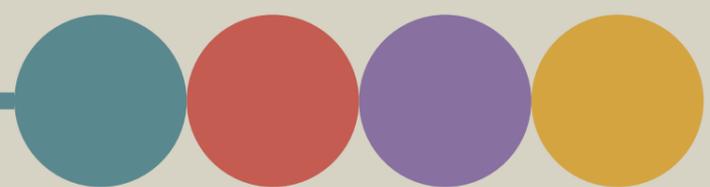


Does Dual Credit Coursework Benefit Underrepresented Students?

A Dallas Area Case Study



July 2025

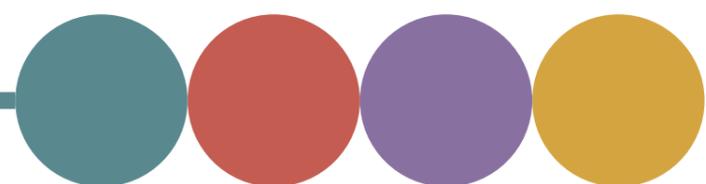


THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE
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Introduction

The pursuit of a college credential for many young adults in the United States continue to be endangered by economic, sociological, and demographic factors. From 2010 to 2021, colleges and universities nationwide experienced a 15 percent decline in enrollment, with the immediate college-going rate among 18-year-olds in 2021 (62 percent) falling six percentage points below that of 2010 (Irwin et al., 2023). While enrollment observed a modest increase of 4.5 percent in 2024, including gains for African American and Hispanic students (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2025), an imminent demographic cliff means the pool of prospective postsecondary students will shrink in future decades and fewer graduates will come through the pipeline to fill occupations that require college credentials—conditions that could ultimately lead to widespread economic decline. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education’s (WICHE) latest projections of births and high school graduation rates indicate that following a peak of high school graduates in 2025, the total number of graduates will decline by 13% through 2041; however, Hispanic and multiracial graduates will grow during this period (Lane et al., 2024). The news is not all bad; current trends in upward (or vertical) transfer show growth among disadvantaged and underserved student groups (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2024a). There is also growth in the number of certificate earners during this past decade, the greatest of which occurred in the 2023-2024 academic year. Still, associate and baccalaureate degree attainment continues to fall, partly due to a drop in students with associate degrees and other micro-credentials as well as non-completers returning to higher education to complete a four-year degree (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2024b), and gaps in completion between White and African American and Hispanic students remain large (Lumina Foundation, 2025).

Underserved students are disproportionately vulnerable to lower college enrollment and completion rates due to a confluence of factors that impede their ability to navigate the complexities of postsecondary education and achieve educational goals, including sociocultural barriers, financial constraints, and limited access to resources. Early student entry into the college pipeline, particularly among underrepresented student groups, may mitigate the effects of the demographic cliff by increasing the number of students taking college courses, earning credits and credentials, and transferring from two-year colleges to four-year institutions. Dual enrollment—or enrollment in college courses that simultaneously grant high school and college credit conditional on course performance—can favor college matriculation and completion for marginalized students, including historic dual enrollment models pre-dating more intense and comprehensive implementations of dual credit programming such early college high schools (ECHS) and pathways in technology early college high schools (P-TECH) (Blankenberger et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2020). This historical study on the educational outcomes of Dallas area dual enrollment students shows that dual credit participation is associated with greater odds of college enrollment, vertical transfer, and credential attainment regardless of students’ socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic background, English proficiency status, and performance in state standardized exams.

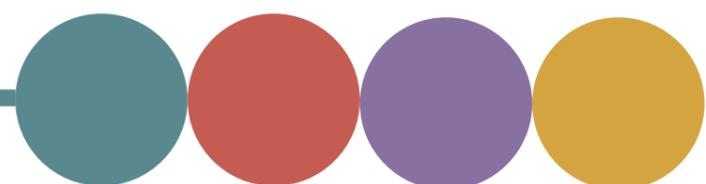


Dual Enrollment Across States

Currently, forty-eight states and the District of Columbia have state-level dual enrollment policies, but only twenty-eight states offer two or more dual enrollment programs (Jamieson et al., 2022). This implies that roughly 43% of states across the nation implement general, “random acts of dual enrollment” that are not aligned with degree or credential pathways (Fink et al., 2022), unlike the ECHS and P-TECH programs. As the focus of this analysis, the general dual enrollment model, where a high school student has access to a restricted number of core-subject-area college-level courses, was prevalent in Texas from the early 2000s to early 2010s. This is how many states currently offer access to college courses and credit in high school, and research points to positive postsecondary outcomes from participation in this kind of dual enrollment programming. A study using nationally representative data from the National Education Longitudinal Study indicates that dual enrollment students, particularly first-generation and low-income students, applied to more colleges, were admitted to selective institutions at higher rates, and were more likely to attain college degrees than their counterparts (An, 2013).

