

Early College Credit for High School Students: Dual Enrollment Strategies and Best Practices

Helpful Definitions

While multiple models exist to provide high schools students with early college credit, the discussion below focuses on Dual Enrollment strategies in particular.¹ When discussing Dual Enrollment strategies, it is critical to note the following:

- Historically, **dual enrollment** as an early college credit strategy has referred to courses taught at the high school campus during the instructional day for which students receive high school and college credit at the same time. **Concurrent enrollment**, on the other hand, has referred to a strategy wherein high schools take regular college courses, which may or may not be approved by high schools for high school credit.
- However, “Dual Enrollment” is increasingly used as an umbrella term for both strategies.
- AB 288 outlines the conditions and requirements for dual enrollment programs operating under College and Career Access Pathway (CCAP) Partnership agreements and exists alongside previous legislation relating to Dual Enrollment programs (including concurrent enrollment, Early College High School, etc.) operating under non-CCAP agreements.²
- Traditional high school students who take college courses offered by postsecondary institutions are designated as “special admit” students by their college.

Purpose of Early College Credit for High School Students

Early college credit programs like those considered Dual Enrollment can offer students:

- An encouraging introduction to the benefits of postsecondary education
- A head start on accumulating credits towards a postsecondary degree or certificate
- Exposure to life as a college student

As K12 leaders and community colleges consider implementing such programs, they must consider the range of strategies available, the benefits and limitations of each, and the critical principles, practices, and considerations that lead to the development of effective partnerships and early college credit initiatives.

Variations on Dual Enrollment Strategies

There are a variety of ways these partnerships and their programs can be structured, and partners should keep their *ultimate goal for students* in mind when designing their program. This will also dictate what kinds of formal agreements K12 and community college partners should pursue.

¹ Explanations of other early college credit models can be found in Hanover Research’s [Dual Enrollment: Models, Practices, and Trends](#) (pp. 5-6)

² For a more in-depth explanation of AB 288 agreements and non-AB 288 agreements, please refer to the [Dual Enrollment: Considerations for AB 288 Agreements and Non-AB 288 Partnerships](#) section of CLP’s [Dual Enrollment Toolkit](#)

Dual Enrollment programs can vary in the following ways:

- Community college credit courses can be offered **individually, as part of a sequence, or part of a comprehensive course of study.**
- Courses may or may not **confer college and high school credit concurrently.**
- **Courses can take place** on either community college campuses or high school campuses.
- **Instructors** could be high school teachers who meet the California Community Colleges' minimum qualifications or community college faculty.
- Programs may choose to focus on **different student populations**, such as those who are historically underrepresented on college campuses or students between 16 and 21 years old who have left/are at risk of leaving high school without a diploma.
- **Entrance requirements vary for students**, with some being more selective and others offering broader access.

Foundational Practices for Dual Enrollment Programs

Adapted from resources developed by the Career Ladders Project and the RP Group, the following principles are integral to the development of any successful Dual Enrollment program.

- **Offer proactive counseling and advising** to help students make informed decisions about which courses will help them complete requirements related to their long-term career and educational goals.
- **Invest in a structured outreach and marketing plan** to recruit potential students from historically underserved backgrounds and referral sources of enrollment opportunities.
- **Use multiple methods** (e.g., GPA, course taking patterns, noncognitive traits like perseverance) to assess students' readiness and help ensure that students who may not shine academically have an opportunity to learn about the benefits of dual enrollment courses and how to enroll.
- **Ensure continuous monitoring of student progress** by both the K12 and community college partners to ensure that students are making adequate progress, and in cases where students need to drop or withdraw from their college courses, that they are able to do so without penalty.
- **Provide opportunities** that allow students to take courses that will help them earn their high school diplomas while they are completing college credits.
- **Outline sequenced educational pathways** to ensure students are completing a series of linked courses will help them to complete needed requirements without extra time or expense.

