NACEP

MYTHS WORTH BUSTING

Research, Resources, & Talking Points for the Field

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INTRO

Guiding Quality Where It Matters Most

The National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) is the national leader in ensuring quality across dual and concurrent enrollment. Since 1999, NACEP has provided guidance, expertise, and accountability for this unique and growing sector of education.

Dual enrollment occupies a shared space between K–12 and higher education, bringing together different systems, expectations, and perspectives. As participation has grown, more students, families, educators, and administrators are encountering dual enrollment, often bringing different understandings of what it is, who it is for, and how it works. Those perceptions can shape participation, practice, and program design.

NACEP supports the field through field-tested quality standards, technical assistance, professional development, and state policy guidance.

This publication brings NACEP's research and practitioner expertise to common misconceptions about dual enrollment, helping ensure decisions are based on what dual enrollment actually is, not what people assume it to be.

Terms Used in This Resource

We use **dual enrollment (DE)** as a broad term for programs that provide high school students access to college courses. This aligns with federal data definitions and common research usage, which define DE as high school students enrolled in college courses for credit, regardless of location, delivery mode, instructor, or whether high school credit is also awarded.

Introduction

Dual enrollment is one of the most promising strategies for increasing college access and success, particularly for historically underserved students. But as DE programs expand across the country, they can also be met with a mix of enthusiasm, skepticism, and misunderstanding. Misconceptions held by students, families, K–12 educators, higher education partners, and administrators can create unnecessary barriers to participation and limit the potential impact of these programs.

This resource is designed to support practitioners in identifying and addressing common myths about dual enrollment. For each myth, we present research-based evidence to "bust" each myth, along with suggestions for how practitioners can advocate for their programs and students. Each section examines a common myth, summarizes what the evidence tells us, and provides talking points for students and families, faculty and staff, and administrators, along with resources and research for exploring the myth and the reality.

STUDENT IDENTITY AND BELONGING

MYTH 01

Dual enrollment is only for the academic all-stars

Dual enrollment is sometimes viewed as an opportunity only for the highest-achieving high school students. Research, however, shows that students across a range of academic backgrounds can benefit from dual enrollment when programs are designed and implemented well.

Talking Points:

This section provides actionable, audience-specific talking points designed to help you respond directly to whoever is voicing a particular myth. Simply identify your audience—whether you are speaking with students and families, faculty and staff, or administrators—and use the corresponding section of the chart to guide your conversation.

Students & Families

- **Real College, Earlier:** Dual enrollment gives high school students access to real college courses and the opportunity to begin college while still in high school.
- **A Supported Start to College:** Begin college while still in high school, with support from both your high school and college as you navigate college expectations.
- **You don't have to be an A student:** Eligibility depends on your motivation, readiness, and meeting certain grade or placement criteria.
- **Growth-Oriented:** Dual enrollment lets you challenge yourself, strengthen your academic skills, and discover what you can accomplish as a college student.
- **College Support:** Dual enrollment is college, and college comes with support. Quality programs provide access to resources like advising and academic support to help you succeed.

Faculty & Staff

- **Inclusive Advocacy:** Help every student see college and postsecondary training as possible and relevant to their future, and encourage them to explore dual enrollment as a pathway to get there.
- **Powerful Equity Tool:** Dual enrollment is a powerful tool to close equity gaps by providing college-going skills, behaviors, and knowledge.
- **Wrap-around supports:** As practitioners, we should ensure that programs connect students to the resources and supports colleges provide to help all students thrive.
- **Challenge Biases:** College potential is not always visible in a student's past performance. Create opportunities for students to challenge themselves and build confidence in their abilities.

Administration

- **Powerful Equity Tool:** Dual enrollment is a powerful tool to close equity gaps.
- **Program Design:** Intentional program design integrates supports that help learners with different backgrounds and levels of preparation build the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to succeed in college coursework. Use CCRC's DEEP and NACEP's Beyond Rigor frameworks as roadmaps for embedding these supports throughout the student experience.
- **Institutional Impact:** Ensuring that all students are aware of the broad benefits of dual enrollment can expand college access, engagement and participation.

Resources:

This section provides a list of handy, accessible resources that offer specific talking points and practical frameworks for each myth. These tools are designed for quick reference to help you dive deeper into the strategies or support your talking points.

NACEP Fast Facts

Dual enrollment, also known as concurrent enrollment, dual credit, and early college, allows high school students to take college courses and earn college credit. Once a relatively small part of the education landscape, dual enrollment now serves millions of students and is an increasingly important pathway into higher education.

Dual Enrollment Playbook + DEEP Framework

The Dual Enrollment Playbook and CCRC's DEEP framework demonstrate how intentional program design can broaden college access and opportunity, particularly for students who might not otherwise see college as an option.

Beyond Rigor

NACEP's Beyond Rigor framework expands the conversation about quality beyond the rigor of individual courses to the full student experience. It emphasizes programs that provide rigorous and relevant college learning, appropriate support, and meaningful progress toward students' educational goals.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

Should Students Falling Behind in School Take Dual Enrollment Courses? | NACEP Research Spotlight

Research indicates that students from diverse academic backgrounds can benefit from dual enrollment. One study tracked Texas high school students who initially struggled during their transition from middle school. Among these students, those who took a dual credit course were substantially more likely to enroll in and complete college compared to their peers who did not participate.

MYTH
02

Students who are multilingual English learners cannot succeed in dual enrollment courses

Language proficiency is distinct from academic capability; because dual enrollment is designed for all students, with appropriate supports and resources, multilingual English learners can thrive in college coursework.

Talking Points:

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Students & Families

- **Fluency vs. Readiness:** Remember that being academically ready for college is different than having perfect language fluency; colleges can use placement tools to help you find the right starting point.
- **Don't Let Language Stop You:** High schools and colleges are increasingly working to support multilingual learners through their academic journey.
- **Ask What's Available:** High schools and colleges may offer tutoring, language assistance, and other resources designed to support your success.

Faculty & Staff

- **Proactive Connection:** Actively connect multilingual English learners (MEL) to tutoring, language assistance, and specialized academic advising to ensure equitable outcomes.
- **Strength-Based Support:** Recognize the unique strengths these students bring while providing the scaffolding they need to thrive in a college-level environment.
- **Focused Advising:** Use advising sessions to help students strategically navigate course options that align with their current language proficiency and long-term aspirations.
- Supporting English Learners is more than good practice. Federal law tasks states and school districts to take appropriate action to address language barriers that can impede students' equal participation in educational programs.

Administration

- **Systemic Inclusion:** Redesigning eligibility and placement practices to be more inclusive is essential for bringing MEL students into the dual enrollment pipeline.
- **Resource Alignment:** Ensure that advising structures are sufficiently resourced to provide the intensive, culturally responsive guidance these students may need.
- **Closing the Research Gap:** While research in this area is growing, we must remain intentional in our support to ensure dual enrollment acts as a tool for equity rather than exacerbating gaps.

