

A photograph of two young adults, a woman and a man, in a library or study area. The woman is on the left, wearing a grey t-shirt and large, colorful headphones. She is smiling and looking at a book held by the man. The man is on the right, wearing a blue hoodie and a backpack. He is looking down at the book. The background is blurred, showing other people and bookshelves.

# UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

Advancing Dual Enrollment in California

OCTOBER 2018

WRITTEN BY: JFF AND CAREER LADDERS PROJECT

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This working paper was collaboratively written by Linda Collins, executive director, and Naomi Castro, director, Career Ladders Project; and by Joel Vargas, senior vice president, and Sarah Hooker, senior program manager, JFF. We would like to thank the College Futures Foundation for their support of this work. We are also grateful to the JFF communications team for their editorial and design expertise.

## ABOUT THIS WORKING PAPER

Both JFF and Career Ladders Project (CLP) have conducted recent research on the evolution and current state of dual enrollment policy and practice in California. Each organization has released analyses of its findings and related recommendations. These publications include:

1. [\*The Dual Enrollment Landscape in California: A CLP Working Paper\*](#)
2. [\*The Dual Enrollment Landscape in California: Case Studies\*](#)
3. [\*Dual Enrollment in California: Applying National Lessons to State Challenges—A JFF Working Paper\*](#)

This co-authored working paper summarizes the combined lessons learned across the two research projects and identifies strategic leverage points for advancing high-quality dual enrollment with a focus on equity.

In the coming months, JFF and CLP plan to engage institutional and system leaders from K-12 and postsecondary education, as well as policy influencers and decision makers, in critical conversations about the prospects for tapping into dual enrollment's potential. Through this process, we will hone our initial recommendations and develop a cohesive agenda for strengthening the vision, capacity, policy support, and demand for high-quality, equitable dual enrollment.

## INTRODUCTION

Dual enrollment, which has long been recognized as a powerful strategy to increase college enrollment, success, and affordability, is on the brink of widespread acceptance and implementation in California. So far, interest in dual enrollment has yielded a crop of well-established partnerships between colleges and local school districts across the state. Yet, compared to many other states, California has been slow to embrace this proven approach.

**The time is ripe to expand high-quality dual enrollment as a strategic step on the pathway to college completion for California students—particularly those from groups that have historically been underrepresented in postsecondary education.**

Through separate analyses of California’s dual enrollment landscape, CLP and JFF reached the same conclusion—that dual enrollment has enormous untapped potential to help increase college completion and advance the state’s economic prosperity. This brief outlines our research findings on favorable conditions as well as existing barriers to dual enrollment’s expansion.

### Dual Enrollment as a Powerful Vehicle for Student Success

A robust body of evidence demonstrates that participating in dual enrollment improves student success in high school and in college. For example, compared to similar peers, dual enrollees have:<sup>1</sup>

- **Higher** rates of high school graduation (7 percentage point increase on average)
- **Higher** rates of college enrollment (15 percentage point increase on average)
- **Higher** rates of subsequently completing a college degree (25 percentage point increase on average).

The positive effects of dual enrollment on college degree attainment are even stronger for low-income students than for their more affluent peers.<sup>2</sup>

From the state’s perspective, dual enrollment has the potential to yield public savings by reducing the time it takes to earn a college degree, and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education.<sup>3</sup>

# I. FAVORABLE CONDITIONS AND BARRIERS

Over the past several years, the California education policy context has been primed for the expansion of dual enrollment. Favorable conditions include supportive state policy, growing demand among students, and a set of separate education reform efforts that have the potential to enhance its impact.

## Favorable Conditions

### *A New Policy Framework for Dual Enrollment*

Assembly Bill (AB) 288, introduced by Assemblymember Chris Holden in 2015, encouraged the expansion of dual enrollment beyond the traditional pool of academically advanced students. The bill included a focus on those who “may not already be college bound or who are underrepresented in higher education.”<sup>4</sup>

AB 288 created a set of criteria for dual enrollment agreements between school districts and community college districts. The agreements are known as “College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP) partnerships.” The law loosened prior restrictions on dual enrollment participation and made it easier for high schools and colleges to expand their programs by:

- Increasing the number of college courses that high school students may take per term;
- Allowing community colleges to offer courses on high school campuses, during the regular high school day, without opening them to the general public; and
- Clarifying that colleges can receive state apportionment funding for high school students, if the courses are offered as part of CCAP partnership agreements.

### *Increased Demand*

In recent years, California community colleges have seen a sharp increase in the number of dual enrollees. In fact, participation doubled in four years—from approximately 31,000 students in fall 2013 to 62,000 students in fall 2017.<sup>5</sup> However, this figure still represents a small proportion of those eligible (*see “Barriers” below*).