State-level findings are also consistent with national trends; a comprehensive study on accelerated program participation among the 2011 high school graduating cohort in Minnesota indicates that participation in advanced courses, including dual enrollment, correlates with higher college enrollment rates (Davis et al., 2017). Research on Utah’s general dual credit program, wherein students earn a limited range of college credits, show that minoritized and low-income dual credit participants experienced increased probability of higher education enrollment by 27% to 34% in comparison to nonparticipants; the probability of completing an associate degree or higher improved by 2% and 8% for minoritized male and female dual credit students respectively (Haskell, 2016). A study on postsecondary outcomes of Nebraska’s 2018 high school graduating class finds that participation in at least one dual credit course was positively correlated with graduating from high school, enrolling in postsecondary, and persisting into the second year of college. Similar to An’s results, minoritized, first-generation, and low-income students especially benefited from dual credit participation (Lee et al., 2022). An examination of Florida high school students who entered ninth grade in 2007 indicates that while White, female and affluent students were more likely to participate in dual enrollment, Black and Hispanic dual credit students also observed positive outcomes related to immediate college and university enrollment, full-time college enrollment, persistence in the first year, and degree attainment (Liu, et al., 2020). An analysis of the 2003 high school graduating cohort in Illinois also shows that dual credit participants who enrolled in community college after graduation were 19% to 28% more likely to attain a bachelor’s degree across all demographics than nonparticipants (Blankenberger et al., 2017).

However, some research points to more mixed findings on college outcomes associated with dual enrollment for underserved student groups, specifically in Texas. One study tracked the 2003-2004 high school senior class in Texas through summer of 2011 from high school graduation to college

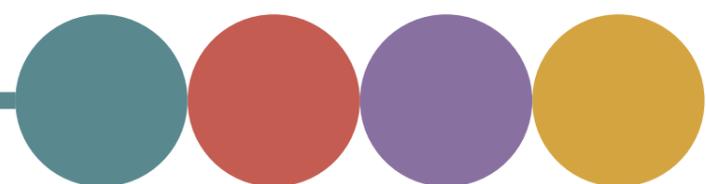


completion and found that dual credit participation increased the likelihood of immediate college enrollment to a greater extent for low-income students than higher-income students and for African American students in comparison to White students; but differences were not observed between Hispanic and White students. Degree completion outcomes were statistically nonsignificant among underrepresented student groups (Struhl and Vargas, 2012). Investigating outcomes from dual enrollment for low-achieving high school graduates in Texas, another analysis on graduating cohorts from 2009 to 2011 found that minoritized and economically disadvantaged underperforming dual credit students experienced less benefit from dual credit participation than their counterparts, even though dual enrollment increased the probability of college enrollment and degree completion for the overall sample (Lee and Villarreal, 2022).

Variations in findings within the Texas context are expected due to the heterogeneity in demographics by region and time periods. Statewide analyses of the general dual enrollment model imply that its benefits may not extend to all students or with similar magnitude. A more localized investigation of this dual credit program limited to one urban region with a high concentration of underrepresented students suggests that these students do benefit from dual enrollment across several postsecondary educational outcomes.

Underrepresented Dual Enrollment Student Outcomes in the Dallas Area

Using the 2011 high school graduating class from 22 area independent school districts (ISDs)¹, the Research Institute at Dallas College analyzed if participation in general dual credit programs (taking college courses without intent to complete a credential) preceding the ECHS and P-TECH models benefited the educational trajectory of underserved student populations up to ten years after high school graduation within the context of the Dallas College service region. A sample of 20,858 graduates were examined using person-level administrative data from the Texas Education Research Center² through quasi-experimental statistical methods³. The research aimed to determine if the odds of a) **enrolling in postsecondary education** within two years of high school graduation, b) **vertically transferring from a two-year institution to a four-year institution**⁴, c) **completing any type of college credential** within six years after high school graduation, and d) **completing a bachelor's degree or above** within six years after high school graduation were greater for dual credit participants than non-dual credit participants within demographic groups pertaining to *socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity (White, African American, and Hispanic), English proficiency status, and performance in 8th grade math and reading state standardized assessments*⁵.