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Dual Enrollment Supporting English-language Learners — Strategies for Instructors

Students who are English-language learners contribute new ways of thinking and seeing based on the additional languages they speak; that asset can help the whole class so it is important to maximize their engagement. In addition, providing information in a variety of modes, giving students time to consider their responses to questions, and actively promoting vocabulary development —especially helpful for English-language learners—can benefit all students.

Designing Dual Enrollment to Reach English Learners: Boosting College Success for California Students

English learners often fall through the gap between the state's disconnected high school and college systems. The vast majority of English Learners do not meet the State's definition of college and career readiness upon high school graduation, and fewer than half enroll in college in the following year. Dual enrollment represents a possible bridge between high school and college for English learners, especially if implemented with attention to their unique assets and needs.

Opening the Dual Enrollment Door Wider for English Learners: A Case Study From Maryland

"English learners have often been left out of postsecondary reform conversations that can have large impacts on their access to college-level, credit-bearing courses," said Julia Raufman, a research associate at CCRC who focuses on the postsecondary pathways and experiences of ELs. "The field needs to be more inclusive of students with English language learning needs, particularly when the goal is to accelerate college completion."

The data demonstrated that there is a nationwide problem of lack of access for emergent multilingual immigrant high school students to dual enrollment coursework.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

Research Priorities for Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Policy and Practice

Research on multilingual English learners (MELs) in dual enrollment is an emerging field, with a current gap in data on specific access and outcomes. Existing studies indicate that while MELs currently access dual enrollment at lower rates, they succeed in college-level work when provided with intentional support, such as language assistance and academic scaffolding. Without such measures, dual enrollment risks exacerbating existing inequities rather than closing them.

Dual Enrollment and Multilingual English Learners: From Equity Gaps Towards Solutions

The study authors identified key opportunities to better support MELs by redesigning eligibility and placement practices to be more inclusive. Recommended strategies include embedding language scaffolding into coursework, training instructors in linguistically responsive pedagogy, and providing focused advising and family outreach in students' home languages.

MYTH 03

Students only enroll in dual enrollment if their friends or existing social networks are also participating

Peer relationships may influence whether students initially consider dual enrollment, but participation can expand networks and create new connections.

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Students & Families	Faculty & Staff	Administration
• **Widespread Participation:** Dual enrollment is common; one-third of high school students have taken a course. And classmates and peers are often considering these courses even if they haven't shared their plans yet.	• **Intentional Community Building:** Highlighting collaborative aspects of dual enrollment can help students build community with new peers, fostering a sense of belonging and easing social concerns.	• **Peer Recruitment:** Students are often the most influential voices for their peers. Identifying and supporting "student ambassadors" leverages this influence to shift the social narrative around dual enrollment and drive engagement.

Students & Families	Faculty & Staff	Administration
• **Prioritizing Long-Term Goals:** While social circles are important, individual educational opportunities provide lasting benefits like increased college readiness and personal confidence. • **Building New Connections:** Enrolling in advanced courses offers a chance to meet motivated peers with similar academic interests, expanding social connections and networks.	• **Normalizing Participation:** Showcasing testimonials and positive social experiences from past students helps others see the broader social benefits and normalizes participation across the student body. • **Peer Advocacy:** Identifying and supporting peer or near peer "student ambassadors" can help shift the social narrative around dual enrollment at the peer level.	• **Strategic Cohorting:** Cohort models or "interest-based" tracks can create built-in social structures that make enrollment feel more socially secure for new students. • **Data-Driven Outreach:** Participation data can demonstrate that dual enrollment is a widely used pathway that offers opportunities to learn, connect, and grow.

Resources:

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Dual Enrollment By the Numbers

Uses national IPEDS data to show the scale of dual enrollment and how high school students are distributed across colleges, sectors, and states.

- **Dual Enrollment By the Numbers: 2023-2024**
- **Dual Enrollment By the Numbers: 2022-2023**

NACEP Fast Facts About Dual Enrollment:

Provides a quick overview of what dual enrollment is, how it works, who participates, and what research says about its benefits.

Dual Enrollment Survey of Student Experience Dashboard:

Provides student-reported data on dual enrollment students' experiences, engagement, supports, and perceptions of their college courses.

Relevant Research:

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"I don't know, I've never been to college!" Dual Enrollment as a College Readiness Strategy

This study highlights how peer dynamics and a sense of shared belonging can normalize participation and strengthen academic motivation across the student body.

Research confirms that peer relationships and social norms play a significant role in adolescent decision-making and academic motivation. While direct studies on social anxiety and dual enrollment are limited, peer influence and identity formation are recognized as key factors in program engagement. Evidence suggests that the social environment matters; exposure to a higher percentage of dual enrollment participants can positively influence outcomes for non-participating students.

MYTH 04

Students with disabilities cannot benefit from dual enrollment

Students with disabilities can and do benefit from DE. "Disability" encompasses diverse needs and does not necessarily limit a student's ability to meet college standards. With appropriate supports and accommodations, many meet and exceed the same expectations as their peers.



Talking Points:

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Students & Families	Faculty & Staff	Administration
• **Inclusive Opportunity:** Dual enrollment is designed for all students, including those with disabilities. Colleges are legally required to provide reasonable accommodations to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to be successful in college-level coursework. • **Collaborative Support:** Working closely with high school counselors and the college's disability services office helps identify and implement the necessary supports for a smooth and successful experience.	• **Proven Success:** Students with disabilities can thrive in dual enrollment courses when provided with appropriate accommodations and comprehensive support. • **Proactive Inclusion:** Professional readiness involves being proactive in delivering accommodations that ensure accessibility and inclusion within the classroom environment.	• **Addressing Representation Gaps:** Students with disabilities represent one of the most underrepresented populations in dual enrollment; there is a clear responsibility to create intentional programming to address these participation gaps. • **Resource Alignment:** Strengthening the partnership between high school special education departments and college disability services is a critical administrative priority for building accessible pathways.

Students & Families	Faculty & Staff	Administration
		• **Policy Alignment:** Developing clear, streamlined processes for transitioning accommodations from the IEP/504 level to the college level removes systemic barriers to entry and success.

Resources:

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Unlocking Potential: A State Policy Roadmap for Equity and Quality in College in High School Programs for Students With Disabilities

When states explicitly design policies to address these equity gaps and ensure appropriate accommodations, support services, and tailored access, students with disabilities are better positioned to thrive.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

Rethinking Dual Enrollment as an Equitable On-Ramp to a Career-Path College Degree Program After High School

Research indicates a significant participation gap for students with disabilities in dual enrollment. While this group represents approximately 13% of the secondary school population, they account for only 4% of dual enrollment students. Currently, there is limited research specifically examining the long-term effects of dual enrollment participation for this student population.

