



Geography of Dual Enrollment Programs in California

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Dual enrollment, which provides opportunities for high school students to take college courses and earn college credit, has long been used by high-achieving, college-bound students to enroll independently in advanced courses. But recent experience shows that structured and supportive dual enrollment programs can to expand educational opportunities and improve outcomes among groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education—including Latino, Black, Indigenous, and low-income students. A better understanding of regional variations in access can inform efforts to expand dual enrollment programs equitably.

PPIC and Wheelhouse researchers have found that dual enrollment has been increasing steadily in California, driven by participation in formal dual enrollment programs. These programs are primarily offered through three initiatives: College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP, 83 colleges), Early College High Schools (ECHS, 26 colleges) and Middle College High Schools (MCHS, 17 colleges). CCAP was established by Assembly Bill 288 in 2016 to expand access to dual enrollment opportunities for students who may not already be college bound or are in groups that are underrepresented in higher education. ECHS and MCHS programs allow high school students to earn both high school diplomas and up to two years of college units. These programs give students a leg up on college and lower college costs: the courses are free for high school students and the vast majority count toward a college degree.

This growth has helped improve racial equity in access to dual enrollment. CCAP programs now have equitable representation of Latino students and near equitable representation in MCHS, compared to their share of the high school population. ECHS had the most severe underrepresentation of Latino students. Black students were found to be equitably represented in ECHS and MCHS programs, but were underrepresented in CCAP programs.

Regions of the state with more Latino and Black students also have larger shares of CCAP, MCHS and ECHS programs. The Los Angeles/Orange County region (LA/OC) is home to 25% of the state's community colleges, but 31% of CCAP programs are in the LA/OC area. Similarly, 8% of California's community colleges—and 10% of its CCAP colleges—are in San Diego/Imperial Valley. ECHS colleges are disproportionately located in the San Francisco Bay Area (35%) and the Central Valley/Mother Lode (15%). MCHS programs are more popular in the Central Valley/Mother Lode (24%), the Inland Empire/Desert (18%), and the San Diego/Imperial Valley (18%).

The increase in Black and Latino representation in formal dual enrollment programs is encouraging. However, more work is needed to achieve equitable access and outcomes statewide. For many California students, access to dual enrollment programs depends on whether their high schools participate. Moreover, Black and Latino students are less likely to pass dual enrollment courses than their white and Asian peers. Colleges and partnering high schools could use disaggregated data to inform their intentional recruitment efforts, provide wrap-around services to support student access, and address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on students' academic and social-emotional well-being.

TOPICS