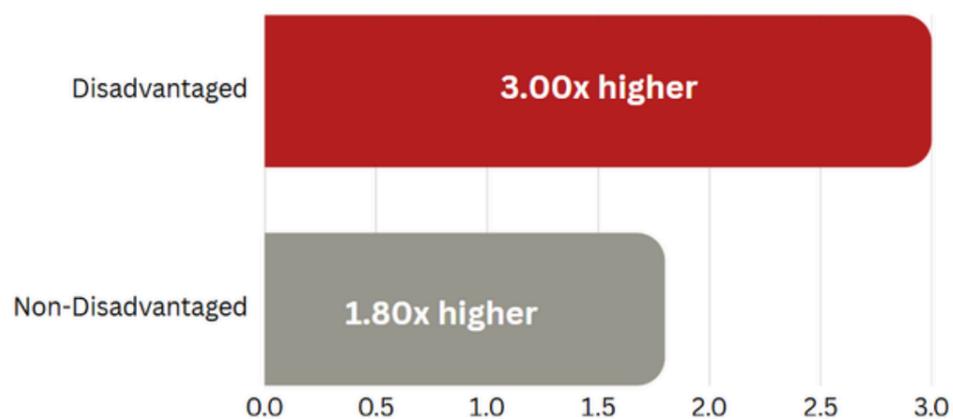


The analysis shows that dual credit participation was associated with greater odds of college enrollment within two years after high school graduation. Dual enrollment also increased the likelihood of credential attainment, including both any credential attained (associate or below and bachelor's or above) as well as the completion of a bachelor's degree or above only. Among the subset of students eligible to vertically transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution, dual credit participation was positively associated with greater vertical transfer rates for most student populations; transfer by English proficiency status could not be analyzed due to sample size constraints⁶. Within 8th grade state standardized assessment performance brackets, dual credit participation appeared to provide greater benefit to students who failed one or more exams or passed both exams without achieving high scores than to high performing or commended students.

Postsecondary Enrollment

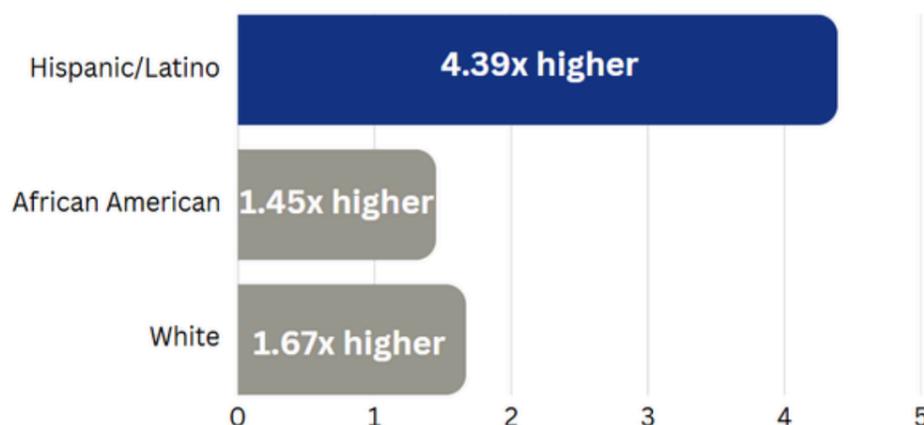
Socioeconomic differences

Odds of dual credit participants enrolling in postsecondary compared to non-participants



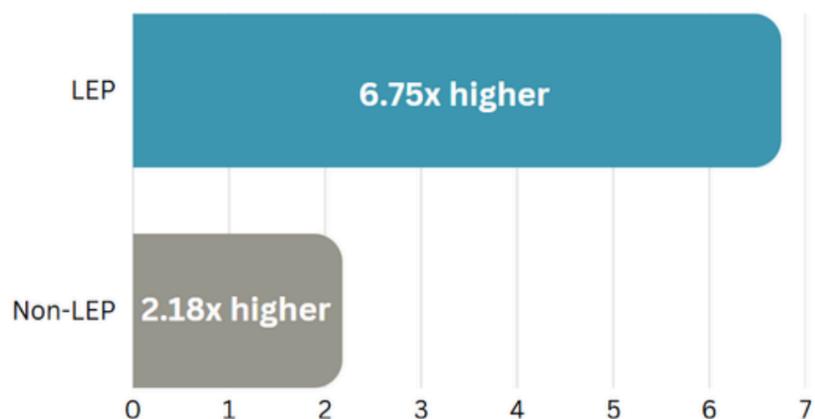
Racial & ethnic differences

Odds of dual credit participants enrolling in postsecondary compared to non-participants



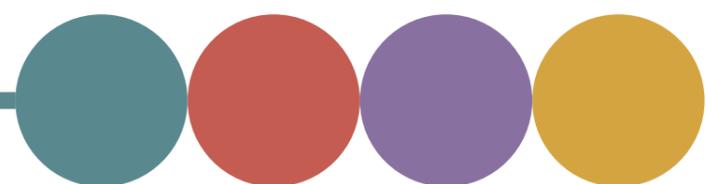
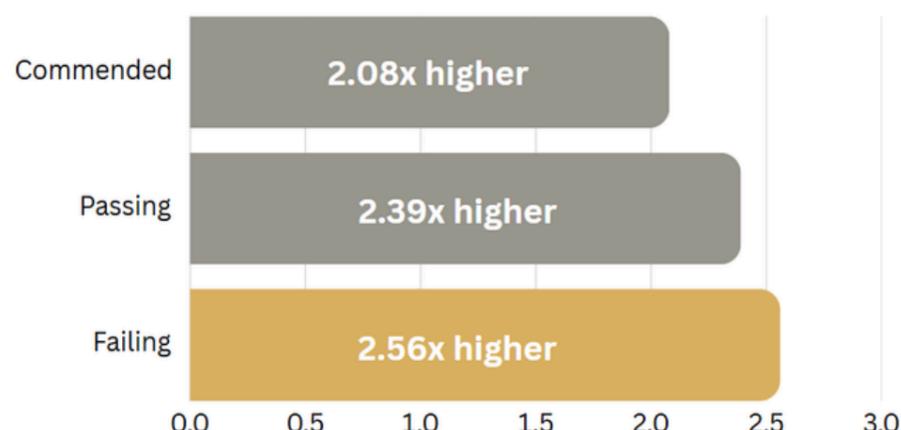
Differences by English proficiency

