

# Brief 11: Catalyzing Equitable College Completion – How Dual Enrollment Supports Progress and Achievement

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*Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion (DE4EC) seeks to increase college enrollment among historically underrepresented students and help them complete postsecondary credentials at community colleges and beyond.*

*This brief presents research from DE4EC learning partner RDP Consulting on the performance of students with dual enrollment experience as they enter college, using an equity lens. Learn more about the longer-term outcomes of dual enrollment in Brief 11: Catalyzing Equitable College Completion – How Dual Enrollment Supports Student Progress and Achievement.*

## Introduction

The California Community Colleges' [Vision 2030](#) provides a roadmap for increasing college attainment and advancing economic mobility for underserved communities. Equitable dual enrollment is outlined as central to achieving these goals, scaling up opportunities so all students across the state take college courses for credit before high school graduation.

At this important juncture, understanding how to position dual enrollment as more than an enrollment strategy and ensure it meaningfully contributes to completion is key. Current evidence on the role dual enrollment plays in supporting college progress and success for historically underrepresented student groups is mixed (Ed-Trust West, 2022; Velasco et al., 2024). RDP Consulting's ongoing research on the *Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion (DE4EC)* initiative provides additional insight into how participation in equity-minded dual enrollment can advance attainment for Black, Latine,<sup>1</sup> and first-generation (first-gen) students and those experiencing economic disadvantage<sup>2</sup> (see Sidebar 1.1).

As part of our *Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research Series*, this brief highlights what participation in equitable dual enrollment can do to support students' progress toward completion over time (see Sidebar 1.2).<sup>3</sup> RDP Consulting examined the longer-term

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

DE4EC is a multi-year collaborative initiative among the Gates Foundation, College Futures Foundation, and Tipping Point Community, carried out with research support from RDP Consulting. DE4EC supports 10 California community colleges and their high school partners in advancing equitable dual enrollment.

Between 2021–2024, these partnerships developed programs to increase access and completion outcomes for students underrepresented in higher education, particularly Black, Latine, and first-generation students, and those experiencing economic disadvantage.

### Sidebar 1.2 Research Brief Overview

This brief includes...

- Key longer-term outcomes for students with dual enrollment experience at a DE4EC college between 2015-2016 and 2022-2023 compared to their peers, including:
  - Retention after their first year
  - Overall course success
  - Fulfillment of transfer requirements
  - Time to associate's degree completion
- Results overall and by demographic groups, including gender, first generation in college status, income level, and race/ethnicity
- Ideas for action to ensure this approach truly catalyzes completion for all participants

1 "Latine" used as the gender-neutral alternative to "Latina" or "Latino." For the purposes of this brief, Latine includes Hispanic and Latine students.

2 Identified as "Low Income" in figures.

3 Find full methodology and all findings in Technical Appendices: Catalyzing Equitable College Completion through Dual Enrollment (Fong et al., 2024).

outcomes of formerly dual enrolled students who participated in dual enrollment at and matriculated to a *DE4EC* college. This analysis found that...

