

Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research Series

Brief 1: Strategies for Equitable Dual Enrollment Participation

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Introduction

Dual enrollment affords high school students the opportunity to enroll in college courses. Evidence shows that dual enrollment prepares students academically, emotionally, and socially for postsecondary success. This approach is particularly powerful for students with low incomes, students of color, and students who are first in their families to attend college. Dual enrollment can strengthen their confidence in their ability to navigate and succeed in college coursework.

In California, more and more high school students are involved in dual enrollment programs. Over 112,000 of the state's high school graduates participated in 2020, an increase of over 50% in just four years (Rodriguez & Gao, 2021). As this strategy surges in popularity, [RDP Consulting](#) is working with the *Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion (DE4EC)* initiative to learn more about what constitutes equitable dual enrollment and how it benefits students who are historically underrepresented in postsecondary education (see Sidebar 1.1).

To inform this effort, RDP Consulting conducted interviews with nearly 100 dual enrollment program participants representing seven *DE4EC*-funded partnerships in 2022. Participants included faculty, staff, and administrators from California high schools and community colleges. We also connected directly with students and parents who identify as African American/Black, Latina/o/x, and/or experiencing economic disadvantage to amplify their unique experience in dual enrollment programs. Interview questions explored the intersection of equitable best practices and effective K12 and college partnerships within *DE4EC* communities.

As part of the *Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research* series, this research brief spotlights initial findings on how to strengthen equitable dual enrollment participation. It highlights (a) how *DE4EC* partners effectively engage students and their parents and successfully register those often underrepresented in dual enrollment programming, and (b) calls out barriers to these efforts. High school and community college counselors, dual enrollment directors, and coordinators responsible for outreach and recruitment may find it particularly helpful as they work to increase students' access to dual enrollment opportunities.

Sidebar 1.1 Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion Overview

Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion (DE4EC) is a multi-year collaborative initiative among the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), [College Futures Foundation](#), and [Tipping Point Community](#), carried out with research support from RDP Consulting. *DE4EC* helps California community colleges and their high school partners build dual enrollment programs centered on strengthening equitable access and completion outcomes for students underrepresented in higher education, particularly African American/Black, Latina/o/x, and students experiencing economic disadvantage.

DE4EC includes the following 10 colleges and their high school partners: Berkeley City College, Compton College, Contra Costa College, Cuyamaca College, East Los Angeles College, Fresno City College, Gavilan College, Hartnell College, Madera Community College, and Skyline College. Each of these collaborations represents different levels of capacity and stages of dual enrollment program implementation.

Key Findings

Strategies for Equity-Driven Outreach, Recruitment, and Enrollment

Equity-driven outreach, recruitment, and enrollment efforts are central to creating successful dual enrollment communities for historically underrepresented students. *DE4EC* partnerships are taking intentional steps to ensure students from disproportionately impacted groups¹ know about these dual enrollment opportunities and practically make it through the enrollment process. They are building rapport with students and their families by communicating, listening, and acting in culturally responsive ways. Strategies include the following.

Make Dual Enrollment Information Easily Accessible to Students

DE4EC partners are centering where and how students and their families access information in their outreach activities.

At the college level, staff distribute flyers and send a dual enrollment team to make presentations at the high schools. Working collaboratively with their community college counterparts, high school staff alert the school community of these information sessions. One college hosts a mini orientation with students and their parents before the student completes an application for admission.

At the high school level, efforts include tabling at local movie theaters, community gatherings, or college fairs; airing commercials across movies, television, and radio; advertising on billboards; posting on Facebook and other social media outlets; and displaying yard signs. Across DE4EC high schools, counselors regularly present on dual enrollment to students and parents in both English and Spanish. Bilingual communication is not just a key equity strategy, it is an ethical imperative. One high school administrator explained the outreach and enrollment timeline, emphasizing the myriad thoughtful layers before registering a high school student for a college course:

In the fall, the Dual Enrollment Coordinator identifies students who might be successful and builds an initial roster of students to recruit. This is a comprehensive process, based on counselor recommendations. The roster is vetted by the high school teachers, whereby they are offering input on student attendance and academic performance. Once the list is in solid form, the counselors book meetings with the parents of select students to offer insight on the rigor and expectations of dual enrollment. Following this meeting, the teacher or counselor assists students with CCC Apply (the California Community College application portal), the application for dual enrollment.

Use Inclusive Recruitment Messages

Inclusive recruitment messages directly speak to students and their families about the positive outcomes of dual enrollment. Students and parents involved in DE4EC-supported dual enrollment programs particularly reported that they were drawn to messages that answered who is eligible, what it costs, and what are the benefits. See sample language below.