Odds of dual credit participants enrolling in postsecondary compared to non-participants



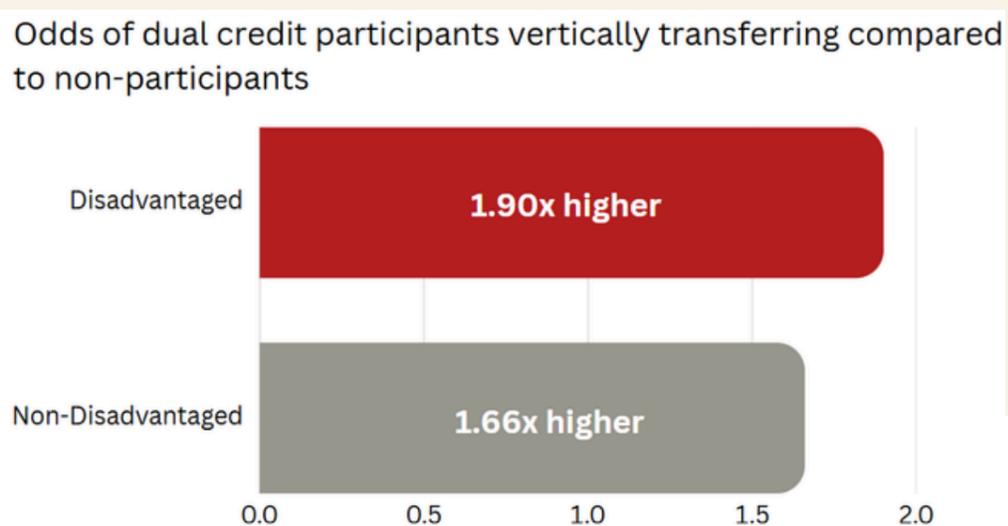
Differences by performance in standardized exams

Odds of dual credit participants enrolling in postsecondary compared to non-participants

