Dual Enrollment for Students from Special Populations:

Improving College Transitions for English Learners, Students with Disabilities, Foster Youth, and Young People Experiencing Homelessness

AT A GLANCE

Interest in dual enrollment is rising in California and nationwide, but students from special populations— including English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, and young people experiencing homelessness—are too often left on the sidelines. This report explores promising practices and recommendations for designing dual enrollment with the assets and needs of these students at the center.

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About JFF

JFF is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. For more than 35 years, JFF has led the way in designing innovative and scalable solutions that create access to economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

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Introduction

In California and across the nation, education leaders share a hunger for innovations that will help to close longstanding equity gaps and improve the outcomes of historically underserved groups. A commitment to equity undergirds the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office *Vision for Success*, a multi-year plan launched in 2017 to dramatically improve student achievement and reduce gaps through faster improvements among traditionally underrepresented student subgroups. In the K-12 system, the Local Control Funding Formula provides districts and charter schools with additional funds based on their enrollment of students from "high-need" groups, and requires them to detail how they are increasing or improving services for these students. Schools and colleges alike face pressure to close achievement gaps and raise success rates across all groups of students.

Given this context, it is not surprising that interest in dual enrollment appears to be at an all-time high—even as overall college enrollment has fallen during the COVID-19 pandemic.[1] Dual enrollment is a research-proven strategy for raising high school graduation and college enrollment and completion rates.[2] Its benefits extend to low-income students, students of color, and those with lower GPAs.[3] Yet little is known about how to promote access and success in dual enrollment for students from special populations—including English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, and young people experiencing homelessness. These groups have the lowest rates of dual enrollment participation of all groups examined in California, and they are lagging further behind as course-taking increases for the general population.

About the Term 'Special Populations'

Throughout this report, JFF uses the term "special populations" to refer to students from four unique groups:

1. **English learners,**
2. **Students with disabilities,**
3. **Foster youth,** and
4. **Young people experiencing homelessness.**

Federal and state laws target funding, support, and accountability provisions for each of these groups, along with racial-ethnic subgroups and low-income students. California's Local Control Funding Formula, for instance, provides extra funds for districts based on their enrollment of English learners, foster youth, and low-income students. Yet information about best practices for supporting students from these groups in the transition from high school to college remains scarce.

We acknowledge that the term "special populations" does not adequately describe the tremendous diversity or intersectionality within and across the groups of students included in this analysis, and we do not intend to falsely equate their experiences. It is our hope that by identifying distinct population-specific findings as well as cross-cutting themes and systemic challenges, we can underscore the need for differentiated solution sets that reach all learners.

Skipping over students from special populations in efforts focused on expanding dual enrollment represents a critical missed opportunity for closing equity gaps in college going and success. With support from the Stuart Foundation, JFF has been exploring what it takes to design dual enrollment with a focus on English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, and young people experiencing homelessness. Together, these students comprise

nearly one-third of California's K-12 student population and are among its least well served *(see "Gaps in College Readiness for Special Populations")*.[4] Their experiences cannot be ignored as system leaders strive to raise college completion rates, reverse longstanding educational inequities, and build the talent pipeline that will fuel the state's economic recovery.

Students from special populations are the least well served by the education system, according to many measures. Among the class of 2019, for example, only 64 percent of foster youth graduated from high school on time and only 10.8 percent of graduates with disabilities met the state's criteria for college and career readiness *(see "Gaps in College Readiness for Special Populations")*.

Research-based interventions are needed to overhaul the current one-size-fits-all approach to college and career preparation to ensure that all students can meet their full potential. Dual enrollment can serve as a bridge between education systems, enabling high schools and colleges to design a connected set of supports for special populations during the critical transition years. It also allows young people to prove to themselves and others that they are, in fact, "college material," and to embark on pathways to degrees and careers that are often perceived as out of reach for students that have experienced learning differences, language barriers, or the trauma of homelessness or foster care. In the words of one foster youth program administrator that we interviewed, "They need this opportunity to build the confidence that they can do it—that they belong in college."[5]

This report surfaces design considerations, promising practices, and policy considerations for bringing the benefits of dual enrollment to special populations. To this end, we've organized our research around three key questions:

Among the class of 2019:

64%
of foster youth graduated from high school on time

10.8%
of graduates with disabilities met the state's criteria for college and career readiness

1 To what extent are English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, and young people experiencing homelessness participating in dual enrollment in California?

2 What are the key factors that affect college transitions and success, including access to and participation in dual enrollment, for students from these special populations?

3 How can California design and scale dual enrollment programs with the needs of students from special populations at the forefront?

Research Methods

JFF reviewed relevant research and policies shaping K-12 and postsecondary education for special populations. We then interviewed representatives of California high schools, districts, and community colleges known for their high dual enrollment rates or other promising approaches to supporting college transitions for these groups. Finally, JFF consulted with researchers, advocates, and state agency staff to discuss the implications of our findings and to inform recommendations.

This report's first section focuses on dual enrollment participation rates for various student groups in California. Next, we explore common barriers to participation shared by the special population groups and promising practices that can help members of all the groups succeed in dual enrollment. This is followed by detailed, population-specific sections that dive deeper into our findings and recommendations for:

- English learners
- Students with disabilities
- Foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness.

Designing Dual Enrollment to Reach English Learners

Across the four special population groups studied, JFF's research uncovered the greatest number of existing examples and strongest appetite for scaling dual enrollment focused on English learners. Our related issue brief, *Designing Dual Enrollment to Reach English Learners: Boosting College Success for California Students*, provides a deeper dive into bright spots and recommendations specific to English learners in dual enrollment.[6]

The conclusion contains reflections and recommendations for local partnerships, state systems, and future research.

Looking at the range of factors impacting dual enrollment for students from special populations, we see a clear common thread that runs through the four groups included in our analysis: all are capable of college and career success, if they receive appropriate supports. But too often they lack opportunities to achieve their potential. We urge the field to identify, learn from, and scale promising practices designed with the needs of students from special populations at the center, rather than as an afterthought.

Gaps in College Readiness for Special Populations

Students from special populations face significant gaps in college and career preparation compared with state and national averages. The table below provides a snapshot of outcomes for the high school class of 2019, including four-year graduation rates and the percentages of students achieving the "prepared" designation for the college/career indicator on the California School Dashboard. The dashboard is an online tool showing to what extent individual schools and districts are meeting student needs.

FIGURE 1

California High School Graduation Rates and College/Career Readiness, 2019

Subgroup	Cohort Size	Graduation Rate	College/Career Ready
English Learners	73,734	72.7%	16.8%
Students with Disabilities	60,633	70.7%	10.8%
Young People Experiencing Homelessness	30,938	77.8%	25.9%
Foster Youth	6,534	64.2%	13.3%
All Students	**509,219**	**85.9%**	**44.1%**

Source: California School Dashboard

Uneven Dual Enrollment Participation Rates in California

California high schools and community colleges have incentives and obligations to figure out how to expand dual enrollment for students from special populations. Assembly Bill 288—the College and Career Access Pathways Act—explicitly states that dual enrollment should be used to benefit "underachieving students" and "those from groups underrepresented in postsecondary education." The law seeks to encourage the development of seamless pathways from high school to community college, improve high school graduation rates, and prepare students for postsecondary degrees and credentials.[7] The legislation developed a framework for secondary-postsecondary partnership agreements and made it easier to deliver college courses on high school campuses. However, it stopped short of providing equity goals or guidelines for ensuring that special populations are able to access dual enrollment courses, and neither the California Community Colleges' Chancellor's Office nor the California Department of Education has provided guidance on how to best serve students from special populations in dual enrollment.

