

The Varied Nature of the Dual Enrollment Student Experience

Courtney Adkins, Patrick D. Manapat, Linda L. García, and E. Michael Bohlig

Dual enrollment—also known as dual credit, concurrent enrollment, early college, college in high school, and joint enrollment—is a partnership between high schools and colleges (most often community colleges) that allows high school students to earn college credit. Depending on the collaboration between these two entities, high school students will take courses at the high school, college, or online, and these courses can be taught by college-approved high school instructors or college instructors. If students pass the dual enrollment course, they receive both high school and college credit.

Dual enrollment has increasingly received attention for the benefits to students who participate in this type of educational program. First, depending on the state and the funding model, dual enrollment programs can be offered at a discounted tuition rate or offered for free to students. This can help students save money in the long run (An & Taylor, 2019). Second, these students are reported to have higher academic achievements in high school and are more likely to graduate with a high school diploma (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017). Third, dual enrollment facilitates students' transitions to college by providing them an early start to college credit accumulation and inspiring them to earn a postsecondary degree (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017). According to the Community College Research Center's six-year study that tracked more than 200,000 dually enrolled high school students, 88% of these students went on to enroll in college and most earned a certificate or degree or transferred from a two-year college to a four-year college within five years (Fink et al., 2017). Fourth, research shows that dual enrollment promotes college access and enrollment for students who may have not planned to attend college, especially minority students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, Taylor (2015) shared that minority students who participated in dual enrollment were 26% more likely to enroll in college and 14% more likely to attain a college degree compared to their non-participating peers.

Even though historically underserved students can benefit greatly from dual enrollment programs, they are less likely than their peers to participate. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), students whose parents had higher levels of education more commonly took dual enrollment courses: Forty-two percent of students whose parents had earned a bachelor's degree or higher took these courses, compared to 26% of students whose parents' highest level of education was lower than a high school diploma. This pattern also holds when it comes to achieving success in college: First-generation students are much less likely than continuing generation students to attain their educational goals (Fry, 2021).

Substantial gaps have also been found in dual enrollment participation between White students and Black and Hispanic students (Fink, 2018; Xu et al., 2021). As with first-generation students, Black and Hispanic students are also less likely to achieve their goals in college:

For instance, when looking at community college graduates across 1,476 institutions for the cohort year 2019, 27% of Black students and 33% of Hispanic students graduated within three years, compared to 39% of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

To help the field better understand how students were learning about opportunities to participate in dual enrollment and what their experiences were once they were enrolled in these programs, CCCSE, also known as the Center for Community College Student Engagement, decided to expand its current survey research on community college students to include dually enrolled students. Over two decades of investigating community college student engagement has taught us that it is crucial for community colleges to consider the student experience to enhance access and foster positive outcomes for students. Therefore, if colleges are to equitably support dually enrolled students, it is imperative that they understand the experiences of those students, especially those who are underrepresented. Thus, in collaboration with an advisory panel of experts, the Dual Enrollment Survey of Student Engagement (DESSE) was created.¹

DESSE was first piloted in the fall of 2022, and the findings that follow are based on that pilot administration. The first set of results is related to all survey respondents. Then, we delve into differences in the dual enrollment experience based on student characteristics such as race/ethnicity, first-generation status, English as a second language (ESL) status, and grade level. The third section of findings focuses on the dual enrollment student experience by instructor-type and location/modality.

What DESSE Measures

Through DESSE, we seek to provide valuable insights to identify necessary support systems that can guide students—especially those from marginalized populations—toward successful postsecondary educational pursuits after high school graduation. As such, the survey contains clusters of items in key areas.

To learn more about why dual enrollment course-taking differs among student groups, DESSE includes items that ask students about how they learned of the opportunity to take dual enrollment courses, and who encouraged them to take the courses. The survey also asks students about potential barriers that make it difficult for them to take dual enrollment courses. The instrument also queries students about how they take dual enrollment courses—whether the classes are online, in person at the high school, or in person at the college—so that we can better understand how course location and modality may affect the student experience. Additionally, DESSE examines dually enrolled students' awareness, use, and satisfaction of support services, such as orientation, advising, tutoring, skill labs, and basic needs assistance, among others. DESSE also includes several items focused on students' engagement with course material, students' engagement with their peers and instructors, and the level of rigor of the courses they are taking.

