

# Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research Series Brief 8: Ready, Set, Launch – Baseline College Enrollment and Outcomes for DE4EC Participants

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## Introduction

Dual enrollment participation can give students a strong start toward attaining college goals. DE4EC launched in 2021 to support 10 California community colleges and their high school partners in leveraging dual enrollment to advance college completion, specifically among historically underrepresented groups (see Sidebar 1.1). To identify the initiative's impact over time, DE4EC's learning partner, RDP Consulting, established baseline academic outcomes for students participating in these programs in the period before its launch (2015–2020).

These analyses offered an opportunity to understand if DE4EC partnerships were primed to increase students' postsecondary attainment coming into the initiative. We explored trends in college enrollment and success for dual enrollment participants involved in these programs. We looked at these outcomes for cohorts who graduated high school between 2015–2016 and 2019–2020,<sup>1</sup> and students involved in these dual enrollment partnerships consistently outperformed their peers.

Find below our key findings, starting with information on dual enrollment participants' matriculation to higher education, followed by their course success and retention rates during their first year. We conclude with ideas for action based on these results.

## Key Findings

**The number of dual enrollment participants who matriculated to higher education within one year of high school graduation rose between 2015–2020—while overall college enrollment trended downward (see Figure 1).** Although college-going decreased for all recent high school graduates in 2020 (most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic), the decline among those with dual enrollment experience was nominal compared to the sharp drop among their peers who did not participate.

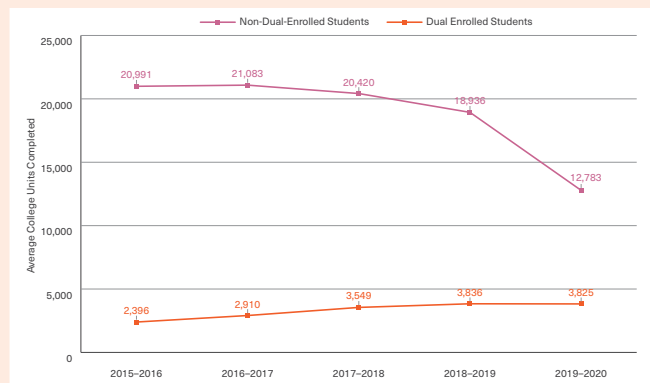
### Sidebar 1.1 Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion (DE4EC) Overview

DE4EC is a multiyear collaborative initiative among the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), [College Futures Foundation](#), and [Tipping Point Community](#), carried out with research support from RDP Consulting.

DE4EC support 10 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.

Find more information at <https://www.r-d-p-consulting.com/de4ec>

**Figure 1.** Postsecondary Enrollment at DE4EC Institutions within One Year of High School Graduation by Prior Dual Enrollment Participation (Graduating Cohorts, 2015–2016 – 2019–2020)



<sup>1</sup> Find a detailed information on data and methods and key findings from these analyses in *Ready, Set, Launch: Baseline Academic Outcomes for Students Participating in Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion Partnerships Compared to Their Peers, 2015–2020*.

California’s community colleges were the top destination for high school graduates with prior dual enrollment experience through a DE4EC partner institution (see Figure 2). In the five years combined leading up to DE4EC’s launch, most dual enrolled students matriculated to the California Community Colleges (63%), followed by the California State University system (22%) and the University of California (11%).

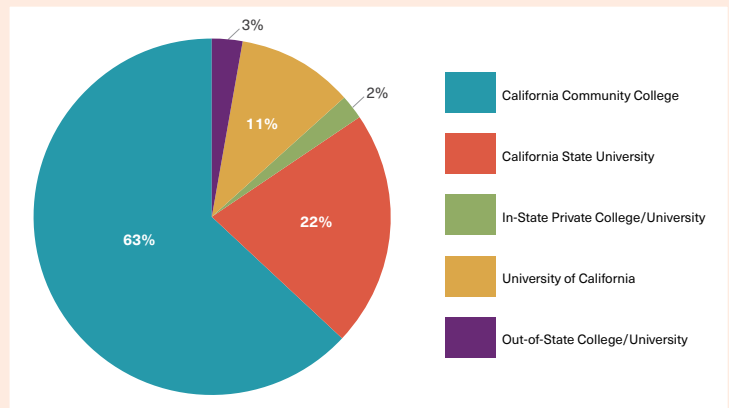
Students who previously participated in dual enrollment had significantly higher rates of course success<sup>2</sup> in their first term (see Figure 3). We compared the success rates of students with and without prior dual enrollment experience in the first fall term after graduating from high school at partnership community colleges and discovered that former dual enrollment participants consistently outperformed their counterparts by about 20 percentage points.

Students who experienced dual enrollment also had higher rates of retention<sup>3</sup> in their first year of college. Here, we compared students with and without dual enrollment experience from partnership high schools, regardless of what community college they attended after high school graduation. All students included in this specific analysis matriculated to a California community college after high school.

