

Highlights from the Dual Enrollment Playbook:

A Guide to Equitable Acceleration for Students

More than 1 million U.S. high schoolers participate each year in dual enrollment, taking college courses that simultaneously fulfill high school graduation requirements and count toward a postsecondary degree or workforce credential. Research suggests that dual enrollment students are more likely than others to graduate from high school, enroll in college, and complete college degrees.

As students across the country grapple with the twin effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and an economic recession, higher education can seem out of reach—and the cost and time savings offered through dual enrollment are more important than ever. This is especially the case for students from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and low-income backgrounds.

But in four of five U.S. school districts, these students don't have equitable access to or success in dual enrollment. On average, 12 percent of white students participate in dual enrollment, compared to 7 percent of Black students and 8 percent of Hispanic students.

School systems and community colleges doubled the size of their dual enrollment programs over eight years, and state legislatures enacted 37 bills in 2019 expanding access to dual enrollment. As dual enrollment grows, we must ensure it does not become a program of privilege that serves primarily white and affluent students.

While most systems still have equity gaps in dual enrollment access, 20 percent do not. In *The Dual Enrollment Playbook: A Guide to Equitable Acceleration for Students*, the Aspen Institute and the Community College Research Center examines nine dual enrollment programs in Florida, Ohio, and Washington that have narrowed or closed equity gaps in dual enrollment for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander students.

These K-12 and community college partnerships show that it is possible to close equity gaps when intentional strategy is paired with innovation and commitment. Through our research, we identified five principles and the supporting strategies and practices through which community college and K-12 leaders can advance equity in high-quality dual enrollment.

Five Principles to Advance Equity in High-Quality Dual Enrollment

I
Set a shared vision and goals that prioritize equity

II
Expand equitable access

III
Provide advising and supports that ensure equitable student outcomes

IV
Provide high-quality instruction that builds students' competence and confidence

V
Organize teams and develop relationships to maximize potential

Principle I

Set a shared vision and goals that prioritize equity

The most equitable dual enrollment programs are driven by clear and thoughtful vision, strategy, and goals, and they have made the success of all students a priority. College presidents, K-12 superintendents, and high school principals make clear why they are committing to equity in dual enrollment and communicate that vision to stakeholders. Where dual enrollment succeeds, it's also because leaders have considered all the policy and revenue implications, committed to doing what is best for students, and allocated resources accordingly—even when faced with financial disincentives.

SPOTLIGHT

At **Bridgeport High School** in central Washington, most students are the children of Latinx agricultural workers and will be the first in their families to attend college. It was once one of the worst-performing schools in the state. The school worked with **Wenatchee Valley College**, where leaders have prioritized serving the college's rural communities, to add more dual enrollment courses at the high school. School leaders also hired teachers who were qualified to teach college-level classes and felt strongly about equity and began to automatically place students—including special education students—into accelerated coursework. At first, teachers, students, and parents resisted the advanced curriculum, but it has come to be accepted as the norm for Bridgeport students, who now have excellent graduation and college enrollment outcomes.

Principle II

Expand equitable access

Colleges and high schools with equitable dual enrollment programs build cultures in which all students—especially students of color—see college and college acceleration as viable, desirable options. Often eligibility is limited to students who are prepared to pass high-stakes placement tests, secure their own transportation to campus, and pay tuition and fees. Partnerships that have narrowed equity gaps work tirelessly to remove these barriers. They make acceleration the default, encourage all students to enroll, and revamp systems to increase the number of eligible students and support them in participating.

Principle III

Provide advising and supports that ensure equitable student outcomes

The best dual enrollment systems systematically offer excellent advising, going above and beyond to nurture students. They help students understand the degrees and pathways that match their life goals and may lead to well-paying careers. They help students design course plans that meet their high school requirements and set them up to fulfill their college and career goals. College and high school teams coordinate with one another on each student's progress and provide extra help to students who need it.

SPOTLIGHT

At **Steubenville High School** in eastern Ohio, it used to be that only advanced students were invited for placement testing for dual enrollment with **Eastern Gateway Community College**. A grant from a community foundation enabled the school to provide all 8th graders with free placement testing each February and cover the costs for those who need to retest. This strategy has helped increase dual enrollment participation for Black and Latinx students and those from low-income backgrounds.

SPOTLIGHT

Counselors at **Emerald Ridge High School**, located south of Tacoma, meet with 10th graders individually to help students select from four types of accelerated options, based on their interests and plans after high school: AP courses, CTE courses that articulate for credit at local colleges (including magnet programs in marine biology and aviation), math courses through Central Washington University taught by high school teachers, and dual enrollment at **Pierce College**. To help students and their counselors connect dual enrollment coursework to longer-term goals, Pierce has built maps that show clearly and precisely how courses will transfer to bachelor's degrees at university partners. Pierce has organized its offerings into six broad career pathways, such as business and STEM.

Principle IV

Provide high-quality instruction that builds students' competence and confidence

College work can be difficult even for students who took advanced courses in their K-12 schools, and dual enrollment providers who are committed to equity mindfully bridge this gap. They orient college faculty to teaching students new to college learning, and when dual enrollment is taught in high schools, they help high school teachers teach to college-level expectations. They collaborate to ensure that dual enrollment courses meet quality standards no matter where or by whom they are taught, that students are oriented to college-style teaching and norms, and that curricula are culturally responsive to all populations.

Principle V

Organize teams and develop relationships to maximize potential

A dual enrollment program can achieve equitable outcomes only when leaders and practitioners at the high school, district, and college trust each other and are similarly committed to equity-oriented goals. They work together to solve shared problems, including lower participation and success rates of students of color. They prioritize innovations that remove barriers to participation for these students and support them to ensure they're successful. They regularly talk through challenges in their work, and they exchange data to assess programs, monitor equity gaps, and make improvements.

SPOTLIGHT

Science faculty at **Lorain County Community College** outside Cleveland work with groups of dual enrollment students on undergraduate research projects in the college's labs, under the philosophy that they will learn by doing and build community along the way. A psychology professor engages dual enrollment research groups in projects in which they study problems in their communities, and the Cleveland Clinic hires many of her former dual enrollment students as interns because of the practical skills they gained from her classes.

SPOTLIGHT

Valencia College in Orlando has built a dual enrollment dashboard that includes student enrollment and demographics disaggregated by race and income, information on course modality, and success measures, such as GPAs and completed credit hours. All Valencia staff can access the dashboard and run reports on individual students, subsets of students, and the entire dual enrollment population. The team can quickly answer questions as detailed as "What percentage of dual enrollment students who take English Composition 1 get a B or above?" or "How many Black students with at least a 3.0 GPA have applied for dual enrollment from Osceola High School?"

For more information, go to higher.ed.aspeninstitute.org/dual-enrollment and <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/research-project/strengthen-dual-enrollment-college-acceleration.html>