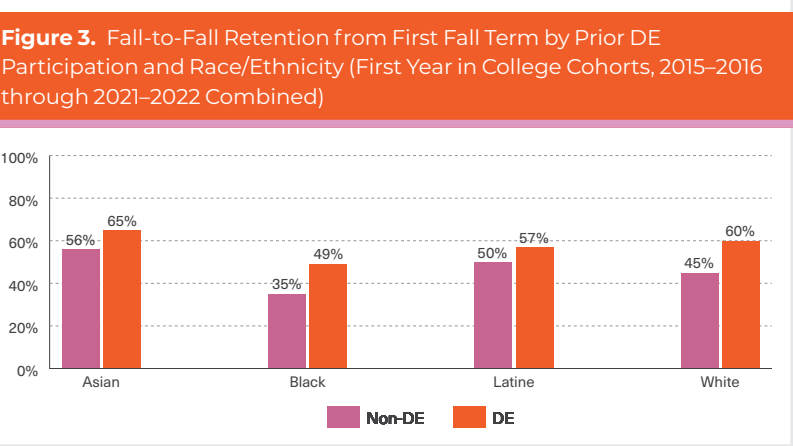
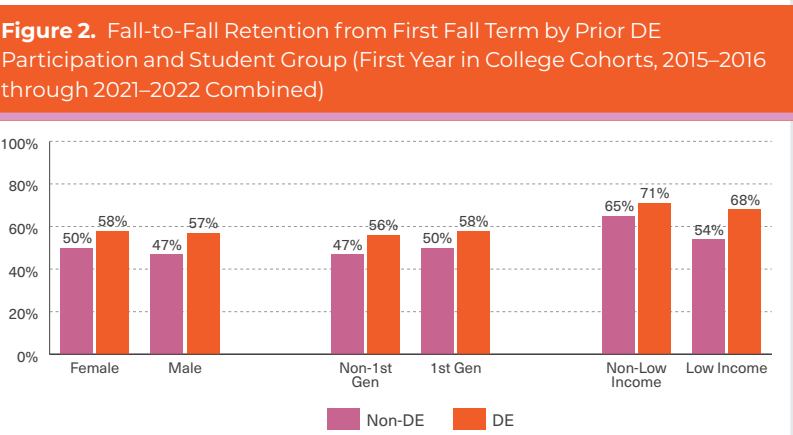
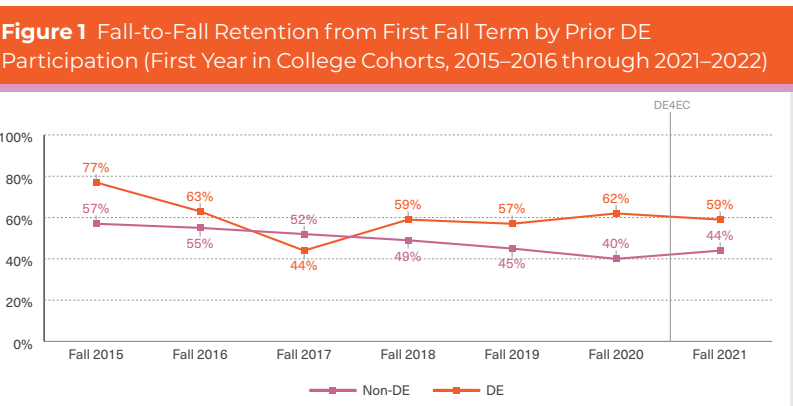
*Students with dual enrollment experience make stronger progress than their peers without, including reaching key academic milestones, preparing for transfer, and completing an associate's degree in less time. Yet, equity gaps remain for certain groups, highlighting opportunities to ensure lasting positive impact.*

## Students with Dual Enrollment Experience Are More Likely to Return to College After Their First Year.

Across all demographic groups—including gender, first generation in college status, income level, and race/ethnicity—formerly dual enrolled students showed stronger rates of fall-to-fall retention compared to their peers who did not participate (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> In the years surrounding *DE4EC*, overall retention rates were consistently 15–20+ percentage points higher for formerly dual enrolled students at participating colleges.

These findings suggest that participation in an equity-minded dual enrollment program positioned historically underrepresented students to persist in college beyond the first year—a major consideration given overall enrollment declines across the system (Cook, 2024).<sup>5</sup> Next to their peers without this experience, Black, Latine, and first-gen students and those experiencing economic disadvantage all returned at significantly higher rates for a second fall term (Figures 2–3).

At the same time, Black students—both those who previously participated in dual enrollment and those who did not—continued their education beyond year one at considerably lower rates. This finding highlights an opportunity to explore how dual enrollment experiences can be leveraged to enhance the persistence of this student group.



4 Monitoring fall-to-fall retention requires a full academic year. Given these time limitations, the first year in college cohort entering in the 2022–2023 academic year is not included in the analysis.

5 Students with dual enrollment experience also demonstrated stronger fall-to-spring retention rates compared to other first-time freshmen. See Brief 10: Catalyzing Equitable College Completion – How Dual Enrollment Supports First-Year Success.

## Students with Dual Enrollment Experience Have Stronger Overall Course Success.

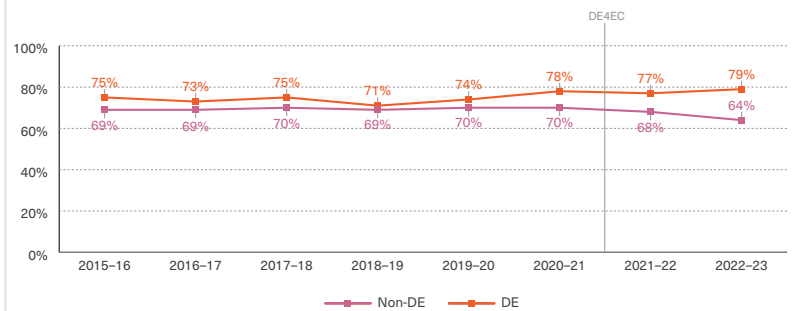
Across **all** demographic groups, formerly dual enrolled students completed a higher proportion of their courses compared to their peers who did not participate (Figure 4).<sup>6</sup> Notably, the gap increased between those with and without dual enrollment experience in the period since DE4EC's implementation. In the most recent year assessed, formerly dual enrolled students passed nearly 80% of all their courses with a grade of C or higher across their college journey, while their counterparts passed just 64% of their classes.