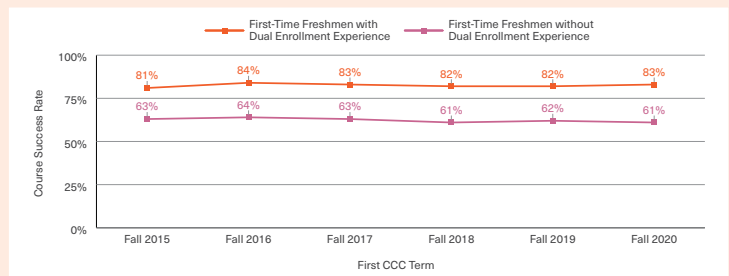
Regarding one-term retention, students who graduated high school in spring 2016 with dual enrollment experience achieved retention rates comparable to other first-time freshmen. However, between 2017–2018 and 2019–2020, a gap developed over time. Formerly dual enrolled students had higher and higher rates than their peers who had not participated (see Figure 4). One-year retention followed a similar trajectory.

Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have had a greater impact on persistence for students who did not participate in dual enrollment. One-term and one-year retention rates dropped for students who graduated high school in spring 2019 and matriculated in the next year. For example, while one-term retention remained steady at 81% for those with prior dual enrollment experience, it declined to 73% for other first-time freshmen during that period. These findings suggest that having dual enrollment experience may have helped students stay on course with their higher education goals in the face of unprecedented disruptions resulting from the pandemic.

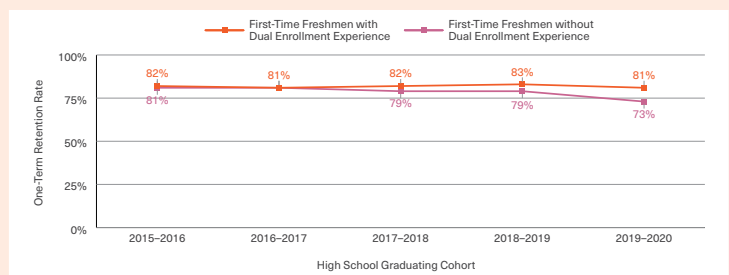
**Figure 2.** Postsecondary Destination among Formerly Dual Enrolled Students within One Year of High School Graduation (Graduating Cohorts, 2015–2016 – 2019–2020 Combined)



**Figure 3.** First Semester Course Success Rates at DE4EC Institutions by Prior Dual Enrollment Participation (Fall 2015–Fall 2020) (Graduating Cohorts, 2015–2016 – 2019–2020 Combined)



**Figure 4.** One-Term Retention Rates in California Community Colleges by Prior Dual Enrollment Participation (Graduating Cohorts, 2015–2016 – 2019–2020)



2 Course success is defined as earning an A, B, C or Pass grade. The rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who earned a successful grade by all the students who received a grade.

3 Retention is defined as enrolling in a subsequent term. Retention rates are calculated by dividing the number of students who enrolled in the subsequent term by the total number of students who were enrolled in the first initial term. For example, one-term retention—fall 2019 to spring 2020; one-year retention—fall 2019 to fall 2020.

## TAKE ACTION

Positive college enrollment and outcomes for students with dual enrollment experience in the period leading up to *DE4EC*'s launch suggest these 10 partnerships have a strong foundation for fostering equitable higher education access and completion. Students involved in these dual enrollment programs consistently outperformed their peers on measures such as college-going and success and retention in their first year.

These baseline outcomes point to additional areas of examination moving forward, including the specific components of dual enrollment programming that are critical to smooth students' transition to and through postsecondary education and how these components could be scaled to support a college-going culture at any high school. Additional research must also explore students' postsecondary journey over time to investigate whether and how the knowledge and skills gained during dual enrollment continue to play a critical role in their success after the first year in college and, ultimately, their attainment of credentials and/or transfer to a university.

Community college and high school partnerships can also use this baseline assessment of dual enrollment impact as a template for gathering their own quantitative data. Dual enrollment collaboratives can examine the college enrollment and success metrics outlined in these analyses at the local level to

inform their own program planning and implementation. Determining trends in the postsecondary enrollment, success, and retention of former dual enrollment participants compared to other first-time freshmen can help leaders and practitioners with both case-making and improvement efforts over time.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

This brief and two others in the *Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research Series* provide highlights from a detailed quantitative analysis of baseline outcomes, disaggregated by student population, in the period leading up to *DE4EC*'s launch (2015–2020). The full set includes:

- [Brief 7: Ready, Set, Launch – Baseline High School Outcomes for DE4EC Participants](#)
- [Brief 8: Ready, Set, Launch – Baseline College Enrollment and Outcomes for DE4EC Participants](#)
- [Brief 9: Ready, Set, Launch – Baseline Outcomes for Historically Underrepresented DE4EC Participants](#)

Find these briefs and the full report at <https://www.r-d-p-consulting.com/de4ec>.

#### DUAL ENROLLMENT FOR EQUITABLE COMPLETION LEARNING AND [E]VALUATION TEAM



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