> ### DEFINITION
> ## Dual Enrollment
>
> The term "dual enrollment" refers to high school students taking college courses for transcripted college credit. In some cases, these courses simultaneously confer credits that meet high school graduation requirements.

Since the bill's passage, there has been a substantial rise in dual enrollment course-taking in the state. A University of California-Davis, study found that 18.2 percent of 2019 California high school graduates took at least one community college course during high school—up from 11.3 percent for the class of 2016.[8]

While participation has increased for all groups, equity gaps have persisted. For the class of 2019, dual enrollment participation rates for Asian and white graduates were 26.3 percent and 21.5 percent, respectively,

compared to approximately 16 percent for Latinx and Black graduates as well as low-income students.

Research released in December 2020 from the University of California-Davis provides the first statewide analysis comparing dual enrollment participation rates for English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, and young people experiencing homelessness versus the general population *(see Figure 2)*.

Their analysis shows that dual enrollment participation for all of these groups lags behind state averages.[9] Over the three-year study period, the opportunity gap has widened for students with disabilities and English learners, who have consistently had the lowest participation rates of all groups. From 2016 to 2019, dual enrollment participation increased by only about 3 percentage points for each of these two populations, compared to an increase of 7 percentage points for all students.

Unfortunately, less is known about the *outcomes* of students from special populations in dual enrollment. California lacks a statewide longitudinal educational database, complicating efforts to track the outcomes of students across the K-12 and postsecondary education systems. To date, there have been no large-scale studies of the outcomes of former dual enrollment participants, in California or other states, that have disaggregated data for special population groups.

Among 2019 California high school graduates:

18.2%
took at least one community college course during high school

Dual enrollment participation rates for the class of 2019:

26.3%
for Asian graduates

21.5%
for white graduates

16%
for Latinx and Black graduates as well as low-income students

FIGURE 2

Comparative Dual Enrollment Participation Rates for California High School Graduates, 2016-2019
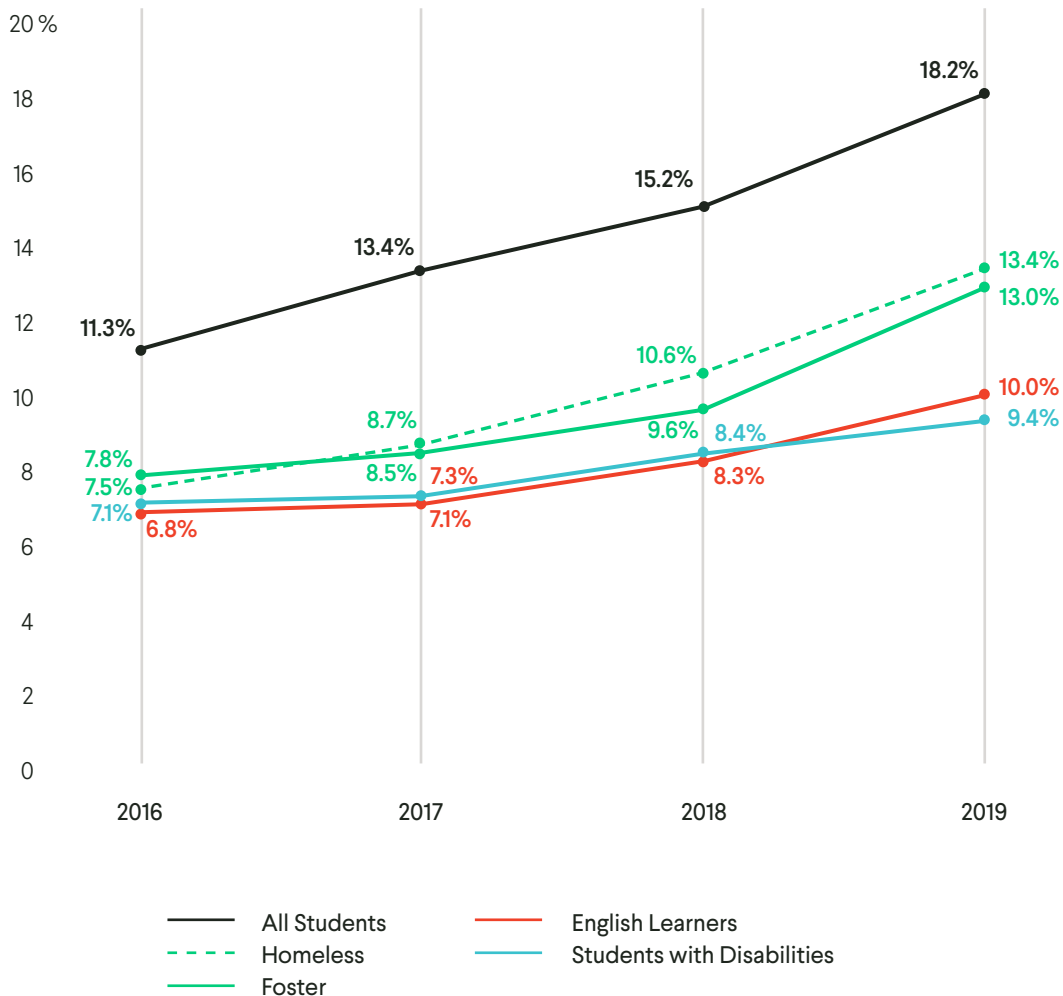
Sources: *A Rising Tide: Dual Enrollment is Growing Among California High School Students,* Wheelhouse: The Center for Community College Leadership and Research, UC Davis, 2020; California Education Lab, School of Education, UC Davis, 2020.

Common Barriers and Promising Practices for Special Populations

After reviewing relevant literature and consulting with researchers, JFF interviewed leaders of sites recommended for their innovative approaches to college transitions for at least one of the four special population groups, as well as sites that had relatively high dual enrollment participation rates for these groups. The interviews explored common barriers and promising practices for supporting special populations during the high school-to-college transition, including specific findings related to dual enrollment when available. Many themes that emerged during interviews are applicable across several or all of the groups.

The sections that follow seek to answer this question:

What are the key factors that influence postsecondary transition experiences—including access to and participation in dual enrollment—for students from these special populations?

Systemic Barriers Impacting Students from Special Populations

Chronic underfunding of counseling and other student services. Numerous studies demonstrate the critical impact that counselors in K-12 schools can have on students' educational outcomes, including subsequent enrollment in postsecondary education—and their role can be especially influential for students with special needs and other barriers to learning.[10] Access to counselors is uneven, however, and in many cases these staff are tasked with addressing school discipline issues and emergency mental health needs, limiting their capacity to support college transitions. California has historically

had one of the highest student-counselor ratios in the United States, and while caseloads have fallen in recent years due to district investments under the Local Control Funding Formula, the state still ranked 47th in the nation in terms of counselor caseloads in 2018-19.[11] Social workers are far rarer in California schools, with a ratio of over 7,300 students per social worker.[12]

In the California Community Colleges, student service professionals' capacity is similarly stretched. A structural limitation on hiring advisors and support staff is the so-called "50-percent law," which requires colleges to spend at least half of their unrestricted funding on instructor compensation. As an unintended consequence, colleges are constrained in their ability to add counselors and other positions that create the conditions necessary for all students to succeed. Categorical funding streams, such as Extended Opportunity Programs and Services, provide colleges with additional funding for support services and financial aid for low-income and first-generation students, but these programs are also limited in their capacity.