At the same time, when applying an equity lens, the benefit of dual enrollment participation to students' course success appears more uneven. For example, among those who participated in dual enrollment, Black and Latine students had significantly lower overall course success rates compared to their White and Asian peers. While less pronounced, first-gen students with prior DE experience also completed a lower proportion of their courses versus their non-first-gen peers, as did those experiencing economic disadvantage when compared to students who were not identified as low income.

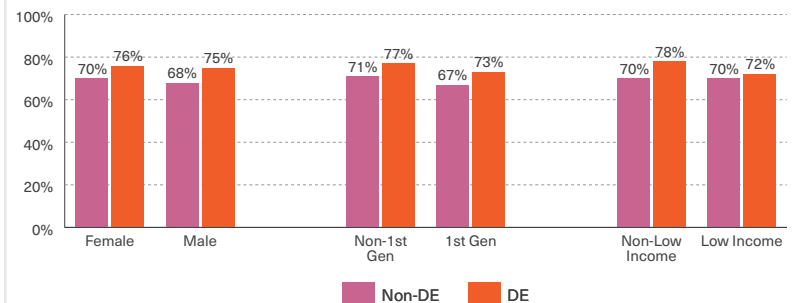
## Students with Dual Enrollment Experience Are More Likely to Fulfill Transfer Requirements.

Formerly dual enrolled students reached the “transfer gate” at higher rates. As part of its ongoing *Through the Gate Transfer Initiative*, the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group) developed a “[transfer continuum](#)” to frame an examination of transfer outcomes in the state's system. The continuum calls out key junctures in this educational journey, zeroing in on “high-leverage” students who are close to transfer, and identifies opportunities for ensuring these students make it “through the gate” to university (Cooper et al., 2020).

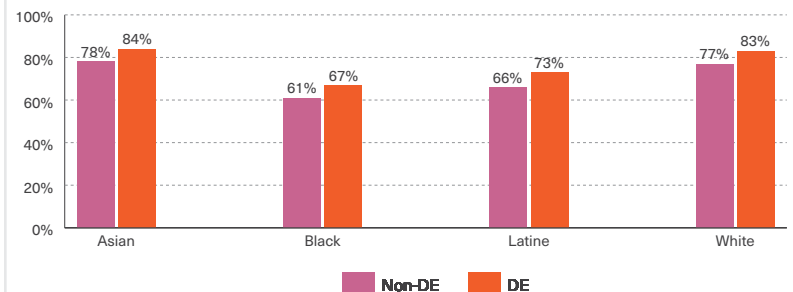
**Figure 4.** Overall Course Success by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



**Figure 5.** Overall Course Success by Prior DE Participation and Student Group (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



**Figure 6.** Overall Course Success by Prior DE Participation and Race/Ethnicity (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



<sup>6</sup> Overall course success is based on all courses taken by the cohort and calculated by dividing the number of courses successfully completed with a grade C or better by the total number of courses taken.

The RPP Group identified students who are “at the gate” (ATG) as one such group, having completed the requirements for transfer: fulfilling ≥60 transferable units, maintaining a 2.0 GPA, and passing transfer-level English and math.<sup>7</sup> Applying this definition to our own analysis determined that **formerly dual enrolled students were significantly more likely to reach the transfer gate compared to their peers who did not participate**, a more than 10 percentage point difference.<sup>8</sup>

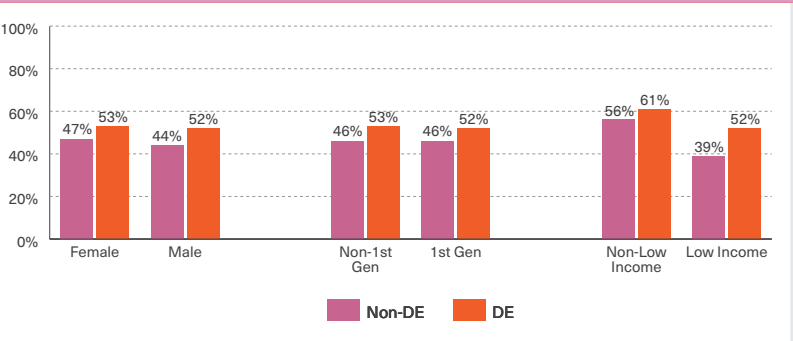
Further, our research found that all historically underrepresented groups with dual enrollment experience were more likely to reach the transfer gate during the period studied than their peers without DE experience (Figures 7–8). **The benefit of dual enrollment participation as it relates to this milestone appears to be most significant for Black students and those experiencing economic disadvantage.**

Notably, *Through the Gate* discovered that while Black students are considerably underrepresented in the “at the gate” group, once they do achieve this status, they are nearly twice as likely to transfer than their White peers (Cooper & Brohawn, 2023). Our analysis suggests that dual enrollment may be a particularly powerful lever for helping more Black students reach this critical milestone and successfully transition to baccalaureate-level education.