MYTH 05

High school students are too young and immature to take college courses

Students don't suddenly become mature and college-ready at graduation. Dual enrollment opens college earlier to students who are ready, with college expectations and supports in place.

Talking Points:

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Students & Families

- **Readiness Is Individual:** Students develop academically and personally at different rates, and many are ready to take on college expectations before high school graduation.
- **What to Expect:** Dual enrollment is a college experience. Along with greater independence and responsibility, courses may include complex, sensitive, or mature subject matter and exposure to challenging ideas and perspectives.
- **Use the Supports Available:** College students have access to a variety of support services. Dual enrollment students should have access to advising, tutoring, and other supports too.

Faculty & Staff

- **Recognize Individual Readiness:** Maturity and readiness vary among both high school **and** college students.
- **Make Expectations Explicit:** High school students may be encountering college norms and expectations for the first time. Clear communication about responsibilities, deadlines, participation, and seeking help can support their transition to greater independence.
- **Comprehensive Supports:** Seeking guidance is part of being a college student, not a sign of immaturity. Dual enrollment students have access to advising, tutoring, and other college supports to help them succeed.

Administration

- **Prepare Faculty:** Provide professional learning that helps faculty understand developmental variation and effectively teach and support students who may be experiencing college for the first time.
- **System Design:** Ensure advising, tutoring, library resources, disability services, and other college supports are accessible to dual enrollment students, including those learning at a high school or outside traditional college settings.
- **Clear Expectations:** Make sure students and families understand what taking a college course means, including academic responsibilities, greater independence, college policies, and the possibility of mature course content.

Resources:

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The Postsecondary Outcomes of High School Dual Enrollment Students: A National and State-by-State Analysis

Research indicates that the vast majority of dual enrollment participants are high school juniors and seniors, with 88% of students nationally enrolled during the 11th or 12th grade.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

ACADEMIC RIGOR AND QUALITY

MYTH 06

Dual enrollment and AP are basically the same thing

Dual enrollment and Advanced Placement (AP) offer different experiences and opportunities. Students should understand those differences and choose the option, or combination of options, that best aligns with their goals.

Talking Points:

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Students & Families

- **Beyond Academics:** AP and dual enrollment both offer rigorous academic opportunities, but DE is an actual college course. Students enroll in college, earn college credit, and gain experience navigating college expectations and systems.
- **How Credit Is Earned:** With AP, college credit depends on an exam score and the receiving institution's policy. In DE, students earn college credit through their performance and successful completion of the course.
- **College Record:** DE is college, and your performance counts. Grades become part of your college transcript, so understand add/drop and withdrawal deadlines and research how your credits will transfer and apply.

Faculty & Staff

- **Explain the Difference:** Help students and families understand that DE means enrolling in the college course and earning college credit through performance, while AP **may** result in credit depending on the exam score and receiving-college policies.
- **Integrated Planning:** Help students strategically plan their high school coursework, exploring how dual enrollment and AP courses can fit together within their broader academic plan and future aspirations.

Administration

- **Intentional Pathways:** Offer AP and dual enrollment intentionally, recognizing that both provide rigorous academic opportunities but different non-academic skill-building experiences. A strong mix gives students multiple ways to pursue advanced coursework and prepare for what comes next.
- **Building Institutional Connection:** A positive and supported DE experience builds institutional trust and familiarity, helping students see the partnering college as a place where they can continue their education after high school.

Resources:

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Quick Reference: AP and Dual Enrollment

AP and DE both offer rigorous academics, but dual enrollment is an actual college course with the systems, supports, credit, and academic record that come with college enrollment.

AP	Dual Enrollment
AP Course Advanced high school course meeting AP curricular requirements.	**College course** Cataloged college course, taught to college standards, including curriculum, assessment, and learning outcomes.
Instruction Taught by a high school teacher.	**Enrollment process in college systems** Admissions, registration, and records (SIS)
Exam & Potential College Credit Students take a standardized AP exam. Colleges may award credit based on the exam score and their AP acceptance policies.	**Instruction** Depending on the DE model, taught by college faculty or an equivalently qualified high school instructor.
	Use of other college supports Advising, tutoring, library, and other student support
	Transcribed college credit Appears on the college transcript

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

Does Dual Enrollment Increase Students' Success in College? Evidence from a Quasi-Experimental Analysis of Dual Enrollment in New York City

Research suggests that dual enrollment and Advanced Placement (AP) courses can be complementary educational pathways, with findings showing that students can often benefit from engaging in both depending on their individual academic goals, learning styles, and future educational interests.

Assessing College-Credit-in-High-School Programs as On-Ramps to Postsecondary Career Pathways for Underrepresented Students

This research brief explores research on five models for delivering college-level content and college credit to high school students. All models have advantages and disadvantages.

Promising Combinations of Dual Enrollment, AP/IB, and CTE: The College and Earning Trajectories of Texas High School Students Who Take Accelerated Coursework

This study showed that students who strategically combine dual enrollment with AP/IB coursework, achieve strong long-term postsecondary graduation rates and early-career earnings outcomes compared to those who participate in only one accelerated pathway.

MYTH 07

Dual enrollment courses are not as rigorous as credit-by-exam products like AP because there isn't a standardized exit exam.

Dual enrollment courses are college courses taught by qualified faculty using the college's curriculum, learning outcomes, and often the same texts and assessments as on campus. Learning is demonstrated through the full college course, not a single high-stakes exam.

Talking Points:

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Students & Families

- **Real College Courses:** Dual enrollment courses are actual college courses taught by college faculty or high school instructors that meet college qualification criteria and use the college's curriculum, learning outcomes, and often the same textbooks, assignments, and assessments.
- **Credit Through the Course:** Students earn college credit by successfully completing the course and its assessments. Credit is earned through performance across the college course rather than a single high-stakes exam score.
- **Multiple Ways to Show What You Know:** College courses assess learning in different ways throughout the term. Students can demonstrate mastery through assignments, projects, exams, and other coursework rather than relying on one test.

Faculty & Staff

- **Faculty Ownership of the Curriculum:** In dual enrollment, college faculty define the curriculum, learning outcomes, and expectations for their courses and oversee alignment across sections. Unlike credit-by-exam programs, faculty retain direct influence over what is taught and how learning is assessed.
- **Limitations of High-Stakes Testing:** Standardized exit exams may not accurately measure a student's true mastery of content. Instead, they often measure how well a student prepares for and takes a specific exam, whereas other students who have fully mastered the material may not be able to showcase their knowledge in a single, high-stakes setting.
- **Collaborative Quality Assurance:** NACEP accreditation* requires high school teachers to collaborate closely with college faculty on course-related items. Syllabus creation and review, assessment questions used on both high school and college exams, and in-depth assignments or projects are required elements of evidence demonstrating that course quality is maintained.

*Note: Not every dual enrollment program is NACEP accredited. Learn more about the elements of program quality and student supports accredited programs must utilize here.

