatly across and within states, with important gaps in access and success for low-income, Black, and Hispanic students.

The report is the first to provide national and state-by-state results on the success of dual enrollment students, broken down by racial/ethnic group, income, and gender. The report and an accompanying data dashboard allow states to assess whether their policies and practices are maximizing the potential of dual enrollment for their students.

"Dual enrollment is a strong on-ramp to increase college enrollment and completion for all students, especially for low-income, Black, and Hispanic students, but there is a lot of room for improvement," said Tatiana Velasco, a senior research associate at CCRC and the report's lead author. "Given the large variation in policies and practices in dual enrollment, college and K-12 leaders should use the evidence in this report to assess and plan strategies to strengthen equitable access and success for all students."

Read the report: [*The Postsecondary Outcomes of High School Dual Enrollment Students: A National and State-by-State Analysis*](#)

View the state-by-state findings on the [data dashboard](#)

Dual enrollment was originally designed to provide accelerated courses to high-performing high school students, and many districts still limit access, creating obstacles to the college acceleration that dual enrollment can provide. The findings in this new report raise questions about how different states' and colleges' approaches to dual enrollment policy, program design, and implementation might affect postsecondary outcomes. The results from this report suggest three key implications for policy and practice:

1. **To fully realize the potential of dual enrollment, high-quality opportunities need to be accessible for more students.** Dual enrollment can benefit students from underrepresented groups in higher education. But to realize this potential, states, high schools, and colleges need to close gaps in access to dual enrollment coursework for lower-income, Black, Hispanic, and other underrepresented groups as well as expand supports to promote success in dual enrollment coursework.
2. **For dual enrollment to jump-start students' college careers and address concerns about affordability, colleges and states need to provide better supports to help students complete more quickly.** Dual enrollment students overall have stronger postsecondary outcomes than non-dual enrollees. But four years after high school, about a third of dual enrollment students—and even greater proportions among low-income, Black, and Hispanic students—continue to be enrolled at a postsecondary institution without having earned a degree.
3. **The state-level results in this report can inform statewide strategies to broaden access to dual enrollment and help more dual enrollment students complete college in as little time and with as little cost as possible.** State, college, and K-12 leaders should use this framework and their own data to benchmark outcomes, set improvement targets, and track progress. Given the wide range of state policies and local implementation practices in the national dual enrollment landscape, our analyses raise questions about how different state and local approaches to policy, programmatic design, and implementation may explain differences in participants' postsecondary outcomes.

The report follows high school students who started taking dual enrollment (DE) courses in the fall of 2015 into college and up to four years past high school graduation. Though the analysis does not control for differences between dual enrollment students and other students who did not take dual enrollment, it is consistent with the findings of other rigorous studies that show dual enrollment improves student outcomes. For all dual enrollment students, the report finds:

- More than 25% of new undergraduates overall and 40% of new community college students in fall 2015 were either current or former dual enrollment students.
- Eighty-one percent of dual enrollment students went to college in the first year after high school, compared with about 70% of students overall. Of those, 51% went to four-year institutions, and nearly a third to community colleges.
- Dual enrollment students who enrolled in college in the first year after high school completed college credentials at higher rates than students who entered college immediately after high school without dual enrollment. This holds across 41 states, with double-digit higher rates in 16 of those states.

	Highest Postsecondary Award			All Awards
	Certificate	Associate	Bachelor's	
DE students	2%	12%	36%	50%
Non-DE students	2%	9%	34%	44%*

* Award completion rates add to 44% due to rounding.

- Almost a third (31%) of dual enrollment students were still enrolled in college and making progress toward a credential within four years of completing high school.
- High school students who took dual enrollment at a four-year institution did particularly well in college but were not as diverse as other dual enrollment students in terms of race/ethnicity and income.
- For community colleges, former dual enrollment students are a strong source of post-high-school enrollments, with more than a third of community college dual enrollment students returning for at least one term to the same community college in the first year after high school.

Low-income, Black, and Hispanic students were underrepresented in dual enrollment, and their postsecondary award completion rates were lower compared to other dual enrollees, although dual enrollment students from these groups had better outcomes than students who did not participate in dual enrollment.

Dual Enrollment Students' Postsecondary Enrollment and Award Completion Rates

	College-Going Rate, DE Students	College Completion Rate	
		DE Students Who Enrolled After High School	Non-DE Students
All students	81%	50%	44%
Low-income students	77%	45%	33%
Black students	82%	40%	27%
Hispanic students	78%	42%	33%

Note: This table shows the postsecondary outcomes of students who started taking dual enrollment courses in 2015 as 11th or 12th graders. For completion outcomes, we compare dual enrollment students who enrolled in college within the first year post-high school with 18–20-year-old college entrants who did not take dual enrollment.

- While 36% of dual enrollment students who enrolled in college within the first year after high school completed a bachelor's in four-years, only 28% of low-income, 29% of Black, and 25% of Hispanic dual enrollees did so.
- Some states have made progress in broadening access to dual enrollment for students from underrepresented groups. However, states where these groups were better represented in dual enrollment tended to show weaker college-going and completion

outcomes, suggesting that there is a tension between increasing equitable access to dual enrollment and ensuring student success.

- A few states had more representative participation and college completion rates for Black and Hispanic students in dual enrollment.

The Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, studies community colleges because they provide critical access to postsecondary education and are uniquely positioned to promote equity and social mobility in the United States. Our mission is to conduct research that helps these institutions strengthen opportunities and improve outcomes for their students, particularly those from underserved populations.