

# Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research Series

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

March 2025

By Kelley Karandjeff, Rogéair Purnell, Kristen Fong, and Darla Cooper

*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

California’s policymakers and practitioners are banking on dual enrollment to open the door to college attainment for more students. State legislation and programs,<sup>1</sup> the California Community Colleges’ [Vision 2030](#), and efforts like *Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion (DE4EC)* are advancing this movement (see Sidebar 1.1).

At the same time, emerging evidence finds mixed reviews on the role dual enrollment plays in supporting college access and downstream success for historically underrepresented student groups (Ed-Trust-West, 2022; Velasco et al., 2024). RDP Consulting’s ongoing research on *DE4EC* provides a window into how participation in equity-minded dual enrollment can contribute to completion for Black, Latine,<sup>2</sup> and first-generation (first-gen) students and those experiencing economic disadvantage.<sup>3</sup>

As part of our *Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research Series*, this brief highlights what participation in equitable dual enrollment can do to support students’ success and retention as they enter college (see Sidebar 1.2).<sup>4</sup> RDP Consulting examined the outcomes of students

### 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

This brief includes...

- Key findings on students’ success in dual enrollment courses at a *DE4EC* college between 2015–2016 and 2022–2023 and college credit attainment upon high school graduation
- Key first-year outcomes for students with prior dual enrollment experience at a *DE4EC* college between 2015–2016 and 2022–2023 compared to their peers, including:
  - Full-time enrollment
  - Course success
  - Fall-to-spring retention
  - Completion of transfer-level math and English
- 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 Includes College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) partnerships (California Assembly Bill [AB] [288](#), 2015; AB [30](#), 2019), and the [California Golden Pathways Program](#).

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

3 Identified as “Low Income” in figures.

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

while they participated in dual enrollment at and after they matriculated to a *DE4EC* college. These analyses found that...

*Students with dual enrollment experience have an advantage in their first year of college. Yet, applying an equity lens reveals that more work is needed to ensure all participants benefit equally once they enter postsecondary education.*

## Dual Enrollment Participants Enter College with a “Leg Up.”

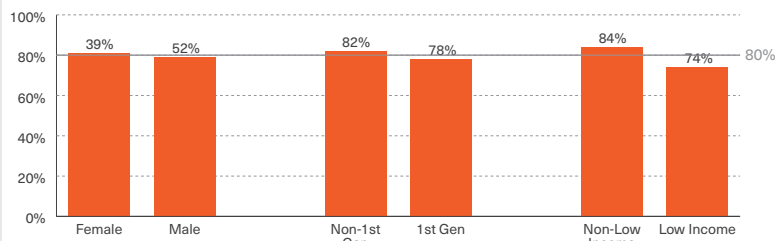
Students who participated in dual enrollment (DE) through a *DE4EC* college from 2015–2016 through 2022–2023 showed strong course success. **Students exhibited an average 80% success rate in their dual enrollment courses.** These results demonstrate that high school students can perform as well as—if not better than—other students enrolled in college classes.<sup>5</sup>

**They also graduated high school with nearly 19 units on average, more than a semester’s worth of college credits if attending full time.** This finding translates to a significant advantage for students who participate in DE, potentially accelerating their path to completion of college credentials and/or transfer.

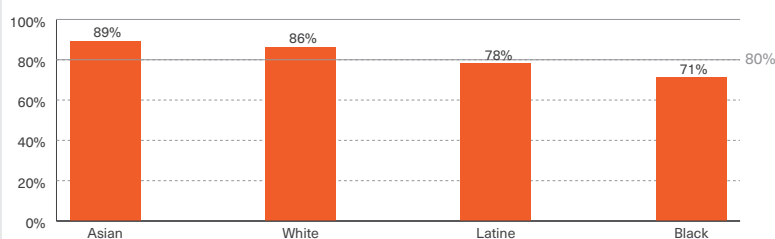
At the same time, **further analysis showed an opportunity to ensure historically underrepresented groups<sup>6</sup> maximize their dual enrollment experience to enhance their prospects for college completion.** Black, Latine, first-gen, and male students and those experiencing economic disadvantage had lower dual enrollment course success rates compared to the overall average for *DE4EC* programs (Figures 1–2).

