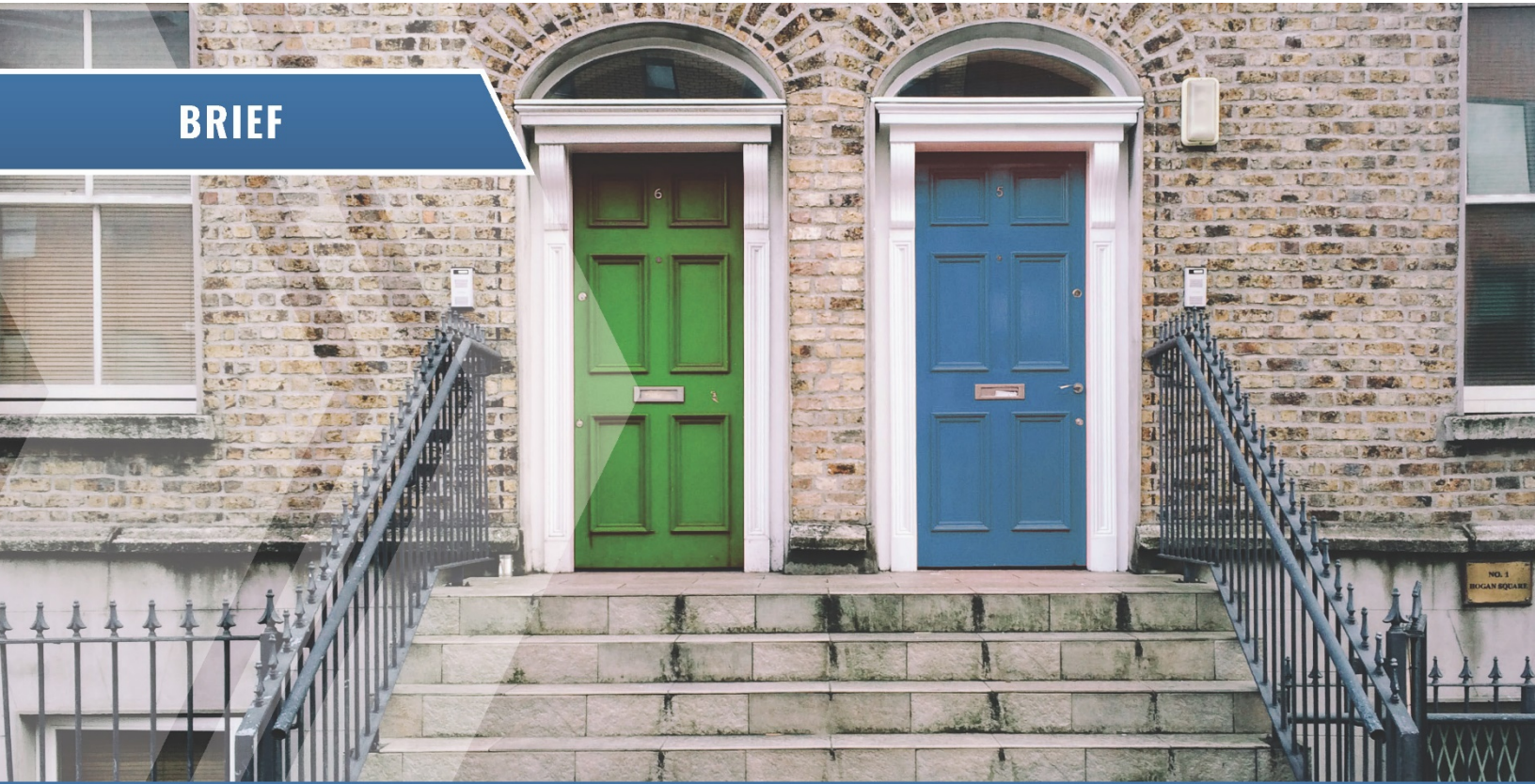


**BRIEF**



# PORTFOLIO OF CHOICE

## Dual Enrollment

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# Portfolio of Choice: Dual Enrollment

## The National Comprehensive Center

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Robson, K., & O'Neal Schiess, J (2020). *Portfolio of Choice: Dual Enrollment*. Rockville, MD: National Comprehensive Center at Westat.

The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government.

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## Key Takeaways

- » Dual enrollment programs operate in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- » During the 2015-16 school year, about 8 percent of students participated in dual enrollment. White students tend to be overrepresented among dual enrollment participants, while Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented.
- » Nearly 70 percent of high schools offer dual enrollment programs nationwide; however, urban high schools and those serving large populations of low-income students are less likely to offer dual enrollment programs than suburban and rural schools, and schools serving smaller populations of low-income students.
- » The design of dual enrollment policies has implications for equity of access. Design elements, including student eligibility requirements, who is responsible for paying for the courses, and program logistics such as when and where courses are offered, all affect who can access these programs.
- » Research demonstrates that participation in dual enrollment programs is associated with greater likelihood of enrolling in and completing postsecondary education. Dual enrollment has also been shown to reduce the time it takes to complete a postsecondary degree.
- » Policymakers wanting to strengthen their states' dual enrollment policies should consider addressing known barriers to equitable access, clarifying and communicating about credit transferability policies, and putting in place strong data collection policies.