¹ The DESSE survey instrument and the advisory panel of experts can be viewed here: <https://cccse.org/dual-enrollment-survey/survey>. The analysis in this article is based on responses to the fall 2022 survey administration.

Who Responded to DESSE

Over 4,000 students from 17 colleges across 11 states responded to the fall 2022 DESSE pilot administration (Table 1). The data we report on in this article are drawn from this pilot administration of DESSE. It is important to note, there were students with conflicting responses for items 15 through 18 on the fall 2022 DESSE pilot survey, which were removed from the results that follow. Items 15 through 18 ask about the location and modality of instruction (survey may be accessed at <https://cccse.org/dual-enrollment-survey/survey>). For example, if a student responded, “All of my courses are like this” to more than one of these items, we considered these conflicting responses, and that respondent was removed from further analyses. Additionally, as the findings published in this article are pilot data, they may not be generalizable to the national dual enrollment population.

Table 1

Respondent Demographics for Fall 2022 DESSE Pilot Administration

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Man	1,439	35.29
Woman	2,581	63.29
Other	58	1.42
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	15	0.43
Asian	196	5.59
African American or Black	184	5.25
Latino or Hispanic	731	20.86
Native Hawaiian	1	0.03
Pacific Islander (non-Native Hawaiian)	3	0.09
White	1,605	45.79
Other	22	0.63
Two or more	748	21.34
Current Grade		
9 th Grade	263	6.32
10 th Grade	417	10.02
11 th Grade	1,767	42.46
12 th Grade	1,715	41.21
First-Generation Status		
First-generation	2,774	66.35
Continuing-generation	1,388	33.35
English as a Second Language		
Native English speaker	3,066	85.40
English as a second language	524	14.60

Initial Takeaways from the DESSE Pilot

There were four initial takeaways from the DESSE pilot. They included the reason students take dual enrollment courses, how students take dual enrollment courses, how they first approach dual enrollment courses, and student support.

Why Students Take Dual Enrollment Courses. While students take dual enrollment courses for a variety of reasons, saving money was the most selected response on the pilot survey with 73% of students marking it. Over half of respondents reported that boosting their high school GPA was a reason. Fifty percent of respondents said earning credit toward an associate degree was a goal for taking dual enrollment coursework, while 45% reported earning credit toward a bachelor's degree was a reason. Forty-two percent of respondents said they were taking dual enrollment courses to see what it was like to be a college student, and 36% reported that a reason for taking the courses was to explore potential careers or college majors.

How Students Take Dual Enrollment Courses. When it comes to how students receive dual enrollment instruction, 46% of pilot respondents reported that they took all their dual enrollment courses at their high school with a high school instructor, 6% reported that all their classes were at the high school with a college instructor, 11% of students reported that all their classes were at the college, and 10% said that all their dual enrollment classes were online.²

Most respondents (47%) reported that they preferred to take their dual enrollment courses in person at their high school. Almost a quarter (23%) responded that they preferred taking the classes at the college through which they took the survey, and a similar percentage (20%) said they liked taking the classes online. Ten percent of respondents reported “No preference” when asked how they liked taking their dual enrollment courses.

Getting Started with Dual Enrollment. Pilot respondents reported being much more likely to learn about the opportunity to take dual enrollment courses from someone who works at their high school rather than someone at the college: Sixty-seven percent of respondents reported that someone who works at their high school helped them learn of the dual enrollment opportunity “Quite a bit” or “Very much,” while only 25% of respondents reported the same for someone who works at the college. As students interact daily with staff and instructors at the high school, this is not that surprising, but the pilot results also revealed that students are much more likely to rely on someone who works at their high school for help with determining which dual enrollment courses to take. Over half said that someone who works at their high school helped them determine which courses to take “Quite a bit” or “Very much,” while only 19% said this of someone who works for the college. Additionally, respondents reported being more likely to receive guidance from friends and family about which courses to take than they were from a college employee.

Support Services. Even though many surveyed students expressed that they were taking dual enrollment courses to earn credit toward a college degree, and over a third said they were doing so to explore potential careers or majors, fewer than half reported interacting with an advisor

² Other possible response options included “None of my courses are like this,” “Some of my courses are like this,” “Most of my courses are like this,” and “Unsure.”

from the college. Furthermore, 88% reported never using transfer credit assistance services, and 77% said they never used career counseling services. Of the 49% of respondents who interacted with an advisor, only 45% said they worked with the advisor to develop a plan that specified the courses they would be required to take to complete a college certificate or degree.

