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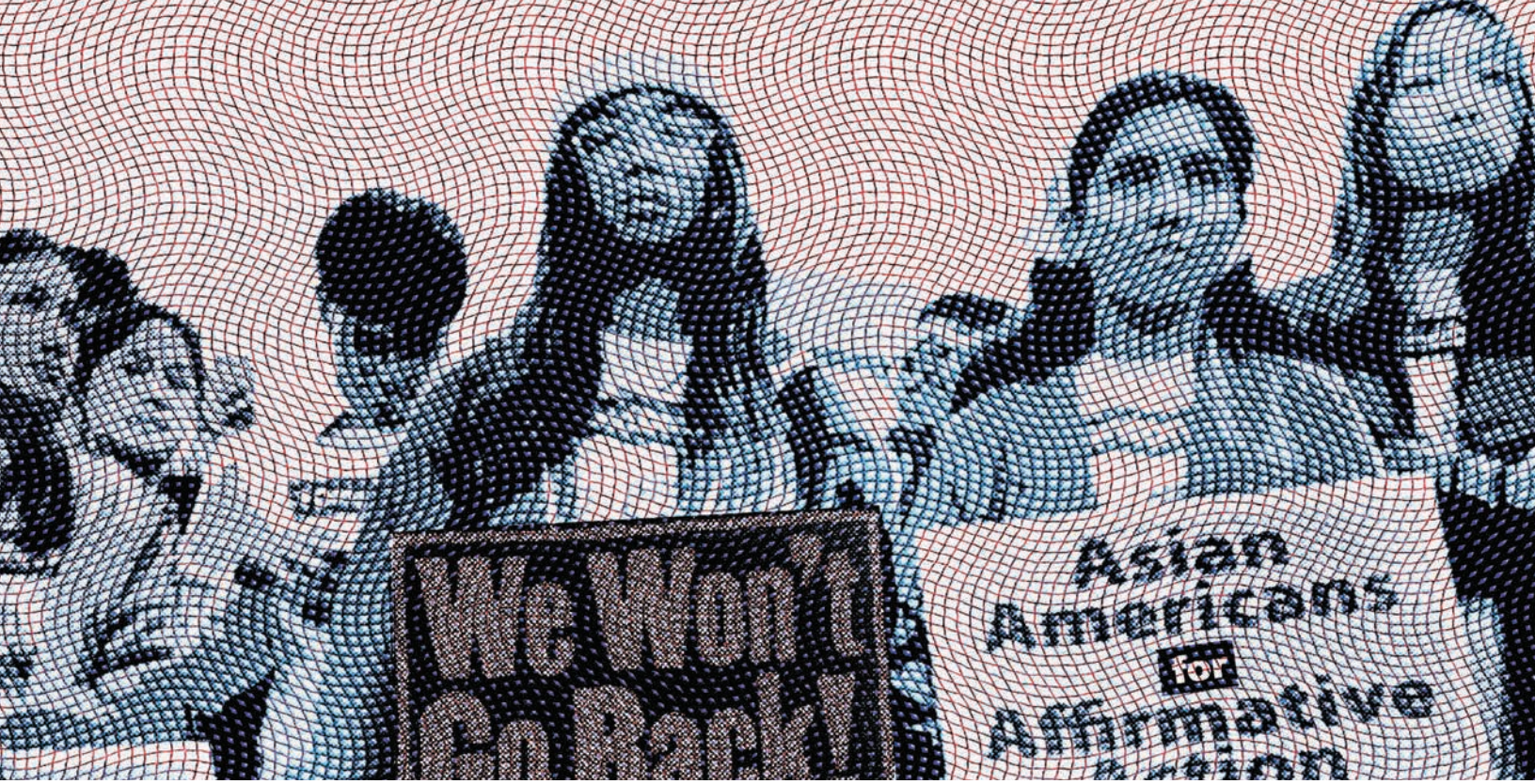
**EQUITABLE COLLEGE PREPARATION PRACTICES**

# Greater Equity in College Access Through High School/College Dual Enrollment Programs

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## Preface

Over 50% of American students in our public schools are Latinx, Black, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI), or American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN). Tapping into their talent and ensuring their access to a college education is essential to our future economic power and the success of our multi-racial democracy. Despite the historical exclusion and current underrepresentation of many Americans in our colleges and universities, in June 2023, the Supreme Court of the United States severely curtailed the use of race in higher education admissions, prohibiting the consideration of an applicant's racial status as part of that process.