## Introduction

Dual enrollment programs, which allow high school students to earn postsecondary credits through partnerships between secondary and postsecondary institutions, are one of several approaches to enabling students to earn postsecondary credit while in high school (see box below). Dual enrollment programs provide high-achieving students with access to more rigorous coursework, but they can also offer other students a glimpse of what postsecondary coursework looks like. In many states, families pay little to nothing for dual enrollment courses, helping decrease the total price tag of postsecondary education. Despite their promise, there are elements of dual enrollment policy design that limit or impede all students from taking advantage of the opportunities they provide.

The goal of this brief is to provide an overview of the dual enrollment policy landscape, including a discussion of the various components of dual enrollment policies, an overview of student participation and outcomes, and suggestions for policymakers looking to strengthen their states' dual enrollment policies.



### Earning Postsecondary Credit While in High School

Dual enrollment is one of several programs that provide students with opportunities to earn postsecondary credit while in high school. Others include:

- » **Advanced Placement (AP):** These are college-level courses that require students to take an exam upon completion of the course. While postsecondary institutions vary in how they award credit to students who pass AP exams (typically earning a score of 3 or higher on a scale of 1 to 5), these courses can help students earn credit or skip introductory-level courses.<sup>1</sup>
- » **International Baccalaureate (IB):** The IB is a comprehensive education program that provides students ages 3 to 19 with a rigorous, college-preparatory course of study. The IB program is recognized and respected among higher education institutions worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Students must pass rigorous exams to graduate with an IB diploma (known as the Diploma Programme or DP). Many two- and four-year colleges and universities award credit to students who have graduated with a DP.<sup>3</sup>
- » **Career and Technical Education (CTE):** These programs provide students with a pathway into specific careers or professions. In high school, CTE provides students with opportunities to explore career pathways and get hands-on experience together with their academic coursework. Well-designed high school CTE programs can connect students with postsecondary programs of study or additional, more specialized training after high school.<sup>4</sup> Depending on the design of a CTE program, students may be able to earn credit toward postsecondary programs or industry-recognized credentials while in high school.
- » **Early College High Schools (ECHS):** These schools are a hybrid of high school and college, where students take courses for college credit. Many students graduate with enough credits to earn both a traditional high school diploma and a two-year associate degree.<sup>5</sup>

## What Are Dual Enrollment Programs and How Do States Design Them?

The terms “dual enrollment,” “dual credit,” and “concurrent enrollment”—among others—are often used interchangeably to refer to a group of programs that, through formalized partnerships between secondary and postsecondary institutions, enable high school students to earn postsecondary credit. (Note that we will use the term “dual enrollment” in this brief to refer to the general set of policies that allow high school students to access college courses for credit, unless otherwise noted.) Because of the relationship between secondary and postsecondary institutions, students are guaranteed college credit upon completion of a dual enrollment course, in contrast to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/what-is-ap>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ibo.org/about-the-ib/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://blogs.ibo.org/blog/2018/05/05/getting-ib-credit-at-university/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/cte/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://hechingerreport.org/research-on-early-college-high-schools-indicates-they-may-pay-for-themselves-in-the-long-run/>



AP and IB programs (described in the box above), where college credit is contingent upon students passing an exam.

States take different approaches to designing dual enrollment programs (and use different terminology for them), and some states have multiple programs in place. Tennessee, for example, has a dual credit, a dual enrollment, and a joint credit program.<sup>6</sup> Each program provides students an opportunity to earn college credit, but specific design elements of the programs, such as where the course is taught, who teaches the course, and whether completion of the course results in high school credit, postsecondary credit, or both, vary from one to the next. Table 1 summarizes key design elements and the prevalence of different options within those elements.

**Table 1. Key dual enrollment policy design elements**

Design element	Options	Number of states
Requirement	Voluntary or mandatory	31 states and DC have one or more voluntary programs and 18 states have one or more mandatory programs. <sup>1</sup>
Postsecondary partners	Two-year or four-year institutions, or both	47 states and DC have one or more programs providing for partnerships with both two- and four-year institutions. <sup>2</sup>
Location	At a high school, at a postsecondary institution, or virtually	30 states and DC have one or more programs that enable students to access dual enrollment courses at a high school, a postsecondary institution, or virtually. <sup>3</sup>
Type of credit earned	Depending on program structure, students may earn high school credit, college credit, or both. In some states, statute does not dictate what type of credit is earned and leaves it up to participating institutions to determine whether to award credit	35 states have at least one program where state policy or legislation indicates that students earn both secondary and postsecondary credit. Some states have multiple programs with different credit-awarding policies. Eight states do not specify the type of credits earned for one or more of their programs. <sup>4</sup>
Responsibility for tuition	Student/family; local education provider (school district or charter school); state; or a combination of one or more of these entities. Some states do not specify tuition responsibility in statute or policy.	In 15 states, tuition payment decisions are made locally for one or more programs. Thirteen states have at least one program where tuition is the sole responsibility of the student/family; 7 states have one or more programs where the local school district is solely responsible for tuition; and in 6 states, the state pays tuition for one or more programs. <sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1902>



Design element	Options	Number of states
Funding for secondary schools	States may fund high schools for participating students at the same per-pupil rate as non-participating students, at a higher rate, or at a lower rate.	40 states and DC fund school districts for participating and non-participating students at equal rates. In 3 states, dual enrollment students are funded at higher levels, and in 2 states, dual enrollment students are funded at lower levels. <sup>6</sup>
Funding for postsecondary institutions	States may fund postsecondary institutions for participating students at the same per-pupil rate as non-participating students, at a higher rate, or at a lower rate.	40 states and DC fund postsecondary institutions for participating and non-participating students at equal rates. One state allows for (but does not require) postsecondary institutions to be funded at a higher level for certain courses, and one state provides for reduced funding for dually enrolled students. <sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1903>

<sup>2</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1905>

<sup>3</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1905>

<sup>4</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1909>

<sup>5</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1904>

<sup>6</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1910>

<sup>7</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1911>

Source: Education Commission of the States, [50-State Comparison of Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Policies](#).