Administration

- **Systems for Quality:** Administrators should establish clear policies, processes, and dedicated staffing to ensure dual enrollment courses consistently meet the same academic expectations as other sections of the college course.
- **Support Faculty Collaboration:** Provide the time, structures, and resources for high school instructors and college faculty to align curriculum, review courses, and engage in ongoing discipline-specific professional learning.
- **Continuous Quality Improvement:** Use regular course review, faculty engagement, and program evaluation to ensure dual enrollment remains aligned with institutional expectations and accreditation standards.

Resources:

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National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships: Accreditation Overview

NACEP accreditation ensures that DE and on-campus courses are equivalently rigorous by placing postsecondary faculty at the center of the processes designed to ensure this similarity.

Higher education institutions in the United States utilize nongovernmental peer-review-accreditation as an essential component of external review for quality assurance and continuous improvement of educational programs. Since 2004, NACEP has served as the sole accrediting body for dual enrollment programs.

Accreditation is awarded to programs after a comprehensive peer review by a team of experienced representatives from NACEP-accredited enrollment programs. Applicants conduct a self-study and prepare an accreditation application with evidence documenting how the college or university implements NACEP's national standards for program quality in the areas of partnerships, faculty, assessment, curriculum, student support, and program evaluation.



Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Dual Enrollment Research

Several decades of empirical research have found no meaningful differences between the level of learning in AP/IB classes and DE courses.

How Do Faculty Define and Enact Rigor in the Dual Enrollment Classroom?

Research shows that high school instructors teaching dual enrollment have sophisticated understandings of college-level rigor and how to maintain it in their classrooms. In NACEP-accredited programs, postsecondary faculty work directly with these instructors to ensure courses meet the same academic standards as their on-campus counterparts.

MYTH 08

Dual enrollment courses taught by high school instructors are not 'real' college courses

Dual enrollment courses are college courses, regardless of where they are taught. In a quality program, high school instructors are approved by the college, meet faculty qualification requirements, and work with college faculty to ensure the same curriculum, learning outcomes, and academic expectations are maintained.



Talking Points:

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Students & Families	Faculty & Staff	Administration
• **Highly Qualified Instructors:** High school instructors who teach dual enrollment are approved by the college and meet its faculty qualification requirements. They teach the college's curriculum and learning outcomes while bringing deep experience in teaching, learning, and supporting students. • **Program Quality Standards:** In a quality program, DE courses should be supported, monitored, and evaluated by the college to ensure they meet the same academic standards as on-campus sections of the course. The credit appears on the college's transcript, carrying the institution's name and reputation with it.	• **Instructional Support:** Actively support high school instructors with the resources, ongoing professional learning, and college faculty connection needed to deliver high-quality college courses. • **Collegial Connection:** Create meaningful opportunities for high school instructors to engage with their college departments and faculty colleagues through professional learning, resources, and campus experiences. • **Collegiate Environment:** Support high school instructors in creating and maintaining an authentic college environment within the high school, including approaches to learning and, where appropriate, the physical space.	• **Valuing Instructor Expertise:** Publicly highlight and celebrate the strong qualifications and dedicated expertise of high school instructors who teach dual enrollment courses, recognizing their vital role in extending college access. • **Strategic Partnerships:** Establish clear, institutional pathways for ongoing communication, resource allocation, and collaborative department reviews between high school teachers and their corresponding college faculty peers.

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Bridging Two Worlds: The Evolving Landscape of High School Dual Enrollment in American Higher Education

This national AACRAO/NACEP study shows that dual enrollment is delivered through multiple models, including courses taught by qualified high school instructors, college faculty, and combinations of the two, across high schools, college campuses, and online. The findings demonstrate that who teaches the course or where it is taught does not define its legitimacy as a college course; institutions maintain responsibility for faculty qualifications, academic standards, and the credit they award.

NACEP National Standards for Program Quality:

Provides nationally recognized standards for ensuring dual enrollment quality across partnerships, curriculum, faculty, students, assessment, and program evaluation.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

The Varied Nature of the Dual Enrollment Student Experience

High school-based DE courses commonly use the same course materials, assignments, and syllabi as other sections of the course taught on college campuses. A multi-institutional survey of the DE student experience found that a majority of students taking DE courses at either their high school or a college campus reported greater academic challenge than in their other high school classes.

How Do Faculty Define and Enact Rigor in the Dual Enrollment Classroom?

High-school-based DE instructors have been shown to possess expansive and nuanced understandings of academic rigor, including subject-matter expertise and skills in building confidence and college-knowledge essential to the success of new college learners.

MYTH 09

Students must have an on-campus experience to benefit from dual enrollment coursework

While an on-campus experience can be great, transportation and logistical challenges should not limit who has access to dual enrollment, since research has shown that students benefit from participation across many formats and modalities.

Talking Points:

This section provides actionable, audience-specific talking points designed to help you respond directly to whoever is voicing a particular myth. Simply identify your audience—whether you are speaking with students and families, faculty and staff, or administrators—and use the corresponding section of the chart to guide your conversation.

Students & Families	Faculty & Staff	Administration
• **College Credit and Support:** Whether you take your dual enrollment course at your high school, on a college campus, online, or in a hybrid format, you can earn real college credit and gain college experience. As a college student, you also have access to academic supports and services offered by the college. • **Benefits Wherever You Learn:** You don't have to be on a college campus to benefit from dual enrollment. Research shows that students who take dual enrollment courses across different locations and formats benefit compared with students who do not take dual enrollment courses. • **Quality Across Settings:** A quality dual enrollment experience can happen in person, online, at your high school, or on a college campus. What matters most is strong teaching, engaging content, and the support you need to succeed.	• **Consistent Quality:** Regardless of where or how a course is delivered, the focus should remain on rigorous instruction, meaningful learning, and the academic support students need to succeed. • **Access:** Transportation, scheduling, long travel distances, and other logistical barriers make on-campus courses difficult for many students to access, particularly in rural communities. Offering dual enrollment at the high school or online expands equitable access. • **Indicators of Success:** Research suggests that the quality of the learning experience and the support students receive matter more than whether a course is taught on a college campus, at a high school, or online.	• **Holistic Campus Engagement:** There are more ways to engage with your partner than hosting courses. K-12 and postsecondary partners can collaborate to provide meaningful on-campus experiences outside of just classes, such as campus tours, academic workshops, and specific college application days. • **Service Access:** Institutional leaders should ensure vital on-campus services are provided to all dual enrollment students regardless of their course location, including dedicated academic advising, tutoring support, basic needs resources, and transfer-planning services, just to name a few.



Resources:

This section provides a list of handy, accessible resources that offer specific talking points and practical frameworks for each myth. These tools are designed for quick reference to help you dive deeper into the strategies or support your talking points.