One would expect advanced rigor in dual enrollment courses, and 38% of pilot respondents reported struggling in their dual enrollment classes. Yet only 17% of the students who met with an advisor reported discussing academic support services. The pilot results also revealed a disconnect between knowing about a service and using it. Fifty-six percent of students reported being aware of tutoring services, but 79% of those students reported never using them. This is particularly troubling when paired with findings from Fink et al. (2017): “Between one third and one half of community college dual enrollment students do not continue taking dual enrollment courses after their first term” (p. 8).

How the Dual Enrollment Experience Differs Across Student Populations

The findings above describe dual enrollment as it is experienced broadly by all students, but it is essential to investigate how the experience differs based on who the student is. Below, we examine differences across race/ethnicity, first-generation status, ESL status, and grade level.

Race/Ethnicity. For the following comparisons across race/ethnicity, we focused on African American, Latino, Asian, and White students (Table 2). Sample sizes for other race and ethnicity groups were quite small—including American Indian or Alaska Native (N = 15), Native Hawaiian (N = 1), and Pacific Islander (N = 3)—and therefore are not included in the findings.

Regarding goals, a difference in aspirations based on race/ethnicity was revealed. African American and Latino students more frequently reported taking dual enrollment courses to earn credit toward an associate degree compared to White students. However, this pattern reverses when examining earning credit toward a bachelor’s degree: African American and Latino students reported taking dual enrollment courses for this reason less frequently than White students. African American students more frequently reported taking dual enrollment courses to see what it is like to be a college student than White students, and Latino students more frequently reported taking these courses to explore potential careers or college programs/majors than White students.

Getting started with dual enrollment also differed across these groups. For example, participation in orientation for dual enrollment courses varied across African American, Latino, White, and Asian students. The process to initially sign up for dual enrollment courses was reported to be “Slightly difficult,” “Difficult,” or “Very difficult” for Asian students the most, followed by Latino students, White students, and African American students the least. In terms of support services, African American students more frequently reported being aware of skill labs (writing, math, etc.) compared to White, Latino, and Asian students. Additionally, among students who knew about the availability of tutoring services, Asian and Latino students more frequently reported using tutoring services at least one time compared to African American and White students.

Table 2*Differences in Dual Enrollment Experience Across Race/Ethnicity*

Endorsed Survey Item	Percentage			
	<u>African American</u>	<u>Latino</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>White</u>
Took dual enrollment courses to earn credit toward an associate degree	54.53	56.99	43.50	44.44
Took dual enrollment courses to earn credit toward a bachelor's degree	39.51	43.12	42.65	53.04
Took dual enrollment courses to see what it is like to be a college student	55.34	46.56	46.95	41.79
Took dual enrollment courses to explore potential careers or college programs/majors	43.88	46.42	38.81	32.30
Participated in an orientation for dual enrollment courses	35.24	28.78	22.14	27.04
The process to initially sign up for dual enrollment courses was difficult	32.08	40.28	54.96	34.81
Aware of writing, math, or other skill lab	53.53	45.09	38.03	45.33
Used tutoring services at least one time	19.46	26.18	28.24	14.14

First-Generation Status. Regarding goals for taking dual enrollment classes, first-generation students—compared to continuing-generation students—less frequently reported taking dual enrollment courses to provide a boost in high school grade point average or class rank, to earn credit toward a bachelor's degree, or to take more challenging courses (Table 3).

Across the two groups, there was an interesting trend related to family. More first-generation students, compared to continuing-generation students, reported that family members did not help at all with learning about the opportunity to take dual enrollment courses. Along the same lines, first-generation students less frequently reported that family encouraged them most to start taking dual enrollment courses and that family helped determine the dual enrollment courses they were taking.

We also observed differences in awareness of various support services across first-generation and continuing-generation students. Compared to continuing-generation students, first-generation students were less aware of academic advising/counseling, career counseling, tutoring, skill labs, transfer credit assistance to a 4-year college or university, and services to students with disabilities. However, first-generation students more frequently reported feeling like part of the community at their respective college.