The state’s newly revamped K-12 school accountability system is likely to further drive demand. The California School Dashboard, which was rolled out in fall 2017, features a “college/ career indicator.” The indicator includes dual enrollment participation rates among the readiness measures, along with other data points such as Advanced Placement test scores.

## **Related Education Reform Efforts**

Our research indicates that dual enrollment stands to be even more impactful if it is rolled out as part of a broader statewide agenda for increasing college enrollment and completion. Dual enrollment aligns with several of California’s recent education reform efforts and priorities. These include:

- **California College and Career Pathways Trust**—Funded at \$500 million in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 budgets, CCPT represented a historic investment in career and technical education pathways for grades 9 through 14. The initiative established a precedent for regional secondary-postsecondary collaboration toward a shared agenda.
- **Strong Workforce Program**—The 2018-19 state budget provides an infusion of funding specifically to build career and technical education pathways in high-demand, high-wage fields from K-12 through community college, as part of the Strong Workforce Program.
- **Guided pathways**—In the community college system, significant public and private investments are supporting the implementation of the guided pathways framework. Guided pathways represent a systemic approach to institutional reforms that focus postsecondary course-taking on clearly delineated, relevant, and structured programs that support students from matriculation to completion. So far, guided pathways have been aimed primarily at “regular” college students and have not as of yet been extended to high school dual enrollees.
- **Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office “Vision for Success”**—The strategic plan adopted by the California Community Colleges Board of Governors in 2017 sets out ambitious goals for improving college and career outcomes for all students. Dual enrollment is consonant with these goals.

## **Barriers to Scale and Equity**

For dual enrollment to reach its full potential in California, education leaders and advocates will have to overcome several barriers.

### ***Overall participation remains low***

While the number of students participating has increased substantially in recent years, overall participation remains low. Approximately 3.2 percent of the state’s students in grades 9 through 12 took dual enrollment courses at a California community college in fall 2017, compared to a national average rate of 10 percent.<sup>6</sup>

## Access and equity gaps persist

The majority of California high school students taking college courses come to the colleges on their own initiative, rather than participating in structured programs.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that most dual enrollees already have access to some college-related support and guidance. It also suggests a need to design and scale dual enrollment opportunities specifically for students from underserved and underrepresented communities, and for students who are not already college bound (an explicit goal of AB 288).

Recent findings from the Community College Research Center suggest that California has a continuing challenge with equity after students participate in dual enrollment. Gaps in degree completion rates between lower-income and higher-income former dual enrollees were wider in California than in other states.<sup>8</sup> Yet dual enrollment can be an important strategy for closing achievement gaps when it is well designed and supported.

However, an earlier study of 3,000 California dual enrollees—60 percent of whom were students of color and 40 percent of whom lived in non-English-speaking households—found that participants were more likely than their peers to graduate high school, enroll in college, and persist in postsecondary education. In college, they also were less likely to need basic skills courses.<sup>9</sup>

To realize the equity potential of dual enrollment, the field will need to creatively move beyond these barriers and focus on implementing high-quality programs that scaffold supports for students to succeed.

### About our Research

With support from the College Futures Foundation, JFF and CLP conducted research in 2017-18 to paint a landscape of dual enrollment in California and to situate the state within the national policy context.

JFF interviewed California stakeholders to understand perspectives on the initial effectiveness of AB 288. JFF also spoke to education leaders in 10 other states to understand how their states have addressed common barriers to scale identified in California.

CLP conducted in-depth interviews with personnel from 48 of California's 114 community colleges to surface common barriers to scale, explore current approaches to growth and development, and hear about future needs. CLP also conducted phone interviews and site visits with leaders of college-high school partnerships that are successfully scaling dual enrollment programs.

## II. KEY CONDITIONS FOR ADVANCING DUAL ENROLLMENT

Findings and recommendations converged around a set of key themes across both CLP's and JFF's research. Stakeholders in California and other states highlighted a common set of barriers to scaling high-quality dual enrollment and pointed to a similar set of potential solutions. Based on the experiences of other states as well as California's unique institutional and political context, we hypothesize that dual enrollment would gain momentum if state and local leaders focused on establishing the following key conditions:

- Vision
- Implementation, quality, and capacity
- Demand
- Supportive policy and funding

In the remainder of this section, we will briefly highlight findings from our research that underscore the importance of each of these four conditions. For a more detailed discussion of the findings, see the working papers and case studies produced by [CLP](#) and [JFF](#).

### *Vision*

College and district stakeholders in California reported that the lack of a coherent statewide agenda for dual enrollment and lack of coordination across the state agencies responsible for implementation (the California Department of Education and the California Community Colleges' Chancellor's Office) were problems. These can lead to confusion and reduce motivation for establishing and strengthening dual enrollment agreements.