Culture of low expectations and lack of support from important gatekeepers.
The opportunities available to students from special populations hinge on whether their schools embrace a philosophy that all students can succeed in rigorous courses and get a head start on earning postsecondary credentials. Unfortunately, interviewees noted that the deficit mindsets of school leaders, teachers, counselors, and support staff often lead to students from special populations being tracked into lower-level courses and passed over for dual enrollment and other college-transition programs. This dynamic is perhaps most pronounced for students with disabilities; as one interviewee noted, "A culture of low expectations permeates everything in their K-12 experience."[13] Students and their families may be unaware that college is even an option if they never receive outreach, college counseling, or financial aid advising. For students who have struggled academically or experienced high rates of absenteeism—which is common for foster youth and students experiencing homelessness—support programs often focus exclusively on keeping students in school and supporting them to earn a high school diploma. Dual enrollment may be seen as unnecessary or out of reach, even though it can improve student engagement and performance.

Uneven access to information and opportunities. Until recently, most dual enrollment students in California accessed college courses on their own, without the support of a program. This required a high level of college knowledge and social capital. Students from special populations are likely to be concentrated in under-invested schools that lack robust postsecondary partnerships and where staff may not have the capacity to oversee the complex logistics of dual enrollment. Registering for classes through the California Community Colleges' online system can be time consuming and confusing. The digital divide, which looms even larger during the pandemic, limits access to online college courses for many low-income and rural students.

Disconnect between the policy approaches and support systems for special populations in K-12 and postsecondary education. For each population we examined, there are substantial differences in the laws, policies, funding streams, and state and local programs offering support in K-12 settings versus in higher education. These differences are particularly pronounced for English learners and students with disabilities. Federal laws entitle both groups in grades K-12 to a set of assessments, monitoring, and support, and associated federal and state funding;

these are not required of postsecondary education. Dual enrollment could help build college navigation skills and students' familiarity with the supports available in community colleges, as long as they are guided by staff who understand the K-12 and postsecondary systems.

Insufficient guidance and support to mitigate the risks associated with dual enrollment. Dual enrollment offers great opportunities, but it comes with risks, too. If a struggling student drops a course after the college's deadline, a "W"—indicating withdrawal—or a letter grade based on their performance will be recorded on their college transcript. Both consequences have implications for academic standing, permission to retake a course, and financial aid eligibility. Excessive Ws can be cause for placing students on progress probation before they even graduate from high school. As a result, some high school staff may be wary of recommending dual enrollment for special populations. However, with careful monitoring using early alert systems and tailored guidance, these situations can be avoided.

Promising Practices:
Dual Enrollment for Special Populations

In spite of the systemic barriers discussed above, JFF found examples of sites that are proactively expanding dual enrollment participation by students from special populations. Their promising practices include:

Conducting intentional outreach. Top districts provide proactive—and, in many cases, multilingual—outreach to students and parents about dual enrollment opportunities in a variety of ways. In-class presentations, parent nights, fliers, and emails can spread awareness and educate the community on a large scale. These efforts demystify dual enrollment and create excitement about the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school.

Establishing expectations of college course-taking for all students. Some high-performing schools and districts have set an expectation that all students will complete at least one or two dual enrollment courses before high school graduation, often as part of a career-themed pathway. In one small district, the superintendent established a goal of getting all students on a career-themed pathway in ninth grade, culminating in a postsecondary degree and/or an employer-valued certification. Setting this standard sends a message that the job of a high school is to launch all students into postsecondary success.

Integrating dual enrollment into the school day. Many interviewees expressed a preference for offering dual enrollment courses during the regular school day at the high school, rather than on the college campus. This model, which AB 288 enabled for sites with College and Career Access Pathways partnership agreements, promotes equity by eliminating transportation barriers and after-school conflicts, particularly for students with jobs and family responsibilities. It also makes it easier to embed support from high school teachers trained in meeting the needs of students from

special populations. Some interviewees noted, however, that courses held on a college campus help build a college-going identity and provide access to college-student role models.

Enlisting the support of counselors in dual enrollment implementation. Despite the severe capacity challenges noted above, many interviewees noted that well-informed counselors are key to the success of dual enrollment programs. Counselors help guide students through the complexities of registration and course selection and collaborate with their college counterparts to address challenges. The most effective counselors are familiar with the unique circumstances and needs of special populations and strive to connect students with available resources provided in the K-12 system, at the college level, and through community partner organizations.

While this section explored several cross-cutting themes that emerged from our research across student groups, there are also important differences between special population groups that require uniquely tailored strategies. In the following sections, we take a deeper look at the specific contextual factors, prior research findings, and implications of dual enrollment for each group, and offer local- and state-level recommendations specific to each group. At the conclusion of the publication, we discuss shared recommendations for practice, policy, and research that emerged from our analysis.

Dual Enrollment for English Learners

During the 2019-20 school year, more than 41 percent of California's K-12 students spoke a language other than English at home. Approximately 19 percent—more than 1.1 million students—were classified as English learners, based on their responses to a home language survey followed by an assessment of listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiency in English. These multilingual students have tremendous potential, but they are often underserved in K-12 and postsecondary education.[14] Just 16.8 percent of English learner graduates in the class of 2019 earned the "prepared" designation for the college/career indicator on the California School Dashboard *(see Figure 1)*, and only 10 percent participated in dual enrollment while in high school *(see Figure 2)*.[15] These statistics signal significant missed opportunities for the students and the state, as more than 80 percent of English learner high school graduates who pursue postsecondary education enroll in a California Community College.[16]

At the K-12 level, the California English Learner Roadmap policy (2017) calls for "alignment and articulation within and across systems" that support postsecondary success.[17] However, there are few examples of high school-college partnerships that focus on academic, linguistic, or social-emotional support for English learners.

>**41%**
of California's K-12 students spoke a language other than English at home during the 2019–20 school year

16.8%
of English learner graduates in the class of 2019 earned the "prepared" designation for the college/career indicator on the California School Dashboard

10%
of English learner graduates in the class of 2019 participated in dual enrollment while in high school

Delayed Access to College-Level Instruction

When exploring the reasons for limited dual enrollment participation and low college-going and completion rates, interviews revealed several interrelated trends. Together, these trends, which are described below, delay student access to the courses needed to prepare for and graduate from college.

Disconnected approaches to English learners across secondary-postsecondary divide

K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions differ widely in their approach to English learners, reflecting the vastly different policy contexts governing each system. Under federal civil rights law, K-12 schools must ensure that English learners can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs. School districts must identify and assess potential English learners, provide assistance to help students become proficient in English, monitor their progress, and reclassify students as fluent-English-proficient when they have met redesignation requirements.

In contrast, at the college level, English learners are not even identified as a group. California Community Colleges have historically lacked a consistent approach to assessment and course placement for students with home languages other than English. In some cases, English learners in college bypass English as a second language (ESL) courses completely, while in other cases, students who were classified as fluent-English-proficient in high school are pushed back into ESL classes in college.[18]

Developmental education reform in California may soon usher in a more standardized approach to English learner placement. Following the passage of Assembly Bill 705 (2017), California Community Colleges must now accelerate progress and place incoming students into transfer-level courses as quickly as possible instead of requiring remedial math, English, and ESL. One specific provision is that English learners who attended four years of high

school in the United States must be allowed to enroll immediately in transfer-level coursework, bypassing ESL requirements.[19]

Implications for dual enrollment

Because of the considerable differences in how English learners are assessed and served in high school versus postsecondary education, it is particularly difficult to identify or track their dual enrollment outcomes. Colleges typically have little to no information from high schools about students' English proficiency. And when colleges do have information, they have no systematic way to use that information to advise on course selection or embedded supports. By default, the responsibility typically falls on high schools to judge their students' readiness for dual enrollment and guide their course selection. In some cases, high schools end up imposing their own requirements— including language proficiency levels and grade point averages— limiting dual enrollment to only the highest-performing English learners.

