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College Business Models for Scaling Purposeful Dual Enrollment

John Fink | Davis Jenkins | Sarah Griffin | Aurely Garcia Tulloch

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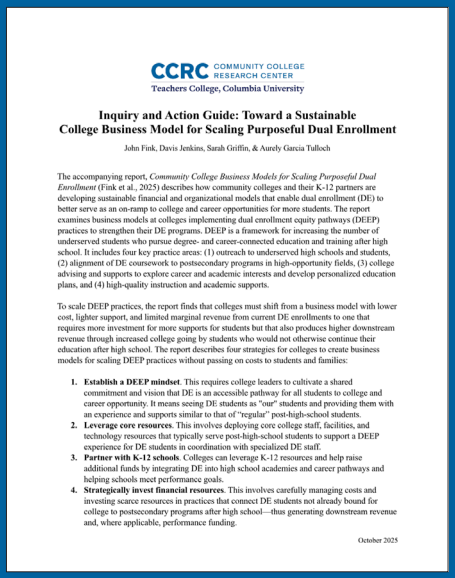
Table of Contents

This report examines how community colleges and their K-12 partners are finding ways to allocate, align, and sustain the resources needed to scale **dual enrollment equity pathways (DEEP)**—a model of purposeful dual enrollment designed to guide underserved students into degree- and career-connected education and training after high school. The report highlights the significant financial and organizational challenges colleges face in moving beyond lower-investment business models for dual enrollment, especially in states that provide little or no direct funding, and it documents innovative strategies colleges are using to make DEEP accessible and affordable without shifting the cost burden onto students and families.



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Inquiry and Action Guide: Toward a Sustainable College Business Model for Scaling Purposeful Dual Enrollment

John Fink, Davis Jenkins, Sarah Griffin, & Aurely Garcia Tulloch

The accompanying report, *Community College Business Models for Scaling Purposeful Dual Enrollment* (Fink et al., 2025) describes how community colleges and their K-12 partners are developing sustainable financial and organizational models that enable dual enrollment (DE) to better serve as an on-ramp to college and career opportunities for more students. The report examines business models at colleges implementing dual enrollment equity pathways (DEEP) practices to strengthen their DE programs. DEEP is a framework for increasing the number of underserved students who pursue degree- and career-connected education and training after high school. It includes four key practice areas: (1) outreach to underserved high schools and students, (2) alignment of DE coursework to postsecondary programs in high-opportunity fields, (3) college advising and supports to explore career and academic interests and develop personalized education plans, and (4) high-quality instruction and academic supports.

To scale DEEP practices, the report finds that colleges must shift from a business model with lower cost, lighter support, and limited marginal revenue from current DE enrollments to one that requires more investment for more supports for students but that also produces higher downstream revenue through increased college going by students who would not otherwise continue their education after high school. The report describes four strategies for colleges to create business models for scaling DEEP practices without passing on costs to students and families:

1. **Establish a DEEP mindset**. This requires college leaders to cultivate a shared commitment and vision that DE is an accessible pathway for all students to college and career opportunity. It means seeing DE students as "our" students and providing them with an experience and supports similar to that of "regular" post-high-school students.
2. **Leverage core resources**. This involves deploying core college staff, facilities, and technology resources that typically serve post-high-school students to support a DEEP experience for DE students in coordination with specialized DE staff.
3. **Partner with K-12 schools**. Colleges can leverage K-12 resources and help raise additional funds by integrating DE into high school academies and career pathways and helping schools meet performance goals.
4. **Strategically invest financial resources**. This involves carefully managing costs and investing scarce resources in practices that connect DE students not already bound for college to postsecondary programs after high school—thus generating downstream revenue and, where applicable, performance funding.

October 2025

INQUIRY AND ACTION GUIDE:

Toward a Sustainable College Business Model for Scaling Purposeful Dual Enrollment

See the **accompanying guide** for recommendations on how colleges can develop a sustainable business model for scaling purposeful dual enrollment, following the findings from this report. The guide includes instructions, activities, and discussion to help college leaders conduct a self-study and gap analysis, prioritize and plan resource allocation strategies, and identify resources needed to implement at scale in the next 1–2 years.

Introduction

The conversation around high school dual enrollment (DE) is shifting. There's a growing consensus that DE should be more than just an early taste of college; it should serve as a purposeful pathway to career-connected postsecondary education and training, particularly for students from historically underserved communities who might not otherwise pursue further education after high school. But to realize this potential, the business model for DE must enable colleges and K-12 schools to scale a more purposeful approach to DE in a way that is financially sustainable.

Conventionally, dual enrollment programs[1] are sometimes described as "programs of privilege" because of uneven student access and participation or as "random acts" because of the limited intentionality and advising with which the course offerings are provided to students. In these cases, too little effort is made to encourage and support students not already intending to go to college to take DE courses, and supports to help students acclimate and succeed in college-level courses are scattershot instead of systematic. Career and college program advising and planning support may be available to students, but it is mostly left to students to seek them out.

While the conventional model might suffice for students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds or those attending well-resourced schools with robust college counseling, it often falls short for first-generation students in under-resourced high schools. These students often require active outreach and encouragement to take DE courses, intrusive academic support, and comprehensive career and college advising and planning assistance to prepare them to pursue postsecondary programs of study in fields of interest to them.

At CCRC, we have developed a framework—based on research on growing efforts by colleges and K-12 partners—to recruit, motivate, and prepare underserved students to pursue a postsecondary degree in high-opportunity fields directly after high school. In this model, which we call "dual enrollment equity pathways," or DEEP, colleges work with their K-12 partners to:

- Reach out to underserved students and families to encourage and support them to participate in dual enrollment;
- Align dual enrollment course offerings to bachelor's and career-technical associate degree programs and pathways in high-opportunity fields;
- Support every student with career and academic exploration, advising, and planning; and
- Deliver high-quality instruction that builds students' confidence as college learners.

As is shown in Table 1, the DEEP approach represents a significant departure from the conventional "random acts" or "programs of privilege" model of dual enrollment.

Table 1.
Conventional Dual Enrollment and DEEP Models Compared

Question	Conventional approach	DEEP approach
Who is it designed for?	Primarily students who are already headed to college after high school	All students, especially those who might not otherwise pursue further education after high school
What courses are offered?	Primarily general education courses or whatever course is easy to offer based on teacher availability	Foundational coursework (including general education courses) aligned to college degree programs in fields of interest to students
What is the approach to teaching?	Reliance on qualified high school teachers with limited quality control and professional development	Strong quality control and professional development through collaboration with college faculty and programs
What academic supports are provided to students?	Ad hoc support, as needed, if students reach out for help	Unavoidable and proactive academic support, frontloaded for new DE students
What college advising is provided?	Advising from the college available to students who seek it out.	College-provided advising for all students at key checkpoints to help explore career and academic interests and create an individualized post-high-school learning plan

Changing the Business Model to Support a DEEP Approach to Dual Enrollment

For community colleges, many of which operate DE programs at a net financial loss (Belfield et al., 2023), increasing investments in DE to provide expanded supports to students beyond those typical of the conventional approach can be challenging, especially in states with limited funding for dual enrollment. Difficulties arise because DE programs have distinct costs, including for dedicated staff to build partnerships and coordinate course delivery with high schools, plan course schedules, recruit students, manage student applications and registrations, and field questions from students and parents. And DE programs may draw in limited revenues to offset these costs. Consistent with their mission to provide access to affordable postsecondary education, community colleges generally seek to offer DE at no or low cost to students and families. And in some cases, college are required by state policy or local agreements to offer DE for free or at a reduced cost.

