



February 2022

Dual Enrollment for Foster Youth: Toward Effective Practice

By Career Ladders Project

Acknowledgments

This project and report were made possible by funding from the California College Pathways Pooled Fund and the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative. Thanks to John Burton Advocates for Youth for providing technical assistance to the community of practice and feedback on this report, and to Alexia Everett from the Stuart Foundation for inspiring this pilot project. Thanks as well to Chabot College, Compton College, and Riverside City College for their participation in the community of practice and their work to open dual enrollment opportunities to foster youth in their communities.

Summary

Dual enrollment holds the promise of successfully transitioning high school students into college with more degree completions in a shorter time. When implemented with quality, it has been shown to be particularly effective for students from groups who have been historically underserved, such as students of color and first-generation students. This suggests that dual enrollment could be particularly impactful in changing the college-going trajectory for foster youth.

Three colleges were chosen to pilot what it might take to support foster youth in dual enrollment. The pilot project occurred over a 16-month period (fall 2020 through fall 2021) that was entirely subsumed by the Covid-19 pandemic. As has been true nationwide, general enrollments at the pilot colleges declined during the course of the pandemic. Both K-12 and postsecondary education were also strained in managing the shift to online or hybrid learning. The pilot resulted in small increases to the number of foster youth served in dual enrollment. There were 27 enrollments of foster youth in dual enrollment and 20 foster youth in high school successfully completed college dual enrollment courses. However, the pilot identified a number of promising practices for supporting foster youth in dual enrollment that surfaced through monthly community of practice sessions with the three colleges. This report summarizes the work of the three sites to increase high school and college success for foster youth through access to dual enrollment. It reviews key challenges encountered by students and practitioners and describes promising practices and notable strategies implemented by the sites. Based on these lessons, it outlines recommendations for policy changes at the high school, college, and state levels that would enable college and high school partnerships to engage and support more foster youth in dual enrollment in California.

Why Dual Enrollment for Foster Youth?

Accessing postsecondary education is key to enabling young adults to achieve long-term economic security, yet many of the most vulnerable youth have lacked the opportunity to do so. Among foster youth in California, just 10.8% obtain an associate or bachelor's degree by age 23, compared with 35.8% of the same-age non-foster youth population ([Courtney, et al., 2020](#)). And while the rates of college enrollment and success have steadily increased over time for foster youth, the completion gap remains significant despite more than 85% of foster youth indicating a desire to attend college. Removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect and frequently disconnected from their families, communities and schools, foster youth are much more likely than their peers to lack the support necessary for a successful college experience. The combination of the additional challenges associated with the foster care experience and the unique responsibility that the state has to these young people warrants focused interventions.

Dual enrollment, which allows a student to enroll in both high school and college at the same time, has long been acknowledged as a powerful acceleration strategy for college completion. Multiple studies have shown that students who participate in high-quality dual enrollment programs during high school are more likely to graduate high school, enter college, and persist in college to completion ([Cowan & Goldhaber, 2013](#); Karp et al., 2007; [Rodriguez, Hughes, & Belfield, 2012](#); Speroni, 2011; Struhl & Vargas, 2012). Students who are most underrepresented in postsecondary education – young men of color, students from low-income families, and students who are the first in their families to attend college – often benefit the most (Karp et al., 2007; [Rodriguez, Hughes, & Belfield, 2012](#); [An, 2013](#); [Struhl & Vargas, 2012](#)). One study from Maine showed higher college graduation rates for students of color with some dual enrollment (76% in 6 years) compared to 43% for students of color with no dual enrollment, and 64% for white students with some dual enrollment and 52% for white students with no dual enrollment ([Hubbard, 2020](#)).

Dual enrollment provides an introduction to higher education for first-generation college students and their families. It offers a low- or no-cost way to earn credit and may help students obtain degrees faster. All this suggests that dual enrollment could be a powerful strategy for increasing postsecondary access and success among foster youth.

“Oh, I definitely believe [counselors] should always encourage [foster youth] to do a little bit more. Sometimes people don't know they have as much ability to do what they can until it comes to the time where they can prove themselves ...I think [dual enrollment] is very beneficial and it's free college courses so you finish faster.”

–Iris Gomez, foster youth and Riverside City College dual enrollment student.

