

Dual Enrollment: Moving to an Electronic Form

Career Ladders Project (CLP) convened a small group of dual enrollment practitioners in a “think tank” in fall 2019, funded by the College Futures Foundation, focused on improving the paper-based enrollment process, with the goal of producing a suite of practitioner-informed potential solutions to share with the field and propose to policy makers. Think tank participants included a district vice president, counselors, dual enrollment directors, an outreach director, admissions and records staff, non-profit leaders, and a former dual enrollment student. We gathered to discuss:

- How the paper-based process limits dual enrollment and blunts its potential as a force for equity
- How colleges have tried to address this situation
- Common misconceptions that have hampered efforts at reform

This document synthesizes key takeaways from the event and identifies possible next steps to remove this barrier to participation and equity. We have also included relevant findings from recent events in spring 2020 stemming from the move by all colleges to remote delivery of all instruction, services and operations due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Context

Dual enrollment is expanding rapidly across California and there are several incentives aligned to promote its spread. Colleges can receive a larger base apportionment funding for dually enrolled students, high schools can meet accountability metrics through dual enrollment, and practitioners increasingly see dual enrollment as a strategy for equity. In recent years, many policy barriers to dual enrollment have been removed by the legislature, offering the promise of expanded access for students from historically underserved populations. As dual enrollment grows however, the paper-based enrollment process has emerged as a pain point and limiting factor.

Dual enrollment practitioners across California have long lamented the paper enrollment form. Because the law requires signatures from the student, a parent/guardian, and a high school principal, traditionally the process was built around hand-signed paper forms or “wet” signatures. Although the law does not specifically call for wet signatures, some college districts have reported that auditors require them, particularly as dual enrollment pertains to apportionment.

As a result, until recently most colleges have relied on a paper-based process that poses many challenges for students and college staff. Acquiring the necessary signatures can take multiple visits to a collection of offices. The form can get damaged or lost. Handwriting can create confusion over a student's name or other vital information, delaying or derailing enrollment, or resulting in missed credits. Some colleges require students to submit the form in person, creating an absolute barrier if the student doesn't have access to transportation.

For colleges, paper forms cost staff time. If there are data errors or inaccuracies, staff are needed to resolve them. Some colleges working to smooth this burdensome process have found it is most effective for a staff member to drive to dozens of separate high schools to pick up the paper forms. In some cases, by the time forms are completed collected and sent to Admissions and Records, it is too late to give students online enrollment dates. This time- and labor-intensive process often becomes a bottleneck for enrollment, with forms ending up on the desks of Admissions and Records personnel who then must hand-enroll hundreds or even thousands of students. As dual enrollment has rapidly grown, in part because the College and Career Access Pathways legislation (CCAP, also known as AB 288) removed many programmatic and administrative barriers, the paper-based enrollment process has become one of the primary obstacles to scaling dual enrollment.

Many colleges have also required dual enrollment students to submit these paper forms as well as a new college application every semester, even if students were continuously enrolled. The legislature recently remedied this situation. In fall 2019, the legislature amended AB 288 to require that the California Community College Chancellor "revise the special part-time student application process to allow a pupil to complete one application for the duration of the pupil's attendance at a community college as a special part-time student participating in a CCAP partnership agreement." Currently the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) is working on a sample dual enrollment form that would allow colleges to meet this requirement.

When discussing electronic signatures, a common question is, "Are electronic signatures legal?" Practitioners often report that their auditors will want to see wet signatures. Electronic signatures are allowable for enrollment and all student forms (see Clarifications section below). The CA Secretary of State has certified both e-signatures and Adobe Sign as legally binding methods for document execution ([Gomez, March 27, 2020](#)). The Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC) and the CCCCCO both use Adobe Sign for "document endorsement and execution (electronic signatures)." A statewide agreement for California Community Colleges provides highly discounted access to Adobe that now includes Adobe Sign at no additional cost to colleges.

Clarification

Many common misconceptions have hampered efforts at reform. Here are a few clarifications:

- Electronic signatures are permissible for all types of “admission forms student form or document.” (See [Title 5 54300](#))
- GPA and/or Accuplacer may *not* be a requirement for admission. (See [Title 3 76000-76004](#), [Legal Opinion 16-02](#), [Title 3 78210-78219](#), [SB 1456](#))
- Physical high school transcripts from dual enrollment students are *not* required for auditors. (See [SB 1456](#), [Contract District Audit Manual](#))
- The 10% FTES cap on special admit enrollment is monitored by the CCCCO and is a state limit, not a limit per college. (See [Legal Opinion 16-02](#), [Contract District Audit Manual](#))
- While there is a requirement for student, parents and high school principal signatures for dual enrollment, no law specifies how *often* this must be done, except for dual enrollment under CCAP as revised by Assembly Bill 30 which stipulates that “the chancellor will revise the special part-time application process to allow a pupil to complete *one* application for the duration of the pupil’s attendance” (see [Title 5 48800-48813.5](#) and [Title 5 76004](#)). The question then becomes: if only one permission form is required for CCAP students, could this equally apply to non-CCAP dually enrolled students as well?

Practitioner example: Chaffey College

Chaffey College decided to improve the enrollment process and move it online in the 2018-19 academic year. Chaffey decided to use Formstack, an online software platform, for their electronic dual enrollment form. Formstack allowed Chaffey to build forms that were customizable and fillable, and also could have built-in logic and helpful reminders in each field. For example, where the form asks students for their college identification number, a pop-up window tells them where to go if they don’t have their number or can’t remember it. The courses that are offered at any particular high school are on a drop-down menu, reducing errors from hand-filling this section. After the student completes the form and electronically signs it, it is routed to their parent/guardian and their high school principal for signing. The software also

enables Chaffey to track the entire process, including how many forms are waiting in a queue for the principal or for parents to sign, and to send email reminders.