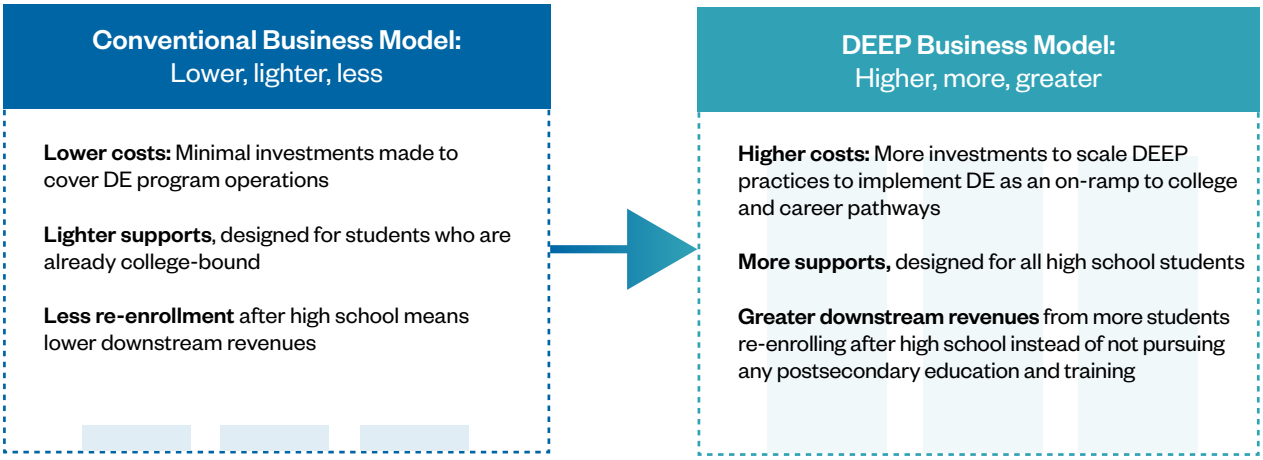
Because colleges must take on, even at a bare minimum, some fixed DE-specific costs while typically generating limited revenue from DE coursework, they may feel forced into a business model that can be characterized as "lower cost, lighter supports." Under this model, colleges prioritize keeping program administration and instructional costs low by offering courses that are easiest and cheapest to deliver—typically those taught in high schools by qualified high school teachers—and keeping dedicated DE staff relatively small, even as enrollment by DE students has grown at many colleges. Even under this model, colleges may still need to pass on costs to students, families, or K-12 partners, many of whom already face financial strain.

Without proactive outreach to underserved high schools with aligned college advising and planning assistance, DE programs tend to serve students who are already college-bound and miss out on the large group of students who would not otherwise pursue postsecondary education after high school. In doing so, these programs miss out on tapping into this substantial source of future tuition revenue: High school graduates without plans to enroll at any college (Belfield et al., 2023).

Actively recruiting students who do not already plan to pursue postsecondary education and providing them with coursework, instruction, advising, and other supports to connect them to college programs of study aligned to careers and bachelor's degrees through the DEEP approach involves additional costs beyond those of the conventional model. These costs are primarily for more staff to work with K-12 schools to align career and college pathways, engage in proactive recruitment, and provide individualized advising and planning support for students.

Figure 1.

Comparing Business Models for Dual Enrollment



Given the costs, why should college leaders want to make the investment needed take a DEEP approach to dual enrollment? While traditional approaches might inadvertently reinforce existing inequities, DEEP practices are expressly designed to broaden postsecondary access and attainment for underserved groups. DEEP aims to cultivate a robust pipeline of talent that is essential for the economic and social vitality of our communities. This proactive approach directly addresses widespread concerns from students, families, policymakers, and the public about the value and affordability of higher education. And it focuses on the growing segment of high school graduates who do not attend college immediately after high school.[2] Moreover, colleges taking a DEEP approach are better positioned to offset costs by connecting students who might not otherwise go to college to postsecondary programs of study in fields of interest, thereby generating greater downstream revenues by attracting new students to college after high school. As shown in Figure 1, in contrast to the lower and lighter business model underlying the conventional approach to DE, the DEEP business model can be thought of as "higher and greater," reflecting the increased investments needed to scale DEEP practices and the greater downstream revenues from future college enrollments after high school.

Learning From Colleges With Varying Levels of State Support for Dual Enrollment

This report presents actionable strategies for colleges and K-12 partners to deploy their resources—staff, facilities, technology, and finances—to deliver purposeful dual enrollment experiences for students, while ensuring affordable access to it. To do this, we draw on in-depth interviews we conducted with colleges in various phases of implementing DEEP practices. We focus on community colleges and their business models, but the findings are also applicable to other postsecondary sectors as well.

Our research involved extensive interviews with DE program staff, budget officers, and senior leadership from community colleges across 10 states. These colleges were selected based on evidence of having scaled at least some DEEP practices, either through national assessments or demonstrated success in closing equity gaps for Black and Latino students in DE access, as revealed by CCRC's analysis of IPEDS data.[3]

We intentionally included colleges operating within a spectrum of state funding contexts, from those with robust DE funding (high) to those with more limited (medium) or no (low) direct state support (see Table 2). This is important since finding the resources to support DEEP practices while also making it free to students, families, and schools is challenging everywhere but especially in states that do not provide funding to colleges for DE sufficient to offset the revenue lost by providing DE free to students and families.

Table 2.
State Funding for Dual Enrollment at Colleges Interviewed

State	College	State DE funding level
Alabama	Coastal Alabama College	High
California	Compton College Lemoore College	High
Iowa	Kirkwood Community College	Medium
Nebraska	Northeast Community College	Low
New Jersey	Hudson County Community College	Low
Ohio	Marion Technical College	Medium
South Carolina	Tri-County Technical College	High
Texas	Alvin Community College Amarillo College South Texas College	Medium
Washington	South Puget Sound Community College	High (Running Start); medium (College in the High School)
Wisconsin	Madison Area Technical College	Low

Note. Funding level characterization is based on a 50-state analysis of state funding of DE (Jenkins et al., 2025).

The report is organized into two main sections. The first examines the typical costs associated with conventional dual enrollment, the additional investments required for DEEP, and the challenges in funding DEEP. The second describes strategies colleges and their K-12 partners are deploying to scale and sustain DEEP. We have also created a companion inquiry and action guide drawing on findings from this report to help colleges assess dual enrollment costs and revenues, consider current staffing and resource allocations, and develop a sustainable business model to support scaling of prioritized program improvements aligned to the DEEP framework.

Dual Enrollment Costs and the Added Costs and Challenges of Funding DEEP

In this section, we examine the college costs typically associated with the conventional approach to DE over and above the costs of offering programs and supports to regular post-high school students. We then describe the additional costs of DEEP dual enrollment and the challenges colleges may have in covering those costs.

Common Dual Enrollment Costs for Colleges

The typical costs to colleges of providing DE under the conventional model are outlined in Table 3.[4] The three largest costs tend to be for instruction, dedicated dual enrollment staff, and program administration and overhead.

Table 3.
Typical College Costs of Dual Enrollment

Primary costs	Other potential costs
• Instruction • Dedicated staff for high schools for program coordination, recruitment, enrollment, and advising support • Indirect services and administration	• Books/course materials • Tutoring/academic support • Instructional oversight and quality control • Faculty development

The costs of instruction vary depending on who is teaching the course and where.

- **College faculty (taught on campus or online).** These costs are similar to those for regular college courses and similarly vary depending on faculty rank and whether they are full-time or adjunct.
- **College faculty (taught at the high school).** This involves the same costs as above plus any additional costs involved in supporting faculty travel to high schools (e.g., reimbursement for mileage).

- **High school teachers (certified to teach college courses).** Colleges typically pay high school teachers through stipends or as adjunct instructors to teach DE courses at the high school. These costs tend to be significantly lower than for courses taught by college faculty.

Colleges typically rely on a dedicated staff to coordinate DE program delivery with high school schools. Dedicated DE staff partner with high school staff to implement DE programs, including planning course schedules, recruiting students, managing student applications and registrations, and fielding questions from students and parents. Despite the fact that these staff have many roles and serve what is often a growing and substantial portion of colleges' students, colleges tend to support a relatively small staff to limit costs.

Another large cost area is for college administration and indirect services. These costs are incurred by colleges for DE students who are served by collegewide functions such as admissions and records, technology services, advising and student services, or library services. Other potential DE costs include:

- **Books and course materials.** Some colleges or high school partners provide textbooks and other instructional materials free of charge for DE students.
- **Tutoring and academic support.** Costs involved in providing academic support to DE students
- **Instructional oversight and quality control.** Costs associated with community college administrators or faculty reviewing and monitoring classes, particularly those taught by high school teachers at high schools.
- **Professional development.** Costs of training and professional development for DE instructors, high school counselors, and college staff.

Additional Costs of DEEP

In the DEEP approach, substantial additional costs are incurred by colleges not only to offer access to college coursework to those who seek it out but also to actively recruit students who might not otherwise go to college and provide them with coursework, instruction, advising, and other supports to connect them to college programs of study aligned to college degrees and careers in fields of interest to them.