Pilot Project Overview and Results

To better understand what it might take to support foster youth in dual enrollment, the California College Pathways Pooled Fund and the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative provided funding for three colleges to pilot this work. Three sites were selected from across California to participate in the 16-month pilot project. The sites are located in three different regions: the San Francisco Bay Area, Greater Los Angeles, and the Inland Empire. The sites range in the extent of programming they offer for dual enrollment and programming for foster youth. Throughout the pilot timeframe, which ran from September 2020 to December 2021, they met monthly to discuss challenges and share promising approaches in a community of practice. They also received technical assistance in supporting foster youth from John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY) and in dual enrollment implementation from the Career Ladders Project (CLP). The challenges, promising practices, and policy recommendations in this report emerged from community of practice meetings and interviews with the sites. Some of the specific approaches undertaken by the sites to identify, reach out to and recruit, support and retain foster youth in dual enrollment are detailed in Appendix A.

Types of Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment refers to a student's enrollment status, in which a student is enrolled in both high school and college at the same time. Dual enrollment classes can take place on a college campus, on a high school campus, or online. Students can access dual enrollment as individuals seeking out a college course on their own, or as a part of a structured program such as a pathway program offered by a high school/college partnership. This can also include early or middle college high schools, which are often located on community college campuses and allow students to begin working toward an associate degree while they complete the necessary coursework for a high school diploma.

In 2016, the legislature passed Assembly Bill 288 which authorized College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP). CCAP is a way of structuring dual enrollment that allows partnerships to offer courses on a high school campus as well as offering additional advantages, such as the ability to limit courses to high school students only, a higher college credit limit, and higher priority enrollment. Structured programs, like CCAP and other dual enrollment pathways programs, often have embedded supports for students. According to [UC Davis Wheelhouse: The Center for Community College Leadership and Research](#), CCAP and other “high school-only” types of structured dual enrollment programs have smaller equity gaps in participation compared with dual enrollment as an individual experience ([A Leg Up on College, 2020](#); [A Rising Tide, 2020](#); and [A Foot in the Door, 2021](#)). Furthermore, the participation equity gaps for these structured “high school-only” types of programs have narrowed over time.

Chabot College, Compton College, and Riverside City College anchored the three sites. Including all sites, the total number of dual enrollment foster youth students served in this pilot was small, with 27 students enrolled from fall 2020 through fall 2021 and 20 students who finished their courses (see data tables in Appendices B-E). While overall participation numbers were small, each site gained valuable insights. And each site made substantial progress learning how to better serve foster youth in dual enrollment. There were also some associated positive effects such as increasing the number of foster youth identified in high school and connecting them to services as they transitioned to college, resulting in earlier onboarding into foster youth support services.

The project illustrates the positive impact that focused attention and support can have on increasing the numbers of foster youth participating in dual enrollment. The gains are scant, but this is relative to the small number of foster youth in the general population of high school students. This work is labor intensive and can be difficult, but can also be life-changing for the youth involved. And the project provided a rich opportunity to illuminate what it takes to expand dual enrollment and improve the transition to college for foster youth—as well as to understand the exclusionary practices and structural barriers that need to be addressed.

Overall, having an established and staffed dual enrollment infrastructure and/or foster youth-serving program gave the sites a more solid basis from which to build; having strength in both dual enrollment and in serving foster youth made for quicker progress. And through their participation in the pilot, the two college programs—dual enrollment and foster youth support—began to collaborate more closely, further strengthening their understanding of how to reach and support foster youth in dual enrollment. However, it's important to acknowledge that all work at the sites occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pilot began at a time when all instruction was being delivered online, posing significant challenges for the sites and for foster youth—even as it presented some new possibilities for better serving foster youth and successfully engaging them in earning early college credits. The unique challenges faced by sites as a result of the pandemic are described in a special section.

Pilot Site Profiles

The site profiles in this section describe the following factors.

- Student enrollment trends.
- Staffing for foster youth programs and for dual enrollment.
- Description of how the site used pilot project funding.
- Direct results of the pilot, measured by the number of foster youth in dual enrollment.
- Unanticipated positive outcomes that surfaced during the pilot.