English language proficiency is treated as a prerequisite for mastering rigorous content

In California and nationwide, English learners have often lacked access to grade-level curriculum and college-preparatory courses while in high school. Traditionally, many school systems have treated language learning and content acquisition as separate and sequential endeavors: students only proceed to rigorous academic courses after achieving a high level of English proficiency. While research shows that students benefit from an integrated approach that builds language learning into all academic subjects, many high schools still require English learners to take multi-period, standalone English language development (ELD) and "support" courses, leaving limited time for enrichment or electives.[20]

Similarly, at the community college level, ESL programs have traditionally consisted of lengthy sequences of courses that can take semesters or years to complete before students can access gatekeeper courses required for transfer to a four-year university. Just as in high school, spending too much time studying language in isolation stops many English learners from accessing high-level academic content. These delays have significant financial and opportunity costs.

Implications for dual enrollment

Interviewees reported that English learners may be unable to take advantage of dual enrollment because their high school schedules are packed with required language-support classes, leaving no room for courses aligned with their long-term career goals. Even when they have the opportunity to participate, these students may find themselves without a strong foundation of college-preparatory courses.

Educators lack training to support English learners

As mentioned above, research favors an integrated approach to English language development in grades K-12; this builds academic language skills and subject-specific vocabulary in all classes, not just in designated ELD courses. To make this approach work, however, all educators must be trained to support academic language development and embrace their role as teachers of English learners.[21] While credentialed teachers in California are required to have some pre-service training focused on teaching English learners within their subject areas, they are often unprepared to adapt their teaching to different levels of language proficiency. Without ongoing professional development to help them differentiate instruction for English learners, teachers may be reluctant to include these students in college- and career-preparatory courses, resulting, in some cases, in further tracking and educational segregation. At the community

college level, there is a similar lack of training in English language development outside of ESL departments.

Implications for dual enrollment

In many cases, dual enrollment instructors—whether they are college faculty or high school teachers with the credentials to teach college courses—are unprepared to support the academic language development of English learners. Without a toolbox of evidence-based instructional strategies for reinforcing literacy and oral language development, instructors may be unable to unlock their students' potential.

Promising Practices:
Dual Enrollment for English Learners

Despite the common barriers to dual enrollment for English learners, JFF found several examples of schools and colleges that are focused on increasing the number of English learners in dual enrollment. Strategies they employ include:

Promoting career and technical education for English learners through pathways-based dual enrollment courses. Several interviewees spoke to the powerful impact of dual enrollment experiences that allow students at all levels of English proficiency to pursue career interests and envision themselves as college students. In one district, long-term English learners are encouraged to participate in cybersecurity and engineering pathways leading to college degrees. Another district implemented a college welding certificate program to increase engagement and improve the employment prospects of late-arriving newcomers who often need to work immediately after high school.

Providing opportunities for English learners to dually enroll in advanced college language courses in their primary languages. Some districts encourage current and former English learners to take college courses in their primary language—such as advanced Spanish grammar and composition—as part of pathways to degrees in fields including agricultural mechanics and plant science. These rigorous language courses help create bilingual, biliterate high school graduates and also confer humanities credits that transfer to four-year universities.

Adding extra support to bolster English learner success. Some schools provide study sessions and tutoring for English learners participating in dual enrollment through designated class periods, after-school programs, or push-in support. Using educators with training and expertise in supporting English language acquisition is key. At Oakland International High School, English learners taking dual enrollment classes have an extra class period to complete college assignments and receive support from trained tutors and high school teachers.

Bringing college ESL courses into high schools—and making these courses count for both high school and college credit. Schools can ease students' scheduling constraints and provide opportunities to earn postsecondary credit by introducing college ESL courses into the high school ELD curriculum. Mountain Empire High School and Cuyamaca College have aligned their approach to language learning, allowing students to complete course sequences that include transferrable college credit and satisfy the requirements for admission to California's public four-year universities *(see "Building a Shared Language Curriculum")*.

Building a Shared Language Curriculum at Mountain Empire High School and Cuyamaca College

Mountain Empire High School, located in rural eastern San Diego county near the Mexico border, serves many Spanish-speaking English learners. Nearly all of the school's English learners earn college credit by graduation. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, Mountain Empire adopted Cuyamaca College's three levels of ESL courses as its ELD sequence, provided through dual enrollment. The curriculum focuses on discussing and writing about difficult English texts, a best practice for language acquisition. Mountain Empire teachers deliver these courses as college adjuncts with training from Cuyamaca's ESL department. Students can earn up to 15 college credits through the three courses, with the final course conferring credit that is transferrable to four-year universities. To date, participants in the program have earned a combined 468 college credits, with participation increasing each year. Graduates now arrive at Cuyamaca College with credits in hand, better prepared academically and confident in their identities as college students. In the words of one 10th-grader, "Students are now learning at a higher level."

Recommendations:
Dual Enrollment for English Learners

JFF's stakeholder interviews yielded a variety of recommendations for designing and scaling dual enrollment for English learners. Those that are specific to supporting English learners are discussed here, while recommendations that are applicable across special population groups are covered in the concluding section of this report.

High School-College Partnerships

- **Use dual enrollment to align required high school and college courses for English learners and launch students on transfer pathways.** By building community college ESL pathways into the curriculum for high school English learners, local partnerships can accelerate students' progress toward

and successful completion of freshman English composition—a pivotal milestone toward an associate's degree and a key transfer requirement.

- **Provide professional development to enable all educators to support English learners' language development and content learning from grades 9-14.** High-quality dual enrollment for English learners should include evidence-based approaches for reinforcing literacy and oral language skills. High schools and college partners can incorporate EL-focused training and resources into professional development and support for instructors.

- **Convene a task force of high-level stakeholders focused on alignment between secondary and postsecondary education for English learners.** The California Department of Education's English Learner Roadmap includes a core principle of "alignment and articulation within and across systems," addressing the disconnected approaches to English learner education in high school and college. Achieving this will require collaboration with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. With the implementation of AB 705, which seeks to maximize the probability that students complete transfer-level courses, the time is ripe for revisiting the handoff between grades 9-12, and grades 13-14. Dual enrollment should be part of a more coherent and efficient strategy to build academic language proficiency, leading to college and career success.

For a more detailed discussion of JFF's findings and recommendations related to English learners, see our companion issue brief, Designing Dual Enrollment to Reach English Learners: Boosting College Success for California Students (December 2020).

Dual Enrollment for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities represent a large and growing number of California students. Nearly 800,000 students participated in special education in grades K-12 in 2018-19, representing approximately 13 percent of total enrollment.[22] The majority of these students have learning disabilities or speech and language impairments. However, the number of students with autism spectrum disorder has grown most rapidly, nearly doubling in the past two decades.[23]

70.7%
of eligible students with disabilities graduated from high school in the class of 2019.

As *Figure 1* shows, only 70.7 percent of eligible students with disabilities graduated from high school in the class of 2019.[24] Graduates from this group were the least likely to have participated in dual enrollment, at 9.4 percent *(see Figure 2)*.[25] Approximately half of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education in the first year after high school graduation.[26]

Limited Support for College Transitions

JFF's literature review and interviews exploring the factors that affect dual enrollment and college-going for students with disabilities revealed recurring challenges related to the postsecondary transition process.