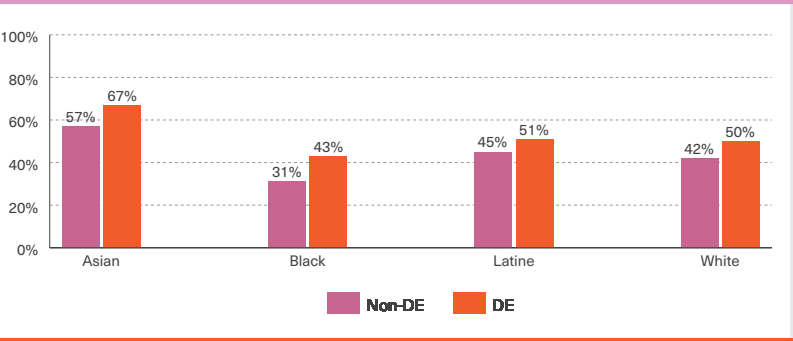
## Students with Dual Enrollment Experience Are More Likely to Earn an Associate’s Degree Sooner.

A key promise of dual enrollment is that completion of college units in high school can potentially decrease the time (and money) needed to earn a postsecondary credential. While time to an associate’s degree (time to degree) shortened for both students with and without dual enrollment experience in each successive cohort at *DE4EC* colleges, the reduction was more pronounced for prior dual enrollment participants (Figure 9). Specifically, formerly dual enrolled students in the 2015–2016 cohort had a longer time to degree than their counterparts. However, for the cohorts that followed,<sup>9</sup> prior DE participants earned their degrees in less time than their non-DE peers.

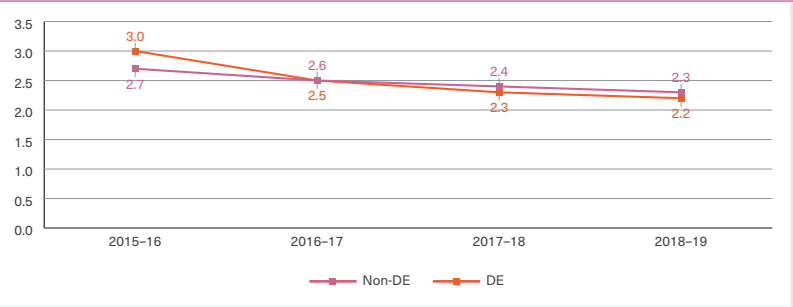
**Figure 7.** Proportion of Students Completing Transfer Requirements and Achieving “At-the-Gate” Status by Prior DE Participation and Student Group (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



**Figure 8.** Proportion of Students Completing Transfer Requirements and Achieving “At-the-Gate” Status by Prior DE Participation and Race/Ethnicity (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



**Figure 9.** Number of Years to Complete an Associate’s Degree by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2018–2019)



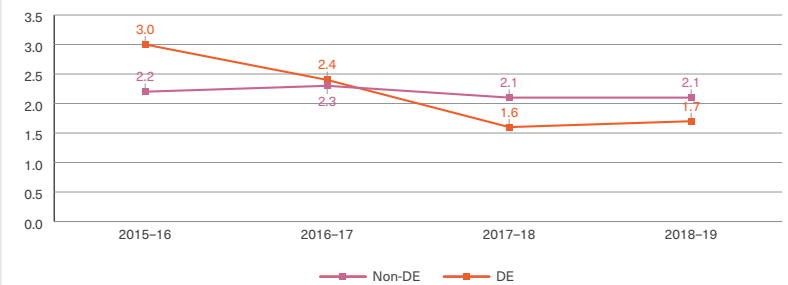
7 *Through the Gate* also classifies students who have achieved an Associate Degree for Transfer but who have not yet transferred as “at the gate.”  
8 Find detailed results in the technical appendices (Fong et al., 2024).  
9 Time to degree is restricted to four years. Given these time limitations, cohorts after 2018–2019 academic year are not included in the analysis.

