



Debunking 10 Myths About Dual Enrollment

AT A GLANCE

Dual enrollment is a proven strategy that boosts high school, college, and workforce success. JFF's new brief debunks common myths to clarify what these programs are and why they matter.

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Introduction

In the ever-evolving education landscape, dual enrollment programs have emerged as evidence-based practices that improve rates of college enrollment, high school and degree completion, and college credit accumulation. Specifically, dual enrollment programs—which may be known by other names, depending on the state—promote partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education. They enable high school students to participate in intentionally designed, rigorous, and authentic postsecondary experiences that can lead to official acknowledgement on college transcripts and transferable credit toward a recognized postsecondary degree or credential.

Dual enrollment programs have increasingly become a part of our education system but are often misunderstood. When students, parents, school leaders, and policymakers make decisions based on inaccurate information about these programs, it can have negative consequences, like students choosing not to participate in dual enrollment despite its benefits, or policymakers deprioritizing policies that would expand access. Below, Jobs for the Future addresses some of the most common myths about dual enrollment programs to provide a clearer picture of what they are and the value they provide. Future installments of “myth vs. fact” will dig more deeply into the nuances of dual enrollment programs.



Myths vs. Facts

Myth #1

There is only one type of dual enrollment model.

Fact

There are several types of college-in-high-school models, including dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school. These models are effective in promoting postsecondary access and success, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and other populations that have historically been underserved in higher education. A glossary that describes the different models is available [from the College in High School Alliance](#).



Policy Solution

Prioritize funding models that provide degree-applicable course sequences to ensure that students make progress toward postsecondary credentials. Options include models that support dual enrollment credits in core academics that maximize college and career options for students, and strategic dual enrollment courses that enable students to earn credits as they explore a particular career and/or postsecondary pathway.

Myth #2

Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses are better for students than dual enrollment courses because they're more rigorous and use standardized exams to validate learning.

Fact

Dual enrollment allows students to earn college credits by completing college-level coursework taught by qualified instructors. Unlike AP/IB programs, where students must pass a single high-stakes exam, dual enrollment assesses learning through multiple measurements, including assignments, projects, and exams, throughout each course. This approach to the assessment of learning and competencies is similar to how most college courses operate. Both AP/IB and dual enrollment can benefit students, but they serve different purposes and validate learning in different ways.



Policy Solution

Enact state-level policies that ensure that dual enrollment and AP/IB courses are weighted equally for a student's high school GPA, and issue public-facing guidance about this policy that includes easy-to-understand definitions that distinguish dual enrollment programs from exam-based options.

Myth #3

Dual enrollment is a new trend and isn't evidence-based.

Fact

Dual enrollment programs have been around for more than two decades, and they have been implemented and evaluated for years across multiple states and research centers.¹



Policy Solution

Ground new policy proposals in established best practices and evidence-based design. Additionally, carve out grant programs that lean into practices that we know are working—such as dual enrollment—to develop and test new strategies through innovation.

Myth #4

Dual enrollment is only for “honors” or already-advanced students.

Fact

Nationally, 82% of high schools offer dual enrollment; about one-third of students take at least one dual enrollment course by graduation, and program participation nearly doubled from 2011 to 2021.² Data offers evidence of benefits across student groups, including learners from low-income households, who are more likely to earn a credential when they participate in dual enrollment.³



Policy Solution

Require proactive outreach and advising supports so eligibility and participation aren't limited to self-selecting students. Target advising/tutoring to first-time college course takers, and monitor whether credits earned are applied to degree or certificate programs, not just whether students have enrolled in such courses.

Myth #5

Dual enrollment only helps students bound for a four-year degree.

Fact

Dual enrollment can be embedded in workforce-connected career and technical education pathways and apprenticeship programs that lead to stackable credentials for in-demand careers that can increase employability and earnings among completers.⁴



Policy Solution

Prioritize pathway-aligned dual enrollment courses mapped to regional labor market needs.

Myth #6

Standardized placement tests are the fairest way to determine dual enrollment eligibility.

Fact

In recent years, many states have evolved their statewide eligibility criteria for dual enrollment programs to reduce an overreliance on assessments and standardized tests.⁵ This shift is due in large part to broader recognition that assessments primarily advantage the highest-performing students and those who are likely to pursue college regardless of their participation in dual enrollment.⁶ Having multiple measures of qualification for dual enrollment widens fair access.

Policy Solution

Permit multiple measures (such as GPA, coursework, or teacher recommendations) for dual enrollment eligibility statewide.

Myth #7

Participation gaps reflect student preference, not policy.

Fact

Too often, policies and practices place (or fail to remove) roadblocks that inhibit participation in dual enrollment programs. White students participate at roughly twice the rate of Black and Hispanic students; English learners and students with disabilities are also underrepresented.⁷ Additionally, financing dual enrollment can be a barrier for students in states that choose not to cover all or any of the associated costs.

Policy Solution

Remove gatekeeping tied to narrow placement tests, and require proactive outreach and supports (such as transportation and advising) for all students. Additionally, provide financial supports to students who are unable to afford dual enrollment costs.