Bright line between disability laws and policies in K-12 versus postsecondary education

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees students with disabilities the right to a "free and

appropriate public education" until a student graduates from high school or turns 21. Students in grades K-12 who have been evaluated and diagnosed with an educational disability receive special education services based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP, which schools are required to develop in consultation with parents or guardians and with the student starting at age 14, specifies the services and supports required for the student to complete the general curriculum in the "least restrictive" environment.

Some students in grades K-12 are served by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, instead of IDEA. Students with a "504 Plan" generally do not require specialized instruction, but they may require accessibility services such as specific seating arrangements or extended time for test taking. Compared to IEPs, there are fewer federal and state laws governing how 504 Plans are developed and updated.

Colleges are not bound by IDEA, but they are covered by Section 504 as well as Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—a civil rights law prohibiting discrimination based on disability status. Unlike K-12 schools, colleges are not required to evaluate or diagnose students. Rather, the onus is on students to self-identify as individuals with disabilities, meet with the institution's office of disability services, and provide documentation of their diagnoses.[27] Students can receive "reasonable accommodations" to support college success, but academic standards cannot be modified and colleges may deny accommodations that would result in a fundamental change to those standards.[28] Unlike IDEA in grades K-12, the ADA does not provide federal funding to support special education services for students with disabilities.

Given these significant differences, the transition to college can be especially jarring for students with disabilities, and many never learn about resources that could support their postsecondary success. College staff also report that many students avoid accessing colleges' offices of disability services due to previous stigmatization based on their disabilities.

Implications for dual enrollment

Dual enrollment instructors frequently report uncertainty about how to accommodate high school students with disabilities in college classes, as well as fear of running afoul of state or federal disability rights laws.

Like other California Community College students, dual enrollment students with disabilities must self-identify with their college's office of Disabled Student Programs and Services to be eligible for accommodations in college courses. This can be a daunting process and requires strong self-advocacy skills.

Without accommodations, students with disabilities lack critical tools for success in dual enrollment courses, and participation may put their grades and future financial aid eligibility at risk. According to one dual enrollment administrator interviewed, without adequate information, students and families "often get off on the wrong foot" with college and are left with the impression that colleges want to "take away" needed services.

Another barrier to dual enrollment can be lack of clarity about the funding streams that can be used to support students with disabilities when they are taking college courses in high school. Widespread confusion on this topic led the U.S. Department of Education to issue a 2019 guidance document clarifying that both IDEA funds and Vocational Rehabilitation funds can be used to support students in dual enrollment programs provided certain conditions are met, but there remains a need for guidance on this topic for California practitioners.[29]

Insufficient Transition Planning

Because IDEA covers students until high school graduation or age 21, the law requires IEPs to address postsecondary transitions for students ages 16 and older. IEPs are supposed to include measurable postsecondary goals and outline required transition services needed to help the student reach those goals.[30] Traditionally, transition programming has focused on eventual employment. But many districts and counties are expanding transition services to include college awareness and preparation, in addition to pre-employment training and work-based learning.

Interviewees reported that transition planning is still often compliance-driven, rife with low expectations, and ineffective at setting students up for postsecondary success. Students are not always included in decision-making and some lack information about their own diagnoses, leaving them unprepared to make specific requests to meet their needs. Disability rights advocates call for improvements, including focusing on each individual's life aspirations and interests, and ensuring that these are reflected in their transition goals. Parent or guardian involvement in the IEP process is critical but not enough. Parents and guardians must also be made aware of the services, supports, and opportunities available for students with disabilities; their child's rights under the law; how to effectively advocate for their child; and what specific services or programs would benefit their child.

For students who have 504 Plans but do not have IEPs, there are no legal requirements for transition planning. These students and their families also need assistance with goal-setting, understanding college degree and certificate pathways, and learning about their options and rights in postsecondary education.

Implications for dual enrollment

Dual enrollment represents a missed opportunity for many students with disabilities. It is rarely discussed in IEP meetings, as transition plans are often compliance-driven, employment-focused, and, in some cases, deficit-based. IEP planning teams may be unaware of local dual enrollment offerings and unfamiliar with the resources available at partner colleges for students with disabilities. Students with 504 Plans may also be overlooked for dual enrollment and unaware that it can be an option for them.

Lack of Qualified, Experienced Instructors

At the K-12 level, there is an acute national shortage of special education teachers, due in part to high attrition rates. In California, districts deal with shortages by hiring long-term substitutes, using teachers with substandard credentials and permits, increasing class sizes, and reducing course offerings.[31] In special and general education settings, teachers report feeling underprepared to address the learning needs of students with disabilities.[32] Inadequate training and professional development, in turn, contribute to the cycle of rapid teacher turnover.[33]

At the postsecondary level, instructors similarly lack the awareness, expertise, and tools to implement instructional practices that support students with disabilities. [34] In many cases, they also need to learn how to provide accommodations while maintaining course rigor and standards.

Implications for dual enrollment

Insufficient educator training can exacerbate barriers to including students with disabilities in dual enrollment. At the high school level, instruction and assessment often take a one-size-fits-all approach, and teachers and counselors may underestimate these students' potential for postsecondary education success. As a result, students with disabilities often end up tracked into less rigorous courses and are less likely to be encouraged to take college courses. Even when they do participate in dual enrollment, they often encounter college instructors who are unfamiliar with inclusive instructional practices that support students with a variety of learning styles and needs.

Promising Practices:
Dual Enrollment for Students with Disabilities

JFF's interviews revealed very few examples of dual enrollment programs in California focused on recruiting or serving students with disabilities. This is likely due, in part, to the systemic barriers described above that impede access to dual enrollment and perpetuate limited options and poor outcomes for students with disabilities after high school. This section summarizes promising practices gathered from California and nationwide that can potentially make dual enrollment accessible to students with disabilities and improve their college transitions more broadly.

Establishing a personalized connection with the colleges' offices of Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS).
Interviewees emphasized that high school students with disabilities and their families need intensive support from trained counselors who can explain the differences between disability services in high school and college, review the students' IEPs, and determine accommodations to boost their success in dual enrollment courses. California's Reedley College created a counselor position within

the DSPS Department to focus on dual enrollment students from the college's numerous feeder high schools (see "Counseling for Dual Enrollment Students with Disabilities at Reedley College").

Integrating wraparound supports into credit-bearing dual enrollment courses and engaging community partner organizations. On the East Coast, the nonprofit organization College Steps uses peer mentors and multidisciplinary teams to support students with disabilities—many of whom are on the autism spectrum—on 12 college campuses. High school students in the program take 3 to 12 credits per semester through dual enrollment, in subjects that include college success skills as well as introductory courses for a wide variety of majors. Student supports are based on their Individualized College Plan, which complements the IEP. The plan addresses academic enrichment, social involvement, pre-employment training, and independent living. College Steps greatly augments colleges' limited staff capacity and helps students learn college navigation and self-advocacy skills at the same time that they are earning credit through dual enrollment.

Providing professional development for dual enrollment instructors based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines. UDL is an evidence-based framework for instruction that meets the needs of all learners by providing multiple means of engaging students, representing content, and allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge.[35] UDL aims to adapt teaching to student needs and remove barriers that many learners, including those with disabilities, face with one-size-fits-all curricula. The national nonprofit CAST, which has led the development and scaling of UDL, has developed numerous career education programs and youth apprenticeships rooted in UDL guidelines. The organization is launching dual enrollment pilot programs for students with disabilities in STEM fields. A core program component will be UDL-based professional development for dual enrollment instructors to help them maximize the potential of students with disabilities.