They also expressed a desire for more clarity on how dual enrollment aligns with other state-level programs and priorities such as CCPT and the Strong Workforce Program. There is a need for stronger and more consistent policy messages regarding the centrality of dual enrollment as a statewide college success and equity strategy.

The concept of a statewide vision and goal-setting has featured prominently in the narrative of dual enrollment's evolution in other states. For example, in Colorado, Indiana, Texas, Ohio, and Kentucky, leadership from the governor's office was cited as a key driver of dual enrollment policy buy-in. Interviewees suggested that executive branch support was helpful because dual enrollment crosses both K-12 and postsecondary education systems but does not "belong" to either. Leaders in several states suggested that demand for dual enrollment increased because

such programs were seen as strategies for meeting visible state goals for postsecondary degree attainment.

### *Implementation, Quality, Capacity*

Many implementation challenges remain in the areas of infrastructure, staffing, and practice. For example, at the state level and in the field, there is no shared definition of “high-quality dual enrollment designed for equity.” There is a hunger for more information and support on effective practices, from program design to partnership agreements. There are also a number of known implementation challenges that may be more efficiently addressed at a state level.

In some states (Iowa, Minnesota, Tennessee, and Washington), dual enrollment partnerships are encouraged or required to meet standards to ensure quality, such as the accreditation standards of the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships. Other states require courses to be chosen from a list of statewide guaranteed transfer courses (Indiana) or be part of a degree pathway (Ohio).

California has such a wide variety of contexts, geographies, student demographics, and regional economies that prescriptive models may not be appropriate. A balance between local design based on a specific context, with statewide guidance and support, has yet to be achieved. There remains a need for a California-specific definition of high-quality dual enrollment that ensures equity, access, and support for students. Colleges would welcome examples of how to implement thoughtful pathway design that integrates student support services as well as peer exchanges with other college and high school partnerships.

Challenges with data collection capacity and systems have hindered California’s overall progress. The state currently lacks a singular mechanism for collecting information such as dual enrollment participation and outcomes. AB 288 partnerships are required to share data at the local level. Some partnerships have embraced data sharing both for program improvement and for targeting interventions for struggling students. Other partnerships are more cautious about data sharing and potential conflicts with federal student privacy laws, and have expressed a need for guidance, templates, technical support, and promising practice examples.

At a state level, the California Community Colleges’ Management Information System only collects enrollment data for course sections that claim state apportionment funding, leaving many students uncouned. A system to collect data on all dual enrollment participants and track outcomes would be helpful in understanding and improving dual enrollment in California.

Capacity at the colleges and high schools is another common challenge. Finding instructors who meet the minimum requirements to teach a college course—and who also have the disposition and pedagogical experience to work with high school students—is especially challenging, particularly in rural areas. While some partnerships offer professional development specifically designed for dual enrollment instructors, the field has expressed a need for more of this type of support. Administrative staffing is another capacity challenge. It is not uncommon for dual enrollment duties to fall to staff already assigned to other areas in both the high school and the college.

The workflow of the enrollment process is also an ongoing challenge. Currently, each dually enrolled high school student must fill out a paper form that contains multiple personal identifiers and requires signatures of the student, a parent, and a school official. This issue could be resolved with support and guidance from the state to find ways to automate and streamline the enrollment process, saving thousands of hours of manual data entry.

### *Demand*

As mentioned previously, dual enrollment demand has been growing from the K-12 sector. Families and students have a growing awareness of the benefits of dual enrollment, not only in terms of cost savings but also as a way to demonstrate college readiness on applications to universities. As demand rises, however, many colleges have not been able to meet the growing volume of requests.

Infusions of funding, such as the California Career Pathways Trust grant and set-asides in the Strong Workforce Program specifically for K-14 partnerships, have provided incentives for colleges and high schools to deepen their relationships, create pathways, and include dual enrollment as a part of those pathways. These programs and partnerships have, in many cases, provided a glimpse of the potential of dual enrollment. While the relationships and pathways created have been innovative, there is concern that when the funding ends, so will the programs.

As demand for dual enrollment grows, faculty and teacher unions have sometimes expressed opposition due to perceived threats to job security and status for instructors on both sides of the high school-college divide. This is also a common issue in other states. In California as well as in other states, challenges are often alleviated at the local level by engaging both high school and college faculty in program design, delivery, and quality control, and promoting collaboration between both groups.