While first-gen students earned more college units through dual enrollment than their non-first-gen peers, Black and Latine students matriculated with fewer credits compared to their White and Asian counterparts (Figures 3–4).

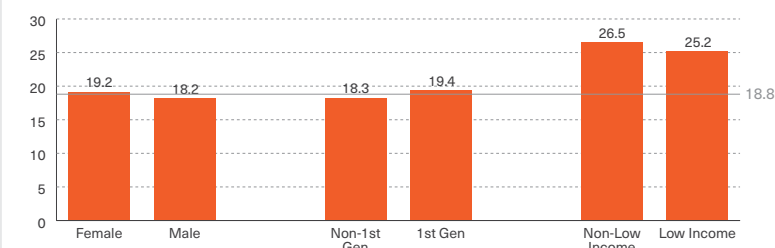
**Figure 1.** DE Course Success by Student Group (2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



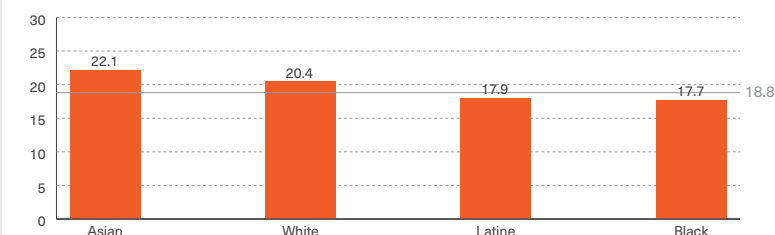
**Figure 2.** DE Course Success by Race/Ethnicity (2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



**Figure 3.** Average Number of College Units Earned in DE by Student Group (2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



**Figure 4.** Average Number of College Units Earned in DE by Race/Ethnicity (2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



<sup>5</sup> Course success is based on earning a grade of C or better. The average course success rate for first-time students in their first year across all California community colleges was 71% in 2020–2021. Find more information at <https://www.calpassplus.org/Launchboard/Student-Success-Metrics-Cohort-View>.

<sup>6</sup> To conserve space, the data presented in this brief will highlight differences for the following racial/ethnic groups: Asian, Black, Latine, and White. Findings for all student groups studied (e.g., two or more races, unknown) are presented in the Technical Appendices.

## Students with Prior Dual Enrollment Experience Are More Likely to Enroll Full Time in Their First Year.

Students who participated in dual enrollment through *DE4EC* performed better on key milestones known to support completion once they matriculated to a partner college. For example, **across all student groups—including gender, first generation in college status, income level, and race/ethnicity—those with dual enrollment experience had higher rates of full-time enrollment in their first year compared to their peers** (Figure 5). For five years running, formerly dual enrolled students—regardless of demographic—were more likely to enroll in 12 or more units in their first year than other first-time freshmen who did not participate.

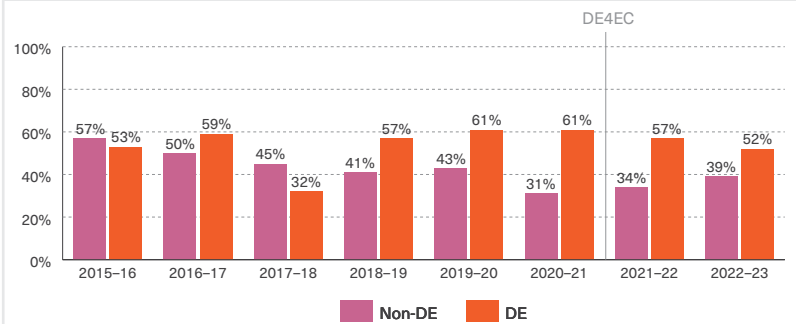
Moreover, among those who previously participated in dual enrollment, first-gen students were far more likely to enroll full time in their first year than their non-first-gen peers. Similarly, male students took a full load at higher rates than their female peers, and Black and Latine students enrolled full time at rates on par with or higher than that of their White and Asian counterparts (Figures 6–7).