Chabot College, San Francisco Bay Area

Located in Hayward, California, Chabot College is part of the two-college Chabot-Las Positas Community College District. Chabot College has had a relatively small number of dual enrollment students but that number has been steadily growing. While the total number of foster youth enrolled at the college has gone down since the pandemic began in spring 2020, the percentage of foster youth enrolled remains about the same because the general college enrollment has also decreased during this same period. Foster youth are served by the Guardian Scholars¹ program, which is staffed by a part-time coordinator and part-time counselor. Dual enrollment is staffed by one person, the Career Pathways Manager, who is also responsible for many other programs.



What They Did

Chabot College used pilot project funds to provide more counseling services for foster youth enrolled in the program and to pay student assistants. Activities included increased, focused recruitment, additional student intake appointments, and coordination between Guardian Scholars and dual enrollment. Over the 16-month pilot, five high school foster youth enrolled in college courses. Ultimately all five withdrew and did not finish their dual enrollment courses (see Appendix C). However, other foster youth, transitioning from high school to college, did benefit from the additional counseling hours the pilot provided. For the first time in the program's history, Guardian Scholars was able to provide counseling appointments in the summer by augmenting hours for the part-time Guardian Scholars counselor. This resulted in early intake of 20 incoming foster youth freshmen, which was an unanticipated positive outcome from extra recruitment efforts and summer counseling. With summer counseling, incoming foster youth were able to see the Guardian Scholars counselor *before* they started their first semester in the fall. These 20 graduating high school students, now new college freshmen, had a smoother transition into college because of early identification and counseling.

¹ Foster youth support programs such as Guardian Scholars programs are offered at some colleges and universities in California and are designed to provide support and community to current and former foster youth on campus. Programs were often seeded by philanthropic dollars, but many now receive public funding through California Community Colleges NextUp or Student Equity and Achievement programs.

Compton College, Greater Los Angeles

Compton College is a single-college district serving the city of Compton and surrounding areas. Compton College has the highest percentage of dual enrollment among the pilot sites and, as at the other sites, dual enrollment has been increasing over time. Identified foster youth remain a relatively small percentage of the overall student population. Foster youth at the college are served by the Guardian Scholars program staffed by a coordinator, who oversees multiple programs, and student support specialists. Dual enrollment is staffed by a coordinator and multiple student support specialists.



What They Did

With their grant from the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative, Compton College funds student support specialists whose role is to assist foster youth in dual enrollment. Support specialists help high school students through the application and enrollment process. They follow up on academic and attendance “early alert” flags from instructors by connecting students with resources and high school counselors who can offer increased support. As a part of this pilot, the Compton Guardian Scholars office increased direct recruitment efforts with feeder high schools. To receive services from Compton’s Guardian Scholars office, youth do not need to be Compton College students. During the 16-month pilot, Compton College supported 12 high school foster youth in successfully completing college courses (see Appendix D). The majority of the foster youth in dual enrollment participated in the last semester of the pilot, fall 2021, after the site had improved processes and learned from past efforts. One unanticipated positive outcome is that more foster youth at local high schools are receiving support from the Guardian Scholars program, even before they become Compton College students, and the high school support providers now know that these resources are available for high school foster youth.

Riverside City College, Inland Empire

Riverside City College (RCC), in Riverside, California, is part of the three-college Riverside Community College District (RCCD). As with the other sites, dual enrollment at RCC has grown in recent years. Of the three pilot sites, RCC serves the largest number of foster youth. Supports for foster youth include: Guardian Scholars; NextUp, a state-funded program that provides intensive support to eligible foster youth; and the Guardian Scholars Engagement & Resource Center. Foster youth support programs are staffed by a director, two specialists, and

a student assistant. Dual enrollment is staffed by an associate dean and one part-time assistant. RCC and the Riverside Community College District have expanded supports to include a learning community, the Guardian Scholars Engagement & Resource Center based at RCC, and a countywide Foster Youth Support Network (FYSN). The support network is a unique model that brings together all organizations across the county that support foster youth to align outreach, referrals and services. It employs staff dedicated to serving foster youth who are embedded into all of the feeder high schools in RCCD's service area. Embedded staff are also responsible for connecting with all new foster youth applicants to RCCD colleges and assisting with matriculation, regardless of service area. The growth of this work has been supported by college Student Equity and Achievement funds, in addition to support from the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative and a \$2 million Governor's Award for Innovation in Higher Education.