The following practices represent essential components of the DEEP approach to dual enrollment. For each we describe what additional costs colleges incur above and beyond the conventional, lower-cost approach to DE. These key DEEP practices and their associated costs are summarized in Table 4 (p. 8).

Outreach efforts by colleges to promote dual enrollment opportunities with a focus on underserved communities. Additional costs include sufficient staff to provide high schools and districts with single points of contact to recruit, enroll, and provide guidance to students in numerous, often remote locations. Colleges typically partner with dozens of high schools and thus require multiple staff to keep caseload reasonable. So, for example, if having enough staff to assign one to 6–10 high schools would allow for monthly in-person visits to schools, investing

in more staff for a lower caseload of 4–5 high schools per staff member might allow for weekly or biweekly visits. Some colleges or high schools provide free transportation for students to classes on college campuses and satellite centers, particularly for courses that require specialized equipment or facilities. And colleges may invest in technology systems including Customer Relationships Management (CRM) systems to streamline admission, registration, and approval processes and thus reduce administrative barriers to students who want to enroll in DE courses.

Alignment of dual enrollment coursework to bachelor's major pathways and career-technical associate degree and apprenticeship programs in high-opportunity fields. Additional costs include staff and faculty time to review DE course alignment with specific college programs and high school graduation requirements. Staff time is also required to regularly evaluate instructor availability by high school and plan course offerings to avoid incoherent offerings or "random acts" of DE and potentially duplicative Advanced Placement course options. These additional costs do not account for prior work done generally by the college to align programs of study to bachelor's degree majors at transfer partners or high-opportunity jobs at local employers, which would require additional time and effort if not already completed.

Advising and support provided by the college to help all students explore program options, select program-relevant coursework, and build personalized postsecondary plans. Additional costs include college staff to provide individualized career and post-high-school educational advising and planning assistance in collaboration with high school counselors. Furthermore, colleges may incur additional costs for extending educational planning software to DE students so they can map out their courses to bachelor's degree majors at transfer partners or to CTE credentials offered by the community college. Colleges may also organize occasional campus visits to help student explore options and showcase programs of study.

High-quality instruction and intrusive and proactive academic supports to ensure students are successful in their dual enrollment courses. Additional costs include quality control, departmental support, and professional development for all DE faculty, including qualified high school teachers teaching courses in high schools. And to provide intrusive academic support systematically to DE students, particularly in their first DE courses, faculty or staff need to allocate time to identify and support struggling students in coordination with K-12 partners. Additional resources may also be needed to extend tutoring, mental health, and other support services provided by the college to DE students.

Close working partnerships with K-12 school and district staff to support program planning, operation, and troubleshooting. Additional costs include staff time for planning and coordination as well as information systems to facilitate information-sharing and communication, and student recruitment, advising, educational planning and progress monitoring. Importantly, the costs for building and maintaining effective DE partnerships include dedicated time from senior college and K-12 leaders to meet and discuss a shared vision and goals for DE as well as to troubleshoot thorny issues.

Finally, an essential element for DE programs to serve as an on-ramp to college and career opportunity for all students, especially those from underserved communities, is for coursework to be provided at no cost for students and families—and if not free for all, then at least free for low-income students. Forgoing tuition and fees to offer DE courses free to students and families reduces the revenue colleges can use to offset the other costs of taking a DEEP approach to dual enrollment.

Table 4.

Summary of DEEP Practices and Added Costs

DEEP practice area	Example practices	Associated DEEP costs
Outreach efforts to promote dual enrollment	• Proactive marketing and recruitment to underserved K-12 schools and communities • Parent education and engagement • College application and registration assistance	• Adequate staff to provide single point of contact and support for numerous partner high schools • Transportation costs for courses at the college • CRM and messaging systems to manage application, registration, approval processes
Alignment of dual enrollment coursework	• DE offerings mapped to postsecondary CTE degrees and bachelor's major pathways • High school students enrolled in foundation courses for transfer and CTE programs	• Adequate staff time to review course alignment with college program and high school graduation requirements • Adequate staff time to plan course offerings and instructor availability by high school to avoid "random acts" • Connecting high school students to college CTE programs, which may require transportation for students to visit college facilities
Advising provided by the college	• College provides advising to all students in collaboration with high school counselors; every student helped to develop individualized education plans aligned to a postsecondary program of study • Collaborative professional development with school counselors	• Adequate staffing to provide individualized advising and planning assistance • Degree planning and progress monitoring systems
High-quality **instruction and support**	• DE students exposed to instruction by college faculty on college campuses and where possible in classes with post-high-school students • Proactive academic and nonacademic support for DE students • Additional supports for new DE students and at key course checkpoints (i.e., at 3- or 6-weeks)	• Prioritizing use of college faculty, which can be more expensive • Extensive quality control, professional development, and support for instructors who are high school teachers • Faculty or staff time to proactively identify and support struggling students • Financial support/incentives to expand certifications of high school teachers • Learning management, early alert, and online tutoring systems for DE students
Close working **partnerships** with K-12	• Close working relationships with K-12 partners through regular meetings at both leadership and program levels with an explicit focus on DE student outcomes and on meeting shared goals • Day-to-day communication with K-12 partners to support planning, operations, and troubleshooting	• Time from senior college leaders to build relationships with many disparate district and school leaders • Adequate staff time to coordinate planning and operations and to troubleshoot with numerous, often widely dispersed schools • Systems for sharing data on students and student outcomes

Challenges in Scaling DEEP Practices Without Adequate State Funding

A core principle of DEEP is that the cost burden should not fall on students and their families, especially those from low-income backgrounds, given that traditional financial aid is generally not available for dual enrollment. Scaling DEEP practices without passing along costs to students and families is considerably more difficult in states that provide less funding to college for DE.

Based on a 50-state analysis, we find that only about 10 states provide per-student funding to colleges at a level equivalent to the tuition and fees they receive for post-high-school students (Jenkins et al., 2025). In another 25 states, state funding covers part of the tuition and fees colleges charge for regular students. Sixteen states provide little to no funding for DE, placing the cost burden instead on colleges, localities, K-12 districts, or students and families. Furthermore, even among states with substantial or partial college funding to colleges for DE, some provide that funding through mandated payments from K-12 schools to colleges. While states may provide additional funds to schools to defray these costs, schools can be reluctant to share this funding with colleges, given that they are often strapped for resources.

In states that provide little or no funding for DE, colleges are often constrained to continue with the conventional "lower and lighter" business model or even pass some costs on to students and families or K-12 schools. While substantial state funding does not guarantee a DEEP approach, its absence certainly poses a significant barrier.

On the other hand, state investments in DE can supercharge college and K-12 efforts to scale DEEP practices, such as Texas House Bill 8's performance bonuses for colleges and FAST scholarship making DE free for low-income students. And even in states with limited funding, our research reveals that some colleges are nonetheless actively seeking ways to implement DEEP practices.

Strategically Investing College and K-12 Resources to Scale DEEP

DE students now comprise more than a fifth of community college enrollments, with this share being a third or more in 11 states (Fink, 2025). Given the potential for DE to serve as an on-ramp to college and career opportunity, particularly for underserved students, colleges—and the communities they serve—cannot afford to operate these programs on a shoestring budget. While some states are more generous in funding DE than others, we found that regardless of the level of state funding, colleges successful in scaling DEEP not only invest in dedicated DE staff; they strategically use their existing college resources—staff, facilities, and technology—that typically serve post-high-school students to benefit DE students. They also collaborate with K-12 schools to make the most of the resources schools already have to prepare and guide students for college and career pathways. Finally, these colleges carefully invest their financial resources to support offerings and practices that connect students to purposeful pathways after high school.

Given the potential for DE to serve as an on-ramp to college and career opportunity, particularly for underserved students, colleges and the communities they serve cannot afford to operate these programs on a shoestring budget.

These combined efforts not only have the potential to help students and their families achieve upward mobility and help build a skilled workforce for local economies; they can also generate downstream revenue for colleges by increasing the number of DE students who continue their education after high school and persist in their college programs.

In this section, we present findings drawn from interviews with DE program staff and senior college leaders that detail four key strategies colleges are using to create a sustainable business model for offering a DEEP experience to students on a larger scale:

1. Establish a DEEP mindset by committing to DE as an accessible pathway to college and careers for every student.
2. Leverage the college's core staff, facilities, and technology resources to support a DEEP experience for students.
3. Partner with K-12 Schools to maximize available resources for DEEP.
4. Strategically invest financial resources to scale DEEP practices.