By moving the dual enrollment process online, Chaffey College practitioners reported that they have:

- Created a streamlined process and reduced errors
- Reduced stress and lines at the admissions and records office
- Freed up staff to focus on student-centered tasks
- Saved \$30,000 worth of staff time per year by eliminating the need to process paper forms

Preliminary example: San Mateo County Community College District

The San Mateo County Community College District (SMCCCD) is also moving paper forms online, benefiting all three colleges in the district. SMCCCD decided to use Salesforce, a customer relationship management software system, to manage the complete record of each student's full history at the college/district. Prospective students input their data in a recruitment or outreach form and Salesforce uses that initial input to populate subsequent forms, reducing the need for students to repeatedly provide the same data for different departments. In deciding on the first task to implement in Salesforce, SMCCCD chose their most challenging paper process, the dual enrollment form.

Spring 2020 COVID 19 makes online forms urgent

The shelter-in-place and social distancing orders of spring 2020 caused by the coronavirus pandemic have made the paper-based enrollment process effectively impossible. To continue dual enrollment, colleges now must create an online process quickly, and in the midst of all the other difficulties they're facing in moving to deliver all instruction and operations remotely.

Continued dialogue and sharing of emerging practices by dual enrollment practitioners will be key to meeting this challenge and taking full advantage of the opportunity it presents. Less than a week after the statewide shelter-in-place order was issued and within two weeks of many colleges deciding to close campus and deliver classes remotely, Career Ladders Project convened a webinar, [Problem Solving: Moving Dual Enrollment Online](#), in which community college and K12 participants exchanged ideas about possible approaches for taking the dual enrollment form online.

Sparked by an idea discussed during the webinar, Antelope Valley Union High School District and Antelope Valley College moved immediately to create an online dual enrollment form that will allow them to continue enrolling students for the fall term. One of the high school counselors also created a Google classroom where students can get help with the new form.

Foothill College presented their use of Smartsheets, an online collaboration and work management platform, for their [dual enrollment form](#) piloted during the spring shelter-in-place order. When students fill out the form, they also provide an email address for their parent/guardian and their high school principal. The form then gets routed to those email addresses for signature. Foothill is also creating a YouTube tutorial to walk students through the process. And they are currently looking at expanding their use of Smartsheets beyond dual enrollment.

In response to the rapid shift to remote instruction and services, the CCCCCO and FCCC have just expanded access to a number of educational technology resources, tools and applications available free or at reduced cost to the colleges. In addition to AdobeSign mentioned above, the CCCCCO and FCCC are completing a Systemwide Master Services Agreement for NextGen Dynamic Forms which offers a “secure, state of the art e-sign/workflow solution” that enables non-technical users to convert paper-based forms into interactive, electronic ones ([NextGen Web Dynamic Forms](#)). These resources and others may be especially helpful for colleges looking to move immediately to e-signatures and online enrollment processes.

What it all means for colleges

For dual enrollment practitioners around the state, the benefits of an electronic form are obvious. Using an electronic form helps minimize errors such as incorrect names, course titles, and section numbers. It saves an enormous amount of time for coordinators who otherwise would have to drive to and from high schools shepherding paper forms. And it eliminates the need for Admissions and Records personnel to use an entirely separate process of hand-enrolling students.

The move toward using an electronic form for dual enrollment dovetails with other college efforts, particularly guided pathways redesign. Many IT departments and technology committees are investigating electronic solutions to create a smoother overall student experience, including a workflow that uses electronic signatures. In this line of thinking, when developing the new online form, it may be helpful for dual enrollment practitioners to expand their view and consider the full process including outreach, communication, and parent education.

Beyond the immediate gains in efficiency however, streamlining the process means that colleges will be able to expand dual enrollment offerings. Therefore, it is critical that we use this opportunity to scale dual enrollment with equity. The building blocks are in place. Recent legislation has removed restrictions and expanded dual enrollment to address students from historically underserved populations specifically. Guided pathways redesign offers the promise of creating comprehensive, student-centered onboarding processes which include early college credit opportunities for students from feeder high schools.

Steps for practitioners

Dual enrollment practitioners have key insights to inform that conversation and they will play a crucial role in carrying out these efforts. Some concrete steps practitioners can take:

1. Find out what technological solutions your college may already have in place, along with those not yet implemented. Consider the range of new tools and applications being made available at favorable price points by the system office and foundation.
2. Make the needs of dual enrollment known to college leadership and key college committees, such as guided pathways design and technology committees. This is especially important as colleges transition all operations and processes to the online environment during the current pandemic.
3. Be aware--not all technological products integrate well, or at all, with current Management Information Systems and technology platforms on campus.
4. Work closely and collaboratively with your high school partners. They know what technologies local high school students are already familiar with and how to support students in accessing new ones.
5. Retain an option for students and families without consistent internet access.
6. Make an online enrollment tool accessible to non-native English speakers; make the form ADA-compliant.
7. Ensure the online form is mobile-friendly. If a parent or guardian doesn't have a smart phone, their student does or someone they know does, and they're much more likely to have a smart phone than a computer.
8. [Let us know](#) what you find! CLP is looking for more examples of colleges and districts who are implementing online dual enrollment forms and processes. We would like to help you share your story.