What They Did

With pilot funding, RCC increased the hours for the Guardian Scholars Student Activities Clerk allowing her to support more foster youth. This staff member is the first point of contact for foster youth accessing the Guardian Scholars Engagement & Resource Center. Additional hours allowed the clerk to provide weekly follow up with dually-enrolled foster youth, ensuring access to technology, assisting with navigating the online learning environment, and providing resources for academic support. The Activities Clerk also worked in coordination with the RCCD FYSN Resource Specialist to host information sessions on the foster youth dual enrollment opportunity. Funds were also used to provide a \$100 cash incentive for each dual enrollment completer. RCC supported eight high school foster youth in successfully completing college courses.

Challenges

Identifying Foster Youth

Identifying foster youth to recruit for dual enrollment can be challenging. There are over 48,000 foster youth enrolled in K-12 schools in California, making up less than 1% of the students in K-12 education. Any given high school has a relatively small number of foster youth. For sites like RCC that have a long history of partnership with local high schools and other agencies that support foster youth, it was easier to identify foster youth to recruit. Chabot College and Compton College have primarily identified foster youth only after they are already college students. Both colleges have a very small staff dedicated to supporting foster youth; working closely with high schools was new for them, so identification of foster youth was more challenging than for RCC. Chabot College made a concerted effort to reach out to foster care partners, but efforts yielded few referrals. The K-12 education system and the foster care system also suffered serious disruption due to Covid-19 and efforts were focused on health and safety, getting students access to wifi and computers, and training instructors in teaching online.

School Mobility

School mobility is higher among foster youth than other students. The California Department of Education (CDE) recently published stability rates for K-12 students; the stability rate is the percent of students who stay in the same school for a full academic year. In the 2019-20 school year, the statewide stability rate for all students was over 92%, but for foster youth the stability rate was 65%. Foster youth are a highly mobile population; students frequently receive new living arrangements that include changing schools. High mobility for foster youth has a negative effect on high school test scores and graduation. For dual enrollment students, this may mean disruption in their college courses and lead to possible withdrawal.

Exclusionary Practices

Through the community of practice, the sites were able to identify a number of exclusionary practices that restrict access to dual enrollment generally or for foster youth in particular. Once these were identified, the sites then worked towards removing them. In one example, a financial aid office delayed or stopped youth from receiving services because they were requiring foster youth to provide documentation to prove their foster care status. Staff in the financial aid office could have verified this directly by accessing the foster youth verification screen on WebGrants ([SB 12 Special Alert](#)). In another example, a site was requiring a minimum high school GPA to restrict dual enrollment opportunities; this is not allowed under Title 5 yet remains a common practice across the state.²

² See the section titled “Clarifications” in [Dual Enrollment: Moving to an Electronic Form from Career Ladders Project](#).

Short Timeframes and Extra Paperwork

All sites found dual enrollment timelines challenging, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when communication and instruction were conducted remotely. Because they're minors, the process for high school students to apply and enroll in college courses involves more steps than the process for adult students; signature approval from multiple people—including parents/guardians and the school principal—is required. Some colleges also require students to submit additional documentation such as high school transcripts, which may lengthen the process. Depending on the type of dual enrollment (i.e., structured “high school-only” dual enrollment programs or students accessing courses independently) offered, some colleges require students to submit a new application and set of enrollment permissions every term even though this is not required by law. And colleges may be unforgiving with enrollment deadlines, even when their own systems experience glitches. One college experienced two technological problems in short succession. First, they weren't able to receive external emails for an extended time period. Second, their system stopped generating student ID numbers required for registration. Despite these obstacles, the college would not extend the enrollment deadline. All of the sites expressed a need for smoother enrollment processes which could involve purchasing software for electronic forms or changing procedures to remove barriers for students.

Similarly, there is a fairly small window of time for a student to withdraw from a class without a notation on their transcript. Depending on the length of the course, the timeframe for withdrawal could be just a few weeks. If a student withdraws after the deadline, their transcript will record a negative notation, potentially impacting their financial aid in the future. While such issues pose challenges for all students, those who are least-resourced, such as foster youth, are likely to be disproportionately impacted.