There are four additional dual enrollment policy design elements that are particularly complex and have broader implications on the equity and quality of programs: student eligibility, teacher quality, course quality, and credit transferability.

## Student Eligibility

States take a variety of approaches to defining student eligibility requirements for dual enrollment programs. Students are generally required to be in high school and meet minimum GPA requirements. Other common eligibility requirements include meeting minimum scores on assessments (e.g., placement tests or “college readiness” assessments adopted by the state board, or other standardized tests like the SAT or ACT), meeting the entrance requirements for the participating postsecondary institution, and obtaining written approvals or recommendations from teachers or principals.<sup>7</sup> GPA and test-score minimums can help ensure that students have the academic skills necessary to be successful with postsecondary-level coursework. However, they can also serve as barriers to participation and access, particularly for underserved groups of students.

The extent to which dual enrollment policies ought to include lower-achieving students (as measured by common eligibility tools) is a topic of ongoing debate. Eliminating strict, test-based eligibility measures would expand access and perhaps address some equity issues (discussed later

<sup>7</sup> <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1907>



in this brief). However, if proper supports are not in place to enable students to succeed, broadening eligibility requirements may set already-struggling students up to fail.

Moreover, while dual enrollment eligibility varies across states, it is not always consistent even within states. In states that offer little state-level guidance on student eligibility, such as Tennessee or Indiana, student eligibility is locally determined. This can result in inequitable access between districts within the state, as one community's policies may be more or less stringent than another's.

## Instructor Qualifications

The majority of dual enrollment courses are taught on high school campuses by high school teachers.<sup>8</sup> However, because dual enrollment courses provide postsecondary-level coursework to high school students, most states require dual enrollment course instructors to meet additional qualifications aligned to requirements for instructors at the postsecondary level. While eight states do not address instructor qualifications in their dual enrollment policies, the remaining 42 have one or more of the following requirements in place:<sup>9</sup>

- » Require dual enrollment instructors to possess a certain number of graduate-level credit hours in the subject or field in which they are teaching;
- » Require instructors to hold a master's degree or higher;
- » Require instructors to meet the same requirements as faculty at the participating postsecondary institution; and
- » Identify other requirements, such as holding industry-recognized credentials and/or work experience in the field in which the individual is teaching.

Dual enrollment instructor qualifications are typically set and/or approved by one of four entities: state boards, including community college boards, boards of regents, and state boards of education; regional accreditation agencies; the National Association of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), the only national accreditor of concurrent enrollment programs; or by the boards of trustees or other entities at individual postsecondary institutions.<sup>10</sup>

The content and rigor of postsecondary-level coursework is different than that of secondary-level coursework, which is why many states require instructors in dual enrollment programs to meet additional requirements. However, many states and communities are grappling with teacher shortages at the secondary level,<sup>11</sup> so having additional requirements in place to teach dual enrollment courses can make it even more difficult for districts to find instructors qualified to teach

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<sup>8</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013001.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQuest2RTanw?Rep=DE1913>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Increasing-the-Supply-of-Qualified-High-School-Teachers-for-Dual-Enrollment-Programs.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-shortage-is-real-large-and-growing-and-worse-than-we-thought-the-first-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series/>



these courses.<sup>12</sup> This is especially true in states that mandate their high schools to offer dual enrollment courses. Indiana law, for example, requires its public high schools to offer at least two dual enrollment courses. In 2015, the Higher Learning Commission, a college-accrediting body, ruled that dual enrollment course instructors must have a master's degree or equivalent in the subject matter. District and school leaders pushed back, citing concerns about their ability to have enough teachers qualified to teach dual enrollment (and thus comply with the law). In 2017, the state persuaded the accreditor to grant a five-year reprieve, giving teachers until 2022 to comply with the master's degree requirement.<sup>13</sup>

## Course Quality

Dual enrollment programs aim to offer students true college-level coursework. To ensure that dual enrollment course quality is on par with that of the traditional postsecondary options they are mirroring, state policymakers have taken a variety of approaches. In 37 states, state-level policy sets requirements or expectations for the quality of dual enrollment courses.<sup>14</sup> These requirements generally fall into one of four categories:<sup>15</sup>

- » State policy places responsibility for setting course quality requirements on participating postsecondary institutions.
- » State policy requires participating K–12 school districts and postsecondary institutions to develop written agreements that outline course quality requirements.
- » State policy adopts the course quality standards set by National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) (or standards that are similar), but stops short of requiring NACEP accreditation.
- » State policy encourages or requires dual enrollment courses to seek NACEP accreditation.