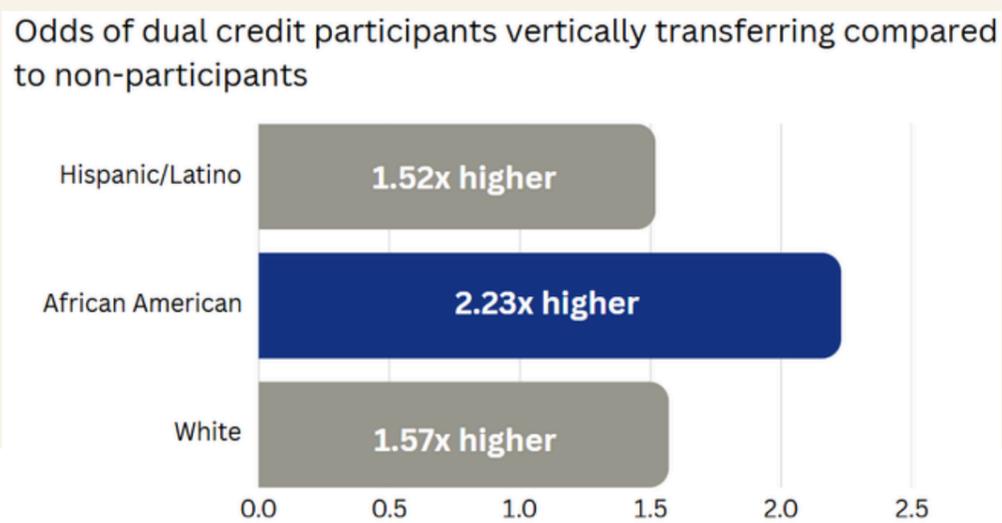


Vertical Transfer

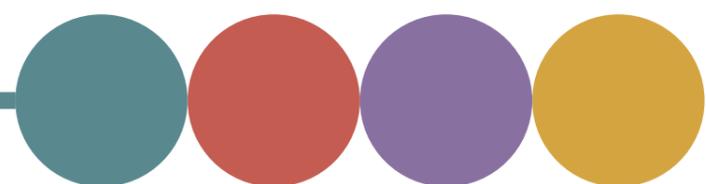
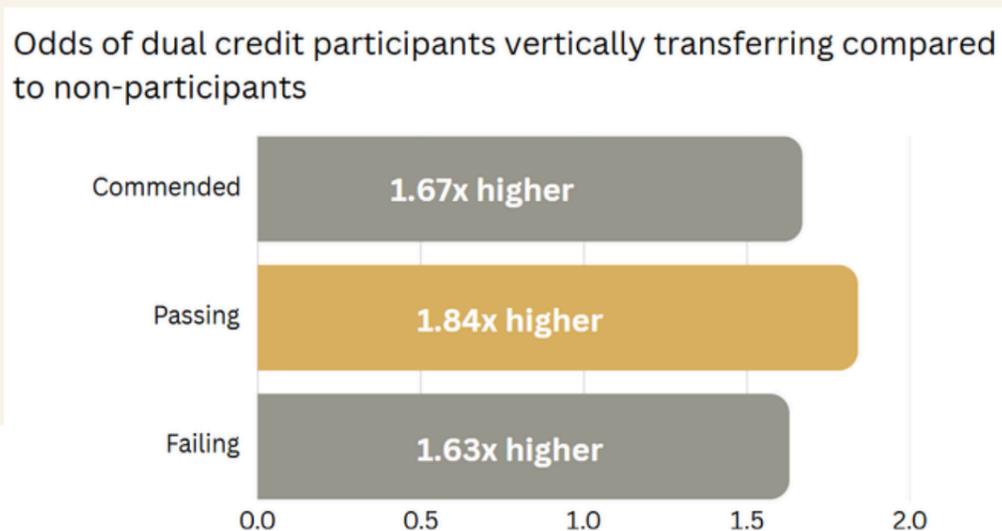
Socioeconomic differences



Racial & ethnic differences



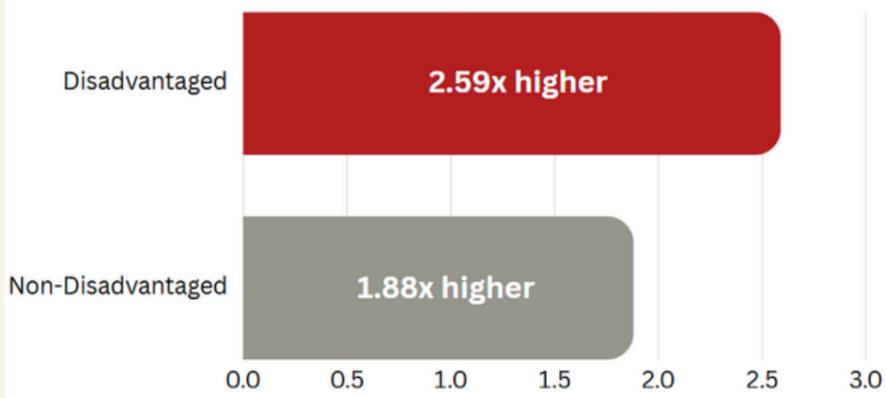
Differences by performance in standardized exams



Completion of a College Credential

Socioeconomic differences

Odds of dual credit participants completing any college credential compared to non-participants



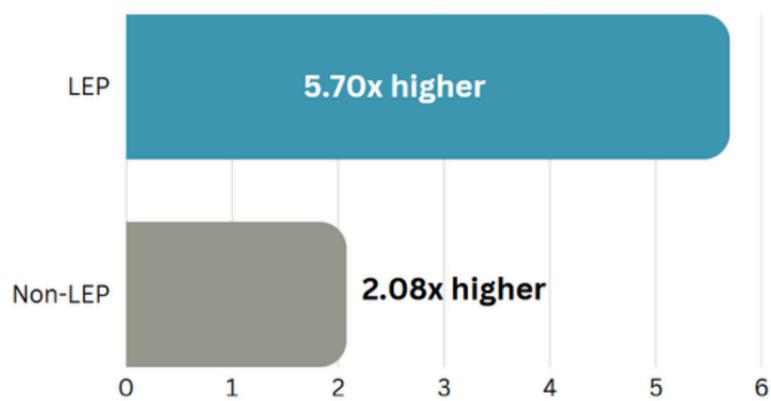
Racial & ethnic differences

Odds of dual credit participants completing any college credential compared to non-participants