Common Questions	Sample Messages for Inclusive Recruitment
Who Is Eligible	College is for everyone. Dual enrollment is for everyone.
What It Costs	Everything is free.
What Are the Benefits	Dual enrollment helps students complete their 15 A–G course requirements for college admission, graduate from high school, and get a free head start on college. Dual enrollment saves time and money by earning college credits for free in high school. Dual enrollment students earn college credit in an achievable classroom environment with support services. There is no comprehensive exam.

This research also underscored that strengthening equitable dual enrollment participation requires messaging specifically to students who are not taking Advanced Placement (AP) classes. Helping low- or middle-performing students understand both the rigors of college coursework as well as available supports can help them set realistic expectations about participation and have confidence that they can succeed. Just as important, faculty and administrators may also need to shift their attitudes and beliefs about which students can benefit from and thrive in dual enrollment offerings and be primed for how to communicate with students and parents accordingly.

Engage High School Counselors to Lead Student Recruitment

High school counselors in this study demonstrated a commitment to equity and inclusion. They shared a belief that this opportunity is for everyone and that participating in dual enrollment facilitates personal, professional, and academic growth. As a result, they have a particularly impactful role to play in the recruitment of historically underrepresented students.

To operationalize this commitment, counselors at several high schools involved in DE4EC alert students of dual enrollment opportunities in one-on-one advising sessions. They distribute informational flyers, host campuswide and classroom presentations, and send mass emails that spotlight the range of courses available for college credit via dual enrollment. On a psycho-social level, counselors build meaningful and trusting relationships with students and their families, so that when it is time to register for dual enrollment, they can effectively guide students onto a career or college pathway.

1. Gio Sosa, "Using Disproportionate Impact Methods to Identify Equity Gaps" The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (2022); p. 6, https://rpgroup.org/Portals/0/Documents/Projects/MultipleMeasures/AB705_Workshops/DisproportionateImpactGuide_July2022.pdf?ver=2022-09-23-170556-467

High school counselors are also integral to students' application process. They described distributing dual enrollment registration forms and supporting students in accurately completing them for admission to the community college. They review the forms to gauge student potential and speak directly with the student about any concerns related to their capacity to pass a dual enrollment class.

Barriers to Equitable Dual Enrollment Participation

Like most efforts across California's public education systems, ensuring historically underrepresented students' access to dual enrollment programming is not without its challenges. Three key obstacles to achieving inclusive dual enrollment communities emerged during this initial research.

A bias towards high-performing high school students: This research identified that some high school administrators, counselors, and teachers continue to believe that access to college coursework should be reserved for academically advanced students. For example, some reported educator beliefs that dual enrollment is meant for students enrolled in AP and or honors courses.

Decentralized enrollment processes: The lack of an online and centralized college application and enrollment process hampers efficient dual enrollment. For example, high school and college personnel described pen-and-paper applications that rotate through several hand-delivered steps and require multiple hand-written signatures before being entered into the community college's database for processing.

A lack of awareness among students and families: There is a persistent gap in parent or family awareness of dual enrollment opportunities. For example, this research indicates that there are an inadequate number of bilingual information sessions to explain key advantages and risks, such as the cost and time savings for a college education and the effect on the student's permanent college transcript. Likewise, students in alternative or continuation programs were shown to have fewer opportunities to learn about the range of dual enrollment choices.

Sidebar 1.2 Spotlight on Practices for Equitable Dual Enrollment Participation

To learn more about how *DE4EC* partners engage their communities and inform students and families about dual enrollment opportunities in equity-driven ways, go to page 18 in the full report.

Conclusion

Equity-driven outreach, recruitment, and enrollment requires a commitment to inclusion and an intentional student-centered approach. This research shows how *DE4EC* partners are operationalizing this commitment with students, families, and communities to ensure they understand and actively take advantage of dual enrollment opportunities.

For example, *DE4EC* high schools are hosting tables at a local movie theater, advertising on social media, and delivering special presentations on dual enrollment to students and parents. Additionally, high school counselors are playing a vital role in this process, fostering a shared belief that dual enrollment is for any student—regardless of academic background. They are helping students and their families know the benefits and requirements of dual enrollment participation, support course selection, facilitate application completion, and gauge a student's potential to pass a class.

Continuing to foster a belief that dual enrollment is truly for everyone—including low-performing high school students—and increasing awareness of these options among priority populations will advance equitable participation. Further strengthening alignment of community college and high school systems also offers an opportunity for improving the engagement of historically underrepresented students in dual enrollment programs.

Take Action

Advancing equitable dual enrollment programming will require high schools, community colleges, and dual enrollment partnerships to continue strengthening and scaling effective practices while simultaneously addressing the obstacles called out in this research.

Visit [Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research series, Brief 4: Recommendations for Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment](#) for possible actions to take at the school/program, community college, dual enrollment partnership, and/or student/family levels.

Find detailed findings and recommendations from this initial research in our full report, [Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Initial Findings from the Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion Initiative](#).