Counseling for Dual Enrollment Students with Disabilities at Reedley College

In recognition of the challenges and inequities dual enrollment students experience when they lack access to appropriate college resources and accommodations, Reedley College created a unique, tenure-track position in its Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) Department for a counselor focused on dual enrollment. Reedley can now reach out to feeder high schools and work with counselors to identify students on dual enrollment rosters with IEPs or other disability support plans. The DSPS counselor meets one on one with students to identify and arrange the accommodations they need in their college courses—whether the courses are conducted on the high school or college campus. The college is building awareness among its partner high schools about the benefits of connecting with DSPS, and hopes to engage in more training for high school staff and administrators about the unique considerations for students with disabilities in dual enrollment.

Recommendations:
Dual Enrollment for Students with Disabilities

High School-College Partnerships

- **Incorporate dual enrollment into transition plans that align with colleges' degree and certificate pathways and lead to the achievement of students' long-term goals.** Dual enrollment is an underutilized tool in the transition planning process for students with disabilities. High school IEP teams should strategically consult with colleges' offices of disability services to discuss degree and certificate pathways, help students choose courses, and preview available accommodations. Transition planning should empower students and parents by building their awareness of college opportunities. Cross-system collaboration that includes

K-12 schools, colleges, workforce systems, and other service providers is essential to effective transition planning.

- **Provide training for high school and college counselors and instructors to make them aware of available supports for students with disabilities at each level.** All educators interacting with students with disabilities in dual enrollment need to understand the ecosystem of support offered at each level as well as the legal context shaping each system's offerings and approaches. Joint professional development and opportunities for staff collaboration will equip counselors and instructors to advocate for students with disabilities and their families as they navigate dual enrollment as well as the college admissions and enrollment processes.

- **Embed support to help students develop college success skills and foster a sense of belonging.** Students with disabilities, like all students, need social and emotional support to thrive in college. Dual enrollment can gradually introduce students to higher education and help them develop college navigation and self-advocacy skills while mastering college-level content. Ideally, dual enrollment programs can also introduce students to a wide range of campus resources and community organizations.

State Systems and Policy Advocacy

- **Incorporate dual enrollment into a statewide IEP template.** California's 2020-2021 Budget Act included funding to convene a workgroup of special education experts to create a statewide IEP template. The template will guide a more intentional process of identifying courses, extracurricular opportunities, and support services that map to students' long-term goals beyond K-12 education. This template should explicitly mention dual enrollment as one of the strategies that can be used to bridge K-12 education and postsecondary success. This will prompt IEP teams to consider dual enrollment as a viable

option for students with disabilities, and work with school administrators and college partners to expand this group's participation.

- **Develop statewide guidance on the practical and legal considerations for serving students with disabilities in dual enrollment programs.** Schools and colleges need guidance that, in clear language:

  ‣ Identifies the services students with disabilities in dual enrollment programs are entitled to under disability law and policy;

  ‣ Distinguishes between K-12 and postsecondary services and what they do and do not provide, mitigating, as much as possible, a lapse in services; and

  ‣ Identifies state and federal sources of funding that can be used to support students with disabilities in dual enrollment programs, and provides information for administrators on how to access available funding.[36]

Accompanying guidance documents should be made available for students, parents, and caregivers.

Dual Enrollment for Foster Youth and Young People Experiencing Homelessness

The number of California students experiencing homelessness has grown by a staggering 50 percent over the past 10 years. There were 269,269 young people in California's K-12 schools experiencing homelessness during the 2018-19 school year.[37]

A survey of California Community Colleges students found that nearly one in five students experienced homelessness during the prior year, and 60 percent experienced housing insecurity.[38] The COVID-19 pandemic has likely driven even more young people into homelessness due to widespread unemployment.[39]

Foster youth are a relatively small group but remain among the most underserved by California's public education systems. The California Department of Education reported that there were 33,514 foster youth enrolled in K-12 schools during the 2018-19 school year, although accurate identification and data collection for this group has been challenging.

As *Figure 2* shows, only 13 percent of graduating foster youth and 13.4 percent of young people experiencing homelessness in the class of 2019 participated in dual enrollment in high school.[40] Both groups' chronic absenteeism rates in grades K-12 are double the state average (20.1 percent for foster youth and 21.1 percent for young people experiencing homelessness, compared to 10 percent for all students during the 2018-19 school year).[41]

1 in 5
California Community Colleges students experienced homelessness in the prior year

60%
experienced housing insecurity

At the postsecondary level, both groups have disproportionally low rates of college going and persistence.[42] Young people experiencing homelessness, for instance, are less than one-third as likely to be enrolled in a four-year college as stably housed peers.[43] Foster youth in community colleges have lower grades and earn fewer credits in their first year compared to their non-foster peers,[44] and only half complete their first two semesters.[45]

While foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness are distinct groups with unique needs, they face many of the same barriers and there is significant overlap between the two populations. For instance, foster youth are nearly three times more likely to be homeless during high school than their non-foster peers.[46] We combine our discussion of dual enrollment for these populations into one section because many of the solutions we identified would benefit both groups. This section begins, however, with a summary of some of the critical differences in the policies, funding streams, and supports available to support college transitions for the two groups.

Different Ecosystems of Support

Foster Youth

The experiences of foster youth are deeply affected by the numerous public systems and professionals involved in their lives, from child welfare social workers, advocates, and lawyers to teachers and foster youth liaisons in K-12 schools, colleges, and universities. California county offices of education have foster youth liaisons who oversee interagency coordination for foster youth in K-12 schools. Part of their role includes collaborating with local postsecondary institutions to support college access for foster youth.[47]

Community colleges, meanwhile, have designated foster youth liaisons through the Foster Youth Success Initiative. Additionally, 18 colleges participate in the Youth Empowerment Strategies for Success/Independent Living Program (YESS-ILP), a collaboration between the California Department of Social Services and the Foundation for California Community Colleges. YESS-ILP assists current and former foster youth transition to postsecondary success and self-sufficiency through mentorship as well as workshops. Another program, Next Up, part of the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services at participating

college campuses, provides resources such as education and career planning, tutoring, books and supplies, housing assistance, and child care. There are also programs supported by a mix of institutional support and private foundation investments—such as the Guardian Scholars and Renaissance Scholars programs—that complement state-funded grant programs for foster youth on many campuses. Some California financial aid programs target foster youth specifically, such as the Chafee Grant, and these students are eligible to receive state financial aid for longer than their non-foster peers through the CalGrant Expansion.

While strong advocacy on behalf of foster youth in California has led to a relatively robust set of programs and funding streams dedicated to their success, coordination within and across these systems remains challenging.

Young People Experiencing Homelessness

In contrast, there are far fewer dedicated college transition and success programs for students experiencing homelessness. Until recently, supporting postsecondary access and success for these students has not taken center stage in state policy advocacy.

Most supports for students experiencing homelessness stem from federal legislation rather than state policy and programs. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA) requires K-12 districts and county offices of education to identify liaisons charged with ensuring that homeless students receive transportation services, enrollment assistance, and referrals to health, dental, mental health, substance abuse, housing, and other services. However, the number of liaisons has not kept pace with the growth in the homeless student population and the demands on these professionals are considerable.

A very small number of California districts and county offices of education receive federal funding from MVA subgrants through the California Department of Education or the competitive Education for Homeless Children and Youth grant. But California's Local Control Funding Formula does not include young people experiencing homelessness as a unique subgroup generating additional funding, and most districts lack a dedicated funding stream focused these students. The demands on the limited staff providing support for young people experiencing homelessness are considerable, and college access assumes a lower priority than meeting crisis-level needs.