The Dual Enrollment Playbook: A Guide to Equitable Acceleration for Students

Findings from the Dual Enrollment Playbook suggest that highly effective programs can be implemented either through primarily high school- or college-located formats if practitioners attend to the specific challenges and opportunities of each.

Online, On Purpose: A Framework for Building Impactful Dual Enrollment Experiences through Online Courses (NACEP)

Drawing from national program quality standards, institutional best practices, and contributions from programs across the country, Online, On Purpose is a practical guide to ensuring impactful online college course experiences for high school students.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

Research on the relationship between the location of DE courses and student outcomes is mixed, with some studies showing that DE students have stronger postsecondary outcomes when taking courses on a college campus, while others show no differences by location.

Recent studies looking at the relationship between course location and student outcomes:

- **Does Delivery Location Matter? A National Study of the Impact of Dual Enrollment on College Readiness and Early Academic Momentum** Hu & Chan (2021)
- **Concurrent Enrollment Outcomes by Course Location** Clayton et al. (2023)
- **The Role of Course Modality in Dual Enrollment: Insights from North Carolina** Edmunds et al. (2026)
- **Understanding the Link Between Dual Enrollment Course Characteristics and Students' Course and College Enrollment Outcomes** Ryu et al. (2023)

Note: Some studies include programs that are not NACEP-accredited and/or operate in states without statewide quality policies, including policies requiring the use of national best practices. See NACEP's Beyond Rigor for more on statewide approaches to dual enrollment quality.

MYTH 10

Why take classes now if I can't afford college after high school?

As more good-paying jobs require education or training beyond high school, cost can make the path forward uncertain. Dual enrollment offers an affordable way to get started, build skills, earn credits or credentials, explore your goals, and make progress toward your future.

Talking Points:

This section provides actionable, audience-specific talking points designed to help you respond directly to whoever is voicing a particular myth. Simply identify your audience—whether you are speaking with students and families, faculty and staff, or administrators—and use the corresponding section of the chart to guide your conversation.

Students & Families

- **Potential Cost Savings:** Dual enrollment can save you money on college tuition. You can earn college credits now, typically at a much lower cost or even for free in many programs, reducing future college expenses.
- **College Exploration and Experience Now:** Dual enrollment lets you explore college courses and future interests while experiencing college firsthand, building the knowledge, skills, and confidence to navigate what comes next.
- **Valuable Head Starts:** Dual enrollment can help you earn college credits, short-term workforce credentials, certificates, or even an associate degree in high school, providing value whether you enter the workforce or continue your education.

Faculty & Staff

- **Communicate Cost Savings:** Clearly communicate how dual enrollment can reduce college costs through low- or no-cost college credits and credentials earned in high school.
- **Make Credits Count:** Help students select courses intentionally and understand how credits apply to certificates, degrees, transfer pathways, or other educational goals. More credits do not necessarily mean more progress.
- **Emphasize Value Beyond Credits:** Help students understand that dual enrollment also provides opportunities to explore interests, experience college, and build confidence about what comes next.
- **Connect to What Comes Next:** Pair dual enrollment with proactive financial aid information, transfer guidance, and pathway planning so concerns about future college costs do not prevent students from getting started.

Administration

- **Prevent Random Credit Accumulation:** Credit accumulation should translate into meaningful progress. Design clear pathways so dual enrollment credits apply toward certificates, degrees, and transfer pathways.
- **Systemic Financial Offsets:** Maximize regional funding structures, grants, and institutional fee waivers to ensure that dual enrollment participation remains completely free or low-cost for historically underserved student populations.
- **Make Affordability Visible:** Build college cost, financial aid, and scholarship information into dual enrollment communications.

Resources:

This section provides a list of handy, accessible resources that offer specific talking points and practical frameworks for each myth. These tools are designed for quick reference to help you dive deeper into the strategies or support your talking points.

WWC Intervention Report: Dual Enrollment Programs

Students who take DE are more likely to finish college. Research shows that DE students tend to persist in college and earn credentials at higher rates, which lowers the risk of taking on debt without a degree. When DE students enter college, they have high rates of enrollment, credit accumulation, academic achievement and degree attainment.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

Funding for Equity Designing State Dual Enrollment Funding Models to Close Equity Gaps

Dual enrollment allows students to earn college credit at low or no cost. In about half of states, dual enrollment is free for students and families. That means that students can start earning college credit for free or at a discount, cutting down on future tuition bills.

National Evidence of the Relationship Between Dual Enrollment and Student Loan Debt

Dual enrollment can reduce how much students borrow for college, as students who take dual enrollment courses in high school often finish college faster and with fewer courses to pay for later. In a national study, DE participation was linked with a lower likelihood of borrowing student loans for some underserved students of color, especially when comparing DE students with similar peers who didn't take DE courses.

MYTH 11

Dual enrollment credits won't transfer to other colleges, especially if students want to go out of state

Most institutions accept dual enrollment credit under standard transfer policies, but whether credits transfer and apply toward a student's program varies by institution and state.

Talking Points:

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Students & Families

- **Research Transfer Policies:** Research how colleges you are considering accept and apply dual enrollment credit, particularly out-of-state or highly selective institutions. Tools like **UConn ECE's Credit Transfer Database** can help you explore how institutions have treated DE credit, but always confirm current policies directly with the college.
- **Ask How Credits Will Apply:** Acceptance is only part of the question. Contact the admissions or registrar's office to ask whether your credits will apply toward your intended degree, major, or general education requirements. **UConn ECE's Tips for Credit Transfer** provides practical guidance for navigating this process.
- **Be Prepared to Advocate:** Keep course syllabi and other documentation that may help a receiving institution evaluate your coursework. If a credit is not initially accepted or applied as expected, ask whether additional documentation or a review process is available.
- **Value Beyond Credit:** The value of DE extends beyond the credits themselves. You'll gain experience with college coursework, expectations, systems, and responsibilities. Even when a credit does not transfer, the college experience does.

Faculty & Staff

- **Proactive Advisor Guidance:** Help students research transfer policies and understand how to verify whether their DE credits will be accepted and how those credits will apply, particularly when considering out-of-state or highly selective institutions. Provide tools and resources that help students navigate the process.
- **Strategic Course Selection:** Help students choose DE courses intentionally, considering their educational goals and how credits are likely to apply toward general education requirements, certificates, degrees, or transfer pathways.
- **Help Students Navigate Transfer:** Share practical tips and transfer information, point students to resources such as transfer platforms, course equivalency tools, articulation agreements, and receiving institutions' policies, and provide a clear contact for questions.

Administration

- **Centralize Transfer Resources:** Provide a clear, accessible place for students and families to find transfer guidance, including statewide articulation agreements, out-of-state considerations, transfer platforms and equivalency tools, and links to institutional agreements. Include guidance on contacting receiving institutions to understand how credits may transfer and apply toward a credential or degree.
- **Build Value Beyond the Credit:** Design dual enrollment experiences that build college skills AND academic skills, teach students to navigate college expectations and processes, and provide lasting value regardless of how individual credits ultimately transfer or apply.