Staffing Capacity

All of the sites reported that there was more demand than they had the capacity to meet for dual enrollment generally *and* for services for foster youth already in college. All three sites used additional funding to increase staff capacity, yet it was not adequate for the work at hand. And while colleges are able to increase hours of some staff positions, long-term and full-time positions often require a more permanent funding source. The additional work of identifying and serving foster youth proved challenging. Of the three sites, RCC has the largest dedicated staff for foster youth support and they used pilot project funds to add hours to directly recruit and support foster youth in high school. Compton College has the largest dual enrollment program and the most dedicated staff for dual enrollment, yet the demand from their high school partners is greater than they are able to meet. Even with a larger dual enrollment staff than the other colleges, it was a challenge to identify and serve 12 foster youth in dual enrollment. In fall 2020, more than a quarter of all Compton College students were also high school students.

COVID-19

The pandemic exacerbated all of the challenges described previously and it added more. As high schools and colleges moved online, foster youth and housing-insecure youth participated less frequently in online education than their peers ([Children Now, 2020](#)). And it wasn't just school-

ing that was disrupted. The courts and many support services closed temporarily and then opened online, which made them more difficult to access for many foster youth ([EdSource, June 2020](#)). While the issues described below impact students beyond foster youth, they are noteworthy as they worsened the challenges that the pilot programs had with recruiting foster youth for dual enrollment. Traditionally, colleges established communication and recruitment of youth in-person. That way of communicating was no longer possible.

Technical Issues

For the sites in this pilot, the pandemic posed specific operational challenges. Enrolling high school students in college courses requires signatures from the student, a parent/guardian, and the high school principal. During the pandemic, many colleges transitioned to using an electronic form rather than a paper form and did not experience problems. Chabot College also switched to using an electronic permission form for the dual enrollment process during this time. Unfortunately, at Chabot College the new process didn't allow dual enrollment staff to access any incomplete forms that had been initiated by students. As a result, they were unable to help students through the application process by following up on the required approvals and reminding people to sign. Forms got bogged down in electronic inboxes awaiting principal or parent/guardian signatures and students couldn't complete their application in time.

Staffing Instability

Compton College experienced staff turnover during the pandemic and had some staff take a temporary leave of absence. This staffing gap strained the capacity of student services and foster youth support. Partner high schools and service providers also experienced similar challenges with staff turnover. Oluwatosin Williams, Coordinator of Student Services at Compton College, explained that when a staff person leaves, so do their relationships with partners, "The thing about having that great person is they know the people, it goes back to the connections. So if you lose a person, you lose not just their job, but you lose their resource, you lose the years that you have gone to lunch with someone. So previously when a student needed something, it was just a phone call away. The loss of a good staff member was the loss of partnerships."

"Without being able to physically just show up and see them it is harder to keep in contact with students and even to make that relationship..."

— Jessika Bohannon, Student Resource Specialist, Riverside City College

Inability to Connect in Person

At RCC, support staff in the Guardian Scholars Engagement & Resource Center explained how making those first connections with students in person was crucial. Jessika Bohannon, Student Resource Specialist, explained, "Without being able to physically just show up and see them it is harder to keep in contact with students and even to make that relationship... I emailed them back and forth 20 times, but they don't know who I am."

Lack of Instructor Capacity

As colleges and high schools transitioned back to in-person instruction, they developed differing health protocols including vaccine mandates. As of fall 2021, while high schools largely returned to in-person instruction, many colleges still held a majority of their classes online. Dual enrollment courses were being offered both in-person and online, but many high schools preferred in-person classes. Christina Read, Career Pathways Project Manager at Chabot College, reported that she found it hard to staff those classes, “One of our new barriers for spring is our faculty don’t want to teach in person. So when I have an in-person class for dual enrollment, I can’t get instructors.”

Promising Practices

Staffing

Dedicate Staff to Support Foster Youth

RCC has the largest number of staff dedicated to serving foster youth. While other colleges may not have the same staffing level that RCC has, even a modest increase in hours for the counselor at Chabot College had a measurable impact on the number of students transitioning from high school to college that they served and the timeliness of that support. Foster youth have unique needs. They may have to manage multiple issues including court appearances, placement changes, navigating family relationships, impact of trauma, and negative perceptions or stigma due to high school transcripts that might show many school changes or uneven high school credit accumulation. Their unique needs are often overlooked when they are grouped with a larger population. By creating dedicated staff positions to serve foster youth, colleges can better meet students’ needs and support their success. Dedicated staff can form relationships with foster care providers in the high school and community, as well as take the time to form relationships with the youth themselves. Vanessa Zamudio, Student Activities Clerk at RCC, explained, “Getting in contact with them, seeing how everything is going ...that’s basically my role, making sure that they have somebody that they can get in contact with if they need anything.”