1. Establish a DEEP mindset by committing to dual enrollment as an accessible pathway to college and careers for every student.

A DEEP mindset includes shared beliefs, priorities, and vision about the purpose of DE, attention to areas for improvement, and clear aspirations for what DE programs should become. College budgets reflect institutional priorities. Establishing a DEEP mindset internally at the college and sharing it with K-12 partners is important because it helps to ensure that resources are invested in ways that support the more access-broadening, postsecondary-pathways-focused practice reflected in the DEEP approach to dual enrollment.

In our interviews, we observed three guiding principles that helped colleges and K-12 partners focus on scaling DEEP practices, which we describe below.

Increasing DE access has huge potential benefits for students, families, and communities

Colleges that are successfully scaling DEEP have made a clear commitment to provide low-cost, accessible DE as a means for expanding postsecondary participation, thus supporting upward mobility for students and families while providing talent for their communities. For example, Dr. Aaron Milner, the president of **Coastal Alabama Community College**, views the college's tuition-free dual enrollment (which they call "early college") policy as a strategic investment. With a background in K-12 education, he believes that the policy will improve college access, especially for first-generation college students, by showing them they are capable of college-level work. He sees this tuition-free approach as a productive "front-end" investment, believing that it is better to use funds for early college opportunities in the near term than for social services later on.

Dual enrollment students are "our" students

As DE students make up an increasingly larger portion of overall college enrollment—sometimes approaching 50% of headcount at the colleges we studied—it has become harder to treat this group as separate from "regular" college students. Embracing a DEEP mindset means truly seeing DE students as "our students" and providing them with the same level of service as any other student enrolled at the college. For Dr. Keith Curry, president of **Compton College** in California, promoting the mindset that DE students are "our students" is both the right thing to do and a key strategy for building postsecondary pathways for local high school students. In addition to expanding dedicated staff resources for DE to increase outreach and advising at partnering high schools, the college has been profiled for its innovative use of emergency aid funds to support DE students. According to Curry, "We believe that those students who are enrolled in Compton courses while still in high school are just as much a part of our community as any other student" (Believe in Students, Compton College, & Equity, 2022, p. 3). The college has thus made it a priority to provide DE students with the same academic and nonacademic support services offered to any Compton College student.

Offering access to college courses isn't enough; DE should provide an on-ramp to postsecondary degree and career pathways

Colleges scaling DEEP also recognize that simply offering college courses is not enough to expand postsecondary participation, particularly among students who might not otherwise pursue further education. In our interviews, President Curry of **Compton College** captured this sentiment in stating, "Our goal is to offer pathways for students and not one-off courses." As with post-high-school students, DE students and their families want a clear path to well-paying jobs and further education at the bachelor's level and beyond. This means coupling a commitment to low-cost access with a commitment to providing a high-quality DE experience that goes beyond just taking classes. When **Tri-County Technical College** in South Carolina started offering DE over a decade ago, college stakeholders developed principles to ensure all students have "collegiate" experience that prepares them to be successful college students and smart consumers of higher education. To ensure academic rigor, all DE courses, even those taught in high schools, are taught by college faculty. Both in and out of the classroom, college faculty and staff aim to equip students with not just academic and technical skills but also "survival skills" for college, like understanding how to use library resources, interact with faculty, advocate for themselves, and develop a growth mindset. As Galen DeHay, Tri-County's president put it, "We not only provide college courses but pathways to careers." This means aligning DE classes to the college's career and transfer pathway maps, helping all DE students develop high school plans aligned with career and bachelor's pathways, and providing college matriculation support for graduating high school seniors.

2. Leverage the college's core staff, facilities, and technology resources to support a DEEP experience for students.

In many colleges, DE is operated mostly separate from the college's main career and academic transfer programs, with its own typically small staff responsible for coordinating with school partners and recruiting, advising, and supporting DE students. As DE has grown to represent a substantial portion of overall college enrollment, colleges can achieve a sustainable business model for DEEP by thinking about how their "core" staff, facilities, and technology systems for "regular" post-high-school programs

and students can be deployed in concert with DE staff to scale DEEP practices. This reflects the mindset described previously that DE students are "our" students and should benefit from all the programs and supports colleges offer.

Here, we look at ways colleges use their core resources not just to offer high school students the chance to take college courses but also to help them explore, plan, and gain momentum on a pathway to good jobs and college degrees after high school.

Leverage core staff and program resources

A key strategy for ensuring sufficient resources to provide a DEEP experience to all DE students is to coordinate and leverage support for DE students from specialized DE staff with that of the "core" college staff and functions that serve post-high-school students. According to a 2025 survey of nearly 300 postsecondary institutions, most (59%) reported that DE is organized in more of a centralized or specialized model, while about a third reported organizing DE staffing such that support for DE students is more distributed to core college functions (Williams & Kilgore, 2025). Regardless of whether a college organizes its DE functions more centrally or distributes responsibility to other college offices, a clear strategy for achieving a more sustainable business model for DEEP is to identify ways to leverage existing college staff, facilities, and technology to support scaling DEEP practices. Colleges with more specialized DE teams should consider how they could rely more upon core college operations to support the scaling of DEEP practices. The burden for scaling DEEP practices need not fall solely on the relatively small, specialized DE staff.

The size, roles, and organization of specialized DE staff varies greatly across colleges. **Tri-County Technical College** is one of the colleges that relies more heavily on its regular program faculty and staff for all instruction and most of the outreach, advising, and planning assistance for DE students. A small staff of four full-time equivalents (FTEs) supports coordination with schools and provides higher-touch support for DE student recruitment, advising, and connection to college resources. Tri-County is able to rely on its core college faculty and staff to provide a DEEP experience for students because its regular post-high-school programs and supports are already organized to help students explore, choose, enter and complete programs aligned with high-demand careers and bachelor's degrees in particular majors. In essence, the college is extending its core pathways-oriented programs, instruction, and supports to DE offerings and students.

Other colleges, particularly those with larger numbers of DE students, have larger DE staff who provide a wider range of supports to DE students, in some cases operating like a core division of the college. Yet even under this more robustly staffed, centralized model, there is strong alignment and coordination with core college functions. For example, **South Texas College**, which serves 12,000 DE students in 70 high school sites, has a large DE team of 37 full-time-equivalent staff. This team is organized as a core division under the vice president and provost for academic affairs and economic development, who also oversees DE enrollment management, scheduling, advising, and student success functions. This organizational alignment ensures that instruction, recruitment, advising, and scheduling for DE are coordinated, creating a cohesive system of supports for students and partner school districts. Table 5 shows the staffing and organization of specialized DE staff at a sample of the colleges we studied and indicates how much the given college relies on core college staff and functions to support DE students.

Table 5.

Examples of Dual Enrollment Staffing at Selected Colleges

College	DE program size	DE staffing	Reliance on core college staff and functions to serve DE students
Coastal Alabama Community College (AL)	**2,500** DE students in 2024-25 (35% of overall enrollment); more than 70 high schools served across 10 counties (mix of larger urban and smaller rural schools)	**6 FTE staff:** • 1 director of the early college program • 5 career coaches, located at satellite campuses with assigned high school caseload	Higher
Compton College (CA)	**2,800** DE students in 2024-25 (35% of overall enrollment); 17 high schools served across 3 partnering districts	**10 FTE staff:** • 1 director of educational partnerships • 4 DE specialists serving three districts • 3 part-time student service advisors that work in high schools • 1 college outreach coordinator • 1 admissions and records staff person • 4 part-time counselors that are assigned to meet with students at specific schools once per week	Lower
Hudson County Community College (NJ)	**860** DE students in 2024-25 (less than 10% of overall enrollment); 20 high schools served	**7.5 FTE staff:** • 1 executive director • 1 associate director • 2 academic counselors • 1 program assistant • 1 administrative assistant • 0.5 assistant	Lower
Kirkwood Community College (IA)	**6,670** DE students in 2024-25 (36% of overall enrollment); 39 high schools served across 7 counties	**19 FTE staff:** • 1 executive dean of K-12 partnerships • 4 centralized operations team members (1 lead operations director, 2 operations coordinators, and 1 health program coordinator) • 6 student academic support coordinators • 8 regional center staff (1 director and 1 center coordinator at 4 centers)	Lower
South Puget Sound Community College (WA)	**2,460** DE students in 2024-25 (20% of total enrollment); 25 high schools served	**5 FTE staff:** • 1 director of K-12 partnership and recruitment • 4 educational planners, each assigned to one of the college's main school district partners	Higher
South Texas College (TX)	**12,000** DE students in 2024-25 (40% of overall enrollment); more than 70 high school sites served across 2 counties	**37 FTE staff:** • 1 director of K-12 partnership and recruitm • 1 associate vice president for DE programs and school partnerships (staff listed below fall under this position) • 1 associate dean for DE programs, managing 1 staff • 1 director of academies and of CTE pathways, managing 5 staff • 1 director of DE pathways, managing 12 staff • 1 director of DE scheduling and enrollment services, managing 11 staff • 1 director of DE program relations and engagement, managing 2 staff	Lower
Tri-County Technical College (SC)	**1,200** DE students in 2024-25 (12% of overall enrollment); 16 high schools served across 7 school districts	**4 FTE staff:** • 1 director of high school engagement and outreach • 1 administrative support person who manages registration • 1 coordinator of CTE programs • 1 coordinator for gen ed and homeschooled students	Higher

Note. DE program enrollment and percent of overall headcount at each college is approximate.

