

Improving College Access and Success through Dual Enrollment

In dual enrollment programs, high school students can take college courses and earn both high school and college credit—but in the past, dual enrollment had been used mostly by high-achieving students. In 2016, the California Legislature passed a law that expanded access to students who had been underserved in higher education. The resulting program, College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP), has become the fastest growing dual enrollment option in California, jumping fivefold from just under 4,500 students in 2016 to nearly 25,000 in 2020.

The jump in participation has also resulted in greater equity for students who have been underrepresented in California colleges, as the share of CCAP students is similar to the makeup of California’s K–12 student population:

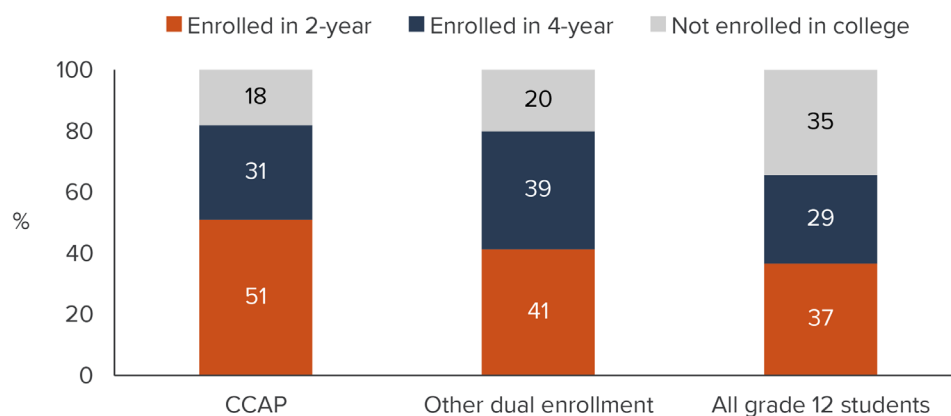
- ▶ **Latino:** 58% of CCAP participants compared with 53% of all 12th grade students
- ▶ **Asian:** 12% of CCAP compared with 9% of all 12th graders
- ▶ **Black:** 4% of CCAP compared with 6% of all 12th graders
- ▶ **White:** 19% of CCAP compared with 24% of all 12th graders

What are the benefits of College and Career Access Pathways?

California offers several [types of dual enrollment programs](#) at no cost to students and their families, but only CCAP courses are held on high school campuses during the school day and limited to only high school students.

The advent of CCAP has given a broad range of students access to dual enrollment and has set more students on the path to college. Students from CCAP programs enroll in college at a rate of 82%, well above the state average for all high school graduates (66%). A slight majority of CCAP students head to a California community college (51%); fewer choose a four-year college (31%). While the share enrolling in community college is promising, it does raise concerns that CCAP students may not be pursuing four-year colleges and may miss out on [the benefits of a bachelor’s degree](#) down the road.

Most CCAP students enroll in college, with over half enrolling in California Community Colleges



Sources: Authors’ calculation using COMIS data from Rodriguez & Gao (2021) using matched MIS and NSC data. Statewide data with all high school graduates are from [CDE college-going rate using NSC data](#).

How do students in CCAP dual enrollment programs perform?

About two-thirds of CCAP students intend to complete an associate degree or transfer to a bachelor's degree program. And CCAP students are doing better towards attaining their goals—overall and by race/ethnicity—than peers who did not participate in dual enrollment. In community college, CCAP students earn credit awards such as associate degrees or certificates within three years of enrollment at higher rates (21%) than those who did not opt for dual enrollment (14%).

CCAP students are slightly less likely to complete these credit awards than students from other dual enrollment programs (25%). Furthermore, disparities exist by race/ethnicity, with greater shares of Asian students (29%) and white students (28%) completing this milestone within three years than Latino students (19%) and Black students (14%). But, Black and Latino CCAP students complete a certificate or degree at higher rates than peers who are not dual enrollees (12% Latino, 8% Black).

In the first year that students attend community college, average GPA is higher among CCAP students than non-dual enrollees, but again, lower than other dual enrollment students. However, CCAP students have been improving: GPAs have climbed steadily each year, from 2.41 for the high school class of 2016 to 2.69 for the class of 2021.

Given that the CCAP program is targeted to increase college access for underserved student groups, factors such as prior academic achievement, family socio-economic status, and student motivation may influence how they fare in courses and could drive disparities in who reaches academic milestones. For dual enrollment leaders, bolstering supports that help underserved students navigate college life and complete college goals may counter some of the negative factors at play.

How can CCAP programs improve college access and success?

Given that CCAP students are often those who have been underserved by higher education, providing courses where students gain college knowledge and navigational skills could promote stronger outcomes. Through college success courses—which bundle academic, behavioral, and personal supports within one transferrable course—students can learn about college expectations and connect with available supports.

CCAP courses that meet requirements across college segments can help advance students on their college journey. General education courses that transfer across UC, CSU, and CCCs are the most valuable in supporting college success. Clarity on available CCAP offerings and coordination between institutions can bolster the pathway—improving access and success.

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Adapted by Stephanie Barton from [Improving College Access and Success through Dual Enrollment](#) by Olga Rodriguez, Daniel Payares-Montoya, Iwunze Ugo, and Niu Gao.