Race-conscious admissions helped ensure America's colleges and universities were more diverse. Without it, there is a greater urgency for college leaders and policy makers to review current practices for equity, and to identify solutions that provide a fairer approach to preparing students for college, admitting them, and supporting their success. Towards that aim, the Campaign for College Opportunity is releasing a series of briefs, including this one, as part of our [Affirming Equity, Ensuring Inclusion and Empowering Action](#) initiative. The series will elevate practices that support the college preparation, admission, affordability, and success of Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, and AIAN students, ensuring America does not return to an era of exclusion in higher education.



# Overview

This brief summarizes the research on **dual enrollment programs—programs which allow high school students to enroll in college coursework through a partnering college or university**—and offers policymakers a strategy to increase college enrollment and attainment via such efforts. Dual enrollment represents a promising lever for increasing educational equity, given its large scale and demonstrated effectiveness for increasing college access and success among its participants. Black, Latinx, and other minoritized students benefit from dual enrollment participation, yet these and other groups underrepresented in higher education often do not have meaningful access to such programs. Strong dual enrollment programs have the potential to raise college enrollment rates among high school graduates and improve college-attainment rates for students who participate. Broadening the benefits of dual enrollment is indeed possible if we can **ensure equitable access to dual enrollment coursework and implement these programs as a seamless and well-supported onramp into college**.

Dual enrollment provides an opportunity for high school students to take actual college courses and thereby acclimate to college-level expectations. Two decades worth of empirical evidence documents the benefits of dual enrollment participation across a range of subsequent outcomes, such as high school completion, college enrollment, and college degree completion.<sup>1</sup> High school dual enrollment programs are widespread nationally. Among the roughly 15 million students enrolled in public high schools each year, about 1.5 million high school students enroll in some type of dual enrollment course, including about 125,000 Black high school students and 267,000 Latinx high school students.<sup>2</sup> Dual enrollment programming is available to students at 82% of public high schools nationally,<sup>3</sup> and by the end of high school about a third of high school graduates have taken at least one dual enrollment course.<sup>4</sup>

Dual enrollment offerings have expanded dramatically over the past two decades, nearly doubling in the decade preceding the pandemic (from 800k students in fall 2009 to 1.5M students in fall 2019) and have continued to grow by more than 10% from 2019 to 2023.<sup>5</sup> However, exclusionary dual enrollment policies, practices, and individual mindsets—beliefs that Black, Latinx, and other minoritized students either would not be successful in dual enrollment courses or would not need college courses as they likely are not college-bound—have replicated and reinforced educational inequities, resulting in persistent gaps in access to dual enrollment coursework for Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, AIAN, low-income, English learners, and students with disabilities.<sup>6</sup> For example, Black and Latinx students comprised 15 and 25 percent, respectively, of public secondary school enrollment nationally in 2017-18, whereas Black and Latinx students only comprised 9 and 19 percent of those taking dual enrollment courses.

**Latinx, Black, NHPI, AIAN students, as well as English language learners and students with disabilities, are underrepresented among dual enrollment students.**

Table 1. Representation in Dual Enrollment Coursework, U.S. Public Schools.<sup>7</sup>

	Share of Secondary School Enrollment (%)	Share of Dual Enrollment Course-Takers (%)
<b>Students with Disabilities</b>	13	4
<b>English Language Learners</b>	6	2
<b>American Indian/Alaska Native</b>	1.0	0.8
<b>Asian American</b>	5.2	5.2
<b>Black</b>	15	9
<b>Latinx</b>	25	19
<b>Multiracial</b>	3.1	2.7
<b>Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander</b>	0.4	0.3
<b>White</b>	50	63

Analysis of US Department of Education Civil Rights data from the 2017-18 school year (N=21,936 public schools).

Although dual enrollment programs are widespread, they are far from uniform. Dual enrollment offerings range in intensity (e.g., number of credits earned in high school), integrated supports (e.g., whether or not colleges provide dual enrollment students with advising, educational planning support, tutoring or other academic supports, or even basic needs support), and coherence (e.g., embedded in career academies or a la carte general education coursework). Dual enrollment is an umbrella term that includes varied models, from immersive Early College High Schools to ‘one-off’ dual enrollment courses that may be taught online, at the high school, or on the college campus by certified high school

instructors or college faculty. Community colleges enroll about seven in 10 dual enrollment students; **in fall 2021 about one in five community college students nationally was a high school dual enrollment student.**<sup>8</sup> Dual enrollment courses delivered at the high school by certified high school instructors is the predominant format nationally, enrolling about four out of every five dual enrollment students.<sup>9</sup> More than 80,000 students enroll at about 300 public Early College High Schools (ECHS) nationally.<sup>10</sup> While smaller in scale, the ECHS model is notable for its intentional design, which typically focuses on broadening access to higher education and offers extensive student supports to help students complete an associate degree or up to two years of transferable college coursework.