Resources:

This section provides a list of handy, accessible resources that offer specific talking points and practical frameworks for each myth. These tools are designed for quick reference to help you dive deeper into the strategies or support your talking points.

Online, On Purpose: A Framework for Building Impactful Dual Enrollment Experiences Through Online College Courses offers advice and tools for helping students explore transfer in the DE landscape. The section "College Credit Portability" describes **UConn ECE's Credit Transfer Database** for researching and tracking how institutions treat dual enrollment credit. Their site also has a **list of useful tips for transfer**. Both are useful resources for helping students and families navigate the transfer process.

Education Commission of the States 50-State Comparison: *Transfer and Articulation Policies:* Provides a state-by-state look at policies that shape how college credits transfer, including common course numbering, transferable general education cores, and guaranteed transfer of associate degrees. Helpful for understanding the broader transfer landscape DE students may encounter and how portability can vary by state.

Bridging Two Worlds: The Evolving Landscape of High School Dual Enrollment in American Higher Education provides national data on how colleges transcribe and accept dual enrollment credit, including findings that 98% of responding institutions accept dual enrollment credit from other institutions. Useful for understanding how colleges actually treat DE credit and putting concerns about credit portability into context.

The Transfer Playbook: A Practical Guide for Achieving Excellence in Transfer and Bachelor's Attainment for Community College Students identifies practices used by community colleges, universities, and transfer partnerships with stronger transfer and bachelor's attainment outcomes, including for low-income, Black, and Hispanic students.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

The Transfer of College Credits Earned in High School Dual Enrollment (North Carolina)

Researchers at the Early College Research Center found that 77% of dual enrollment courses taken by North Carolina students transferred to an in-state public university, compared with 31% of **AP courses**. Students from historically underserved groups faced greater transfer challenges in both pathways.

Bridging Two Worlds:

The Evolving Landscape of High School Dual Enrollment in American Higher Education Research suggests that the vast majority of postsecondary institutions handle high school DE credit transfer like they do other credit transfer. According to a national survey of nearly 300 institutions, 98% reported accepting DE credits when standard transfer credit requirements are met, though 36% of these same respondents perceived that there are difficulties with other institutions accepting them.

Higher Education: Students Need More Information to Help Reduce Challenges in Transferring College Credits

Dual enrollment students may encounter the same challenges with credit transfer and applicability as community college students generally, with national data showing that four-year institutions reject as much as 40% of community college credits students seek to apply toward a bachelor's degree.

MYTH 12

Expanding access to dual enrollment means lowering academic expectations, setting students up to fail

Maintaining high academic expectations while using broader measures of readiness, such as high school GPA, can expand equitable access to dual enrollment while producing student success comparable to traditional placement measures.

Talking Points:

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Students & Families	Faculty & Staff	Administration
• **Readiness Is More Than a Test Score:** Some courses, particularly gateway math and writing, build on specific knowledge and competencies students need to succeed in the course, making appropriate placement important. More broadly, readiness for dual enrollment can be demonstrated in different ways, including grades, prior coursework, and other measures, not just a placement test.	• **De-emphasize High-Stakes Testing:** Overreliance on placement testing for DE eligibility can exclude students who may not perform well on standardized tests but otherwise have the preparation to succeed in DE courses. • **Advocate for Equitable Access:** Actively advocate for and implement the use of multiple measures for placement, ensuring more equitable and accurate assessment of readiness for a wider range of capable students.	• **Collaborative Placement Policies:** Work collaboratively to implement comprehensive placement policies that are fair, accurate, and truly reflect a student's potential for success in dual enrollment, promoting equity and student growth. • **Institutional Support Infrastructure:** Establish and resource systemic, concurrent support frameworks—such as co-requisite labs, tutoring channels, and executive functioning workshops—to scale

Students & Families	Faculty & Staff	Administration
• **Multiple Measures:** Using multiple measures of college readiness helps ensure that students who are capable of college coursework can access dual enrollment, regardless of a single test score. Many DE programs consider grades, prior coursework, and other indicators alongside or instead of placement tests.	• **Implement Instructional On-Ramps:** There are strategies to successfully on-ramp DE students who might not meet traditional placement cutoffs, providing timely and/or concurrent academic and executive skill development to help them meet the expectations of a college course. • **Intentionally Guide Informed Choices:** Engage students in proactive academic advising to help them make informed choices, ensuring they understand course expectations and are matched with the appropriate pathways and support systems that align with their current academic goals.	academic success alongside expanded access policies. • **Leverage Early Alert:** Extend existing early alert systems to dual enrollment students and establish processes with high school partners to identify concerns and coordinate timely support.



Resources:

This section provides a list of handy, accessible resources that offer specific talking points and practical frameworks for each myth. These tools are designed for quick reference to help you dive deeper into the strategies or support your talking points.

Dual Enrollment Access in Policy Varies

This 2019 Education Commission of the States Policy Snapshot highlights four state approaches to expanding dual enrollment access: reducing costs, removing participation barriers, expanding eligibility, and increasing qualified educators.

An Opportunity to Expand College Access? Rethinking Dual Enrollment Eligibility Policies Post-Pandemic

Since the pandemic, which required that colleges use alternatives to in-person placement testing, it is increasingly common for states and colleges to use alternative methods for placing students into DE coursework, such as high school grades. In Ohio and Florida, statewide placement policies were changed to include alternative methods after state leaders found that pandemic-era shifts away from placement testing did not result in meaningful changes to student performance in DE coursework.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

Improving the Targeting of Treatment: Evidence From College Remediation

Placement testing can exclude students who are capable of succeeding in dual enrollment. Research suggests that heavy reliance on high-stakes placement tests can unnecessarily restrict access (Taylor et al., 2022). These tests have also been questioned for their ability to predict college success and may create disparities in both access to testing and pass rates (Scott-Clayton et al., 2012).

"Waving" Goodbye to Placement Testing: Broadening the Benefits of Dual Enrollment Through Statewide Policy

A causal analysis of Ohio's Innovative Program policy, which allowed colleges to waive placement testing requirements for DE, found that colleges that implemented the policy expanded access to underserved students without reducing course pass rates.

Should Students Falling Behind in School Take Dual Enrollment Courses?

Research suggests students do not need a history of high academic performance to benefit from DE. A Texas study found that students who struggled during the transition from middle school but later took dual credit were substantially more likely to enroll in and complete college than similar peers who did not participate.

MYTH 13

Students should earn as many dual enrollment credits as possible

More credits can create more complexity. As students accumulate college credit, intentional course selection and advising become increasingly important to ensure credits transfer, apply toward a credential or degree, and advance students toward their goals.