Hire and Train Effectively

It’s not just having enough staff, colleges need to train their staff well and hire the *right* staff. Many of the RCC staff had experience providing support for foster youth before they worked at the college. They develop workshops for new staff as well as for the broader campus community working with foster youth. RCC also employs peer mentors who are former foster youth. Vanessa Zamudio, a former foster youth and graduate of the RCC program, is currently Student Activities Clerk with RCC. In that role, she is often the first point of connection between foster youth and the college and she maintains weekly contact with enrolled students. Vanessa explained that starting relationships with foster youth can be difficult, “Sometimes they feel like they can’t open up to certain people.” Sharing her own experience as a foster youth helps them reach out to her if they need support. “That’s basically my role, making sure that they have somebody that they can get in contact with and feel comfortable talking to.”

Support

Focus on Onboarding and Retention

As noted previously, the process to apply and enroll in college courses is more complicated and entails more steps for high school students than adults. The process requires multiple signature approvals and, depending on the college, may involve additional documentation. All of the sites provided extra support for foster youth through the application and enrollment process. Chabot College's Guardian Scholars counselor helped students navigate the enrollment process. Compton College offered an orientation to all dual enrollment students and provided follow-up with student support specialists, including one who supports foster youth along with general dual enrollment students. RCC provided support through one-on-one interaction and weekly check-ins with students.

Offer Tangible Assistance

All of the sites offered free books for students in dual enrollment, but two sites were also able to offer financial assistance to high school students. This rarely happens; because of restrictions on the use of Proposition 98 funds, colleges have not generally used state funds for direct student aid. Both RCC and Compton College were able to do that with philanthropic funding. RCC offered cash incentives for successful completion of dual enrollment courses for foster youth, with an award of \$100 per successful course. Compton College was able to offer \$114 to all dual enrollment students in Afternoon College and CCAP partnerships. Tangible assistance also took other forms, for example Compton College extended Guardian Scholars workshops and mental health support to high school foster youth.

Use an Asset-based Approach

The offer of dual enrollment conveys an implicit expectation of success, a belief in the student's capacity to succeed. It's an asset-based approach in contrast with the deficit-based mindset and low expectations that many foster youth experience when it comes to college. Vanessa Zamudio explained, "You know, [with] a traditional student, people ask them 'Where are you going to college?' And sometimes for foster youth, [the question is], 'Are you going to college?' or 'Do you think you *can* go to college?'" Her approach is to change that narrative for foster youth by "putting them on that path, so that all students feel like they have an equal chance in that college is something that's in their plans."

Institutional

Work Across Departments

Campus offices managing services for foster youth and dual enrollment are used to working with partners that are external to the college. They are not used to working together however, and for all of the sites, cross-program collaboration between foster youth and dual enrollment offices is new. But effective collaboration is essential because it can enable dual enrollment recruitment to be more intentional about including services for foster youth. Similarly, more intentional foster youth outreach will ensure students have the support they need to take advantage of and succeed in dual enrollment.

Identify and Remove Barriers

“We just work on removing barriers. What’s going to get in their way? What’s been preventing them from being successful?” explained Whitney Ortega, Director of Foster and Kinship Care Education at RCC. Throughout the pilot project, sites in the community of practice focused on identifying and removing exclusionary practices that affect either dual enrollment generally or foster youth specifically (see examples in the section on Challenges.) This work is iterative and ongoing; as laws and processes change, new barriers may arise inadvertently. It’s critically important that sites continuously review their practices from a student’s point of view.