Succeeding in a college course in high school can boost students' confidence as college learners, increase exposure to new topics and areas of study, and build momentum as they transition to college after high school. The most rigorous experimental evaluations of the ECHS model show strong impacts on college attainment among low-income and students of color, demonstrating what is possible when dual enrollment programs are implemented with a focus on increasing college access that includes intentional outreach and support for underserved students and families.<sup>11</sup> And research on more casual dual enrollment coursetaking outside of the ECHS model indicates that the college enrollment and degree completion benefits from participating in dual enrollment extend to Black, Latinx, and lower-income high school students.<sup>12</sup>







## Unlocking the Potential of Dual Enrollment for Greater Equity

Dual enrollment programs are widespread nationally, but access to dual enrollment coursework is uneven and replicates existing educational inequities. Compared to the overall composition of secondary school enrollment, students with disabilities, English learners, American Indian, Black, Latinx, multiracial, and Pacific Islander students—and men across all these groups—were underrepresented among dual enrollment participants during the 2017-18 school year (Table 1). Nationally, white students participate in dual enrollment coursework at about twice the rate of Black and Latinx students.<sup>13</sup> Numerous studies from individual regions or states show similar gaps in access. For example, from the 2015 to 2018 school year, the percent of California high school graduates who had taken a dual enrollment course grew from 11 to 18 percent, but throughout the expansion, gaps in access remained persistent, with Black, Latinx, economically disadvantaged, homeless, English learners, and foster youth most impacted.<sup>14</sup> Importantly, since the expansion of dual enrollment partnerships through California’s College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) policy, which was designed with an explicit goal of expanding college access for underserved populations, CCAP partnerships have had more success equalizing access to dual enrollment for Latinx students.<sup>15</sup>



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To unlock the potential of dual enrollment for greater equity, exclusionary policies, practices, and individual mindsets about which students dual enrollment is for must be removed, revamped, and rethought.

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## EXCLUSIONARY POLICIES

Dual enrollment is commonly governed by state policy, which can determine how and if these programs are funded and who bears the costs, requirements around student eligibility to take dual enrollment courses, and instructor qualifications to teach dual enrollment courses. Limited state funding for dual enrollment for schools and colleges can shift the cost burden to drive up costs for students and families, and this is a major barrier to access and participation<sup>16</sup> with a disproportionate impact on low-income students, Black, Latinx, and other underrepresented minorities, students with disabilities, English language learners, foster youth, and students experiencing homelessness.<sup>17</sup> In 2019, 25 states had policies in place that provided dual enrollment coursework at no cost to students, whereas students and families in the other 25 states bore the cost of dual enrollment (often at a reduced rate) or it was locally determined whether and how much students pay for their dual enrollment coursework.<sup>18</sup> State policies (or lack thereof) related to dual enrollment funding can create barriers to access by disincentivizing schools and colleges from offering dual enrollment coursework, or it can create barriers to student participation by not offering sufficient financial assistance for books, tuition/fees, and transportation for lower-income students.<sup>19</sup>

Policies that also govern who is qualified to teach dual enrollment coursework structurally exclude students from racially minoritized groups from accessing dual enrollment. About 80 percent of dual enrollment courses taught nationally are taught by high school teachers who have been approved by colleges to instruct the dual enrollment course. Qualification to teach a high school dual enrollment course is typically determined by college or state policy under requirements of regional accreditors. In many settings, high school instructors must have completed at least a Master's degree (in the discipline of the dual enrollment course) or 18 graduate credit hours in their subject area. Most high school teachers do not have advanced graduate training in specific disciplines. High schools that serve large proportions of Black, Latinx, AIAN, and NHPI students are more likely to not offer any dual enrollment courses,<sup>20</sup> and the lack of availability of high school instructors who qualify to teach dual enrollment courses is commonly identified as a major barrier to achieving equitable access.<sup>21</sup>



