

MY TURN

We need to get serious about expanding dual enrollment for high school students



BY GUEST COMMENTARY
MAY 7, 2021

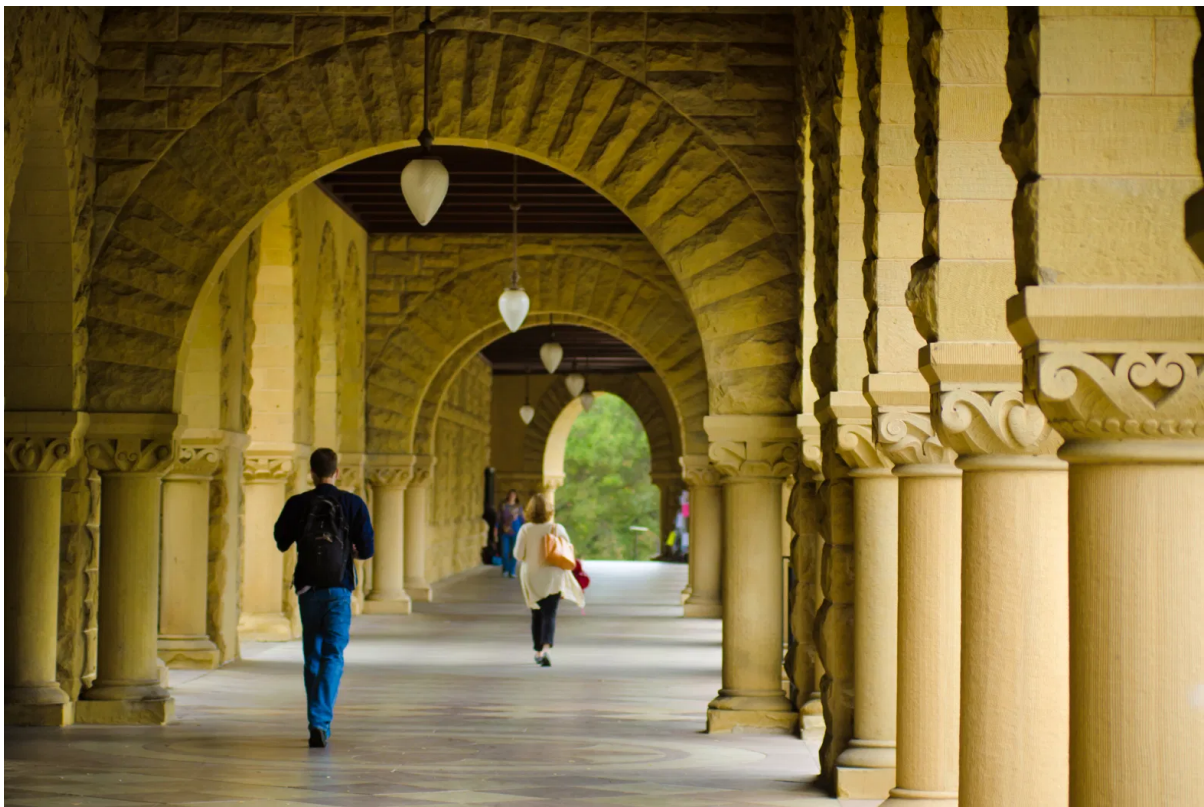


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IN SUMMARY

Dual enrollment is widely considered to be a powerful academic success strategy to support college-aspiring students.

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Now is a critical time for California policymakers to expand high school student access to dual enrollment community college classes, as persistent high school achievement gaps have grown larger due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the reliance on inequitable distance learning practices.

Dual enrollment is an educational practice that enables a high school student to enroll in and complete credit-bearing college courses. Completing these college courses may provide a student with both college and high school credits. Dual enrollment college courses may be offered on a college campus, in a high school classroom or via an online format. For more than a decade, expanding dual enrollment has been of great interest to California state policymakers.

[Research consistently shows](#) that dual enrollment cuts costs for students, exposes students to college-level coursework and rigor, and gives students greater confidence to enter and complete college. [Students enrolled](#) in dual enrollment courses are more likely to graduate from high school and continue on to earn a bachelor's degree.

Dual enrollment is widely considered to be a powerful academic success strategy to support underrepresented, low-income and first generation college-aspiring students. Unfortunately, access to dual enrollment opportunities is not equal, as [82% of California high schools](#) have no students enrolled in community college classes, and Latinx and African-American students are substantially underrepresented in community college course-taking compared to their share of high school students.

For first generation college-aspiring students in particular, the lack of critical resources such as high school guidance counselors creates challenges not typically experienced by students with family members who attend or have previously attended college.

[State data collections document](#) the slow progress in the number of California high school students enrolling in credit-bearing community college classes in the past several years.

This trend is noteworthy but not surprising, as the state has undertaken several initiatives in the past decade that have incentivized dual enrollment expansion, including the California Career Pathways Trust, the California College and Career Access Pathways Partnerships and the dual enrollment metric in the [College and Career Indicator of the California School Dashboard](#).

While progress in addressing inequities is always welcome, in California it is simply too little, too late.

It is time for much bolder systemic changes to be considered if California is going to seriously address high school achievement gaps and prepare the vast majority of high school graduates for postsecondary - educational and career - success.

In the absence of expanded and sustained efforts to address these inequities, California will likely continue to experience postsecondary education opportunity and achievement gaps for decades to come.

To accelerate the expansion of dual enrollment opportunities for California high school students, all community college and public school districts need to commit to dual enrollment as a key equity strategy on a long-term and sustained basis.

At the state level, California policymakers need to:

- Raise awareness about the need to significantly grow the beneficial practice of dual enrollment, such as by legislatively directing the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges to jointly develop and implement a strategic outreach plan focused on promoting and supporting the expansion of high school student dual enrollment opportunities;
- Enact legislation to remove arbitrary policy barriers, such as enrollment caps, eligibility requirements, high school principal advance approval and credentialing-related issues that can frustrate student access to dual enrollment;
- Strengthen incentives that create institutional demand for dual enrollment, such as by legislatively directing the state Board of Education to assign more weight to the dual enrollment metric in California's College and Career Indicator and School Accountability Dashboard; and
- Allocate a substantial amount of competitive funding to expand the implementation of high school reform models that feature dual enrollment, such as middle college high schools, early college high schools and grade 9-through-14 career pathway programs.