Below we describe some specific ways that the colleges where we conducted interviews—both those with larger DE staff and those with smaller ones—leverage their core staff and program resources to provide DE student supports associated with the DEEP approach.

Access and outreach. Colleges leverage their core marketing and recruitment functions to reach out to underserved students and reduce costs to schools. For example, even though they are responsible for encouraging high school students generally to pursue postsecondary education and training, **Kirkwood Community College**'s college and career transition counselors also play a vital role in advising and recruiting DE students who might be interested in enrolling in the college's career-technical or transfer programs after high school. At **Tri-County Technical College**, the Office of High School Outreach and Engagement works with K-12 partners to promote DE as an opportunity to get a head start on the college's well-defined career and bachelor's pathways while in high school. Their outreach efforts start with students and families in middle schools, to help them begin high school and DE planning early.

Alignment to career and degree pathways. Colleges provide high-quality information to students and counselors to help them map high school and DE coursework to college CTE and transfer pathways that lead to good jobs and majors in fields of interest. For example, **Alvin Community College** has created custom program maps for each of its DE high school partners. Each map traces DE course sequences to the most popular four-year degree programs among former graduates of the high school—which have helped to reassure students that their courses are helping them meet their future educational goals. As a part of this effort, math faculty at the college have worked with partner school districts to align math courses with specific program pathways at the college, helping to ensure that students complete relevant math courses in their field of interest.

Career and college advising. Colleges connect DE students to regular college advisors for career and educational advising and planning. For example, **Coastal Alabama Community College**'s career coaches help all students develop an individualized educational plan. All DE students are placed on a degree path such that they can see how their courses contribute to a specific degree. At **South Puget Sound Community College**, each advisor (called an educational planner) is assigned a caseload of Running Start dual enrollment students from particular high schools, working with them to create educational plans. All Running Start students—like all the college's regular students—are also required to take a college success course in which they continue to work on developing their educational plans in coordination with an advisor. Similarly, **Tri-County Technical College**'s dual enrollment students are assigned a CTE pathway-specific or transfer college advisor who works with high school counselors and DE staff to help students develop and follow a state-mandated high school Individual Guidance Plan with embedded DE courses. And at **Lemoore College**, whose DE enrollment has grown to represent one in five of their students overall, college leaders decided to reallocate one of the college's five counselors to focus exclusively on DE students.

Instruction and academic support. Colleges assign academic administrator and faculty time to provide strong management, supervision, and professional development for high school teachers who teach DE, and to make academic support more readily accessible for DE students.

For example, **South Puget Sound Community College** sends a college faculty member to review the teaching of every College in the High School (CiHS) course to ensure consistency

with on-campus instruction. High school CiHS instructors receive a stipend to participate in CiHS activities, including professional development. The professional development opportunities can be the same opportunities organized for all college faculty members or something unique to the high school instructor. Other institutions accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), including **Kirkwood Community College** and **South Texas College**, have well established processes for providing quality control for courses taught in high schools and for professional development for high school teachers who are DE faculty. For example, **South Texas College** hosts annual workshops during the fall and spring semesters to prepare high school DE faculty for teaching college courses. During these workshops, DE faculty receive course and discipline-specific training and updates on DE initiatives and other relevant initiatives taking place at the college, and they attend a meeting with their respective academic departments.

Colleges also leverage core staff resources to work in coordination with high school partners to identify and support students who are struggling academically in DE coursework. For example, any DE student identified as struggling in a course at **Alvin Community College** is scheduled to meet with a college DE advisor to create an improvement plan. During the meeting, the DE advisor works with the student to understand their challenges and identify their strengths. The plan is shared with the student's instructor so they are aware of the student's plans to improve their grade. Before the drop deadline, the student and the DE advisor meet to determine whether the student should remain in the course or drop it.

Scaling the use of Open Educational Resources (OER) is another strategy for proactively supporting student success by providing instructional materials immediately when the course begins at no cost. Colleges including **South Texas College**, **South Puget Sound Community College**, and **Lemoore College** have leveraged college-wide OER initiatives to develop high-quality, free instructional materials for both DE and regular post-high-school offerings.

Leverage college facilities

There are often long commutes between colleges and their school partners, especially in rural areas. Nationally, colleges have commonly implemented more online DE coursework to address this barrier, but online DE courses—particularly in asynchronous formats—are challenging to implement in a high-quality way at scale (Fink & Jenkins, 2025; Williams, 2025). Instead, colleges scaling DEEP practices have worked creatively to redeploy underutilized facilities to maximize the opportunity for face-to-face instruction. This is particularly important for CTE coursework, which typically requires specialized facilities that may not be available at smaller, rural high schools.

To reduce transportation challenges for students, colleges use satellite campuses or regional centers to increase access to DE coursework as well as college advising, planning, and other supports. Colleges also use regional centers as sites for providing opportunities for DE students, particularly those in rural areas, to start in CTE programs in high-demand fields. For example, **Kirkwood Community College** operates four regional centers that serve as key hubs for DE, especially for rural communities. These centers house most of the direct staffing for DE, including student academic support coordinators, who coordinate with high schools to recruit and advise DE students. They are also the site of Kirkwood's career academy programs (see case study example on the next page).

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

Providing Access to In-Demand CTE Programs for Rural High School Students

Kirkwood Community College's career academy programs are designed for high school juniors and seniors and focus on specific career paths. These academies typically comprise 4–6 college-level courses and are often equivalent to the first semester of many of the college's regular CTE degree programs. Career academies are offered through the college's regional centers, as a key part of the college's strategy to expand postsecondary opportunities to students in rural communities.

Curriculum. Career academy students spend part of their school day completing coursework at the regional center (a quarter to a third of their school day depending on their academy) for a year-long, cohort-based experience. The curriculum is designed to support career exploration and intentional alignment with postsecondary pathways, offering students high school and college credit. Some academies align with college certificates and offer embedded work-based learning, internships, and industry-recognized credentials. The industry advisory boards for the college's CTE programs provide input on career academy curriculum and course offerings. After completing their junior year, students may return to the high school where they have the option to take additional DE classes. Otherwise, in their senior year, students have the option to return to the regional center or—when permitted by their high school—matriculate to the college's main campus to begin the degree program that aligns with their chosen career academy.

Outreach and recruitment. High school sophomores are often invited to visit the regional centers to learn about these programs. Academic department faculty, regional center staff, and college admissions staff also conduct outreach to these students. Career academy faculty also work with high school CTE instructors to help transition students when they are ready for college-level work.

Advising and support. Student academic support coordinators help career academy students develop educational plans. They also work with program faculty to encourage academy students to continue pursuing an applied associate degree at the college once they graduate.

Two other colleges that have many smaller rural high school partners leverage satellite centers to deliver high-quality, career-aligned DE coursework. **Tri-County Technical College** addresses the needs of rural partner districts by having them bus students to the college's community campuses (i.e., satellite locations), conveniently located near high school career centers. For high schools far from these campuses, the college dispatches its own faculty to teach on-site.