Myth #8

Dual enrollment students make up only a sliver of college enrollees.

Fact

In many states, high school students participating in dual enrollment programs account for more than 20% of community college head count, and in some states the number exceeds 50%.⁸ Dual enrollment accounts for roughly 6% of total enrollment at public four-year colleges.⁹

Policy Solution

Treat dual enrollment as a core access and completion strategy in community college funding models.

Myth #9

Dual enrollment offers watered-down college courses and is not rigorous.

Fact

Thirty-four states have some form of statewide policy or requirement regarding dual enrollment quality to ensure consistency and aligned practices across institutions.¹⁰ Additionally, dual enrollment instructors often must meet the hiring criteria of the partnering college, which usually requires an advanced degree that incorporates discipline-specific graduate coursework.



Policy Solution

States should implement a mechanism to assess dual enrollment quality, either through the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships' accreditation or another statewide approval mechanism.

Myth #10

Taxpayers are paying twice for the same course in dual enrollment, which is inefficient and wasteful.

Fact

State funding for dual enrollment isn't a double payment to both high schools and colleges for each course; it simply contributes to covering course tuition on behalf of students. Instead of students paying for college courses themselves, the state may invest in making those courses available at no cost to them, thus lowering the overall cost of college for program participants. Additionally, studies show that dual enrollment programs have a high return on investment and provide significant social and fiscal benefits to state and federal programs through savings (due to higher educational attainment and a reduced need for public assistance) and increased tax revenue.¹¹ For example, a study conducted by American Institutes for Research on the dual credit program in Texas found that "each dollar invested in dual credit returned \$1.18 from students spending less time in college and entering the workforce earlier."¹²



Policy Solution

Policymakers should fund dual enrollment programs to remove tuition burdens for students from low-income households, and they should ensure that neither high school nor college partners are financially burdened in offering dual enrollment options. Additionally, federal policymakers should provide financial resources to support states that need extra assistance expanding their dual enrollment programs.

Learn more about

- [Benefits of Dual Enrollment](#)
- [Glossary: Understanding College in High School Programs](#)
- [From High School to Workforce: Dual Enrollment Case Studies](#)

Endnotes

- 1 What Works Clearinghouse, WWC Intervention Report: Dual Enrollment (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute for Education Sciences, Department of Education, February 28, 2017), https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/WWC/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_dual_enrollment_022817.pdf.
- 2 Community College Research Center, *Understanding Dual Enrollment: Policy Fact Sheet* (New York, New York: Columbia University Teachers College, April 2024), <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/understanding-dual-enrollment.html>.
- 3 Tatiana Velasco, John Fink, Mariel Bedoya, and Davis Jenkins, *The Postsecondary Outcomes of High School Dual Enrollment Students: A National and State-by-State Analysis* (New York, New York: Community College Research Center, October 2024), <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/postsecondary-outcomes-dual-enrollment-national-state.html>.
- 4 CCP Evaluation Partnership, *Career and Technical Education Pathway Increases Employment and Earnings* (Greensboro, North Carolina: Early College Research Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2025), <https://earlycollegeresearch.uncg.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/CTE-Employment-and-Earnings-Infographic.pdf>.
- 5 “50-State Comparison: Dual/Concurrent Enrollment,” Education Commission of the United States, June 2022, <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/dual-concurrent-enrollment-2022-eligibility>.
- 6 Jennifer Zinth and Elisabeth Barnett, *Rethinking Dual Enrollment to Reach More Students* (Denver, Colorado: Education Commission of the United States, May 2018), <https://www.ecs.org/rethinking-dual-enrollment-to-reach-more-students/>.
- 7 Community College Research Center, *Understanding Dual Enrollment*, <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/understanding-dual-enrollment.html>.
- 8 “DataPoints: New Data on Dual Enrollment,” American Association of Community Colleges, August 30, 2024, <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/2024/08/30/datapoints-new-data-on-dual-enrollment/>.
- 9 “DataPoints: New Data on Dual Enrollment,” <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/2024/08/30/datapoints-new-data-on-dual-enrollment/>.
- 10 Amy Williams, Alex Perry, and Dianne Lassai Barker, *Equity Starts With Quality: The Essential Role of State Policy in Shaping the Future of Dual Enrollment* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, October 2024), <https://media.nacep.org/docs/briefs/Equity%20Starts%20with%20Quality-Pre%20Release-Single%20Page.pdf>.
- 11 One example is a study funded by the Institute of Education Sciences on Colorado’s concurrent enrollment program that found increases in individual income, higher tax revenue, and savings for programs like Medicaid and corrections. Robert Reichardt and Rachel Christeson, *Colorado Concurrent Enrollment Return on Investment and Cost Model* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: APA Consulting, September 29, 2020), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED608037.pdf>.
- 12 Trey Miller et al., *Dual Credit Education Programs in Texas: Phase II* (Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, July 2018), <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/Dual-Credit-Education-Programs-in-Texas-Phase-II-July-2018.pdf>.



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