Table 3*Differences in Dual Enrollment Experience Across First-Generation Status*

Endorsed Survey Item	Percentage	
	<u>First- Generation</u>	<u>Continuing- Generation</u>
Took dual enrollment courses to provide a boost to my high school grade point average or class rank	45.80	60.10
Took dual enrollment courses to earn credit toward a bachelor's degree	34.15	50.29
Took dual enrollment courses to take more challenging courses	29.85	46.01
Family members did not help me at all with learning about dual enrollment	40.18	30.77
Family most encouraged me to start taking dual enrollment courses	29.99	40.31
Family members helped me determine the dual enrollment courses I am taking right now	56.75	70.43
Aware of academic advising/counseling	38.75	65.33
Aware of career counseling	28.16	44.05
Aware of tutoring	39.21	64.04
Aware of writing, math, or other skill lab	29.49	44.92
Aware of transfer credit assistance to a 4-year college or university	32.95	55.97
Aware of services to students with disabilities	16.61	29.05
Feel like part of the community	69.46	59.65

English as a Second Language. Several differences also emerged when comparing students for whom English is a second language (ESL) and those who are native English speakers (Table 4). First, ESL students more frequently reported taking dual enrollment courses to earn credit toward an associate degree than their native-English speaking peers. Second, ESL students more frequently reported that family did not help at all with determining the dual enrollment courses they were taking.

Next, there were differences among ESL students and native English speakers regarding the use of support services. In terms of how often services were used, ESL students who were aware of certain support services more frequently reported using them than their non-ESL peers who had the same awareness. This included academic advising and planning services, career counseling services, tutoring services, and skill labs. And echoing what was reported for first-generation students, ESL students more frequently reported feeling like part of the community at their college.

Table 4*Differences in Dual Enrollment Experience if English Is a Second Language*

Endorsed Survey Item	Percentage	
	English as a Second Language	Native English Speakers
Took dual enrollment courses to earn credit toward an associate degree	60.57	49.10
Family members did not help me at all with determining the dual enrollment courses I am taking right now	46.42	31.11
Used academic advising and planning services at least one time	47.24	32.29
Used career counseling services at least one time	31.78	20.61
Used tutoring services at least one time	31.31	18.66
Used writing, math, or other skill lab services at least one time	37.45	25.46
Feel like part of the community	71.32	60.33

Grade Level. Last, we examined differences across grade level. Before reporting on these results, we acknowledge that some of the observed differences may seem obvious given that 12th graders would be expected to be more knowledgeable and experienced compared to their 9th grade counterparts. However, some of the trends reported below may indicate there are opportunities to help students get on a clear academic path earlier. While many dually enrolled students, especially those in lower grades, will not have firm ideas about their future college major or career plans, early exploration of those two things may help ensure they takes classes that will be useful to them after they graduate from high school (Table 5).

Regarding goals, there were some notable differences between upperclassmen and lowerclassmen. Compared to 9th-grade students, 11th graders more frequently reported taking dual enrollment courses to boost their high school grade point average or class rank and be more challenged in their courses. Students in 12th grade more frequently reported taking the courses to save money on college. When asked about their primary goal immediately after graduating high school, 12th graders most frequently reported a goal of attending an in-state or out-of-state 4-year college or university, followed by 11th graders, 10th graders, and 9th graders. Furthermore, more 9th graders reported being undecided about post-high school plans compared to 12th graders.

In the classroom, 12th graders more frequently reported engaging in the following activities compared to 9th graders (reporting “Sometimes,” “Often,” or “Very often”): worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources, worked with other students on projects during class, worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards or expectations, and received timely feedback (written or oral) from instructors on their performance. Compared to 12th graders, over twice as many 9th graders reported that none of their instructors clearly explained the class attendance policy. Regarding instructor expectations, the majority of 10th graders, 11th graders, and 12th graders reported that their dual enrollment instructors expected more than high school instructors. However, only 46%

of 9th graders reported higher expectations from their dual enrollment instructors compared to high school instructors. Across support services, 12th graders were more aware than 9th graders of academic advising/counseling, tutoring, skill labs, and transfer credit assistance to a 4-year college or university. For each service, percentages for 10th and 11th graders fell somewhere in between the percentages for 9th and 12th graders.