Coastal Alabama Community College strategically places its career coaches on satellite campuses and at other outlying sites to better serve students across its expansive 10-county service area, which includes widely dispersed rural high schools. This is done to increase access to DE recruitment, advising, and planning and to provide opportunities for DE students, particularly those in rural areas, to start on CTE programs in high-demand fields. Local industry advisory boards are also attached to the satellite campuses to ensure that programs meet local workforce demand, directly benefiting DE students enrolled in CTE programs.

Leverage technology systems

In addition to serving various K-12 partners, colleges typically offer DE courses in different and multiple locations (the college, the high school, online) for any given partnership. At the same time, colleges have limited human resources to manage their admissions, registration, case management, student portals, learning management, and other front- and back-end program operations across their partnerships. Every college we interviewed that is scaling DEEP practices relied on technology systems to facilitate communication and coordination among college and K-12 staff and students; automate registration, student educational planning, progress monitoring, and other business processes; and provide academic support to students. Most colleges use multiple technology systems, including mobile-friendly technology, to more quickly and reliably communicate and provide information to staff and students.

While all of the college we interviewed leveraged existing college technology systems to support DE processes, some hired DE-specific technology vendors. For example, multiple colleges sought services through vendors such as DualEnroll to automate and streamline DE application and course registration processes. College leaders noted that streamlining these processes frees up a lot of staff time given the complexity of managing application and registration approvals between multiple college and K-12 stakeholders. Additionally, DE advisors at **Alvin Community College** built a partnership with some local districts whereby college staff can directly access the high schools' student information system (SIS). According to Alvin staff, this has allowed DE advisors to streamline the registration process and remove registration barriers for students. Below are some specific ways that colleges have leveraged existing collegewide technology systems to support DE students.

Instruction and academic support. Every college we studied use existing learning management, early alert, and online tutoring systems available collegewide to manage instruction and provide academic supports for DE students. For example, multiple colleges require high school instructors to use the college's same learning management platform for DE courses, including college-approved syllabus templates. Colleges typically use early alert systems to identify struggling students and online tutoring services to provide additional academic supports; these technology systems can be extended to also benefit DE students. For example, **South Texas College** uses the collegewide Starfish early alert system to identify and support struggling students, and it has significantly increased its investment in Upswing, an online tutoring platform available 24/7 for students, to provide additional academic support to DE students.

Communication. To increase coordination and communication among staff, faculty, students, and K-12 schools, colleges leverage existing CRM systems, student portals available through existing SIS, as well as mobile communication functionality built into these

systems. When **Northeast Community College** planned to implement a new CRM system, DE program leaders advocated to include DE students in the roll-out. The college made the decision that any new technology system being implemented for non-dual enrollment students would also include dual enrollment students. The college also built an internal tool that uses a Helpdesk-style ticketing system to track and quickly respond to questions and requests from parents, students, and high school partners. **Tri-County Technical College** used Blackboard to create a "DE Hub," and similarly **Coastal Alabama Community College**'s "Coyote Hub" serves as a one-stop for student services in the student portal. Across all these systems, college leaders emphasized that mobile communication and text messaging is the preferred form of communication for students.

Student advising and progress monitoring. **Compton College** leverages its collegewide Ellucian enterprise SIS to support tracking of student advising and key academic milestones as well as to communicate directly with students. **South Puget Sound Community College** and **Hudson County Community College** use EAB Navigate, already available collegewide, for advising tracking and educational planning with DE students. **South Texas College** uses DegreeWorks to monitor DE student course enrollment and final grades by term and as an advising tool for guiding students toward degree completion.

3. Partner with K-12 schools to maximize available resources for DEEP.

Scaling DEEP practices requires shared commitment and investments from both college and K-12 partners. One way that colleges have developed mutually beneficial partnerships with high schools to enable the scaling of DEEP practices has been to connect their DE offerings to existing high school college and career programming such as early college high schools (ECHSs) or career academies. When college and K-12 leaders establish mutually beneficial partnerships in which DE opportunities are woven into related high school programs, both parties benefit; this can help generate more overall support for scaling DEEP practices. For K-12 districts, scaling DEEP practices, such as building DE coursework in the 9th–12th grade course plans for students in related college and career programs, can increase district revenues through state performance funding. And for colleges, building DE coursework into high school programming (and thus helping districts generate more revenue) creates a new pool of resources that can be tapped to support the scaling of DEEP practices.

Here we summarize how colleges can partner with K-12 districts to maximize resources for DEEP in two steps: The first is weaving DE offerings into related high school programs to generate more college revenues to support the scaling of DEEP practices. The second is leveraging expanded DE offerings to grow the total amount of resources available to K-12 districts and colleges to support college and career pathways.

Integrate dual enrollment into related high school academies and career pathway programs to generate more support

College leaders taking a DEEP approach seek to create postsecondary career pathways for high school students. High school leaders share this goal and are advancing related high school programs—often in partnership with colleges—such as secondary CTE programs, career academies, and ECHSs. Yet, these offerings may not include DE coursework (e.g.,

secondary CTE programs and career academies) or may not provide coherent connections to postsecondary programs of study (e.g., ECHSs). However, these programs hold great potential to provide a more seamless transition into college coursework, and through a DEEP approach they can provide DE students with pathways advising and support on a large scale, which colleges may not be able to achieve alone. By weaving DE coursework into related high school programs, colleges can tap into new resources from K-12 partners to support the partnership's joint goals of scaling DEEP practices.

Connecting DE coursework to high school college and career programs can be a particularly useful strategy to fund DEEP practices in states with little or no funding to colleges for DE. For example, **Madison College** does not receive state funding and does not charge tuition for DE courses taught by high school teachers—the majority of its DE coursework—offered to nearly 5,000 students at more than 50 high schools. However, through a partnership with local school districts, the college has established several academies at partner high schools where students enroll full-time at Madison College and can complete up to 60 college credits in a transfer associate degree pathway aligned to bachelor's degree programs. For example, some of these academies focused specifically in STEM fields and align DE coursework to STEM bachelor's degree majors at local universities. Madison College's academy partnerships with local school districts have generated more resources for the college to support the scaling of DEEP practices. For example, as a part of the agreements with local school districts, school districts pay Madison College regular student tuition and also provide funding for books, transportation to college facilities, and meals during the school day. In addition, the school districts share costs with Madison College to cover support staff (including one college advisor for every 50 students enrolled in a STEM academy). Co-funding support staff provides every STEM academy student with career exploration, college advising, educational planning, and academic supports. To help with start-up funding, Madison College partnered with its largest school district, Madison Metropolitan School District, to raise more than $200,000 from a private foundation (Wroge, 2019).

Increase local resources by helping K-12 schools meet performance goals

Colleges that are scaling DEEP practices report that doing so helps their K-12 school partners increase revenue through state performance funding for high schools and districts that reward pathways-oriented dual enrollment. This means that there are more total resources to work with locally. It also means that K-12 leaders can better justify shared investments in DEEP practices—particularly when they know how much DE contributes to K-12 performance metrics and funding and when they can forecast projected gains from future DE growth.

For example, school districts that partner with **Kirkwood Community College** can receive additional funding through Iowa's state funding formula, or "supplementary weighting," for students who are enrolled in DE programs. As a result, school districts receive extra funding for students who are enrolled in DE courses; this provides a financial incentive for high schools to expand access to DE coursework and to use funding to support DEEP-aligned practices.

Partner school districts of **South Texas College** use students' DE performance to meet college readiness standards as part of the state's College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) indicators. One district proudly noted that 16% of its students earn associate degrees (compared to 2.5% statewide) and that 42% of its high school graduates complete DE coursework

(compared to 23% statewide). School districts with graduates who meet CCMR indicators in demonstrating college readiness through completion of math and English through DE or the accumulation of 9 or more DE credits earn a CCMR Outcomes Bonus for their district.

In states that provide funding based on the number of students who meet college and career readiness standards, expanding access and success in DE coursework is a proven strategy that gives educators the chance to work with students throughout a semester to promote success rather than relying solely on how students score on a single standardized exam.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

Connecting Underserved Students to Postsecondary Pathways Using ECHSs and P-TECHs

South Texas College has become a national model for expanding college access though its dual enrollment program (DE, called dual credit in Texas), which now enrolls around 12,000 students annually in 70 high school sites in 21 districts across a large service area with high poverty rates and low rates of college-going. The college began waiving tuition for DE courses in 2000 to address financial barriers and to encourage a college-going culture. More than a decade ago, the college began partnering with schools to create ECHSs and more recently Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECHs), which provide an introduction to college culture, wraparound supports, and more coherent DE curriculum that research has shown benefit students from underserved groups.