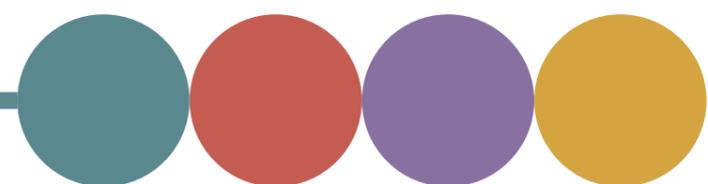
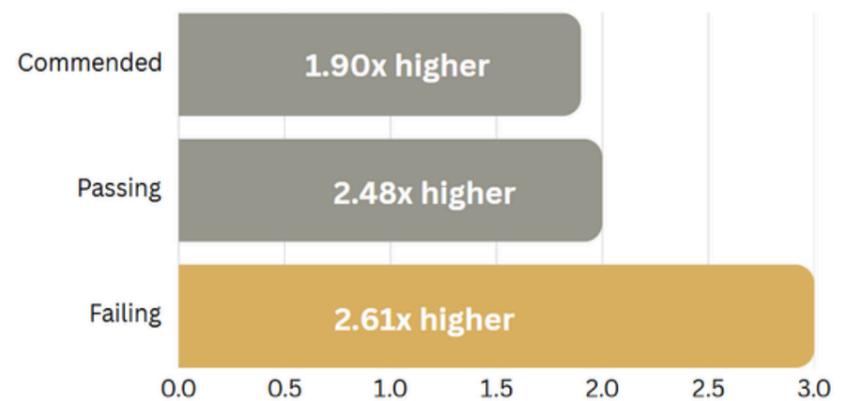
Differences by English proficiency

Odds of dual credit participants completing any college credential compared to non-participants



Differences by performance in standardized exams

Odds of dual credit participants completing any college credential compared to non-participants



Completion of a Baccalaureate Degree or Above

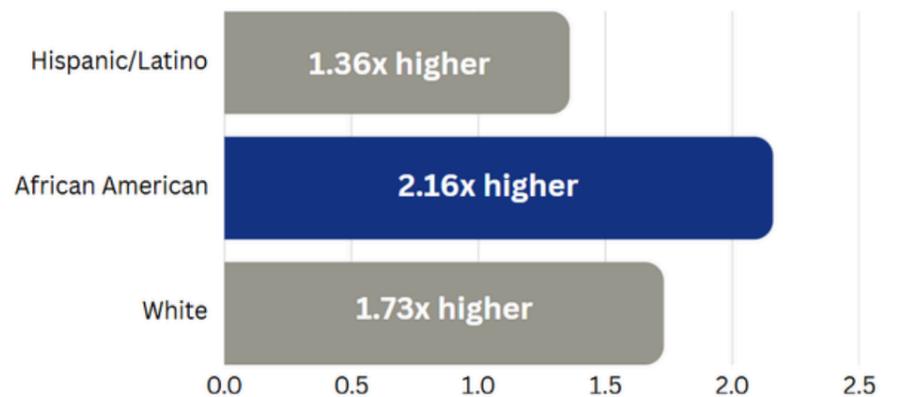
Socioeconomic differences

Odds of dual credit participants completing a bachelor's or above compared to non-participants



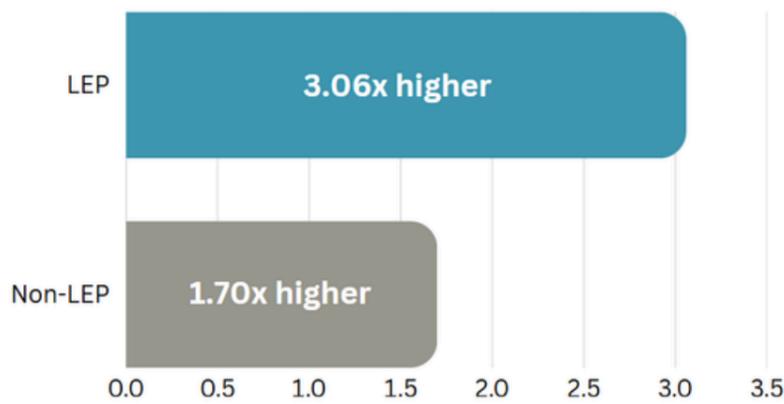
Racial & ethnic differences

Odds of dual credit participants completing a bachelor's or above compared to non-participants



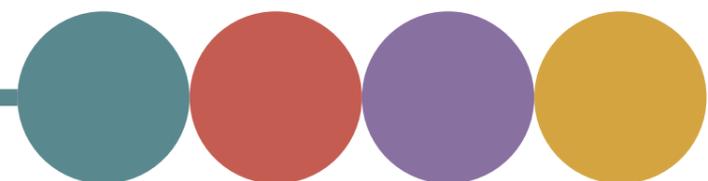
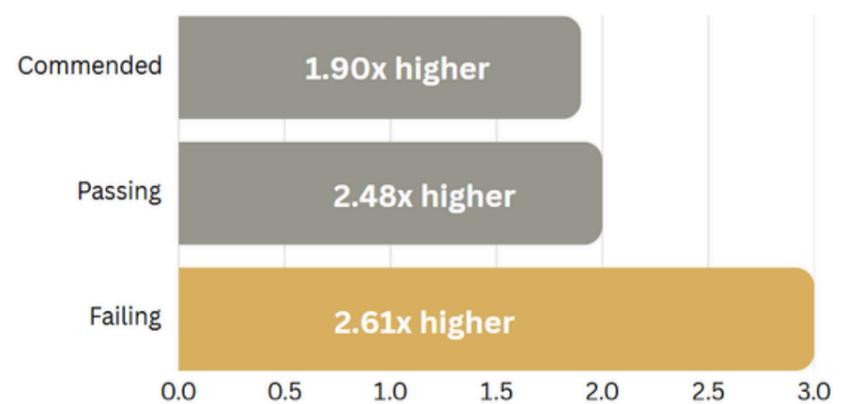
Differences by English proficiency