## Credit Transferability

Credit transferability between institutions of higher education is a well-known challenge in higher education, as students who transfer between institutions often lose credit. One study found that nearly 40 percent of students who changed schools received no transfer credit, resulting in a loss of the investment of time and resources for nearly a full year of college.<sup>16</sup> These credit transferability challenges emerge in dual enrollment programs as well, meaning that students may take dual enrollment courses in high school, only to find that those credits either do not transfer to their

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<sup>12</sup>[https://www.mhec.org/sites/default/files/resources/MHEC\\_Concurrent\\_Enrollment\\_Teacher\\_Credentialing\\_Initiative.pdf](https://www.mhec.org/sites/default/files/resources/MHEC_Concurrent_Enrollment_Teacher_Credentialing_Initiative.pdf)

<sup>13</sup><https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/quality-control-dual-enrollment>

<sup>14</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQest2RTanw?Rep=DE1913B>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/17/16/11716.pdf>

<sup>16</sup><https://hechingerreport.org/federal-study-finds-nearly-40-percent-transfer-students-got-credit/>





chosen postsecondary institution at all, or transfer only as elective credit rather than as credit toward their chosen major or course of study.

Some states have tried to address this issue by requiring all—or subsets of—public postsecondary institutions to accept dual enrollment credit taken by students attending high schools in that state. In New Mexico, for example, any course in the general education core may be offered for dual credit, and those courses must be transferable to any institution and count as fulfilling a lower-division course.<sup>17</sup> Utah law requires the State Board of Education and the State Board of Regents to coordinate to establish an approval process for dual enrollment courses that ensures credit is consistent and transferable to all higher education institutions. The law also requires higher education institutions to accept dual enrollment credits on the same basis as those earned by full- or part-time students enrolled at the institution.<sup>18</sup>

Other states require institutions to accept dual enrollment credits in certain circumstances. In Texas, for example, postsecondary institutions must grant undergraduate course credit for dual credit courses if the course is in the core curriculum (e.g., math, English), if it is a CTE course, and if it is a foreign language course. In Nevada, postsecondary institutions must award credit for all dual enrollment courses that they provide.<sup>19</sup>

However, in 20 states and DC, state law does not require postsecondary institutions to accept credits from dual enrollment programs, meaning that the decision to award credit is likely made on a case-by-case basis and varies across institutions.

Policymakers must carefully consider the credit transfer structures in place: While dual enrollment programs offer students the opportunity to earn college credits while in high school—often for free or at a substantially discounted price—students only benefit if those credits count toward degree completion at postsecondary institutions.

## Where Do Dual Enrollment Programs Operate and Who Participates?

Dual enrollment programs operate in every state and the District of Columbia. (As of 2019, New York is the only state in the country that does not have a statewide policy governing at least one type of dual enrollment program.<sup>20</sup> Local programs do exist, however.<sup>21</sup>) Survey data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) suggests that about one-third of all high school

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<sup>17</sup>N.M. Stat. Ann. § 21-1B-3(E)

<sup>18</sup>Utah Code Ann. § 53E-10-302(2), -302(7)

<sup>19</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQest2RTanw?Rep=DE1914>

<sup>20</sup><http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBQest2RTanw?Rep=DE1901>

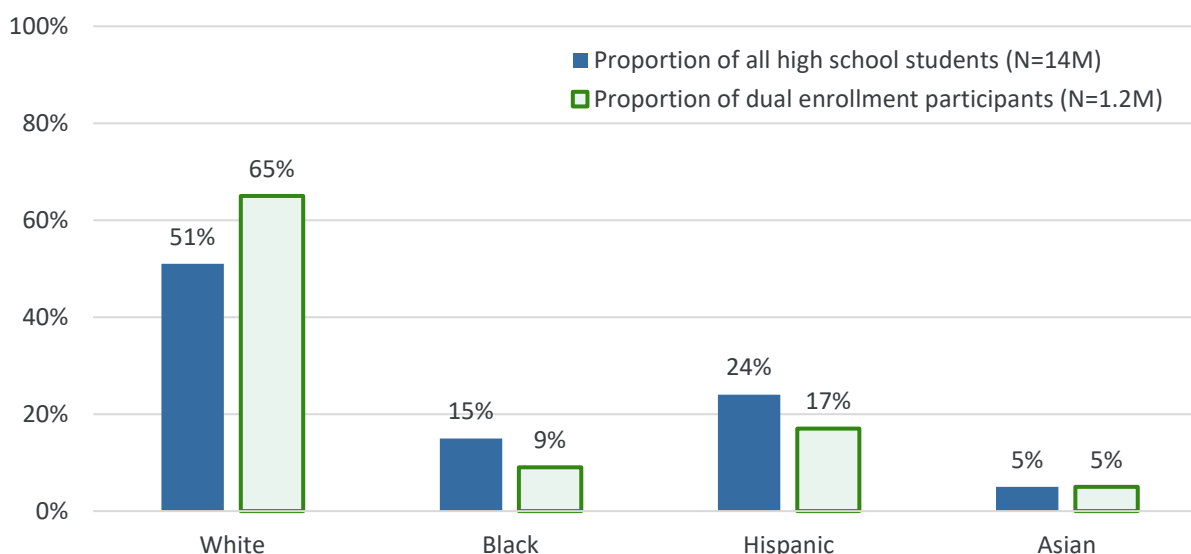
<sup>21</sup>[https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/evaluation/areas-of-focus\\_1/college\\_readiness/college-now/](https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/evaluation/areas-of-focus_1/college_readiness/college-now/)



graduates take courses for postsecondary credit at some point while they are in high school,<sup>22</sup> not including AP or IB courses.<sup>23</sup>