Even though ECHSs are more expensive to offer than a la carte DE courses and require extensive partnership work with K-12 schools, 7,310 or 63% of South Texas's DE students are in ECHSs or P-TECHs. Early College High Schools and P-TECHs provide a more coherent transition to college coursework, and they offer wraparound supports needed by historically underrepresented students to succeed in college. Because this arrangement leads to high numbers of students earning many college credits and often associate degrees in high school, the college benefits from the new Texas community college funding policy in which colleges earn performance funding when DE students successfully earn at least 15 credits in high school. High schools benefit because participation increases graduation rates and state college and career readiness performance metrics. South Texas has a dedicated director overseeing DE courses in career-technical fields, working with school districts to align offerings with high-wage, high-demand areas like welding and electrical.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

Connecting Underserved Students to Postsecondary Pathways Using High School Academies

Hudson County Community College (HCCC) is actively collaborating with local K-12 districts to establish high school academies that integrate DE coursework. This initiative is a key component of the college's strategic vision and plan to advance equitable outcomes in the communities they serve and to support students along their educational journey from K-12 education to college and career pathways.

Alignment with college programs. The president of HCCC is working to align high school academies with the college's programs of study, aiming for a model where high schools have an academy that directly corresponds to college offerings and which serves as a pathway for students to transition from high school to college. The college develops new programs with embedded DE by collaborating with high school faculty.

Specific degree options. HCCC has designed degree options, aligned with Middle States accreditation, that are taught within the high schools or by college instructors. Popular options include a science- and mathematics-focused liberal arts degree and a general liberal arts degree designed to cover general education requirements, with up to 60 credits transferable to in-state universities in New Jersey. The college's academic counselors focus on supporting students to take courses that are highly transferable so that students' credits are applicable to four-year degrees. One notable example involves partnerships with Hudson County Schools of Technology (High Tech and County Prep High Schools), where students can earn associate degrees through high school academy DE courses taught over four years of high school. These include an A.S. in science and mathematics program and an A.S. in environmental studies program.

Meeting school needs. The college recognizes that K-12 districts need to align their CTE programs with postsecondary pathways for state and Perkins funding, which provides a strong incentive for partnership. If a high school lacks specialized instructors, equipment, facilities, or labs, HCCC works with them, developing an MOU to bring high school students to the college for classes. Recognizing the rigorous coursetaking experiences that this approach provides, more high schools are becoming interested in offering such options, especially after seeing magnet high schools successfully implement them, which adds value and helps retain students who might otherwise leave their regular high schools.

County support. Hudson County allocates $300,000 annually to support the college's partnership with the Hudson County Schools of Technology. This funding helps the college cover administrative and overhead costs connected to its partnership with the school. Additionally, this funding is also used to cover expenses, such as for books, incurred by students and families with financial hardship.

4. Strategically invest financial resources to scale DEEP practices.

Financing DEEP requires colleges to shift from a business model where costs are kept low with limited student support and marginal enrollment revenue, to one where colleges invest in practices that encourage and support students without clear postsecondary plans to enroll at the college after high school, and thereby generate future revenues. Here, we describe strategies colleges are taking to invest their limited financial resources to support practices that connect DE students to postsecondary programs after high school. As mentioned, financing DEEP is harder in states with limited or no state funding, but even colleges in these states can use local funding and other resources to support DEEP practices.

Measure and closely monitor dual enrollment costs

Colleges scaling DEEP find it useful to account for the costs of DE and determine if the college is breaking even. Instructional costs can vary significantly based on whether a course is taught by a regular college faculty member, an adjunct, or a high school teacher, as well as if there are additional material or facility fees. Detailing the costs of different types of DE coursework helps college leaders understand which courses are more or less expensive, allowing for better planning and resource allocation.

Kirkwood Community College did a cost study to understand the expenses associated with its DE program, which leaders consider to be crucial to the college's overall mission and business model. The study included not only direct instructional costs but also administrative costs and those for systems and services all students use. The study revealed that when overhead costs were included, they were not generating enough revenue to cover expenses This led college leaders to request a 2% increase in the rates charged to their K-12 partners.

The college's president has used the findings from its cost studies to provide greater transparency to K-12 schools, which receive funds from the state to pay for costs of DE charged by the college. When the cost increase was communicated to local superintendents, there was no resistance because the college clearly articulated the rationale behind the adjustment. By demonstrating the actual costs involved, Kirkwood has been able to show K-12 administrators that DE costs would likely increase over time. The president shared the cost model with the other Iowa community college presidents to encourage them to study their costs. Doing so helped inform discussions about the drawbacks to colleges charging the schools different rates throughout the state, which caused confusion and uncertainty among school leaders about the true cost of DE.

Marion Technical College developed a model using an Excel spreadsheet to determine the optimal number of students needed in a DE course to break even. The model takes into account different funding levels by course location and instructor type, course-specific lab fees, as well as historical pass rates for specific courses (which contributes to how much state revenue is expected from the state performance funding model). College leaders use this model to estimate how many students need to be enrolled in the course section for the college to break even and thus helps the college monitor and manage DE costs.

South Texas College has carefully monitored costs to ensure the sustainability of its free DE program since 2000. To better help K-12 schools forecast costs, the college has implemented a flat rate model for fees charged to schools when college faculty teach DE courses, which is designed to be revenue-neutral. However, college leaders continuously assess costs to ensure that the proportion of more expensive college faculty teaching DE courses does not increase substantially.

To measure and monitor staffing costs, **Compton College** developed an annual report detailing staff time and effort with net salary and benefits for each college staff member supporting DE. This includes dedicated DE staff as well as percentages of time allocated to supporting DE for core college staff such as the president, vice presidents, deans, registrar, and institutional research. For Dr. Darlene Zarazu, director of educational partnership at Compton College, "the compilation of this report underscores the significant institutional investment of time and effort dedicated to dual enrollment at Compton College. The documented hours reflect intentional cross-departmental collaboration—spanning executive leadership, academic affairs, student services, and institutional effectiveness—to ensure compliance, operational alignment, and measurable outcomes that advance equitable access and student success." See Table 2 in the accompanying inquiry and action guide for a table template example based on Compton College's report.

Invest scarce resources to scale DEEP

The college leaders we interviewed demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the complex nature of college budgets for DE programs, including cost drivers and opportunities for generating revenues to cover costs to scale DEEP practices. The strategies for investing scarce resources to scale DEEP practices were highly specific to the DE funding context. Below we describe these strategies with examples from colleges, many of which were using more than one of these strategies in an integrated approach to financing DEEP practices.

Implement a sustainable pricing model that balances variable costs and returns. Many colleges charge different prices depending on where DE courses are taught and by whom. Colleges tend to charge less for courses taught in high schools by qualified high school teachers than for those taught on campus or online by regular college faculty. Courses taught by high school teachers typically incur much less instructional cost compared to those taught by college faculty. But given the large scale of DE offerings, particularly those taught by high school instructors, college budgets for DE can get out of balance if revenues do not closely match costs.

Kirkwood Community College employs a strategic finance model that balances revenue from fees charged to K-12 schools for different types of DE programs. For courses taught in high schools by credentialed high school teachers, the college charges 22% of regular tuition. For courses taught by regular college faculty on campus or online, the college charges 80% of regular tuition. Schools pay 100% of regular tuition for career academy courses taught at college regional centers by college faculty. The college carefully monitors enrollment in these three program types to ensure they stay within budgets by balancing enrollments in lower- and higher-revenue courses while also maximizing enrollment formats that better connect students to postsecondary pathways after high school.

For example, given that the college receives 100% reimbursement for career academy programs, Kirkwood maximizes revenue from career academy programs by operating its regional centers as separate "profit" centers. Tracking revenue and expenses by academy and location allows the college to evaluate the financial performance of each academy and center and ensure they are operating in line with fiscal expectations. The college covers center administrative and college-wide costs, while centers cover instructional costs. Center directors are directed to maintain or increase instructional revenue each year, and they are provided access to detailed center budget data and support from dedicated budget analysts to aid in program and budgeting. According to college leaders, this incentivizes the centers to offer career academy programs that lead to good jobs, which will thus attract more students.