This finding is significant because research suggests that taking a full load supports students’ “rates of engagement, completion of gateway courses, persistence, and credential attainment” (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2017). Dual enrollment may be specifically impactful for motivating historically underrepresented student groups to enroll full time in their first year.

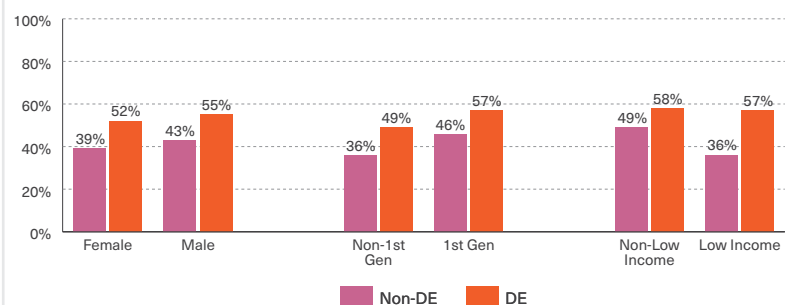
## Students with Prior Dual Enrollment Experience Have Stronger First-Year Course Success.

When looking at first-year performance, positive news emerged again. **Across all student groups, formerly dual enrolled students showed stronger first-year course success compared to other first-time freshman** (Figure 8). Further, the gap widened at the onset of *DE4EC*. These results suggest that equity-minded programs support students’ readiness for the rigor and expectations of college coursework post-matriculation. The results also align with the feedback of *DE4EC* participants who described how their dual enrollment experience gave them the skills and

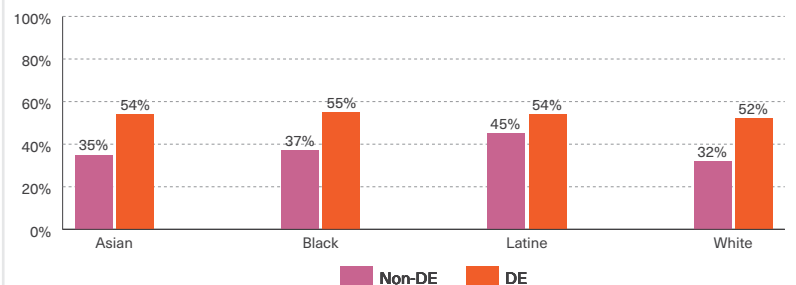
**Figure 5.** Proportion of Students Enrolling Full Time in Their First Year by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



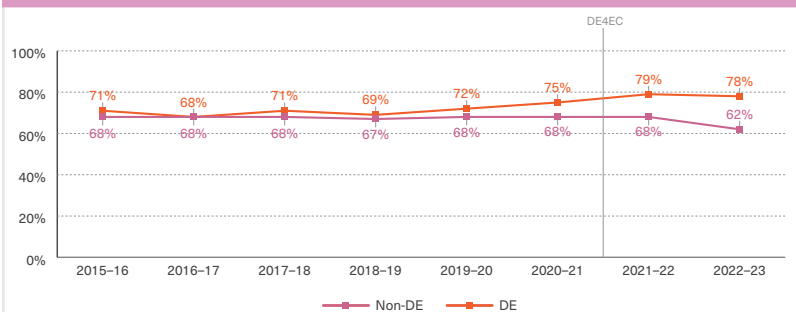
**Figure 6.** Proportion of Students Enrolling Full Time in Their First Year by Prior DE Participation and Student Group (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



**Figure 7.** Proportion of Students Enrolling Full Time in Their First Year by Prior DE Participation and Race/Ethnicity (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



**Figure 8.** First-Year Course Success by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



confidence to succeed in college and beyond (Purnell et al., 2023).