Cross-institutional

Build Strong Relationships

All of the sites emphasized the importance of building relationships with their counterparts in foster youth support at the high schools and County Offices of Education, with county child welfare systems, with care providers, and most importantly with students. RCC has a long history of serving foster youth and a county-wide Foster Youth Support Network which made identifying foster youth and transitioning them to college much easier than it was for colleges without similar pre-existing relationships. Prior to the pilot project, RCC had also embedded staff at the high schools to build relationships with foster youth and support their transition to college, funded by the Governor’s Award for Innovation in Higher Education.

Policy Recommendations

Lessons from the pilot project suggest several policy recommendations that would enable sites to better support foster youth in dual enrollment. While some recommendations apply to the local college and high school level and can be implemented by practitioners, others require guidance or clarification from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, the California Department of Education or a legislative solution. The unique needs and experiences of foster youth should be understood and incorporated into dual enrollment—from embedded, ongoing support provided by staff who are specially trained in supporting foster youth, to access to structured dual enrollment such as CCAP from a county-run alternative school.

College and High School Policy

Built-in, Not Added-on

Dual enrollment designed to support foster youth should be built into their regular educational experience, not appended as an afterthought. Some types of dual enrollment such as CCAP³ may be better suited for this intentionally-designed approach. For instance, offering courses during the high school day, as CCAP allows, means students don’t have to choose between taking a college course

³ For more information, see “Types of Dual Enrollment” on page 4.

and other responsibilities like a job or sports. As a part of the recruitment and enrollment process, foster youth who self-identify should be referred to the college department that supports foster youth so they can begin receiving services and supports. College courses should count toward high school graduation requirements, as well as providing college credit; this is also known as “dual credit.” Dual credit can help foster youth meet high school graduation milestones while accelerating their college completion.

Training for Instructors, Counselors and Support Staff

To meet the unique needs of foster youth, instructors, counselors and support staff should have specialized training. There are professionals on college campuses who already work with foster youth, including specialized counselors, who can provide training and support particularly in the area of how to work in or outside a classroom setting with students who may have experienced trauma. Advocacy organizations like [John Burton Advocates for Youth](#) also provide training for those working with foster youth. Similarly, many college instructors may be better prepared to teach dual enrollment courses if they have access to pedagogical support and training.

Remove Barriers

There are a number of barriers for students imposed through historically exclusionary practices in dual enrollment. Colleges and high schools should identify these and change their internal policies and practices. One common example is the inappropriate use of high school GPA as a means of qualifying to participate in dual enrollment. A community college cannot refuse admission or enrollment to any student based on their high school GPA. GPA can be used to inform placement for math or English courses. The use of assessment and GPA in the enrollment process must be consistent with how it is used for adult college students.⁴

State Policy

Clarify Excused Withdrawals

Currently, Title 5 Section 55024 (e)(1) states that “‘Excused Withdrawal’ (EW) occurs when a student is permitted to withdraw from a course(s) due to specific events beyond the control of the student affecting his or her ability to complete a course(s) ...” A number of specific examples are given within the regulation. College and high school partnerships would benefit from clarification or guidance from the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office around the use of EW for circumstances that often affect foster youth such as moving to a new residence out of district, experiencing housing insecurity, or losing access to necessary technology such as a computer or wifi. Foster youth (and other special populations such as homeless youth) could be recognized as deserving special consideration for EWs.

Allow County Offices of Education Access to CCAP Partnerships

County Offices of Education (COEs) provide many of the alternative educational settings in California, in which foster youth are often enrolled. Currently COEs are not allowed to enter into CCAP agreements with community college districts, which denies students access to this dual enrollment option. CCAP is a type of dual enrollment agreement that provides some flexibility

⁴See [Title 3 76000-76004, Legal Opinion 16-02, Title 3 78210-78219, SB 1456](#).

distinct from non-CCAP dual enrollment, such as allowing college courses taught during the high school day to enroll only high school students. Recent research by UC Davis Wheelhouse has found that CCAP and other types of structured dual enrollment have reduced racial/ethnic gaps in dual enrollment participation; this suggests that foster youth may benefit more from participating in CCAP dual enrollment than other types. The law should be modified to allow for COEs to enter into CCAP partnerships.