Odds of dual credit participants completing a bachelor's or above compared to non-participants



Differences by performance in standardized exams

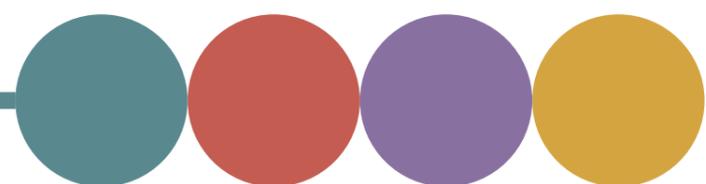
Odds of dual credit participants completing any college credential compared to non-participants



Focusing on Hispanic students—who are a significant proportion of the student body at this Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)-designated College—differences between dual enrollment participants and nonparticipants in this student group were greatest in relation to postsecondary enrollment and completion of a college credential. Hispanic dual credit participants were 4.39 and 2.41 times more likely to enroll in college and complete any type of credential, respectively, than Hispanic students who did not partake in dual credit. African American and White student groups did not observe such high differences between dual credit participants and nonparticipants for these outcomes. However, the dual credit participants and nonparticipants within the African American student group observed the largest differences in regard to vertical transfer and completion of a baccalaureate degree or higher credential; participants were 2.23 times more likely to transfer from a two-year college to a four-year institution and 2.16 times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher than nonparticipants.

Differences in all outcomes between dual enrollment participants and nonparticipants within the socioeconomically disadvantaged student group were observed to be greater than within the non-disadvantaged group. Disadvantaged dual credit participants were three times more likely to enroll in college, 1.9 times more inclined to transfer to a four-year institution, 2.59 times more likely to attain a postsecondary credential, and 1.84 times more probable to complete a bachelor’s degree or a higher credential than nonparticipants. Dual enrollment participants relative to nonparticipants within both socioeconomic groups observed the least variation in the magnitude of outcomes for vertical transfer and completion of a baccalaureate degree or above; non-disadvantaged dual credit students were 1.66 times more likely to transfer versus disadvantaged dual credit students, who were 1.9 times more likely to transfer; non-disadvantaged dual credit students were 1.7 times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher as opposed to disadvantaged students dual credit students who were 1.84 times more inclined to fall within this degree attainment bracket.

These findings can inform dual enrollment policy makers and practitioners in developing and delivering a similar structure of dual credit programming in regions comparable to the Dallas metroplex in size and population.

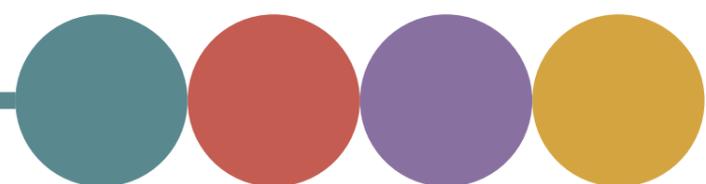


Policy Implications and Culture of Early College Going

Given the strong links observed in this study between dual enrollment and college enrollment, vertical transfer, and completion for low-income, minoritized, English language learning, and academically vulnerable students, states and localities delivering a similar mode of dual enrollment may consider expanding funding for such programs to improve access, especially for underserved populations; increasing general dual credit programs in high-need areas and locales could help close gaps in college-going and postsecondary attainment. Policymakers could also refine strategies to help dual credit community college students transition successfully to four-year institutions through the articulation of two-year transfer pathways academically aligned to four-year degrees in collaboration with local universities (Dallas College, 2025). With regard to institutional practices, community colleges can implement more robust advising support, including career and professional development, to ensure dual enrollment students have clear pathways for transferring, completing degrees, and placing into gainful occupations aligned with their educational training and life goals. High school students face challenges assimilating in college courses and culture, and dual credit providers can bridge this gap by orienting faculty to teaching students new to college learning, ensuring students are oriented to college-style teaching and norms, and that pedagogy and curricula are culturally responsive to all student populations.

Most importantly, creating a culture within the school districts from the elementary grades onward in which all students, especially those who are minoritized and underserved, view college and early college opportunities as accessible, feasible, and desirable options, can substantially close equity gaps not only in dual enrollment participation, but also in college going, completion, earnings, and social mobility. Establishing such norms can only be successful through collaboration between school, school district, and partner college leadership, teachers and faculty, and students who take participatory roles to solve shared problems, create innovative strategies to remove barriers to dual enrollment access and academic success, and improve programs through data collection and analysis as well as discuss challenges in their work.