Participation in dual enrollment varies by race and ethnicity: While more than 1 in 10 White students participate, only about 1 in 16 Hispanic students and fewer than 1 in 20 Black students do.<sup>24</sup> Compared to the student population as a whole, White students are substantially over-represented among dual enrollment participants, while Black and Hispanic students are under-represented (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Participation in dual enrollment by race/ethnicity compared to overall student population, 2015–16<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup><https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/equity-dual-enrollment-finK-dream2020.pdf>

The size of racial/ethnic gaps in dual enrollment participation vary substantially across districts, yet are common. Nearly one-quarter of school districts have gaps equal to or larger than 7 percentage points. In general, districts with larger proportions of Black and Hispanic students and greater racial/ethnic income disparity are associated with larger racial/ethnic gaps in dual enrollment participation.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, participating students tend to come from families where the adults have higher levels of education. According to NCES, 42 percent of students whose parents hold a bachelor’s degree or higher take at least one course for postsecondary credit (not including AP or IB courses) while in

<sup>22</sup><https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019176.pdf>

<sup>23</sup>[https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/hsls09/pdf/2012\\_student.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/hsls09/pdf/2012_student.pdf)

<sup>24</sup><https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/easyblog/access-dual-enrollment-advanced-placement-race-gender.html>

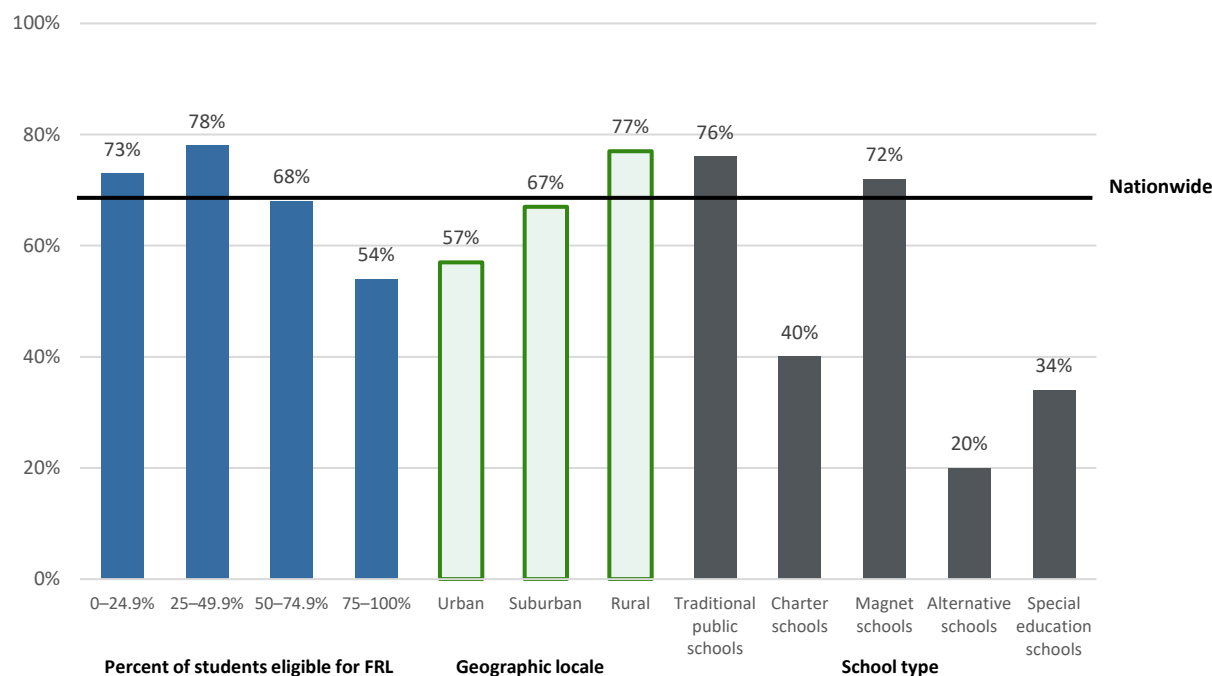
<sup>25</sup><https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/crcd-advanced-placement-dual-enrollment-access.pdf>



high school, compared to just 26 percent of students whose parents do not hold a high school credential.<sup>26</sup>

These data suggest that White students and students from families with higher levels of education tend to participate in dual enrollment at higher rates. But participation rates do not tell the entire story, as access to dual enrollment programs is not evenly distributed across schools. According to a recent analysis by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), about 69 percent of all high schools offer dual enrollment programs nationwide.<sup>27</sup> However, there is substantial variation across a number of factors, including the socioeconomic makeup of the student population, the geographic location of the school, and school type (see Figure 2). Schools with student populations where the majority are eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL, a proxy for socioeconomic status) are less likely to offer dual enrollment offerings. Similarly, schools in urban settings are less likely to offer dual enrollment than suburban or rural schools; charter, alternative, and special education schools are less likely to offer dual enrollment than traditional public and magnet schools.