Finally, state or institutional policies perpetuate educational inequities through overreliance on standardized placement tests to determine dual enrollment eligibility. College placement testing, where students are assessed through standardized exams to determine their readiness for college-level math or English coursework, has been shown to unnecessarily prevent students from accessing college coursework.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the use of placement testing to determine high school students' eligibility to take dual enrollment courses excludes students who could otherwise benefit, with a disproportionate impact on Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, AIAN, and students from other marginalized groups.<sup>23</sup> Students may be excluded by not gaining access to testing preparation or the placement tests themselves (which may require referral by high school educators), or the placement tests may themselves unfairly exclude students through racial and linguistic bias in their design and delivery in a high-stakes setting.<sup>24</sup>

Multiple measures assessment (MMA), wherein one or more alternatives to placement tests (primarily high school grades) are used to determine student readiness for college coursework, is more effective in helping students into and through college-level coursework.<sup>25</sup> Echoing the broader reform movement around MMA, during the pandemic many states and colleges shifted away from solely relying on placement testing and instead began using high school grades to determine eligibility for dual enrollment coursework. Analyses conducted by state agencies in Ohio and Florida indicate that the transition from placement testing to high school grades was accompanied by increased access to dual enrollment without significant changes in the pass rates of dual enrollment courses.<sup>26</sup>

Yet even rigid requirements related to minimum high school grade point averages (GPA) can result in the exclusion of students from minoritized racial backgrounds at higher rates than their white peers. For example, a student who experienced a challenging transition into 9th grade but since recovered in their 10th grade courses might be ineligible for dual enrollment in 11th grade due to their cumulative high school GPA. It is possible to rethink rigid requirements for eligibility and open a wider door for high school students to take dual enrollment courses—while simultaneously providing expanded supports to ensure students succeed in those courses. For example, **an evaluation of Ohio's Innovative Waiver program revealed that removing placement testing requirements and providing additional supports resulted in increased dual enrollment participation among Black and Latinx students without impacting their dual enrollment course success rates.**<sup>27</sup>

## **EXCLUSIONARY INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES AND INDIVIDUAL MINDSETS**

Even within similar state policy contexts, institutional practices matter in advancing (or inhibiting) access to and success in dual enrollment courses.<sup>28</sup> Colleges and high schools that take a passive approach





(e.g., information about dual enrollment is available upon request with minimal or no effort to outreach to underserved communities) place the burden on students and families to seek out and register for dual enrollment coursework, and this does not close gaps in access for Latinx, Black, NHPI, AIAN, and lower-income families.<sup>29</sup> And when college advising is limited for dual enrollment students, colleges rely on high school counselors—overburdened and less familiar with college program options and requirements—to do the bulk of advising.<sup>30</sup> As dual enrollment students have grown in number particularly at community colleges, college and K-12 leaders have worked to shift from a passive approach to outreach and support for dual enrollment students to one that is more strategically aligned to promoting college access and attainment by expanding outreach and providing college advising and support to help students explore and plan on their dual enrollment coursework building into college degree programs in fields of interest.<sup>31</sup>

Mindsets around dual enrollment comprise the goals and purposes K-12 and college leaders ascribe to their dual enrollment partnerships and the beliefs of individuals running these programs around which types of students are—and are not—a good fit. Strong leadership and dedication to student success from educators is a cornerstone of an effective dual enrollment program, and key personnel like school counselors and principals are influential in outreach, encouragement, and referral into dual enrollment courses. Yet individuals bring racist biases to their work that replicate racist tracking of students into advanced academics or not. Racist beliefs that dual enrollment is best suited for a profile of student who looks whiter and wealthier, and who has been identified as on the ‘advanced’ track exclude Black students as well as those from other minoritized or marginalized groups.<sup>32</sup> Encouragingly, many other practitioners describe these attitudes as ‘outdated’ mindsets and instead bring an inclusive and affirming approach to expanding access to dual enrollment and providing adequate supports for all students to succeed.<sup>33</sup>



# Learning From Effective Models of Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment is widespread nationally but far from uniform in terms of how programs are designed and implemented. In a national analysis examining access to dual enrollment and racial equity gaps at the school district level, Xu et al. noted that even controlling for state and local factors (e.g., academic preparation, family socioeconomic backgrounds, district racial composition), there is substantial variation in access to dual enrollment within states and even among high schools in the same district.<sup>34</sup> These authors noted that while the vast majority of school districts reported gaps in access to dual enrollment for Black and Latinx students, about one in five districts reported near-zero gaps or higher rates of participation in dual enrollment among Black or Latinx students.