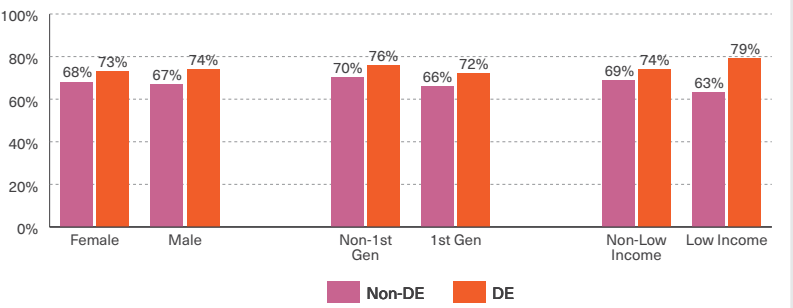
Yet, when comparing first-year course success rates between different groups of former DE participants, we uncover further opportunities to enhance equitable outcomes (Figures 9–10). For example, first-year course success for Black, Latine, and first-gen students with dual enrollment experience lagged that of their White, Asian, and non-first-gen counterparts. So, while they outperformed their peers who did not participate in dual enrollment, equity gaps persist for these historically marginalized groups. These data signal an opportunity for colleges to support a strong academic start for all their first year.

## Students with Prior Dual Enrollment Experience Are Significantly More Likely to Return after Their First Semester.

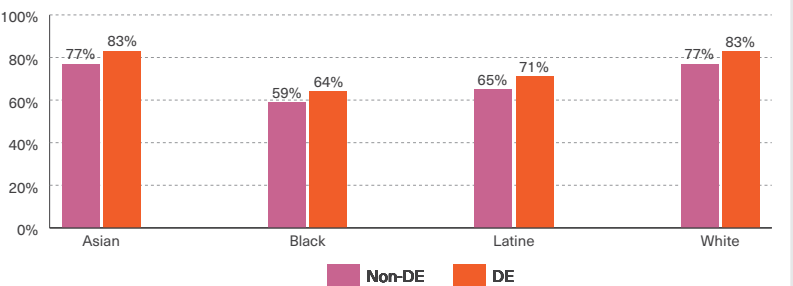
In the California Community Colleges, just under half of students continue their education after their initial fall term (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, 2024). However, when students do successfully finish their first year, they are more likely to complete their degree and/or achieve transfer readiness (Dembicki, 2024).

Across all student groups examined in this study, formerly dual enrolled students showed stronger rates of fall-to-spring retention<sup>7</sup> compared to other first-time freshmen (Figure 11). After some inconsistency for earlier cohorts, overall rates have been persistently higher in more recent years. While fall-to-spring retention took a hit for all students in the years surrounding the initial COVID-19 crisis, it recently rebounded to pre-pandemic levels for both those who did and did not previously participate in dual enrollment. However, rates remain higher for formerly dual enrolled students.

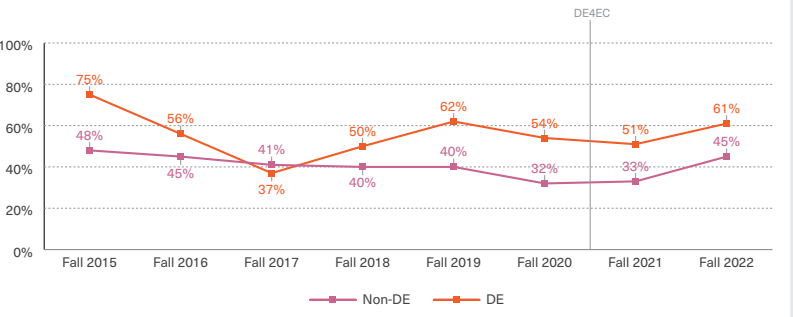
**Figure 9.** First-Year Course Success by Prior DE Participation and Student Group (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



**Figure 10.** First-Year Course Success by Prior DE Participation and Race/Ethnicity (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023 Combined)



**Figure 11.** Fall-to-Spring Retention in First Year by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



7 Fall-to-spring retention is based on the proportion of students enrolled in the fall term who re-enrolled in the following spring term in their first year.