- **Engage community-based organizations and partners** to provide additional supports (e.g. health services, mental health counseling) that students might need to be able to focus on their academic responsibilities.
- **Eliminate the potential barrier of transportation issues** by arranging travel to and from the campus or by providing students with public transportation fares.
- **Use pedagogical approaches that focus on engaging students** in their learning, avoiding a “sage-on-the-stage” approach and employing small group activities and team projects that allow students to work with their peers and draw on their personal experiences and interests.
- **Mirror an authentic college experience for students taking courses at the high school** by hiring community college instructors and by enrolling a mix of students, including regular college students and not just special admit students if possible.

Dual Enrollment Program Components

Though Dual Enrollment programs can vary in structure, the following components have been identified by the Career Ladders Project and the RP Group as universally critical to enabling student success:

Student Orientation

Community-building activities prior to the start of courses that promote relationships and a sense of belonging among new and continuing students, staff, and instructors

Parent Orientation

An event to help parents and guardians support their students as they navigate the various procedures, protocols, and paperwork required to be a special admit/dually enrolled student. This is also the time to highlight for families the higher level of effort required to be a successful college student

Academic advisement, counseling, and educational planning

Services that are critical for helping students identify courses and educational pathways that are aligned with their interests and long-term career and/org education goals and for providing information on the unique requirements and demands of college coursework

Eligibility Criteria

While non-AB 288 agreements require that the K12 district determine whether students are prepared to undertake college-level coursework as a precondition of recommending them for special admit status, AB 288 agreements allow college district governing boards to define the criteria used to identify eligible students since they “have a specific purpose of serving

students who may not already be college bound or who are underrepresented in higher education.”³

College success/preparation and career exploration courses

Courses to help students to develop the skills and habits, both academic and social, necessary to acclimate to the college environment, navigate available resources, and meet the demands of college-level work

Early warning system

A process or system to monitor students’ attendance and academic progress to ensure that students are provided additional personal or academic support when they are identified as off track to complete their course(s) successfully

Supplemental instruction or labs

Additional instruction designed to help students strengthen skills and knowledge so they can successfully complete their college coursework

Dual Enrollment Program Models Throughout the Country

Below are brief, adapted descriptions of Dual Enrollment programs profiled by Career Ladders Project for their notable program features.

Reedley College

Description

Currently partnered with 10 local high schools and the local Regional Occupation Program (ROP), Reedley College offers high school students the chance to take college courses at their high school campus for both high school and college credit.

Promising Practices

- Dual Enrollment students benefit from **streamlined enrollment**, where they are automatically re-enrolled each term rather than needing to re-apply each term or use paper forms
- Courses are **integrated into a pathway strategy**, which is based on local economic needs

Norco College

Description

Norco College’s partnership with Eleanor Roosevelt High School offers students the chance to take college courses at their high school campus for both high school and college credit.

³ From Legal Opinion 16-02, Section II. A., pp. 5-6

Promising Practices

- All Dual Enrollment students take a **college-readiness course** prior to starting on their pathway courses
- Having a **single point of contact** at their partner high school has been critical in establishing a strong working relationship

East Los Angeles College

Description

The Los Angeles Unified School District has established an agreement with local community colleges to allow high school students the opportunity to take courses at institutions such as East Los Angeles College.

Promising Practices

- **Flexible pathway models** give students options, whether they engage in work-based learning with partners such as UPS or they desire to complete the required general education transfer units before graduating high school
- **Noncredit adult classes** based on local need are paired with dual enrollment to emphasize college as a resource for entire families and communities

Helpful Resources

The Career Ladders Project

- [Dual Enrollment Toolkit: A Resource for Community Colleges and School District Partners](#)
- [Dual Enrollment Overview: Case Studies](#)

The Research and Planning Group of California Community Colleges

- [A Guide to Launching and Expanding Dual Enrollment Programs for Historically Underserved Students](#)

JFF

- [Dual Enrollment Policies that Support Early College Strategies for Low-Income Youth](#)

Career Academy Support Network

- [Dual Enrollment for High School Students](#)

Hanover Research

- [Dual Enrollment: Models, Practices, and Trends](#)