**Figure 2. Dual enrollment offerings by schools' socioeconomic makeup, geographic locale, and type: 2015–16<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup><https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/694961.pdf>

<sup>26</sup><https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019176.pdf>

<sup>27</sup><https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/694961.pdf>



Taken together, data on dual enrollment participation and access suggest that these programs may too often be used as acceleration opportunities for White, middle- and upper-income students attending traditional or magnet, suburban, and rural schools.<sup>28</sup>

The uneven availability of dual enrollment opportunities across schools creates a significant equity issue. Ensuring that all districts offer dual enrollment opportunities is a critical step toward ensuring equity of access. However, even where programs do exist, there are a number of structural and implementation barriers that affect the equity of student access and participation. Three in particular stand out: student eligibility, program funding structure and cost, and program logistics.

## Student Eligibility

As discussed, states and districts vary widely in their approach to student eligibility policies for participation in dual enrollment programs. While students' ability to be successful with college-level coursework is an important consideration, it's also possible that high school students who may not see themselves as college-bound could shift their perspective if they achieve early success at postsecondary-level work. Research suggests that expanding access to middle-achieving students (with scores falling just short of "college-ready" on common measures) can boost students' post-high school aspirations and help them develop behaviors and skills associated with postsecondary success, such as critical thinking or problem-solving skills.<sup>29</sup> As a result, eligibility requirements are an important equity consideration for policymakers. Traditional measures of "college-readiness" may limit program accessibility to certain types of students, leaving other groups of students behind.

## Program Funding Structure and Cost

One contributing factor to availability of dual enrollment programs is the funding structures for schools. As described in Table 1, states may fund high schools for participating students at the same per-pupil rate, at a higher rate, or at a lower rate as non-participating students. Where states fund schools at a lower rate, there is a disincentive for schools to offer programs or encourage students to participate in them. Similarly, states may fund postsecondary institutions for participating students at the same per-pupil rate, at a higher rate, or at a lower rate as non-participating students. As with high schools, where states fund postsecondary institutions at lower rates, those institutions have little incentive to participate. These disincentives can contribute to the unequal distribution of dual enrollment programs across states, and thus to unequal access for students.

In addition to funding structures, state policies also vary in where they assign responsibility for the costs of dual enrollment. In at least 13 states, tuition costs associated with participation in dual enrollment programs are the responsibility of the family or student. In a handful of others, students and families are partially responsible, with the state or school district covering the remaining portion. When families are responsible for any portion of tuition, even if the cost is substantially

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<sup>28</sup>[http://hcmstrategists.com/promising-policy/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/MakingEquityIntentional\\_FinalDraft.pdf](http://hcmstrategists.com/promising-policy/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/MakingEquityIntentional_FinalDraft.pdf)

<sup>29</sup>[https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking\\_Dual\\_Enrollment\\_to\\_Reach\\_More\\_Students.pdf](https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking_Dual_Enrollment_to_Reach_More_Students.pdf)



less than it would be if taken at a postsecondary institution rather than through a dual enrollment program, it creates a barrier to access for families who are struggling financially. Policies like Georgia's, which covers the full cost of tuition, mandatory fees, and books for dual enrollment participants,<sup>30</sup> eliminate cost as a barrier, ensuring that where programs are offered, all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can participate.

## Program Logistics

As described above, dual enrollment policies are complex, involving numerous design elements that affect their implementation. Several logistical components, including how program availability is communicated to students and families and when and where courses are offered, affect equity of access and participation. To begin with, dual enrollment programs tend to be lesser known among families and key school and district personnel (such as school counselors) compared to other credit-bearing opportunities such as Advanced Placement (AP).<sup>31</sup> Students cannot participate in programs if they are not aware of them. Some research suggests that states with strong policies revolving around dual enrollment accountability—including policies requiring a school or district to notify all students and families of the availability of dual enrollment programs—tend to have higher participation rates.<sup>32</sup> Simply communicating information about dual enrollment programs is a necessary first step to improving access.

Beyond communication, however, the basic logistics of dual enrollment programs can have major effects on students' ability to participate. If courses are offered before or after regular school hours, students who have jobs or who caregivers may be unable to participate. Courses offered at locations other than the student's high school may be inaccessible if programs do not provide free, reliable transportation for students.

## What Do We Know About the Outcomes of Students Who Participate in Dual Enrollment Programs?

Studies of dual enrollment programs generally find positive associations between program participation and postsecondary outcomes, including college enrollment, persistence, and completion. A less-robust body of evidence suggests that dual enrollment has positive effects on participants' high school outcomes. On the other hand, recent research suggests that traditional postsecondary students may be negatively affected by large percentages of dual enrollment students in their classes—although more research needs to be done to fully understand the nature and scope of that finding.

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<sup>30</sup><https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/694961.pdf>

<sup>31</sup><https://www.insightintodiversity.com/equity-in-higher-education-requires-equal-access-to-dual-enrollment-in-high-school/>

<sup>32</sup>See Appendix Table A4 <https://ccrc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/crdc-advanced-placement-dual-enrollment-access.pdf>



## Dual enrollment is positively associated with enrollment in and completion of postsecondary degree programs.

Several rigorous studies have demonstrated that students participating in dual enrollment programs are significantly more likely to enroll in college than non-participating students.<sup>33</sup> One study found that dual enrollment participants immediately enroll in college after graduating from high school at a rate that is 19 percentage points higher than the national average.<sup>34</sup> Another study, which tracked 200,000 students for five years after they first took a community college course as high schoolers in fall 2010, found that 80 percent of those students continued in college after high school, and most earned a certificate or degree or transferred from a two-year to a four-year institution within those five years.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, several rigorous studies comparing students participating in dual enrollment programs to similar students who did not participate have found that dual enrollment students were significantly more likely to attain their postsecondary degree.<sup>36</sup> For instance, an evaluation of College Now, the dual enrollment program of the City University of New York, found that dual enrollment participation increases postsecondary achievement.<sup>37</sup> A study of students participating in dual enrollment programs in Texas found that as the percentage of students taking at least one dual credit in a high school cohort increases, the cohort's share of students who earn both an associate's degree and a bachelor's degree increases.<sup>38</sup>