Table 5

Differences in Dual Enrollment Experience Across Grade Level

Endorsed Survey Item	Percentage			
	<u>9th Grade</u>	<u>10th Grade</u>	<u>11th Grade</u>	<u>12th Grade</u>
Took dual enrollment courses to provide a boost to my high school grade point average or class rank	46.98	58.66	60.42	50.68
Took dual enrollment to take more challenging courses	23.65	35.41	44.14	40.97
Took dual enrollment to save money on college	59.07	72.31	72.06	75.06
Attending an in-state or out-of-state 4-year college or university is my primary goal immediately after I graduate from high school	44.78	59.38	63.93	66.96
Undecided on my primary goal immediately after I graduate from high school	22.20	11.90	10.30	3.67
Have at least sometimes worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	73.11	85.78	90.08	91.89
Have at least sometimes worked with other students on projects during class	57.88	68.58	75.51	76.11
Have at least sometimes worked harder than I thought I could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	67.86	76.55	79.03	81.37
Have at least sometimes received timely feedback from instructors on my performance	67.56	78.08	82.33	86.67
None of my instructors clearly explained the class attendance policy	13.78	7.09	5.31	5.11
Instructors of my dual enrollment courses expect more than the instructors of the high school classes I have taken	45.77	62.91	66.09	66.64
Aware of academic advising/counseling	49.39	52.71	54.84	60.33
Aware of tutoring	49.75	51.95	54.55	59.03
Aware of writing, math, or other skill lab	32.59	32.24	39.87	42.71
Aware of transfer credit assistance to a 4-year college or university	37.93	49.05	46.92	51.28

Does Where and with Whom Students Take Dual Enrollment Courses Make a Difference?

For a more detailed picture of one aspect of the dual enrollment student experience, it is necessary to look at where students take classes and with whom they take their classes.

Why Students Take Dual Enrollment Courses. Students' goals and motivations for taking dual enrollment courses vary by location of classes and instructor type. Sixty-nine percent of survey respondents who reported that they took all their classes at their high school with a high school instructor were much more motivated by using dual enrollment to provide a boost to their GPA compared to 52% of students who took all their classes with a college instructor at the high school, 45% of students who took all their classes at the college, and 43% of students who took all their classes online.

Students who took all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor were also more likely to mark that earning credit toward a bachelor's degree was a reason for taking dual enrollment courses, while students who took all their dual enrollment classes at the high school with a college instructor, online, or at the college were much more likely to respond that earning credit toward an associate degree was a goal. Seventy-one percent of students who took all their classes at the college reported this, compared to 62% of students who took all their classes at the high school with a college instructor, 57% of students who took all their courses online, and 39% of students who took all their courses at the high school with a high school instructor.

Survey respondents who took all their dual enrollment courses at the college were also more likely to mark that exploring potential careers or college majors was a reason for taking the classes (51%) as did 48% of students who took all their classes at the high school with a college instructor. Forty-one percent of students who took all their classes online marked this, and 33% of students who took all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor reported it as a reason for taking dual enrollment courses.

Support Services. Perhaps the largest differences in the dually enrolled student experience when the data are disaggregated by location and instructor type are around support services. In CCCSE focus groups over the last two decades, countless students have spoken to the importance of student support services such as orientation and advising. Past CCCSE research on high-impact practices found that students who participated in orientation were more likely to pass developmental courses, gateway courses, and persist to their second term than their peers who did not participate in some type of orientation prior to or during their first term (CCCSE, 2014). Additionally, a 2018 CCCSE study found that students who reported that an advisor helped them develop an academic plan were more engaged across all CCCSE's benchmark areas than those who did not receive this guidance. However, DESSE pilot respondents reported markedly different experiences with these services based on the location and modality of instruction.

Respondents who took all their dual enrollment classes at their high school with a high school instructor were much less likely to participate in an orientation for dual enrollment: Only one in four reported doing so. Comparably, only 30% of students who took all their classes online reported they participated in orientation. The percentage of respondents who took all their classes at the college was quite different with 47% marking that they had participated in an orientation.

Thirty-six percent of respondents who took all their classes at the high school with a college instructor marked that they participated in an orientation.

Survey respondents who took all their classes at the college were more likely than their peers to be aware of and use services such as advising, career counseling, skill labs, and tutoring. Of those students who took all their classes at the college, 77% were aware of advising services; of these, 71% met with an advisor from the college at least once in the past year. Seventy-three percent of dual enrollment students who took all their classes online were aware of advising services, while only 58% of those students interacted with an advisor at least once. Seventy-two percent of students who took all their classes at the high school with a college instructor were aware of the services, and half of them had met with an advisor at least once. Fifty-three percent of students who took all their dual enrollment classes at the high school with a high school instructor were aware of advising services, but only 36% of these students had met with an advisor at least once.