At the postsecondary level, California Community Colleges and public four-year universities have recently redoubled their efforts to address the basic needs of

young people experiencing homelessness and other low-income students through solutions such as emergency housing programs, food pantries, shower and laundry facilities, and case management.[48] In 2019, the California legislature passed a historic investment—$19 million annually across the state's three public higher education systems—for rapid rehousing efforts supporting college students experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. Governor Gavin Newsom's 2021-22 budget proposal contains several significant investments focused on mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the state's economically vulnerable college students, including $100 million in one-time funding to address food and housing insecurity in the California Community Colleges.[49]

While recent state-level actions signal that the challenges facing young people experiencing homelessness are on the radar of policymakers and system leaders, strategies must be developed that bridge the worlds of high school and postsecondary education and help create pathways to financial independence for this group.

Shared Barriers to College Readiness and Success

Both these groups experience frequent interruptions to learning and may be forced to prioritize meeting their basic needs over attending college.

High Rates of School Mobility

Young people experiencing homelessness and those in the foster care system experience extremely high rates of school disruption. Foster youth in California change schools an average of 2.5 times between grades 9 and 12.[50] Each change interrupts learning, course continuity, and relationships with peers and adults. Instability also impedes young peoples' ability to envision and plan for their future after high school, as they are constantly in survival mode.

As students enroll at new schools, teachers and support staff may be unaware that they are homeless or foster youth, resulting in missed opportunities to provide support.

Implications for dual enrollment

The high probability of changing schools during an academic term can have consequences for dual enrollment. If students must withdraw from college courses after the add/drop deadline, their academic record could be affected. These risks may lead some support staff to discourage foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness from participating in dual enrollment altogether.

Students may petition California Community Colleges for an "excused withdrawal"—which does not affect their academic standing or financial aid eligibility—for extenuating circumstances beyond their control. Neither homelessness nor changes in foster care placements are explicitly stated by the governing statute as justifiable reasons for an excused withdrawal, but the petitioner can offer other grounds, with documentation.[51] Still, submitting a petition for an excused withdrawal requires strong self-advocacy skills or support from a well-informed adult who understands the process. Many high school counselors and dual enrollment coordinators remain unaware of this option.

School mobility can also affect students' access to dual enrollment in the first place. The availability of dual enrollment courses can vary widely from school to school; different schools may partner with different community colleges; and each institution has its own set of enrollment and course registration processes. Navigating dual enrollment can be challenging under normal circumstances, but for students who change schools frequently, it can be too daunting to even attempt.

Housing Instability

Interviewees frequently cited housing instability as a major barrier facing foster youth and students experiencing homelessness, particularly at the postsecondary level. Housing instability can contribute to high rates of summer melt, when graduating seniors who accepted an offer of college admission fail to matriculate in the fall.

Implications for dual enrollment

Interviewees noted that housing instability can be an all-consuming challenge for students, impeding progress in dual enrollment and other courses. Dual enrollment is especially likely to fall by the wayside if courses are offered after school and treated as add-ons, instead of being integrated into the school day and counting toward completion of high school graduation requirements. Students who lack safe and stable housing are also likely to have technology barriers, posing extra challenges when dual enrollment courses are online.

Unmet Mental Health Needs

Up to 80 percent of children in foster care have significant trauma-related mental health issues, compared to approximately 18 to 22 percent of the general population.[52] Adverse life experiences can manifest in high rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. Young survivors of trauma may lack the support to fully engage in learning, and the high suspension rates of foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness in the K-12 system may be strongly correlated with the experiences of trauma and instability. For these groups and all students, mental health needs have, in many cases, become even more acute during the COVID-19 pandemic.[53]

Implications for dual enrollment

If educators lack the tools to recognize and respond to the needs of students who have experienced trauma, they may undervalue the academic potential of foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness. These students may be overlooked for opportunities to participate in dual enrollment. And even if they do have access, their performance may be affected when their mental health needs remain unaddressed. Educators at the high school and college levels need to have a strong foundation in trauma-informed teaching practices to support the success of all learners.

Promising Practices:
Dual Enrollment for Foster Youth and Young People Experiencing Homelessness

JFF did not find many dual enrollment programs that focus on recruiting and serving foster students or young people experiencing homelessness. More commonly, interviewees reported that these students' participation in dual enrollment is a result of strong partnerships and a college-going culture across entire schools.

There are a few examples of dual enrollment pilots being designed focusing on foster youth in particular. Promising practices identified in our research included:

Providing a warm handoff between the staff and programs serving foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness in the K-12 and community colleges. Specialized liaisons, social workers, and other social service professionals focused on supporting foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness can help identify students eligible for programs and scholarships, build supportive relationships, and connect students to campus resources. At Rio Hondo College, for instance, the YESS-

ILP program identifies eligible high school foster youth through close collaboration with school-based social workers who are funded by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services. Students participate in a five-week noncredit workshop on independent living and college success skills at high school or group-home sites, followed by a campus visit. Similarly, the Riverside Community College District Foster Youth Support Network deploys student support specialists into feeder high schools to conduct college exploration workshops with foster youth, provide application and financial aid support, and connect graduating seniors to the colleges' Next Up and Guardian Scholars programs.

Incorporating dual enrollment into existing college transition programs for foster youth. Structured, cohort-based dual enrollment opportunities can complement and enhance the impact of colleges' outreach programs for high school-aged foster youth, enabling students to begin earning college credit in a supportive and trusted environment. Woodland College, for instance, has recently added a dual enrollment component for a small cohort of YESS-ILP students who were already participating in regular life skills workshops with the college. The noncredit workshop is now followed by a credit-bearing college counseling course,

supported by an AmeriCorps counselor who audits the class alongside the youth. The counselor connects struggling students to other campus resources, including tutoring and disability services. Upon completion of the course, students are encouraged to take additional dual enrollment courses in subjects aligned with their educational goals.

Integrating case management and wraparound support into dual enrollment programs targeting foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness. To ensure that youth have the support needed to succeed in dual enrollment, practitioners must coordinate closely with service providers and partner organizations focused on child welfare, mental health, housing, and other basic needs. Intensive case management will be a core component of the emerging pilots that are being designed at three community colleges with the support of John Burton Advocates for Youth *(see "Dual Enrollment Pilot Programs for Foster Youth")*.

The college transition programs described in this section have implemented innovative strategies for reaching and connecting with foster youth before high school graduation, although young people experiencing homelessness continue to be underserved.

Dual Enrollment Pilot Programs for Foster Youth

John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) is coordinating with three community colleges and Career Ladders Project (CLP) to identify best practices for using dual enrollment to help foster youth succeed in their educational and career goals. JBAY and CLP will provide capacity-building assistance and peer learning opportunities to the three colleges, which are piloting targeted outreach and intensive support to foster youth in dual enrollment. The collaboration will lead to the development of a framework of effective practice for dual enrollment, centered on the needs of these students. This framework, which will include recommendations related to student recruitment as well as best practices for student success, will be published in 2021 as a tool for high school–college partnerships statewide.