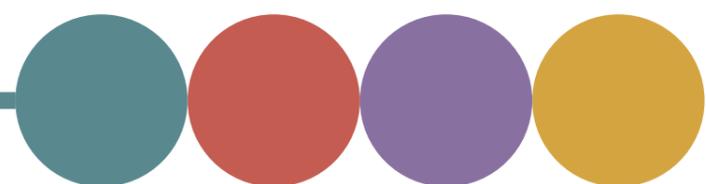
College admissions and enrollment trends and the policies related to them are swiftly changing. Demographic shifts, including a rising Hispanic population, the volatility of diversity and inclusion programs, the uncertainty of financial resources to support students, and the rapid movement towards highly technologized fields in the labor market amplify the need to scale college acceleration programs to prepare the current generation of students for the coming century. Despite the many forms of dual enrollment—from those of higher intensity and engagement such as early college high schools to those more limited in scope—early immersion into the college going process and environment, in any capacity, can equip young learners with the tools needed to navigate the complexities of higher education, regardless of pressures faced in our current political and economic climate.



Notes

- ¹ The 22 ISDs from which student-level data were used are as follows: Carrollton-Farmers Branch, Cedar Hill, Cooper, Coppell, Dallas, DeSoto, Duncanville, Ferris, Forney, Garland, Grand Prairie, Highland Park, Irving, Lancaster, Lewisville, Mesquite, Midlothian, Northwest, Red Oak, Richardson, Rockwall, and Sunnyvale.
- ² Housed at the University of Texas at Dallas, the Texas ERC holds longitudinal student- and person-level records from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).
- ³ Propensity score analysis with inverse probability weighting (IPW) was used to mitigate selection bias by controlling for observable baseline characteristics when measuring the relationship between dual credit participation and educational outcomes and establish comparability between the treatment and comparison groups. Binomial and multinomial regression models were employed to estimate enrollment, transfer, and attainment outcomes, controlling for a comprehensive set of demographic, educational, and environmental characteristics.
- ⁴ Those students who enrolled in a two-year institution within two years following high school graduation, had the option to vertically transfer (to a four-year), and did transfer within four years after the semester in which they began at the two-year (beginning from fall 2013).
- ⁵ Standardized assessment performance was classified by three levels: Commended (passed both exams/high achievement or commended in at least one exam); Passing (passed both exams without commended designation); Failing (failed at least one exam).
- ⁶ All results were statistically significant at the 1% or 5% significance levels.

For further methodological details, contact the Research Institute, ResearchInstitute@DallasCollege.edu.



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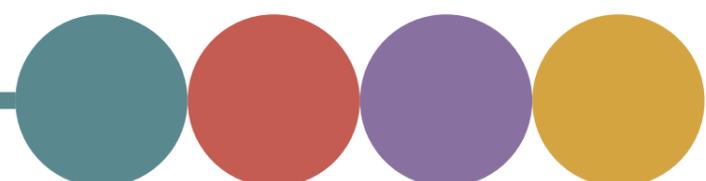
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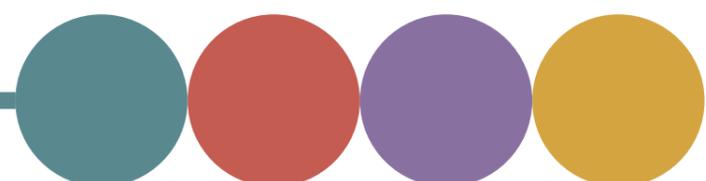
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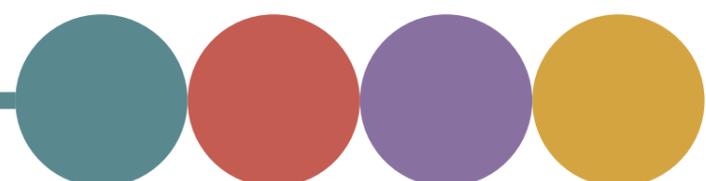
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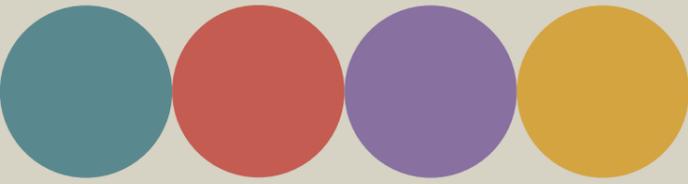
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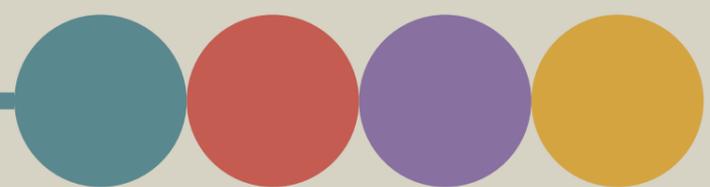
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