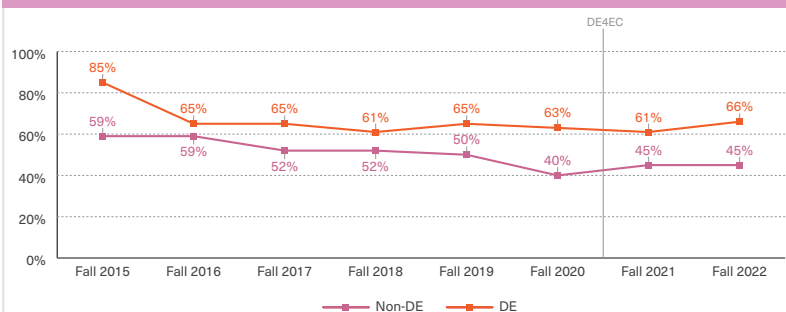
First-year retention rates also indicate that **experience in equity-minded dual enrollment programs positively positioned historically underrepresented students to remain engaged in college** (Figures 12–13). For example, for Black and Latine students who are the least likely to earn a degree or certificate,<sup>8</sup> dual enrollment experience was associated with higher-than-average retention compared to their peers who did not participate. While their non-DE counterparts saw a more pronounced drop in retention in the years surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, persistence from the fall to spring semesters remained relatively strong for Black and Latine students with dual enrollment experience. Many factors contribute to retention, yet these data suggest that DE participation may have helped prepare Black and Latine students to stay in school amidst unprecedented disruptions.

## Students with Prior Dual Enrollment Experience Are Significantly More Likely to Complete Transfer-Level Math and English in Their First Year.

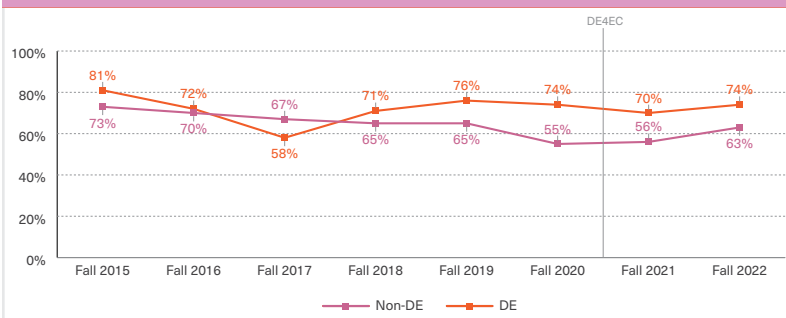
In California, increasing completion of transfer-level English and math in students' first year has also been a major emphasis, both supported by legislation such as AB 705 (2017) and AB 1705 (2022)<sup>9</sup> and included in the [Student Centered Funding Formula](#). As a result of these developmental education reforms, colleges must place students in transfer-level coursework in these disciplines and provide the necessary support to help ensure their success.

**This research finds that across all student groups, formerly dual enrolled students complete transfer-level math and English in their first year at higher rates than their peers who did not participate (Figures 14–21).** First-year success in these gateway courses improved for former DE students following AB 705 implementation, then accelerated during *DE4EC*. In comparison, outcomes trended downward for first-time freshmen who did not participate in dual enrollment during this time. By 2022–2023, there was a roughly 20 percentage point gap between these groups in both math and English.

**Figure 12.** Fall-to-Spring Retention for Black Students by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



**Figure 13.** Fall-to-Spring Retention for Latine Students by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



Notably, Black, Latine, and first-gen students who have historically lower outcomes when it comes to these metric<sup>10</sup> appeared to do better when they enter their first year with dual enrollment experience. As with the overall results, our analyses found that transfer-level math and English completion in the first year was particularly strong for Latine and first-gen students with DE experience and only improved during *DE4EC* implementation. While better than their non-DE peers, these results were more inconsistent for Black students with prior dual enrollment participation.

