Speaker: John Fink

Topic: About Dual Enrollment Equity Pathways (DEEP)

Fink: Dual enrollment and its many shapes and sizes, high school students taking college courses, has grown tremendously over the last two decades, and most of that growth has happened in community colleges.

[Slide: Fall Enrollment Data Across Community Colleges]

This is looking using fall enrollment data among students 17 or younger across the country, and what we see is that most of this expansion has been at community colleges. And even though this only goes through 2021, we know from the National Student Clearinghouse that we've seen double-digit growth of dual enrollment since 2021.

And largely, the expansion of dual enrollment has been a really positive thing for students and communities throughout that time, CCRC and others, many other researchers have really studied the benefits of dual enrollment. In fact, like 10 years ago, CCRC wrote a brief summarizing what do we already know about the benefits of dual enrollment. And since then, there's been What Works Clearinghouse intervention reports, really showing that, particularly early college high schools and more intensive forms of dual enrollment have these really strong benefits for participants. But even looking nationally across all different types of concurrent, dual credit, dual enrollment, course taking, we see that these students have really strong postsecondary outcomes, and this has all been sort of reviewed. So we know that these programs, in large part, really work and work well for students.

But one of the challenges that we've also observed, and many other researchers have as well, is that we hear this phrase that their programs are privileged, and we know that there isn't equal access to dual enrollment programs.

[Slide: National Analysis of School District Representation]

So this is some data we reported in our most recent research brief, looking at national analysis of school districts in showing that compared to high school populations, Native American, Black, Hispanic, multiracial, Pacific Islander students with disabilities and English learners are particularly underrepresented. When you look at who's getting access to dual enrollment courses, we know that this issue is one in most, if not all, states in many districts, so it's programs of privilege.

But the our research at CCRC and others that have done has shown that dual enrollment really can work for all students. Like in one study from Texas, finding that students who had a challenging transition into high school that were sort of falling behind

academically, dual credit could really be a part of turning it around and propelling them into college. And then two other studies from our colleagues at CCRC looked and found that dual enrollment really had strong benefits for Black and Hispanic students, both applying to more selective universities as well as entering into STEM and persisting in STEM major. So even though we have these programs of privilege and gaps in access, we know that dual enrollment really can benefit all students.

So when we look at school districts nationally, one thing that we observe is that although gaps in access are widespread, there are about one in five school districts that have closed these gaps in access to dual enrollment. And with the Aspen Institute, we studied a subset of these partnerships that had just stronger outcomes in dual enrollment, both in terms of access and success for students of color. And we documented a series of strategies there around broadening access and connecting students to advising and providing high-quality instruction.

But the one thing that we observed from this research was that many of the colleges we visited were implementing guided pathways reforms, which really addresses another question that we hear in the dual enrollment space, which is this issue of random acts of dual enrollment. And so we're not just asking with this deep research, you know, access for who, but we're also asking access to what.

[Slide: Map of Community College Guided Pathways Implementation]

And we, as we've been tracking guided pathways implementation, as you can see in this map, it's pretty widespread among community colleges across the country. We've been really asking, you know, what could this look like when colleges connect their guided pathways reforms to dual enrollment with an equity focus? And that was some of the questions motivating this research on deep or dual enrollment equity pathways.

First, we wanted to ask, what does it look like when guided pathways practices are implemented in dual enrollment programs? But also, what can we learn from early college high schools, which, although are relatively smaller in scale, are quite effective, especially when they're focused on serving underrepresented communities. So, what can we learn from those models that could be scaled to the millions of high school students taking dual enrollment courses, and finally, what is this? How can we build on what's already known around effective and equitable dual enrollment practices, like we laid out with the Aspen Institute in the dual enrollment playbook?

The dual enrollment equity pathways framework really started as a review of those questions. What do we know from existing research? What are the subcomponents that we would expect to see at colleges and high school partners applying guided pathways to

dual enrollment with a focus on equity? And we describe this as a four-part framework that my colleague Sarah will talk about.

[Slide: Dual Enrollment Equity Pathways Diagram / High Opportunity Trajectories]

But I want to emphasize. That what this is leading to, this is about just about access for who, but access to what. And really, what this is leading to, as you can see in these arrows, is high opportunity postsecondary trajectory for high school students. And by that, we mean direct entry into a university towards a bachelor's degree program, entry after high school into a community college transfer pathway that's really well aligned to a specific bachelor's degree major at the university, so that all the credits are going to transfer and apply to that bachelor's degree program. That's what we mean by high opportunity transfer, and that's drawing from our our work on guided pathways. And it's leading to a workforce program that's aligned to a high wage, high demand career in the local economy. So, by describing this framework, we're really thinking about the ways that pathways practices can not just push students into college, but to really pull them into college pathways by tapping into students' interests, motivation, and aspirations.