Keeping costs low and prioritizing investments in underserved students and schools. **South Puget Sound Community College** (SPSCC) primarily provides DE through two Washington State programs with different state funding levels: Running Start, wherein students take courses at the college during 11th and 12th grade, and College in the High School (CiHS), in which individual college courses are taught at the high school. Running Start students are treated like regular post-high-school students, benefiting from on-campus instruction and strong pathways-oriented programs. The funding for Running Start covers tuition costs for Running Start students and additionally the course and student fees for any student that qualifies for the free/reduced-price lunch program, but funding for CiHS is much lower. There is no cost to students to take CiHS courses, but the funding model at the state level makes it more difficult for the college to provide the same DEEP practices to students in CiHS courses.

SPSCC has strategically focused on supporting low-income and remote schools through its CiHS program to expand access beyond historically more privileged Running Start participants. The college embeds navigators on high school campuses to increase outreach, support CiHS students with college and career planning, and better connect students to other campus resources. Although CiHS funding is less than Running Start per student, the college uses a "low-overhead" approach, reinvesting Running Start surpluses into navigators and partnerships with low-resource schools.

Capitalizing on state and local workforce development funding. **Tri-County Technical College** uses South Carolina Workforce and Industrial Needs Scholarship (SC WINS) funds and state lottery tuition assistance scholarships to offset tuition and fees, allowing it to offer DE at little to no cost to students. This covers most instructional costs. Similarly, **Coastal Alabama Community College** relies on state funding provided by the state's legislature to build the state's workforce to offer DE coursework to over 5,000 students at no cost.

Hudson County Community College (HCCC) in New Jersey funds DE programs through a multi-pronged approach heavily reliant on county support, strategic budgeting, and a long-term return on investment. This is necessary because state support accounts for a relatively small share of community college operating budgets in New Jersey. A significant portion of the college's funding for DE comes from an annual allocation from Hudson County specifically supporting partnerships and covering administrative and overhead costs. The county also provides additional funding for DE scholarships for students. HCCC offers significantly reduced tuition for DE with fee waivers. It is actively measuring the return on investment for DE programs, focusing on enhanced student retention, believing that connecting high school students to the college will lead to more students returning after high school.

Generating performance funding and reinvesting in strengthening dual enrollment program supports. In Texas, House Bill 8 restructured community college funding to an outcomes-based model. **South Texas College** has used this funding to expand its support and operations for partnering school districts. The college generates significant revenue through HB 8's performance funding provisions, which provide $3,500 per DE student who completes 15 credit hours in a cohesive field of study. South Texas College has strategically reinvested this additional revenue by reducing flat rate instructional costs for college faculty teaching DE, increasing staffing, enhancing student support (e.g., 24/7 online tutoring), and promoting OER.

Generating downstream revenue by increasing post-high-school matriculation of DE students. In our interviews, colleges commonly made clear that their central goal in investing in pathways-oriented coursework and guidance aligned with the DEEP model is to increase student participation and success in postsecondary education after high school. Colleges can generate a new source of downstream revenue if they can enable students who would not otherwise pursue any formal postsecondary learning to enroll in and complete high-value career-technical or bachelor's pathway programs at their institutions after high school. Other CCRC research has shown that this is a way colleges can make up for revenue lost by offering DE for free or at a discount (Belfield et al., 2023).

Most colleges carefully monitor rates of DE student re-enrollment after high school, first and foremost to increase the number of underserved students who go directly on to postsecondary education after high school, but also with an eye to increasing post-high-school enrollment. For example, **South Texas College** research shows that for several years the rate at which DE students return to the college after high school has been consistent at around 18%. The college launched Valley Promise, a last-dollar initiative to provide students an affordable education toward an associate degree. An area of focus entails increasing the matriculation rate for DE students who do not earn an associate degree in high school. The Valley Promise initiative includes recruiters who strategically focus on two groups of DE students: juniors and seniors who have taken only a few DE credits (and therefore might be persuaded to finish their programs at the college after high school) and students who have indicated an interest in pursuing a bachelor's degree (to make them aware of the bachelor's degree programs offered by the college).

Kirkwood Community College data on post-high-school matriculation rates by DE program type has indicated that matriculation rates are higher among students in more cohesive, pathways-oriented cohort programs. These results have helped college leaders justify their investments in career academy programs at its regional campuses, which are costlier to implement but include DEEP practices like coursework aligned to college degree programs, college advising, and high-quality instruction using college facilities and program faculty.

In another twist on how colleges can generate revenue streams to advance post-high-school success of DE students, **Amarillo College** is planning to use funds generated by Texas performance funding outcomes achieved by DE students to fund a new "promise" program that will enable former DE students to complete their degrees after high school for free (see the case study example on the next page).

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

A Free College Program for Former Dual Enrollment Students

Amarillo College is launching a new free college program called Badger Bound, slated to begin in fall 2026, which will offer free associate degree education to high school students in its service area who earn at least 15 DE credits with the college and matriculate at the college after high school.

The Badger Bound program offers significant benefits to eligible students, including up to 45 credits of free education at Amarillo, covering fees and books upon matriculation. To facilitate this, participating independent school districts (ISDs) will grant the college access to their K-12 pipeline for engagement activities like DE information sessions, campus tours, and faculty demonstrations, with the goal of fostering early college awareness. Additionally, while the state covers DE tuition for low-income high school students through the FAST scholarship, Amarillo is working with participating ISDs and local foundations to cover the tuition for other students who do not qualify for FAST.

Amarillo's program is designed to capitalize on recent legislation from the state aimed at strengthening career outcomes of K-12 and college students and building a supply of talent for the state's employers. For colleges, this includes performance funding of $3,500 for every high school student who completes 15 credit hours in DE. And similarly, K-12 schools receive outcome-based bonus funding for students who complete 9 credits of DE and meet the state's career and college readiness benchmark.

Before college leaders pitched the Badger Bound program to school district partners, Amarillo institutional research staff analyzed the feasibility using a mathematical model that took account of these recent state changes and funding incentives. This model was designed to determine if the program could be funded entirely by state performance-based funding, specifically the $3,500 the college receives for every high school student who earns 15 DE credits. The model assumed maximum expenses, no external funding partners, and no additional downstream performance funding from increased matriculation.

Based on historical data of students who attained 15 DE credits and subsequently matriculated to Amarillo, the model projected a profit in all previous years, with the lowest profit being $600,000. To estimate future costs, the college made a projection based on five times the maximum number of students who matriculated in the past. The ambitious goal is to reach 800 students who earn 15 DE credits and matriculate, which would require a nearly four-fold increase in the number of students achieving this credit threshold. The short answer, according to college leader, is that it is "indeed, quite possible" to fund the free college program solely with state funding incentives for DE.

Conclusion

Strengthening dual enrollment as an on-ramp to college and career opportunity by implementing DEEP practices is essential to advancing upward mobility for students and supplying talent for communities and states. Yet, this can be challenging for colleges to do without passing along costs to students and families, as the costs incurred from a DEEP approach to DE go beyond the conventional low-cost, light-support DE business model. And these challenges are compounded in states where there is limited funding to colleges for DE.

Nonetheless, this report shows how college and high school partnerships across the country are expanding access to DE coursework and supports designed to connect more students to postsecondary and career pathways. As this report shows, colleges can create a sustainable business model for implementing DEEP practices on a large scale by aligning internally and externally with K-12 partners on a shared vision or "DEEP mindset," strategically organizing and deploying core college resources, connecting DE to high school programs to generate additional revenue, and making thoughtful investments to maximize scare resources.

Endnotes

1. Throughout the report we use the term dual enrollment to refer to a variety of ways in which students take courses for college and high school credit through a postsecondary provider prior to high school graduation. Dual enrollment is also known by other terms—such as dual credit, concurrent enrollment, or early college—across different state and local contexts. All these are intended when we refer to dual enrollment programs.

2. The most recent figure on the national college-going rate (the percent of high school graduates who enroll in college the first fall after high school graduation) is 62% for the class of 2022. This is down from a height of 70% for the class of 2016 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

3. To select institutions that met one or both of these criteria, we reviewed data on dual enrollment practices among nearly 300 postsecondary institutions that participated in AACRAO/NACEP's high school dual enrollment practice survey (Williams & Kilgore, 2025) and federal data on colleges' dual enrollment participation by race/ethnicity in the 2022-23 academic year (Fink, 2024).

4. For a more in-depth analysis of the costs of DE to colleges, see Belfield et al. (2023).

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