We see a similar pattern when we look at this metric by student group (Figures 10–12). For example, among Black students in the 2015–2016 cohort, the difference was almost a full year, with DE students taking *more* time to complete their degree. However, that gap closed significantly with the 2016–2017 cohort, and ultimately flipped for the cohorts that followed. For the final cohorts assessed, Black students with dual enrollment experience completed their degrees a full semester sooner than their peers without.

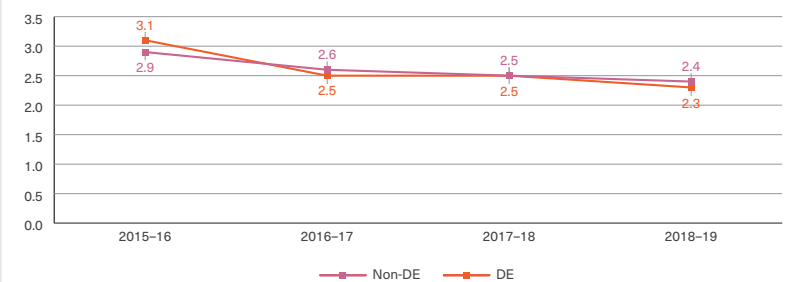
When it comes to Latine and first-gen students, the differences between those with and without dual enrollment experience were less pronounced. However, this metric still trended in a positive direction, with formerly dual enrolled Latine and first-gen students completing sooner than their non-DE counterparts for the last cohort assessed.

In the context of the California Community Colleges, these data suggest that dual enrollment can be a viable strategy for reducing time to degree. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, just over one quarter of CCC students presently complete a certificate, degree, and/or transfer in six years (Perez & Gomez, 2024). Based on these results, dual enrollment could help students—particularly those with historically lower outcomes—accelerate their college completion.

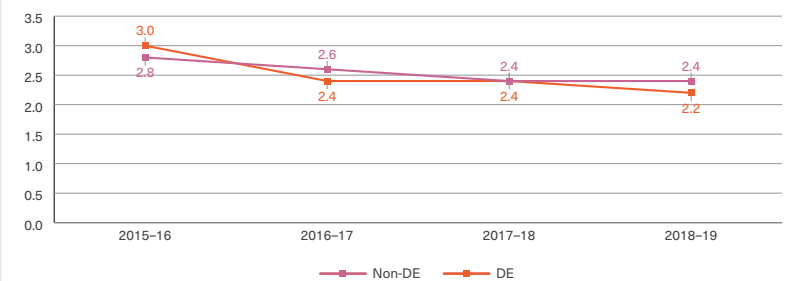
**Figure 10.** Number of Years for Black Students to Complete an Associate's Degree by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2018–2019)



**Figure 11.** Number of Years for Latine Students to Complete an Associate's Degree by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2018–2019)



**Figure 12.** Number of Years for First-Gen Students to Complete an Associate's Degree by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2018–2019)





# Conclusion

This research suggests that equity-minded dual enrollment programs can position participants to stay on the path toward attainment of college credentials and transfer. Like dual enrollment participants' performance in their first year after matriculation,<sup>10</sup> this intervention appeared to continue "lifting all boats." Across all demographic groups, students with dual enrollment experience universally achieved outcomes supportive of completion at higher rates than their peers who did not participate. Former dual enrollment participants demonstrated higher levels of retention after their first year, performed better in their courses overall, fulfilled transfer requirements at higher rates, and completed their associate's degree in less time. Yet, applying an equity lens shows opportunity gaps remain for Black, Latine, and first-generation students and those experiencing economic disadvantage when it comes to these critical completion milestones.

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10 See Brief 10: Catalyzing Equitable College Completion – How Dual Enrollment Supports First-Year Success.



## TAKE ACTION

Given the overall positive impact of dual enrollment on the longer-term outcomes of participants, this research suggests that colleges should expand these opportunities. At the same time, expansion should come with intention. These results suggest that community colleges must continue working with purpose to ensure all historically underrepresented groups experience the downstream benefits of dual enrollment participation, particularly Black, Latine, and first-gen students and those experiencing economic disadvantage.

Specifically, colleges and high schools should partner to...

- Promote dual enrollment to high school students and their families, along with high school and college counselors, emphasizing how participation can help students reach their educational goals more successfully and quickly and with less debt.
- Investigate what factors—regardless of dual enrollment experience—affect Black students' retention rates, which are lower than their peers, and determine how dual enrollment could help to reverse this trend.
- Equip dual enrollment participants with information on how to access college resources and supports beyond their first year at the institution, particularly special programs and services geared toward historically underrepresented groups; normalize their use as central to thriving academically, fulfilling transfer requirements, and completing college credentials.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Find more information on *DE4EC* and all publications in the *Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research Series* at <https://www.r-d-p-consulting.com/de4ec>.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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



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