



College Business Models for Scaling Purposeful Dual Enrollment

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Community colleges and their K–12 partners are increasingly called on to make dual enrollment not only an acceleration strategy for college-bound students but also an accessible on-ramp to college and career opportunity for those who might not otherwise pursue postsecondary education after high school. But doing so requires more strategic investment and attention to ROI in the face of scarce resources.

This 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 help students explore career and academic interests and develop personalized education plans; and
4. High-quality instruction and academic supports for students.

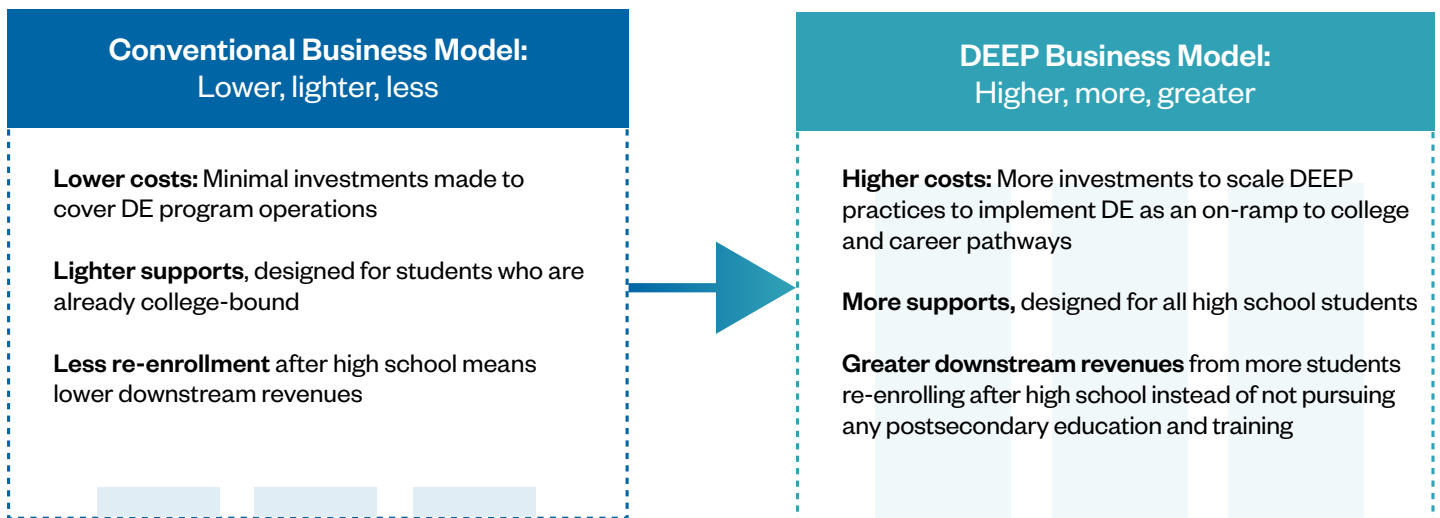
The report documents how colleges can allocate, align, and sustain resources to scale more purposeful dual enrollment programs that recruit, motivate, and prepare underserved students to pursue a postsecondary degree in high-opportunity fields directly after high school. The full report profiles 13 community colleges across 10 states and demonstrates that while the financial and organizational challenges are substantial, colleges and their K-12 partners are innovating to make purposeful dual enrollment accessible and affordable without shifting the cost burden onto students and families.

Dual enrollment can serve as an important on-ramp to college and career opportunity, especially for underserved students.

Shifting the Business Model to Sustain Purposeful Dual Enrollment

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 degrees and careers in fields of interest to them. By contrast, conventional dual enrollment—sometimes described as “programs of privilege” because of uneven student access or “random acts” because of the limited advising and intentionality of course offerings—is lower in cost, more reliant on high-school-based instruction, with minimal student support.

Figure ES1.
Comparing Business Models for Dual Enrollment



To scale DEEP practices, 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.

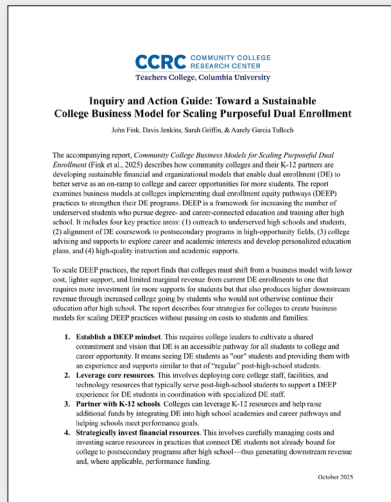
Strategically Investing College and K-12 Resources to Scale DEEP

Findings in the full report draw from in-depth interviews with community colleges across 10 states operating in different state funding contexts—from more robust (e.g., Alabama, South Carolina, Washington) to limited (Iowa, Ohio, Texas) to minimal (Nebraska, New Jersey, Wisconsin). 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 to make DE 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 the college’s core resources.** This involves deploying core college staff, facilities, and technology resources that typically serve post-high-school students to also support a DEEP experience for DE students in coordination with specialized DE staff.
3. **Partner with K-12 schools to maximize available resources.** This means building mutually beneficial partnerships with K-12 schools to increase the total available resources by integrating DE into related high school academies and career pathway programs and helping K-12 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.

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. The strategies for investing scarce resources to scale DEEP practices are highly specific to the DE funding context. Colleges we visited are financing DEEP practices through an integrated approach using multiple strategies, including:

- Measuring and closely monitoring dual enrollment costs and revenue
- Implementing a sustainable pricing model that balances variable costs and returns
- Keeping costs low and prioritizing investments in underserved students and schools
- Capitalizing on state and local workforce development funding
- Generating performance funding and reinvesting it to strengthen DE program supports
- Generating downstream revenue by increasing post-high-school matriculation of DE students



Planning Guide for Strategic Dual Enrollment Finance

This report is accompanied by an **inquiry and action guide** designed to help colleges develop improvement plans and a sustainable business model for scaling purposeful dual enrollment, following the findings from the 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 priority improvements at scale in the next 1–2 years.

Conclusion

Dual enrollment has doubled in the past decade; high school students now make up a fifth of all community college enrollment nationwide. And in 11 states and more than 250 community colleges, DE students are a third or more of total enrollment. At the same time, community college enrollment among students right out of high school has declined, which is a problem for both the colleges and the students who forgo further education. Given the potential for DE to serve as an on-ramp to college and career opportunity for students who might not otherwise pursue postsecondary education, colleges—and the communities they serve—cannot afford to neglect investing their limited resources in a more purposeful approach reflected in the DEEP model.

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