In this section, we look at ways in which policymakers at the college- and K-12 levels can form or reform dual enrollment programs to ensure greater racial equity in dual enrollment participation and success.

## **BROADENING ACCESS WITH EXPANDED SUPPORTS**

Early College High Schools (ECHS) illustrate what it takes for dual enrollment to deliver on its potential for greater equity in higher education. ECHS typically prioritize underserved communities and provide coherent college curricula and strong counseling and student supports. Studies demonstrate that participation in ECHS programs increases the likelihood of entering college, persisting, and completing a college degree, with particularly strong effects for Black and Latinx students and low-income students.<sup>35</sup> While ECHS models are much smaller in scale compared to more casual dual enrollment course-taking among traditional high school students, ECHS models include concerted efforts to broaden access and expand supports that can be applied to any dual enrollment program. For example, focused outreach to underserved communities is a key component of the ECHS model<sup>36</sup> and is essential for advancing equity in dual enrollment more broadly.<sup>37</sup> As is evident in the ECHS model, high schools and college partners must increase support to students in order to match the additional challenges required to succeed in a college-level course in high school.<sup>38</sup> To broaden dual enrollment access to students who attend under-resourced K-12 schools, providing additional supports is particularly important to ensure students can thrive in the more demanding learning environments of a dual enrollment course.



**How are institutions both expanding access and providing additional supports with a focus on ensuring Black and Latinx students are benefiting from dual enrollment? In the Dual Enrollment Playbook,<sup>39</sup> researchers from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) and the Aspen Institute described the practices of nine community-college–high-school partnerships that had achieved equitable access and strong early college outcomes for Black and Latinx dual enrollment students. The Playbook outlined five key areas of practice:**

-  **Setting a shared vision and goals** that prioritize equity between college and K-12 partners, setting high expectations for students, evaluating equity gaps, and committing to targets to close them.
-  **Expanding equitable access by building early awareness**, improving outreach to Black and Latinx communities, actively recruiting, and limiting the impact of placement testing, costs, transportation, and other barriers.
-  **Connecting students to advising and supports** that ensures equitable outcomes by coordinating advising across college/K-12 partners and proactively providing supports to struggling students.
-  **Providing high-quality instruction that builds students' competence and confidence** by supporting faculty to enable excellent teaching.
-  **Organizing teams and developing relationships** that maximize the partnership's potential by assessing outcomes and enacting data-driven improvements to the policies and practices in place.

These partnerships featured in the Playbook actively reached out to high schools with large enrollments of Black and Latinx students as well as directly to Black and Latinx communities to share about dual enrollment opportunities and to encourage and support their participation. Each partnership took steps to eliminate barriers to access, connect students to advising and supports, and provide high-quality instruction.



## **EXTENDING GUIDED PATHWAYS TO DUAL ENROLLMENT TO BUILD MOMENTUM FOR COLLEGE**

Five of the partnerships featured in the Dual Enrollment Playbook were anchored by colleges that were early adopters of “guided pathways” reforms. Guided pathways (GP) is a whole-college redesign model—based on 20 years of evidence about organizational impediments to student success in community colleges—through which colleges “backward map” programs of study to good jobs and baccalaureate transfer by field while redesigning advising, placement, instruction, and technology systems to enable students to choose, plan, and complete programs efficiently and affordably.<sup>40</sup> GP reforms are being implemented by hundreds of community colleges nationally, including through formal statewide efforts in more than a dozen states including California, Texas, New York, and Ohio.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, dual enrollment has grown to represent a substantial portion of headcount at many community colleges.<sup>42</sup> As such, emerging research from California, Texas, Florida, and Ohio documents how colleges are extending their GP reforms to high school dual enrollment and the potential of this approach to increase equity in the high school to college transition. In conceptualizing how the GP approach can extend to dual enrollment, researchers at the Community College Research Center identified a set of “Dual Enrollment Equity Pathways” practices aimed at advancing equity by closing gaps in dual enrollment coursework with adequate academic and navigational supports that is aligned to postsecondary degrees in fields of interest to students including reaching out to students’ families, aligning course offerings to high-demand college majors, providing students with proactive academic support, and ensuring high quality instructional delivery.<sup>43</sup> GP offers a framework for not only closing gaps in access to dual enrollment coursework but better leveraging dual enrollment coursework to build students’ motivation – by connecting to their purpose, aspirations, and interests - to continue in college after high school.