These findings are striking. They suggest that community colleges can leverage dual enrollment as an essential strategy for supporting more students across all demographic groups in completing this major milestone in the first year and, in turn, gaining early momentum toward completing college goals.

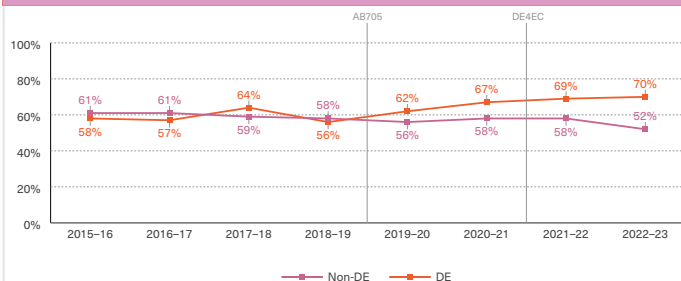
**Yet equity gaps between different groups of formerly dual enrolled students emerged again, particularly for transfer-level math completion in year one.** These rates lagged for Black, Latine, and first-gen students who participated in dual enrollment when compared to their Asian, White, and non-first-gen peers who also had DE experience. These trends highlight an opportunity to use dual enrollment programs to inform all student groups about the benefits of completing these key milestones early and how to access the support they need while taking these courses.

<sup>8</sup> Find CCC student success rates, including disaggregated degree attainment and transfer data, at <https://www.calpassplus.org/Launchboard/Student-Success-Metrics-Cohort-View>.

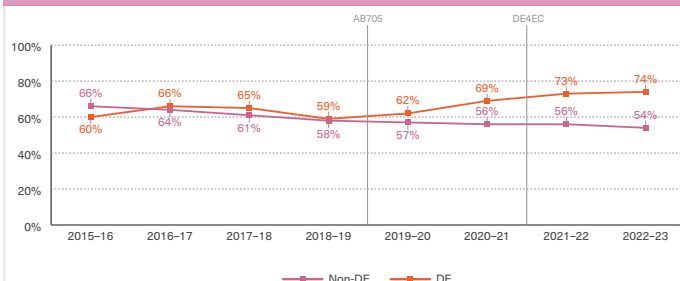
<sup>9</sup> Find additional information on AB 705 and AB 1705 at <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/equitable-placement>

<sup>10</sup> For more information on disproportionately lower rates of transfer-level math and English completion for Black, Latine, and first-generation students in the CCC over time, visit <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/transfer-level-dashboard>.

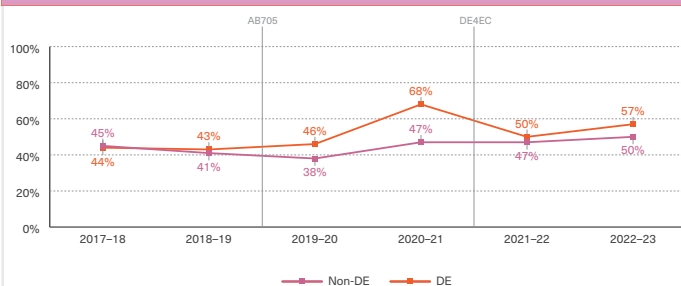
**Figure 14.** Transfer-Level Math Completion in First Year by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



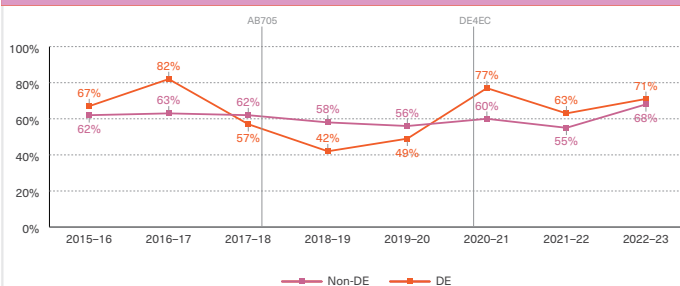
**Figure 15.** Transfer-Level English Completion in First Year by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