Students who took all their dual enrollment classes at the college were more likely to discuss the following topics with their advisor than their peers who took all their classes at the high school or virtually: how well they were doing in their dual enrollment courses, their outside commitments to help determine how many dual enrollment courses they should take, when their next advising session should be, and academic support services.

Student-Faculty Interaction. Not surprisingly, students who took all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor were more likely to report that all their dual enrollment instructors learned their name. Eighty-nine percent of those respondents reported that this was the case, versus 61% of students who took all their classes at the high school with a college instructor, 65% of students who took all their classes at the college, and 54% of students who took all their classes online.

The familiarity and sense of comfort students have with the high school environment and their instructors potentially impacts the levels of interaction they have with their instructors. Forty-two percent of students who took all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor reported that they had “Often” or “Very often” discussed their grades or assignments with an instructor, versus 32% of their peers who took all their classes at the high school with a college instructor, 29% who took all their classes at the college, and 19% who took all their classes online.

Regarding rigor, 70% of those taking all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor said the assignments in their dual enrollment classes were more challenging than those in their other high school classes, compared with 59% of students taking all their classes at the high school with a college instructor, 67% of those taking all their classes at the college, and 62% of students taking all their classes online.

Additionally, on the item that asks students if they have worked harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor’s standards, 39% of students who took all their classes at the college responded that they did this “Often” or “Very often,” while 37% of students who took all their classes online reported the same. Forty-six percent of students taking all their classes at the high

school with a high school instructor said this, while 37% of those taking all their classes at the high school with a college instructor affirmed the same.

Impact of Location/Modality and Instructor-Type on Student Success

Students' responses varied based on location and instruction type when asked whether taking dual enrollment courses had made them feel more or less confident that they would be successful in college after high school. Half of those who were taking all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor said they felt "More confident" or "Much more confident" about this, while 58% of students taking all their classes at the high school with a college instructor said the same. Sixty-one percent of students taking all their classes at the college reported this, as did 57% of students taking all their classes online.

The literature is mixed about whether location of course affects student outcomes (An & Taylor, 2019). While the student respondents to DESSE who take all their courses at the college are certainly more aware of and more likely to use support services and are more confident about their ability to find success in college after graduating high school, there are advantages that taking courses at the high school bring. For instance, transportation would likely not be a barrier for most students taking courses at their high school: Twenty-one percent of students who took all their classes at the college said that transportation issues made it difficult for them to take dual enrollment courses, compared to 13% of students who took all their classes at the high school with a college instructor and 6% of students who took all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor. Interestingly, 12% of respondents who took all their dual enrollment courses online reported this.

Additionally, 11% of students who took all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor reported that scheduling—when courses are offered—could be a challenge versus 17% of students who took all their classes at the high school with a college instructor and 21% of students who took all their classes at the college. Twenty-two percent of students who took all their classes online reported that the timing of classes could be a barrier to persistence.

The pilot findings are also mixed regarding the impact of instructor-type on the dual enrollment student experience. Students who took all their dual enrollment courses with a college instructor were clearly more well informed about and more likely to use support services such as advising, but students who took all their courses with a high school instructor were more likely to report important connections with their instructors and to report that their dual enrollment coursework challenged them to do their best work.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on previous CCCSE research, we know that increased student engagement—in areas such as academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student effort, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners—is a proxy for improved student outcomes such as persistence (McClenney et al., 2007). As DESSE is inclusive of many similar items as those in these five areas, we can draw broad conclusions about dually enrolled students' levels of engagement. Further, when we disaggregate the data by student characteristics, location, and

instructor type, we see that the dual enrollment experience is much more engaging for some students than others.

When we think about the beginning of the dual enrollment student experience, we should strive to ensure that students start strong. Half of respondents reported that they were taking dual enrollment courses to earn an associate degree, but many respondents were more likely to depend on someone from the high school than someone from the college to help them decide which courses to take. The dual enrollment experience can be an ideal time for colleges to begin modeling for all students that meeting with an academic advisor can help them build a foundation for their later college journeys and future career plans. This will help ensure that students do not make decisions about the courses they are taking based on incomplete information.