## **ALIGNED INSTITUTIONAL INCENTIVES FOR INVESTING IN GREATER EQUITY THROUGH DUAL ENROLLMENT**

In many communities there are growing incentives for colleges and universities and their K-12 partners to invest in efforts to utilize dual enrollment as an access point to higher education for Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, and AIAN students underrepresented in higher education.

- ✓ **Incentives for K-12 schools.** K-12 leaders—particularly those leading underserved districts and schools (e.g., Title 1)—are motivated to partner on expanding dual enrollment to increase the value they are providing to their communities by helping students save money and time on their college journey. And K-12 leaders and students alike report appreciating that they earn the college credit based on their performance in the course instead of their performance on one high-stakes test, as is the case with Advanced Placement.<sup>44</sup>
- ✓ **Incentives for Community Colleges and other Broad Access Colleges.** Community colleges, which enroll about 70 percent of dual enrollment students nationally, have been experiencing steep losses in enrollment among older adult students—a trend that existed for nearly a decade before 2020 and then went from bad to worse with the pandemic.<sup>45</sup> In other words, community colleges (and many broad access four-year institutions which serve large dual enrollment populations) have lots of open seats. And, even though some colleges may only generate a fraction of the revenue per dual enrollment course enrollment compared to a regular course enrollment, there are still strong college incentives to implement dual enrollment programs as an intentional onramp to postsecondary education for students who might be on the fence about attending college.<sup>46</sup>
- ✓ **Incentives for more selective four-year institutions.** In the wake of the ban on affirmative action in college admissions, leaders of selective four-year institutions can strengthen connections through dual enrollment and community college transfer with partner community colleges and underserved (e.g., Title 1) high schools to grow a talented and diverse pipeline of incoming students.





## Recommendations

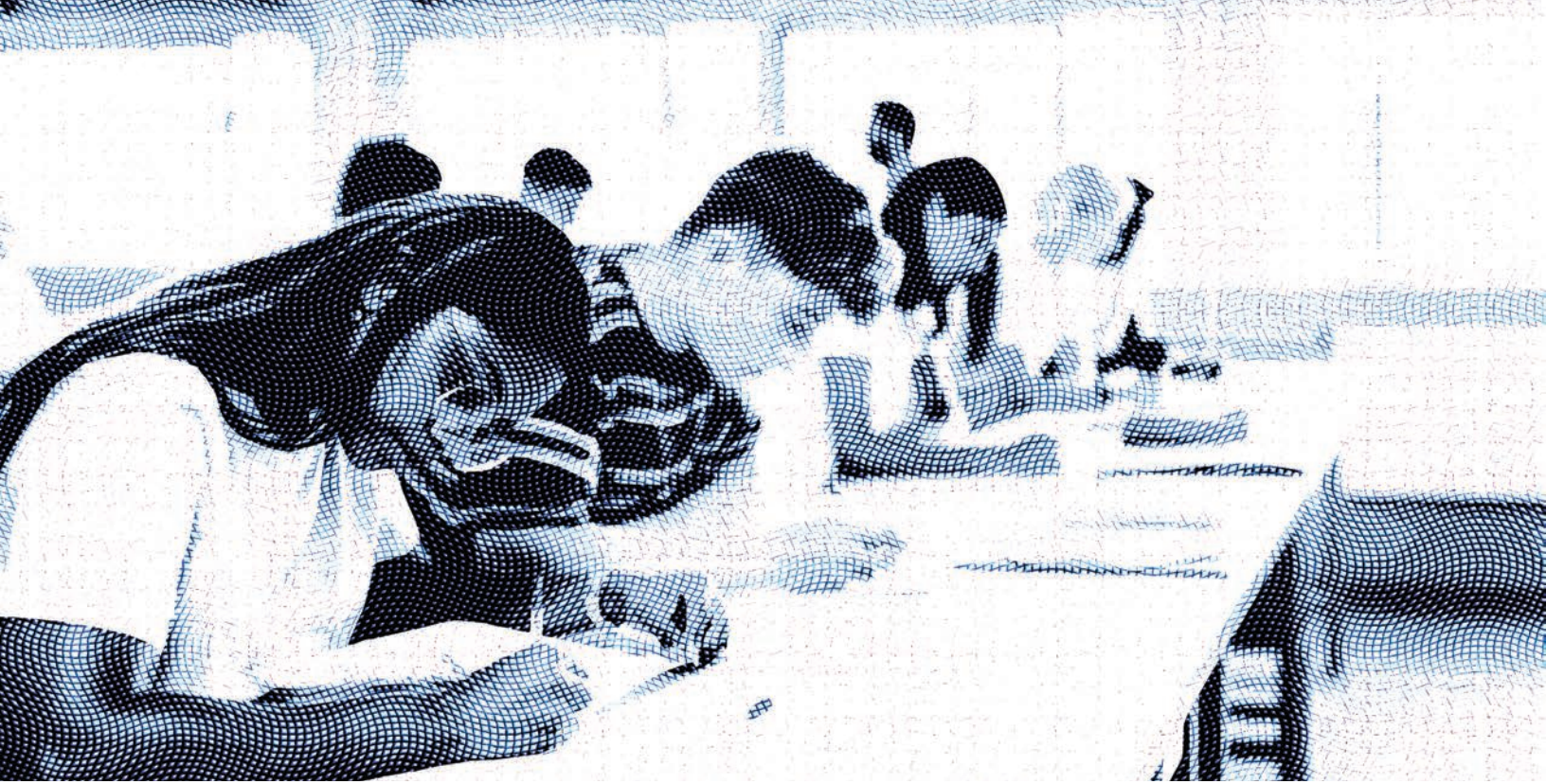
Increasing access to dual enrollment is a major focus among state policymakers. In 2019, over 100 bills addressing dual enrollment were introduced in legislatures covering 37 states; of these, 36 bills addressing access to dual enrollment coursework were enacted by legislatures in 23 states.<sup>47</sup> Despite numerous bills seeking to expand access to dual enrollment coursework, only six states (CO, HI, MA, MN, MO, WA) currently have policies that incentivize participation among underserved high school students, and only Colorado and Minnesota explicitly focus incentives on racially minoritized students.<sup>48</sup>