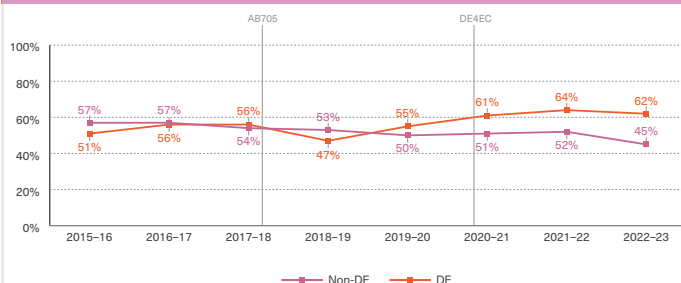
**Figure 16.** Transfer-Level Math Completion in First Year for Black Students by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



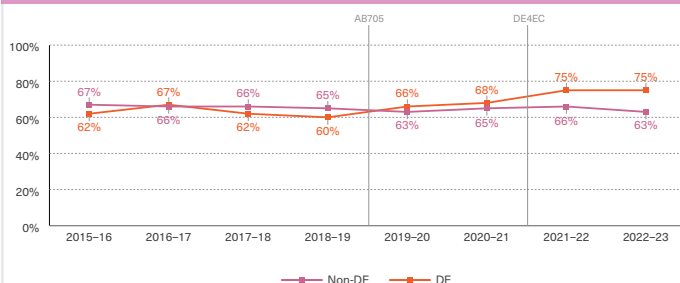
**Figure 17.** Transfer-Level English Completion in First Year for Black Students by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



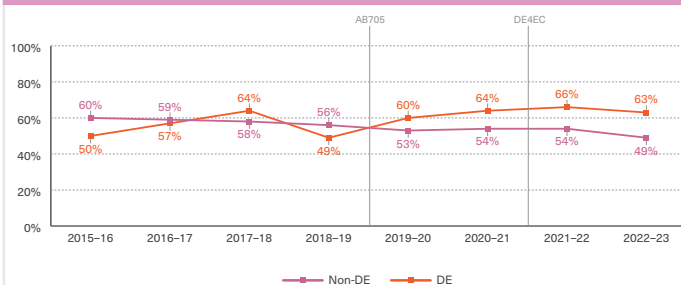
**Figure 18.** Transfer-Level Math Completion in First Year for Latine Students by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



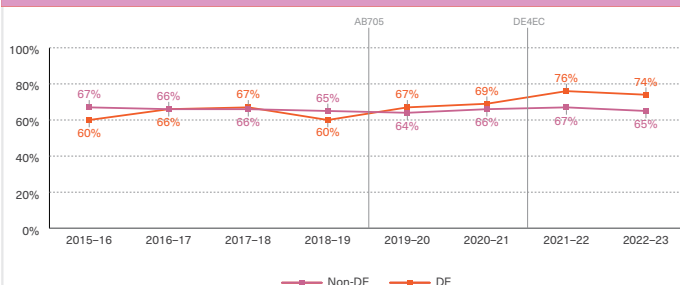
**Figure 19.** Transfer-Level English Completion in First Year for Latine Students by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



**Figure 20.** Transfer-Level Math Completion in First Year for First-Gen Students by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)



**Figure 21.** Transfer-Level English Completion in First Year for First-Gen Students by Prior DE Participation (First Year in College Cohorts, 2015–2016 through 2022–2023)





## Conclusion

This research suggests that equity-minded dual enrollment programs can offer participants a strong start toward completion of college credentials and transfer. This intervention appeared to “lift all boats” when *DE4EC* participants matriculated to a partner community college after high school graduation. Formerly dual enrolled students universally demonstrated improved success, retention, and achievement of key metrics known to increase completion. Yet, a deeper dive into the outcomes of historically underrepresented participants—both during their dual enrollment experience and in their first year in college—reveals opportunity gaps.