## Supportive Policy and Funding

The passage of AB 288 in 2015 represented a significant step forward by easing restrictions on dual enrollment; it also created a clear framework for partnership agreements and defined the conditions under which community colleges can claim apportionment funding for high school dual enrollees. Nonetheless, our research found that policy and implementation issues remain. Districts and colleges have had difficulty negotiating cost-sharing with regard to expenses such as college textbooks and any stipends provided to dual enrollment faculty. Some interviewees expressed a desire for more system-level guidance and templates for negotiating agreements, though they are grateful for the flexibility to adapt agreements to their local circumstances.

Stakeholders also reported a climate of lingering concerns about the possibility of fiscal penalties if programs run afoul of regulations. This threat has a unique historical basis in California. A 2003 audit of the community college system revealed questionable use of public funds, due to a situation in which colleges had taken advantage of dual enrollment to claim apportionment funds for courses that did not meet legal requirements. This contributed to a perception that colleges and school districts were “double dipping” when both sides claimed state funding for dual enrollees, and a fear that institutions would need to reimburse the Chancellor’s Office if they were found to be in violation of state policy. However, CLP research has found that colleges are slowly becoming less concerned with compliance than when AB 288 was first approved.

In other states, interviewees reported that the establishment of a clear funding structure was an important development that enabled the expansion of dual enrollment. In many cases, the approach evolved from a laissez-faire stance to a detailed set of policies and regulations that establish which institutions or stakeholders should bear costs associated with dual enrollment, and under what conditions. Some states, such as Texas, enacted “hold harmless” funding policies, opening the doors for both high schools and colleges to claim per-pupil funding for dual enrollees, and ensuring that neither institution faces a disincentive to participate. Champions used research on the long-term return-on-investment of dual enrollment to justify the near-term state funding for both the K-12 and postsecondary institutions.

Finally, one of the known challenges with AB 288, California’s principal dual enrollment legislation, is that it is scheduled to sunset in 2022, and the future direction of state policy remains unclear. The uncertainty surrounding the regulatory climate and state commitment to dual enrollment continues to impact college planning efforts and faith that they should invest in dual enrollment at scale.

### III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Uptake continues to be hindered by capacity issues and implementation challenges, and local partnerships still look to state agencies for stronger guidance and support for taking on dual enrollment.

Our findings point to a set of four recommendations for California stakeholders interested in expanding dual enrollment with a focus on access and equity:

- **Articulate a coherent vision of the role of high-quality, equitable** dual enrollment within the college completion movement in California.
- **Build capacity**, share effective practice, address known implementation challenges and expand high-quality dual enrollment across districts and community colleges.
- **Build broader demand for high-quality dual enrollment**, especially among students from backgrounds underrepresented in higher education.
- **Identify additional policy opportunities**, as well as policy barriers and considerations for future legislation, before the sunset of AB 288 in 2022.

These recommendations are intended to spur continuing conversations among state and local leaders about the prospects for tapping into dual enrollment's potential as a strategy to advance the overarching goals of college completion and economic mobility for more Californians.

Dual enrollment is not, by itself, a silver bullet to align systems or close longstanding equity gaps. Its power comes from its connection to a clear and ambitious college completion agenda that encompasses the years before high school graduation.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Data represent the combined results of five studies of dual enrollment that met the highly rigorous design standards of the Institute for Education Science’s What Works Clearinghouse. Institute for Education Sciences, *WWC Intervention Report: Transition to College, Dual Enrollment Programs* (Washington, DC: 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Brian P. An, *The Impact of Dual Enrollment on College Performance and Attainment* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin—Madison, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Earl Haskell, “The Effects of Dual-Credit Enrollment on Underrepresented Students: The Utah Case,” *International Journal of Economics and Finance*, 8(1) (2015): 144.  
Joel Vargas, *The Economic Payoff for Closing College-Readiness and Completion Gaps: Why States Should Invest in Accelerating Low-Income Youth to and Through Postsecondary Credentials* (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> “AB-288 Public schools: College and Career Access Pathways partnerships,” California Legislative Information, October 8, 2015, [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201520160AB288](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB288).

<sup>5</sup> “Management Information Systems Data Mart,” California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://datamart.cccco.edu/datamart.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> “DataQuest,” California Department of Education, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>; “Fast Facts about Dual and Concurrent Enrollment,” National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, accessed April 27, 2018, <http://www.nacep.org/research-policy/fast-facts/>.

<sup>7</sup> Naomi Castro and Linda Collins, *The Dual Enrollment Landscape: A Working Paper* (Oakland: Career Ladders Project, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> John Fink, Davis Jenkins, and Takeshi Yanagiura, *What Happens to Students Who Take Community College ‘Dual Enrollment’ Courses in High School?* (New York: Community College Research Center, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Katherine Hughes et al., *Broadening the Benefits of Dual Enrollment: Reaching Underachieving and Underrepresented Students with Career-Focused Programs* (New York: Community College Research Center, 2012).