State and college system policy can enable colleges and K-12 partners in using dual enrollment as a mechanism for increasing equity in the high school to college transition. The following describes four policy areas that are essential to address for states and systems to advance equitable dual enrollment.

- ✓ **Prioritize increasing equity as a goal of dual enrollment programs and publicly track progress.** Without focused efforts to expand access for underserved students, efforts to increase participation in dual enrollment may further exacerbate racial/ethnic inequities of access. Policies can enable more equitable access to dual enrollment coursework if they, like California’s College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP), explicitly focus expansion efforts on reaching students “who may not already be college bound or who are underrepresented in higher education”.<sup>49</sup> State and system policies can prioritize equity by clearly defining underrepresented groups, setting explicit goals for access and success in dual enrollment for students from those groups, and publicly reporting annual progress toward metrics aligned to those targets, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, income, and other important factors (e.g., students with disabilities, English learners, prior academic achievement).
- ✓ **Eliminate cost-related and other barriers to participation.** If low- and moderate-income students and families bear substantial costs to take dual enrollment courses, achieving equal access will not be possible. Pell grants are not available to low-income high school students to use for dual enrollment coursework, thus states and systems must ensure cost is not a barrier to accessing dual enrollment. In addition to allocating funding to cover tuition and fees, states and systems can require or support expanded use of open educational resources (OER) to reduce textbook and course material costs. When there are limited options for dual enrollment being offered at the high school site, transportation to the college to take the dual enrollment courses can be another major barrier.



- ✓ **Conduct equity audits of existing policy.** Since state and local policy contexts vary substantially with regard to dual enrollment offerings, state and system leaders should conduct equity audits of existing dual enrollment policies to identify and remedy those creating disproportionate impact on Black, Latinx, low-income, and other marginalized groups.
- ✓ **Use alternatives to placement testing to determine eligibility for dual enrollment.** States and colleges should implement and promote the use of alternative methods to high-stakes placement testing to determine whether students can participate in dual enrollment. Overreliance on placement testing creates unfair barriers to dual enrollment participation and college-level coursework more generally.
- ✓ **Increase the supply of qualified dual enrollment instructors with a focus on underserved high schools and districts.** The scarcity of qualified high school instructors is another major hurdle to broadening access to dual enrollment, particularly in underserved rural and urban Title 1 high schools. Expanding the instructor pool is essential so that students are not excluded from taking dual enrollment courses based on their local high school's access to qualified instructors. States and systems can support this by aligning teacher pipeline initiatives and secondary education certification with efforts to expand the number of qualified dual enrollment instructors. And states and systems can leverage state and federal funding to provide direct support to high school instructors to complete required graduate coursework to qualify to teach dual enrollment courses. For example, Minnesota's Pathway to 18 program provides tuition assistance for high school instructors to complete the graduate credit hours needed to qualify to teach dual enrollment courses at one of seven different state universities, and the program prioritizes tuition support for Black, Indigenous, and teachers of color.<sup>50</sup>