Talking Points:

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Students & Families	Faculty & Staff	Administration
• **When More Credits Make Sense:** Earning substantial college credit can be valuable when you have a clear goal, such as completing a certificate or degree, accelerating your college pathway, building toward a specific career, or attending a particular college. Make sure the courses you choose fit that goal and, if you have a college in mind, research how your credits will apply there. • **When Strategic Exploration Makes Sense:** You don't have to earn a large number of credits for DE to be valuable. Use courses to explore majors and careers, experience different subjects, learn how college works, and build confidence navigating college expectations, systems, and supports. • **Do Your Homework:** If you plan to earn substantial college credit in high school, connect early with colleges you are considering and seek advising about how your courses will transfer and apply to your intended program. The more credits you earn, the more important it is to know where they are leading.	• **Connect Courses to Student Goals:** Help students understand how available DE courses connect to their academic and career goals, including exploration, general education credit, credentials, degrees, and transfer. • **Recognize Different Goals:** Help students use DE intentionally, whether they are accumulating credits toward a defined goal or using college courses to explore majors and careers, experience college, and build college knowledge and confidence. • **Guide Intentional Course Selection:** Help students choose courses that align with their readiness and goals, and encourage students accumulating substantial credit to seek advising from colleges they are considering about how those credits will apply.	• **Build Intentional Pathways:** Where course offerings allow, design clear sequences that help students make meaningful progress toward certificates, degrees, transfer pathways, or career goals. Ensure students can see where courses lead rather than simply accumulating available credits. • **Make Pathways Visible:** Clearly communicate how DE courses and sequences connect to credentials, degree requirements, transfer, and other postsecondary opportunities at your institution so students and those advising them can make informed choices. • **Resource Advising Systems:** Invest in coordinated K–12 and postsecondary advising so students receive increasingly intentional guidance as they accumulate college credit, including support in understanding transfer and applicability.

Resources:

This section provides a list of handy, accessible resources that offer specific talking points and practical frameworks for each myth. These tools are designed for quick reference to help you dive deeper into the strategies or support your talking points.

DEEP Insights Redesigning Dual Enrollment as a Purposeful Pathway to College and Career Opportunity

This paper proposes four best practices for aligning dual enrollment with equitable pathways: outreach, alignment, advising, and support. The authors call for secondary and postsecondary partners to better align DE course offerings to postsecondary programs and/or careers by conducting an inventory of

current offerings, mapping courses to programs, and supporting instructor development. Additionally, students and families need earlier exposure to information about the connection between DE and postsecondary/career opportunities, including a comprehensive advising model for high school students that includes program planning, checkpoint advising, and a variety of career pathway exposure.



Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

Dual Enrollment Momentum Metrics: Leading Indicators for Program Improvement

This report introduces and validates a set of dual enrollment momentum metrics that colleges, K–12 partners, and state or system leaders can use as early indicators of student postsecondary success. Using longitudinal data from four states, the report examines how different measures of college course taking in high school—including credit accumulation thresholds (6+, 9+, 12+, 15+, 24+, 30+), completion of college math or English, and earning a college credential—predict outcomes after high school such as college enrollment, completion, and time-to-degree. The findings show that these metrics are strong and reliable predictors across student groups and school contexts, though different metrics are better aligned to different goals: lower credit thresholds and college English completion are especially predictive of college enrollment, while higher credit thresholds and college math completion are more closely linked to college completion and shorter time to a bachelor's degree.

From Fragmented to Focused: Intentional Dual Enrollment and The Federal Role in Maximizing Student Experiences

While research exists indicating that the more DE credits students complete, the more likely they are to enroll in college, evidence suggests that access to postsecondary learning alone is not enough to ensure a successful transition from high school to college and/or career. There must be intention behind the courses that students take, and there needs to be a clear path for them to follow, supported by appropriate advising and coaching along the way.

What do Dual Enrollment Students Want? Elevating the Voices of Historically Underserved Students to Guide Reforms

This case study demonstrates that "students want their DE courses to be aligned with career and academic pathways in their fields of interest." Practitioners simply need to provide an avenue for students to take advantage of these alignment opportunities through increased awareness, proactive advising, and education regarding available resources and pathways.

INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

MYTH 14

More dual enrollment means fewer students and fewer courses on campus

Dual enrollment does more than offer college credits earlier. It can bring new students into higher education, including those who may not have otherwise seen college as an option. By helping students experience college, succeed in college coursework, and build an early connection to an institution, DE can expand rather than simply redistribute the pool of future college students.

Talking Points:

This section provides actionable, audience-specific talking points designed to help you respond directly to whoever is voicing a particular myth. Simply identify your audience—whether you are speaking with students and families, faculty and staff, or administrators—and use the corresponding section of the chart to guide your conversation.

Students & Families

- This myth is primarily an institutional concern, but it can shape the DE opportunities available to students.
- **Choose Based on Your Goals:** You may hear that you should "save" certain college courses for after high school. If a DE course fits your goals and you are ready for it, earning that credit now can help you explore college or make progress toward what comes next.
- **Know Your Options:** The DE opportunities offered through your high school may not be the only ones available. Explore local college websites, connect with college DE staff, and talk with other students to learn about options offered on campus, online, or through other partnerships.

Faculty & Staff

- **Cultivate an Enrollment Pipeline:** View dual enrollment as a vital pipeline that can significantly increase our college's future enrollment. By introducing students to our campus and academic programs early, we are actively cultivating future full-time matriculants, including students who may not have otherwise attended college.
- **Enhance Strategic Recruitment:** Recognize that instead of cannibalizing enrollment, dual enrollment functions as an effective recruitment and retention strategy. It may make students more likely to choose our institution when they graduate high school, expanding our overall student body while improving the likelihood of future college attendance and persistence, particularly for underserved populations.

Administration

- **Beyond Matriculation:** Research indicates that dual enrollment students who matriculate demonstrate significantly higher retention and long-term degree completion rates, making dual enrollment an important strategy for advancing institutional completion goals.
- **Optimize Academic Alignment:** Collaborate with secondary partners to align DE coursework directly with high-demand degree pathways, turning early access into a long-term enrollment model for the institution.

Resources:

This section provides a list of handy, accessible resources that offer specific talking points and practical frameworks for each myth. These tools are designed for quick reference to help you dive deeper into the strategies or support your talking points.

Explore NACEP's Student Outcomes Research Collection: NACEP has compiled more than 25 national, regional, state, and institutional/system studies examining outcomes for students who participate in dual enrollment. The collection includes rigorous, large-scale quantitative research across a range of DE models and provides a strong evidence base for understanding the impact of dual enrollment on college access and success.

National Center for Education Statistics- National College Going Rates

Nationally, the overall college-going rate stands at 62% for high school graduates, meaning there is a significant pool of high school students (38%) who are not enrolling in college anywhere at all (Digest of Education Statistics, 2022). Dual enrollment represents a powerful mechanism to engage and capture these otherwise non-college-bound students for future institutional enrollment.

Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

State Findings: Dual Enrollment Student Outcomes

National research indicates that dual enrollment serves as an effective institutional pipeline, showing that 36% of dual enrollment students—and 37% of low-income students—re-enroll at their dual enrollment college in the first year after high school, with 25% enrolling for two or more terms after graduation.

Research on Dual and Concurrent Enrollment Outcomes

NACEP has compiled more than 25 studies of dual enrollment student outcomes, providing a go-to collection of research from across the country.

WWC Intervention Report: Dual Enrollment Programs

Rather than reducing postsecondary enrollment, DE can bring more students into higher education, including those who might not otherwise attend. Research finds DE participants are 12%–19% more likely to attend college and 6%–42% more likely to complete a degree.

MYTH 15

Expanding dual enrollment is not financially sustainable for colleges

Dual enrollment requires investment, but growth does not have to come at a financial loss. Sustainable programs intentionally align funding, staffing, partnerships, and program design with their scale and goals.

Talking Points:

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Students & Families

- This myth is primarily an institutional concern, but it can shape the DE opportunities available to students.

Faculty & Staff

- **Look Beyond the Zero-Sum Assumption:** DE does not simply move students and courses from the college campus into high schools. It can bring college to students who may not otherwise have enrolled and expand the population of students who see college as an option.
- **Recognize What DE Can Unlock:** Success in a college course can provide students with proof that they belong in college and can succeed there, while building familiarity with college expectations, systems, and supports.
- **See DE as an Entry Point:** For many students, DE is their first relationship with a college. A strong experience can build connection and familiarity that may influence whether and where they continue their education after high school.

Administration

- **Drive Institutional Retention and Completion:** Leverage dual enrollment as a powerful driver of institutional completion metrics, as matriculated DE students demonstrate significantly higher retention rates and long-term degree completion rates once they transition into full-time college students.
- **Optimize Academic Alignment:** Collaborate with secondary partners to align DE coursework directly with high-demand degree pathways, turning early access into a predictable, long-term enrollment model that stabilizes institutional growth.

Resources:

This section provides a list of handy, accessible resources that offer specific talking points and practical frameworks for each myth. These tools are designed for quick reference to help you dive deeper into the strategies or support your talking points.

College Business Models for Scaling Purposeful Dual Enrollment

This report shows how well-designed dual enrollment can grow the pool of future college-going students, including those who might not otherwise pursue postsecondary education. It examines sustainable approaches that require greater upfront investment but can create long-term value by increasing postsecondary continuation. An accompanying guide helps leaders apply the findings locally.

How Do States Fund Community College Dual Enrollment?

This blog post can help practitioners and policymakers understand how state dual enrollment funding policies shape colleges' ability to offer dual enrollment as a purposeful and affordable on-ramp to college and career pathways. It introduces a state-by-state taxonomy of community college dual enrollment funding based on three dimensions: the level of funding provided to colleges, the mechanism used to distribute funds, and whether funding flows directly to colleges or through K–12 systems. The analysis shows that many states still provide limited, inconsistent, or unpredictable funding, making it difficult for colleges and K–12 partners to scale the outreach, advising, pathway alignment, and academic supports needed for dual enrollment equity pathways. The blog is a useful resource for leaders seeking to compare state policy approaches, identify funding gaps, and make the case for more sustainable funding models that allow dual enrollment to expand opportunity without shifting costs to students and families.



Relevant Research:

This section compiles foundational research articles and brief publication summaries that offer evidence-based data points to back up your conversations. These references provide the empirical support needed to counter common misconceptions with detailed research, data, and facts.

How can Community Colleges Afford to Offer Dual Enrollment College Courses to High School Students at a Discount?

The economics of dual enrollment can vary substantially based on state and local funding contexts. In some states with stronger funding for DE (e.g., California, Washington Running Start, Texas HB8 incentive funding), expanding DE courses can substantially increase institutional revenues. And in other states where DE is not well funded, colleges must absorb more of the costs for expanding DE if they do not want to pass along those costs to students and families. Further, the costs and revenues for DE courses also vary substantially by who teaches the course and where it is located, and some arrangements for DE courses may be more or less costly than others.

In their analysis, Belfield et al., 2023 outlined three potential ways in which colleges can break even on DE courses, even in more challenging state funding environments:

- ***Economies of scale***: As DE enrollment increases, the average cost to deliver courses per student falls overall at the college. In other words, many colleges already have open seats available, and filling them with more students–even at a discount–is better than leaving them empty.
- ***Student success***: Because DE students have relatively high success rates, increasing DE student enrollment can generate disproportionate gains in state performance funding environments where DE students are included in performance calculations.

- ***Yield surplus***: When implemented well with a focus on college access and connection to postsecondary and career pathways, DE can motivate new students to enroll in college after high school and thus generate future enrollment and revenue for the college by increasing the supply of students. This can be especially beneficial to institutions as former DE students tend to be retained and complete college at higher rates than students overall.

Why Has Community College Enrollment Declined and What Can We Do About It?

Enrollments at many broad access colleges and universities have been declining even before the pandemic (Jenkins, 2023) – and high school dual enrollment offers a clear strategy for addressing the leaky pipeline from high school into college and therefore grow future enrollments at our college.

BUILT BY THE FIELD, FOR THE FIELD

This resource began with what NACEP was hearing from members: persistent misconceptions about dual enrollment were shaping conversations with students and families, faculty, district and institutional leaders, and policymakers. You asked for better tools to respond; we listened.

Members of NACEP's Advocacy and Research Commissions worked together to turn that need into this resource. The Advocacy Commission helped identify the myths most in need of attention and recognized the need to equip different audiences with relevant talking points. The Research Commission identified and distilled research findings to ground those responses in evidence and connect practitioners with research to go deeper.

Like so much of NACEP's work, this guide reflects the expertise of people doing this work every day. Commission members did not simply review a finished product. They helped identify the need, shape the approach, contribute content, and refine the resource over time. We are especially grateful to Advocacy Commission Chair Sarah Stashkiw and Research Commission Chair John Fink for their leadership and significant contributions throughout the project.

Bringing the resource together was also a team effort, with NACEP staff helping translate the commissions' ideas, research, and contributions into a practical publication. Ray Chard synthesized the commissions' ideas, research, and contributions, developed a practical structure for the publication, and contributed significantly to its content. Additional contributions came from NACEP team members Dianne Barker, Andrea Roma, and Carla Yorke. Miranda Rodriguez and Aspin Sanchez shaped the publication's format and key design elements, finding clear ways to present a complex body of content. Amy Williams provided substantive editorial direction, strengthened the messaging and content, and incorporated NACEP's national perspective and resources throughout.

To every commissioner who contributed an idea, challenged an assumption, found a piece of research, tested the language, or helped make this resource more useful: thank you. This resource is stronger because the field helped build it.