We should also work to ensure all students have equitable experiences. An example of a group of students who reported having quite a different dual enrollment experience than their peers are first-generation students, who in the general population are disproportionately students of color and from low-income backgrounds (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2023) and composed approximately one-third of DESSE pilot respondents. These survey respondents were less likely than continuing-generation students to report that a goal of taking dual enrollment courses was to earn credit toward an associate degree or a bachelor's degree. These same students were also less likely than their peers to know about available support services, such as advising, tutoring, skill labs, and transfer credit assistance. First-generation students are already less likely to attain a college degree than students whose parents went to college, but dual enrollment programs that put equity at the forefront could be an opportunity to change that narrative.

Mehl et al. (2020) suggests, "for populations that have long been underserved, the lack of clear college pathways can limit the benefits of dual enrollment" (p. 34). They continue on to offer examples of colleges that have worked to provide all students with career and college exploration and that have worked to align dual enrollment course-taking with long-term planning (Mehl et al., 2020). An example that the playbook provides happens in Washington state:

All students complete a "High School and Beyond" plan, which they start by the end of 8th grade with the help of a website that shows them which courses they should take to prepare them for specific careers and where jobs are available in the state. The plan can be used to help students plot dual enrollment pathways that fit their overall goals. (Mehl et al., 2020, p. 32)

Ohio's Lorain County Community College also helps its dual enrollment students create clear pathways for success by mapping the courses students should take at the high school, the community college, and a partner university to earn a bachelor's degree in more than three dozen majors (Mehl et al., 2020).

Additionally, students who take all their dual enrollment classes at the high school are less likely to use as many support services as students who take all their classes at the college. For example, only one in four dually enrolled students who took all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor participated in orientation to dual enrollment, while nearly half of students who

took all their classes at the college did so. Obviously when students are physically on the college campus, they have more opportunity to access support services, but it is important to note that students who took all their courses at the high school were less likely to even know about the support services that were available to them. All students—regardless of instructor-type or location/modality—should be made aware of available support resources.

Providing and making students aware of support services will not happen organically, but it is possible. Community College Research Center has developed a dual enrollment equity pathways (DEEP) framework for broadening the benefits of dual enrollment to traditionally underserved students (Fink et al., 2023). Fink et al. (2023) describes practices at several institutions that include checkpoint advising and coordinating advising across sectors so that no matter where students take courses, advising with a focus on developing a program plan is inescapable. The authors also offer examples of how colleges and their high school partners can work together to recognize and quickly offer support to students who are struggling academically. On a similar note, one of the reviewers of this article pointed out that some high schools have dual enrollment centers that handle and coordinate all dual enrollment activities including advising as well as support services. Centers such as these can be instrumental in keeping dually enrolled students on track, especially if they are meeting students where most of the students are—at the high school.

For two decades, CCCSE findings have illustrated that building relationships and forming connections are instrumental for many students to find success. It is not surprising that students taking all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor are more likely to report that their instructor knew their name than their peers taking all their classes at the high school with a college instructor, at the college, or online. Students taking all their classes at the high school with a high school instructor are also more likely to report discussing their grades or assignments with their instructors than their peers taking courses in different ways. Certainly, built-in familiarity makes forming connections easier, but there should be little difference in how instructors interact with students, regardless of instructor-type, location, or modality. The Dual Enrollment Playbook and the DEEP report speak to the importance of providing dual enrollment instructors with professional development built around teaching this type of coursework (Fink et al., 2023; Mehl et al., 2020).

Dual enrollment is an opportunity for high school students to be introduced to college-level coursework and support services and to earn college credit—and often, to do so at minimal or no cost to them. For many students from historically underserved populations, the value of this early entry into higher education cannot be overstated. For the dual enrollment experience to be truly valuable, however, students need to be set on a path that will lead them to success. One of the first steps in helping students find success in dual enrollment is understanding how they are experiencing dual enrollment. Therefore, colleges may benefit from investigating the experiences of their dually enrolled students based on the different variables outlined in this article.

Note. CCCSE conducted a second DESSE pilot in spring 2024 and anticipates running a large-scale field test in 2025.

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Courtney Adkins (adkins@cccse.org) is the director of CCCSE, in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy, College of Education, at The University of Texas at Austin.

Linda L. García (linda.garcia@cccse.org) is the executive director of CCCSE, in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy, College of Education, at The University of Texas at Austin.

Patrick D. Manapat (pmanapat@ou.edu) is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology, Dodge Family College of Arts and Sciences, at The University of Oklahoma.

E. Michael Bohlig (adkins@cccse.org) is the retired associate director of research for CCCSE in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy, College of Education, at The University of Texas at Austin.