The research on the effect of dual enrollment on students from low-income families is mixed. Some research suggests that dual enrollment has even stronger positive effects in terms of college degree attainment on low-income students compared to students from more affluent backgrounds.<sup>39</sup> However, other studies find gaps among higher and lower-income students in terms of their effect on degree completion. For example, among students who participated in dual enrollment at age 17 and first matriculated into a 4-year college between ages 18 and 20, 64 percent earned a degree. However, 71 percent of higher-income students earned a degree compared to just 58 percent of lower-income students. Similar gaps exist for students who first matriculate to community colleges: 46 percent of students overall earned a postsecondary award; however, 50 percent of higher-income students did so compared to 43 percent of lower-income students.<sup>40</sup> More evidence is

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<sup>33</sup>[https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc\\_dual\\_enrollment\\_022817.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_dual_enrollment_022817.pdf) see, for example, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1026262> and <https://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/early-college-high-schools-dual-enrollment-Pell-Grants-HEA.pdf>

<sup>34</sup>Fink, Jenkins, and Yanagiura, *What Happens to Students*; U.S. Department of Education, "Immediate College Enrollment Rate," The Condition of Education (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cpa.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpa.asp).

<sup>35</sup><https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-happens-community-college-dual-enrollment-students.pdf>

<sup>36</sup>[https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc\\_dual\\_enrollment\\_022817.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_dual_enrollment_022817.pdf)

<sup>37</sup><https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/he.20010>

<sup>38</sup><https://raymarshallcenter.org/files/2018/04/Dual-Credit-Policy-Brief-April-18-2018.pdf>

<sup>39</sup><https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1009522>

<sup>40</sup><https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-happens-community-college-dual-enrollment-students.pdf>



needed before a conclusive understanding can be reached on the effect of dual enrollment participation on attainment outcomes of students from low-income families.

## Dual enrollment may accelerate postsecondary degree completion.

Because dual enrollment programs allow students to accrue college credit while in high school, it is logical that those students would be positioned to graduate from postsecondary institutions in less time than their peers who matriculate having earned no credits. Research seems to support this hypothesis. Nationally, 62 percent of students enrolled in four-year institutions graduate with a bachelor's degree in six years.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, 60 percent of students who participated in dual enrollment as high schoolers graduate from four-year institutions in five years—a full year faster.<sup>42</sup> A report from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center similarly found that former dual enrollment participants who subsequently enrolled at a public four-year college and completed a bachelor's degree did so, on average, one year sooner than did other completers who did not participate in dual enrollment. Moreover, among associate degree earners, former dual enrollment participants completed their degree nearly two years earlier, on average, than did nonparticipants.<sup>43</sup>

There is a less robust body of evidence on other effects of dual enrollment. Some research indicates that dual enrollment participation is associated with positive effects on measures of high school success, such as attendance and college readiness.<sup>44</sup> Other research looks at the effect of dual enrollment participants' presence in postsecondary classrooms on the outcomes of traditional postsecondary students. One recent study suggests some cause for potential concern and further inquiry. It found that traditional community college students enrolled in entry-level math and English courses who were exposed to a higher proportion of dual enrollment peers had lower pass rates and grades in those courses, higher course repetition, and lower subject persistence.<sup>45</sup>

While there is more research to be done on the various effects and outcomes associated with dual enrollment, the evidence largely points to positive effects for participants' postsecondary outcomes—a key goal of these programs.

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<sup>41</sup>[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_ctr.asp#:~:text=That%20is%2C%20by%202018%20some.at%20private%20for%2Dprofit%20institutions.](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_ctr.asp#:~:text=That%20is%2C%20by%202018%20some.at%20private%20for%2Dprofit%20institutions.)

<sup>42</sup>Fink, Jenkins, and Yanagiura, *What Happens to Students*; U.S. Department of Education, "Immediate College Enrollment Rate," *The Condition of Education* (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cpa.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpa.asp).

<sup>43</sup><https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/media/k2/attachments/what-happens-community-college-dual-enrollment-students.pdf>

<sup>44</sup>[https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc\\_dual\\_enrollment\\_022817.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_dual_enrollment_022817.pdf)

<sup>45</sup><https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/happy-together-peer-effects-dual-enrollment.html>





## Best Practices for Designing High-Quality Dual Enrollment Policies

Dual enrollment policies enable students to earn postsecondary credit while in high school. Research demonstrates that participating students are more likely to enroll in and complete a postsecondary credential than their peers who do not participate. Dual enrollment programs can also reduce the time students spend in postsecondary institutions, which can result in substantial savings on the cost of tuition. However, research also demonstrates that dual enrollment programs are not available to or accessed by all student groups equitably. There are several steps policymakers can take to strengthen dual enrollment programs:

1. **Eliminate known barriers to equitable access.** There are several well-known barriers that make it difficult for all students and families to access dual enrollment programs. To address these, policymakers should:
  - a. **Ensure equitable distribution of dual enrollment programs across school types.** Not all high schools offer dual enrollment programs. Urban high schools, those serving large populations of low-income students, and those operating outside of the traditional district system—such as alternative high schools or charter schools—are less likely to offer dual enrollment programs, meaning certain types of students are less likely to have access to them. To address these gaps, some states require all high schools to offer dual enrollment. Indiana, for example, requires all public high schools to offer a minimum of two dual credit courses.<sup>46</sup> Other states require all public high schools to provide students with access to postsecondary credit, but allow flexibility over the program type and approach. Texas, for example, requires all districts to implement a program through which students can earn the equivalent of at least 12 semester hours of college credit in high school. The state’s dual credit program is one avenue for satisfying this requirement; however, Texas school districts can also choose to offer AP courses, IB programs, and/or advanced CTE courses.<sup>47</sup> Regardless of the approach, state policymakers must provide students with equal access to advanced coursework, and ensure that no gaps in access exist across racial/ethnic, socioeconomic status, or geographic lines.
  - b. **Ensure equal per-pupil funding.** In addition to the requirements that states put in place for schools to offer dual enrollment, state policymakers ought to ensure that the state’s approach to funding secondary and postsecondary institutions for dual enrollment students does not create a disincentive for them to offer programs. Specifically, states that fund institutions at lower per-pupil rates for dual enrollment participants likely create disincentives for those institutions to offer programs or encourage students to participate. Ensuring equal per-pupil funding can eliminate this disincentive.

<sup>46</sup><https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED603615.pdf>

<sup>47</sup>[https://www.legacypreparatory.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/TEA\\_Dual\\_Credit\\_FAQ.pdf](https://www.legacypreparatory.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/TEA_Dual_Credit_FAQ.pdf)





- c. Ensure that policies about program logistics account for access for high-need student groups.** Policymakers must carefully consider how the logistical components of dual enrollment programs—such as when and where courses are offered—affect different groups of students. Courses that are offered only after traditional school hours or in locations other than the high school may be inaccessible to students who have after-school responsibilities or who lack transportation. Providing classes at the high school and during the school day can address these barriers, but so too can providing reliable transportation to and from other locations.
  - d. Adjust student eligibility requirements to broaden access.** Policymakers must strike a delicate balance between ensuring that dual enrollment programs are accessible to all students who can benefit from them while also ensuring they are not setting up students to fail. Traditional student eligibility requirements, such as scores on placement exams, may limit access for certain student populations. Policymakers might consider alternative eligibility criteria such as grade level, regular attendance, or course-taking patterns, or including students who fall just below “college-ready” cutoffs on placement exams.<sup>48</sup> Strong counseling and support for all participating students is also an important component of ensuring that students are able to succeed in dual enrollment courses.
- 2. Clarify and communicate credit transferability policies.** If students earn postsecondary credits through dual enrollment programs that do not transfer to the postsecondary institution of their choice, they miss out on the potential benefits of earning postsecondary credit and may waste money (depending on the funding structure). Policymakers must set clear policies for credit transferability, and communicate those policies clearly with all stakeholders—faculty and staff at participating high schools and postsecondary institutions, students, and families. Policymakers may choose different approaches, such as requiring all postsecondary institutions to accept dual enrollment credit, requiring postsecondary institutions to accept certain courses for credit (e.g., English, math, other “core” courses), or requiring postsecondary institutions to accept for credit the courses they teach. Regardless of the approach, it needs to be communicated widely and clearly so that students can make informed decisions about dual enrollment options.
  - 3. Collect better data and establish transparent data reporting systems.** Although national data allows the field to understand who is participating in dual enrollment and what their outcomes are, states vary in their data practices. Policymakers should ensure that their states’ data collection policies capture the number of students who are participating in dual enrollment programs, demographic characteristics of those students, as well as information on students’ course taking, including which courses students are taking, how many courses individual students take, and their outcomes. In addition, policymakers ought to consider longer-term data collection that would help them answer questions about whether and where students enroll in postsecondary following high school graduation, whether and which credits transferred (in the absence of clear policies regulating credit transferability), and their postsecondary outcomes, including whether and when they complete a degree program. This data will provide

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<sup>48</sup>[https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking\\_Dual\\_Enrollment\\_to\\_Reach\\_More\\_Students.pdf](https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Rethinking_Dual_Enrollment_to_Reach_More_Students.pdf)



policymakers with a better understanding of the extent to which dual enrollment policies are reaching all students and whether they are supporting students in earning postsecondary credentials, and allowing for adjustments to the program if and as gaps are identified.



## Key Resources on Dual Enrollment

- » [Education Commission of the States 50-State Comparison](#)
  - › Provides an overview of each state’s dual enrollment policies and allows for comparison across states on a number of key programmatic elements such as the type of program, states’ approaches to course quality and instructor qualifications, and how states fund participating institutions.
- » [Government Accountability Office](#)
  - › The GAO’s report, *Public High Schools with More Students in Poverty and Smaller Schools Provide Fewer Academic Offerings to Prepare for College*, provides data on access to college preparation programs, including dual enrollment, across public high schools.
- » [Community College Research Center at Columbia University](#)
  - › This organization conducts and publishes research on programs and policies designed to prepare students for college.
- » [What Works Clearinghouse](#)
  - › The WWC Intervention Report on dual enrollment programs provides a summary of research on the effectiveness of dual enrollment programs.