### TAKE ACTION

Given the overall positive impact of dual enrollment on the first-year outcomes of all student groups, this research suggests that colleges should expand these opportunities. At the same time, expansion should come with intention, prioritizing dual enrollment access and success for historically underrepresented student groups. These results suggest that community colleges must continue working with purpose to ensure Black, Latine, and first-generation students and those experiencing economic disadvantage make the most of their dual enrollment experience while in high school and continue to thrive once they matriculate to postsecondary education. Specifically, we suggest colleges and high schools partner to...

- Offer high school students and their families guidance on how to leverage dual enrollment for strategic credit accumulation that accelerates completion of credentials.
- Integrate holistic supports (e.g., education/career planning, proactive counseling, tutoring) into the standard dual enrollment experience so all students succeed in their DE courses and boost their sense of academic self-efficacy.
- Employ dual enrollment as a key lever for encouraging full-time enrollment and increasing equitable first-year completion of transfer-level math and English.
- Promote college resources and supports to students participating in dual enrollment; specifically highlight special programs and services available after matriculation, including those designed to enhance course success, retention, and early completion of transfer requirements among Black, Latine, and first-gen students (e.g., Umoja, MESA, Puente).

### 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>.

# References

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2024). *Fall 2023 student enrollment status summary report*. [California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Management Information Systems Data Mart](#)

Center for Community College Student Engagement. (2017). *Even one semester: Full-time enrollment and student success*. The University of Texas at Austin, College of Education, Department of Educational Administration, Program in Higher Education Leadership. [https://www.ccsse.org/docs/Even\\_One\\_Semester.pdf](https://www.ccsse.org/docs/Even_One_Semester.pdf)

Dembicki, M. (2024, June 24). Promising data on persistence, retention. *American Association of Community Colleges, Community College Daily*. <https://www.ccdaily.com/2024/06/promising-data-on-persistence-retention/>

The Education Trust-West. (2022). *Jumpstart: Setting goals to drive equitable dual enrollment participation in California's community colleges*. <https://west.edtrust.org/resource/jump-start-setting-goals-to-drive-equitable-dual-enrollment-participation-in-californias-community-colleges/>

Fong, K., Cooper, D. M., Purnell, R.D., & Karandjeff, K. (2024). *Technical appendices: Catalyzing equitable college completion through dual enrollment*. RDP Consulting. [https://www.r-d-p-consulting.com/files/ugd/ba21ad\\_db6accbb00bb4d11879f574a779df0c4.pdf](https://www.r-d-p-consulting.com/files/ugd/ba21ad_db6accbb00bb4d11879f574a779df0c4.pdf)

Rodriguez-Kiino, D., Purnell, R., & Karandjeff, K. (2024). *Student insights on how dual enrollment helped them succeed in college (Dual Enrollment for Equitable Completion: Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Research Series Brief 5)*. RDP Consulting. [https://www.r-d-p-consulting.com/files/ugd/348955\\_e1ce7c44cd344c2a9389a0bbc1b2db76.pdf](https://www.r-d-p-consulting.com/files/ugd/348955_e1ce7c44cd344c2a9389a0bbc1b2db76.pdf)

Velasco, T., Fink, J., Bedoya-Guevara, M., & Jenkins, D. (2024). *The postsecondary outcomes of high school dual enrollment students: A national and state-by-state analysis*. Columbia University, Teachers College, Community College Research Center. <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/postsecondary-outcomes-dual-enrollment-national-state.pdf>



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office for providing the data analyzed to complete this brief and The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group) for their partnership in the overall *DE4EC* learning and evaluation effort.

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



Rog  air D Purnell, PhD  
RDP Consulting  
President & CEO  
[www.r-d-p-consulting.com](http://www.r-d-p-consulting.com)

### RDP CONSULTANT PARTNERS

Darla M Cooper, EdD  
Amal Amanda Issa, MEd  
Kelley Karandjeff, EdM  
Kristen Fong, PhD

Roy Robles  
Diane Rodriguez-Kiino, PhD  
Ic  e Shields-Harris

Design by



Scan this QR code for  
more information on our  
*Advancing Equitable Dual  
Enrollment Research Series*