## Conclusion

Each year, thousands of school districts across the country partner with higher education institutions to enroll more than a million high school students in dual enrollment college coursework. Because it currently operates at such a large scale and has been shown to increase college enrollment and completion, dual enrollment has great potential for increasing college access and success for Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, and AIAN who have not been well served in the high school to college transition. Yet, exclusionary policies, practices, and mindsets have created barriers to entry for Latinx, Black and other potential beneficiaries of dual enrollment programs. While the potential of dual enrollment programs has not yet been fully realized, emerging and innovative models illustrate what it takes for dual enrollment to produce greater educational equity. By focusing policies, practices, and mindsets on broadening the benefits of dual enrollment to Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, AIAN students and students from other groups underrepresented in higher education, we can expand college opportunity for hundreds of thousands of Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, and AIAN high school students across the country.

For additional information and resources on dual enrollment please click here <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/research/high-school-to-college.html>



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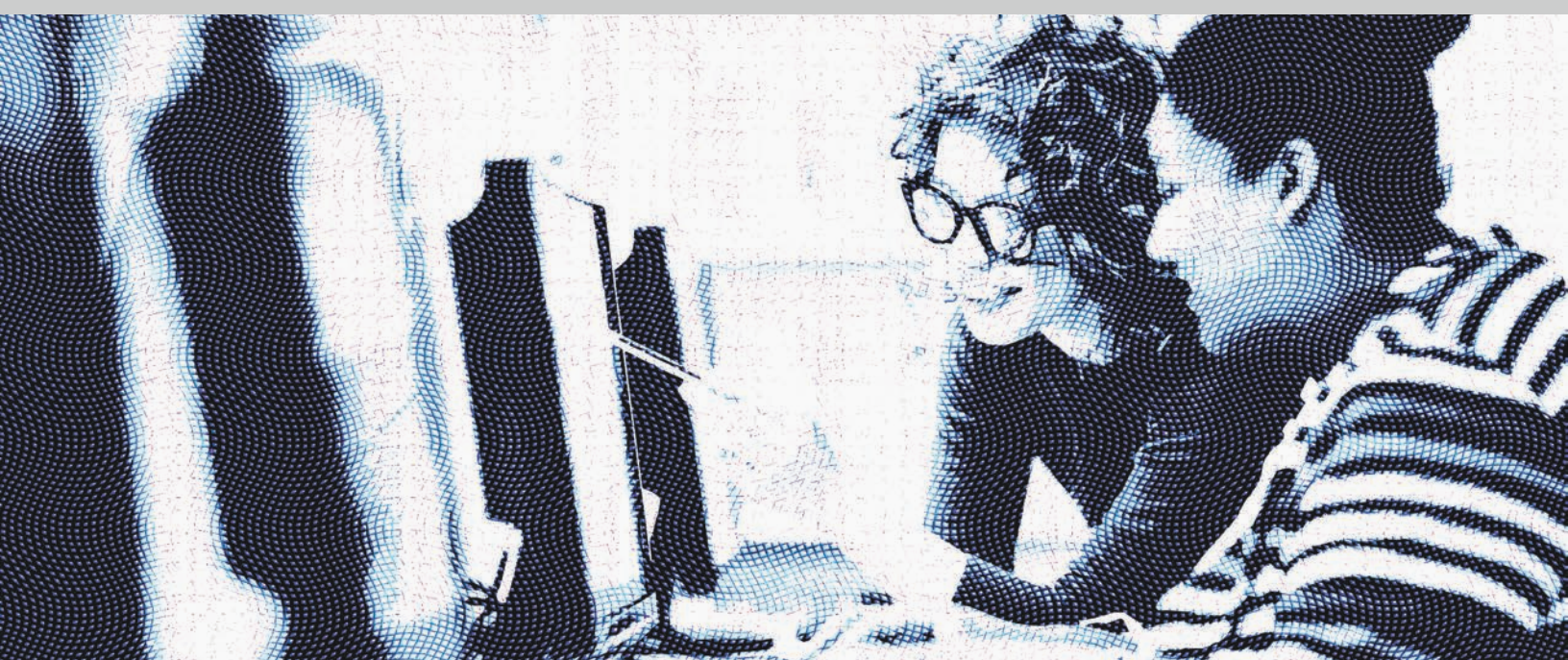
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