Recommendations:
Dual Enrollment for Foster Youth and Young People Experiencing Homelessness

High School-College Partnerships

- **Provide professional development *by* and *for* special population support staff.** There is a clear need for capacity building related to dual enrollment for staff focused on serving foster youth and students experiencing homelessness, as well as a need for training on the needs of special populations for broader dual enrollment field. Districts, colleges, and county offices of education should facilitate joint professional development, resource sharing, and collaboration between dual enrollment practitioners and liaisons, counselors, and social workers within the foster and homeless student support ecosystem. Such cross-training can empower all staff to better recognize and address the unique issues impacting these students and ensure that they can access and succeed in dual enrollment.

- **Integrate basic needs support into the design and scale-up of dual enrollment programs serving foster youth**

and young people experiencing homelessness. Academic success requires that young adults' critical needs for shelter, nutrition, and physical and emotional safety be met. While these supports are traditionally seen as outside the scope of most dual enrollment programs, staff should build partnerships with public agencies and nonprofit organizations focused on housing, social services, child welfare, mental health, and related fields. Colleges should also ensure that foster youth and students experiencing homelessness have access to their institutions' basic needs centers, mental health resources, and dedicated programs for special populations.

State Systems and Policy Advocacy

- **Pilot and support the expansion of college transition programs that focus on students experiencing homelessness.** Unlike the offerings available for foster youth, there is not a complementary set of programs or funding streams in California to support college access and transition for young people experiencing homelessness. Given the size and growth of this population, the state should invest in identifying high school students experiencing homelessness, connecting them with

partner community colleges, and providing the support they need for a smooth transition to college. California should also provide these young people with targeted financial aid counseling and basic needs support. Dual enrollment can increase the probability students will attend college and succeed, while helping them save money toward a postsecondary degree. It should be a core component of pilot programs.

- **Provide guidance and funding for colleges to support the basic needs of dual enrollees.** Community colleges' resources for supporting students' basic needs—such as food pantries, mental health resources, and emergency housing assistance—typically are not offered to high school students participating in dual enrollment. However, as the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office strives to leverage dual enrollment as a strategy for closing equity gaps, institutions should be urged to treat dual enrollees as *college* students and offer them the full range of student support resources that are available to the general student body. Wraparound support for dual enrollment students with unique needs—including unaccompanied homeless youth and foster youth

living in group homes—may yield powerful returns. Additional state investment will be necessary for campuses to sustain their critical basic needs supports and expand them to serve all college students experiencing housing and food insecurity or mental health challenges— including those who are still in high school.

- **Issue guidance on withdrawal regulations for dual enrollment students and clarify that excused withdrawals can be used for circumstances outside a student's control.** Foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness should not be penalized if they withdraw from college courses in the middle of an academic term due to extreme circumstances such as loss of housing or changes in foster care placements. Excused withdrawal petitions can be used to mitigate academic consequences in these cases—for dual enrollees as well as for traditional college-aged students. However, many dual enrollment coordinators and high school counselors are unaware of this option. Guidance is needed to provide accurate information about the potential consequences of course withdrawals or failing grades, as well as potential avenues for advocacy on behalf of students with significant extenuating circumstances.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Dual enrollment is a promising strategy to connect and maximize the reform efforts and equity agendas across California's K-12 and community college systems. Leaders at the institutional and state levels are enthusiastic about dual enrollment's potential and have prioritized equitable representation, particularly with regard to race, ethnicity, and income. However, as this report demonstrates, equity cannot be achieved without attention to the unique circumstances of students from special populations and the structural conditions that impact their outcomes.

JFF's research began with analyzing data to understand to what extent students from special populations are participating in dual enrollment in California. We learned that dual enrollment participation rates for all special population groups lag far behind state averages, with particularly large and widening gaps for students with disabilities and English learners.

Through our literature review and interviews, we also sought to understand the factors that affect postsecondary transition experiences—including access to and participation in dual enrollment—for students from special populations. We learned that common barriers include low expectations, insufficient outreach and guidance, and disconnected policies and support structures at the K-12 versus postsecondary levels. At the same time, innovative high schools and colleges that provide targeted support for students from special populations in dual enrollment are overcoming systemic barriers, achieving promising results, and changing mindsets about which students are ready to excel at the college level.

Finally, we explored how to design and scale dual enrollment with the needs of students from special populations at the forefront, and offered population-specific recommendations. In this conclusion, we offer general recommendations for leaders in local partnerships, state systems, and the research community.

Overarching Recommendations for Designing Dual Enrollment for Special Populations

> ### Recommendations for High School–College Partnerships

▸ **Establish local equity goals for dual enrollment that include special populations and disaggregate data to address course-taking gaps.** Students from special populations should be included in the conversation about equity in dual enrollment and practitioners should interrogate data to understand the factors that contribute to uneven participation. K-12 districts can formalize commitments to closing equity gaps by incorporating dual enrollment into Local Control and Accountability Plans. Similarly, colleges can address dual enrollment for special populations as part of their institutional equity plans.

▸ **Equip dual enrollment practitioners to support students from special populations.** Instructors and staff need training that helps them maximize the potential of students from special populations. Important topics include inclusive instructional design, trauma-informed teaching practices, strategies for supporting academic language development for English learners, and accommodations for students with disabilities in college courses. Counselors, coordinators, and registrars also need training to help students from special populations with the logistics of dual enrollment, including admissions and financial aid issues that are likely to arise for foster youth and young people experiencing homelessness.

▸ **Ensure dual enrollment students are connected with college-level supports and programs targeting special populations.** Dual enrollment should provide an early and personalized introduction to California Community Colleges resources like Disabled Student Programs and Services, food pantries, foster youth programs, and undocumented student resource centers. This can help to destigmatize these programs and allow youth to build supportive relationships with college staff. College leaders and staff should embrace dual enrollees as college students and identify the customized set of supports that can play a role in each student's pathway to completion.

Recommendations for State Systems

▶ **Elevate and disseminate promising examples of dual enrollment partnerships that focus on access and success for special populations.** The California Department of Education and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office should use their communication channels and convening power to highlight examples of secondary-postsecondary partnerships that are implementing innovative, asset-based approaches for serving special populations in dual enrollment. The sharing of best practices is needed to demonstrate that all students can succeed in dual enrollment given the right support, and to encourage broader adoption of programs focused on special populations.

▶ **Provide field guidance on the range of programs, services, and funding streams that can be used for special populations in dual enrollment.** Guidance documents from system-level leaders are needed to clarify schools' and colleges' legal obligations and considerations for supporting students from special populations in dual enrollment, particularly related to students with disabilities. Similarly, guidance documents should demonstrate the range of programs and funding streams in the K-12 system and California Community Colleges that can be used to support dual enrollees with special educational needs and build aligned approaches across grades 9-14 to enhance their success.

Recommendations for Research

▶ **Analyze longitudinal, student-level data to better understand the impact of dual enrollment on college and career readiness and success for English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, and young people experiencing homelessness.** More research is needed to better understand how and to what extent the benefits of dual enrollment that have been documented for low-income and underrepresented students also apply to special populations.

▶ **Pilot and study the effectiveness of different types of dual enrollment courses that are designed to reflect the diversity within and across these groups.** There is tremendous diversity within each of the special population groups and no one-size-fits-all approach will be appropriate. Research can help test and study the relative benefits of different types of dual enrollment courses and support strategies for groups such as immigrant newcomers, long-term English learners, students with learning disabilities, students on the autism spectrum, students living in group homes, and many other significant groups. Research can enhance the field's understanding of contributors to successful outcomes for a wider range of dual enrollment students, enabling institutions to better target their efforts to close equity gaps.

Together, these recommendations can potentially transform dual enrollment from a one-size-fits-all solution that is most accessible for students on the cusp of college-going to one that also leverages the untapped assets of California's students from special populations.

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