Offer Wide Latitude in Determining Satisfactory Academic Progress

One out of every three foster youth who enrolls in community college is unable to continue because they lose eligibility for financial aid due to Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)⁵ requirements. College financial aid departments should take full advantage of the various flexibilities available in federal regulations, as described in detail in a recent report from John Burton Advocates for Youth.⁶ In particular, a recent presentation from the U.S. Department of Education clarified that colleges and universities may exclude dual enrollment courses when calculating GPA and course completion rates to determine if students are making SAP. This guidance stated that a “school can treat the high school student like a transfer student. Therefore, the school can handle the high school coursework according to its transfer credit policy outlined in its SAP procedures (e.g., choose to factor in grades or not).”⁷

⁵ Successful completion of coursework toward an eligible certificate or degree. When a student does not meet the SAP determination, they may become ineligible for financial aid.

⁶ <https://jbay.org/resources/overlooked-obstacle/>

⁷ See presentation #19, slide 23 at <https://fsaconferences.ed.gov/2021sessionppts.html>.

Conclusion

Although the pilot project did not significantly increase the numbers of foster youth participating in dual enrollment at the sites, it was successful in generating valuable insights into promising practices and challenges to be addressed in supporting access to dual enrollment for foster youth. This is a critical moment to use those insights to shape reform efforts, as the field of dual enrollment is moving quickly. Faced with enrollment loss and disengagement from postsecondary education among historically-underserved students, colleges and high schools are turning to dual enrollment as a critical equity lever as the state moves to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

New evidence is also surfacing. Recent research on dual enrollment in California by UC Davis Wheelhouse found that dual enrollment participation among foster youth rose from 2015-16 to 2018-19, although it still lagged behind participation for the general population. One interesting finding concerned a specific type of dual enrollment: structured programs of “high school-only” courses offered on the high school campus. Wheelhouse found that enrolling students in this type of dual enrollment reduced racial/ethnic access gaps. Could this hold true for students farthest from opportunity such as foster youth?

A “high school-only” dual enrollment program can offer a structure that more easily builds in support services, both academic and social, which boost college success for foster youth. A structured program is an effective way for college and high school partnerships to implement the promising practices named in this report. Faculty, counselors and staff who have specialized training can concentrate on supporting students in the program with regular check-ins, tangible supports, and staff who understand the unique needs of foster youth and bring an asset-based approach in supporting their success. And if high school-only dual enrollment is a part of a pathway—a sequence of courses and supporting activities that lead to a certificate degree and/or transfer—students will have a roadmap to postsecondary completion.

The sites in the pilot advanced the understanding of both barriers and promising practices for supporting foster youth in dual enrollment. They have already begun changing local practice and policy based on their learnings. It will be instructive to revisit these sites in future years to see how they continue to build on this initial work. The issues uncovered are worth exploring as California moves to expand dual enrollment, if that expansion is truly to include foster youth in those opportunities that lead to postsecondary success and long-term economic security.

Appendix A: Approaches Used in the Pilot

Identifying Foster Youth for Dual Enrollment

- At the high school
 - College staff can work with high school Foster Youth Liaisons (FYL) to identify foster youth for recruitment and support.
 - Colleges can embed staff at the high schools who can create relationships with foster youth early and keep regular contact with them.
- At the college
 - Many colleges offer Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE), free courses for foster care providers or prospective care providers. The providers may care for high school-age foster youth who may be interested in dual enrollment. Dual enrollment programs can partner with these programs to offer presentations or written information to caregivers about dual enrollment.
 - Campus-based foster youth services can work with the dual enrollment program to identify students who self-identified as foster youth on their application and are already participating in dual enrollment and extend extra services to them.
- In the community
 - Colleges can reach out to Foster Youth Liaisons (FYLs) at the County Offices of Education. FYLs are able to identify foster youth in each county.
 - Colleges can reach out to Independent Living Programs (ILPs) that work with foster youth and care providers. ILPs provide training, services and benefits to current and former foster youth to help achieve self-sufficiency.
 - Colleges can reach out to other child welfare partners such as child welfare agencies, transitional housing providers, foster care placement agencies and Court Appointed Special Advocates. These programs offer a range of services to foster youth and can be conduits for information about dual enrollment programs to both caregivers and youth themselves.

Outreach and Recruitment

- Intentional messaging. Use messaging that includes foster youth in general dual enrollment recruitment materials and presentations to help them feel invited and welcome. Messaging can go directly to foster youth and also to the network of support providers.
- Peer recruitment. Hearing from foster youth who are in college, especially when they have experienced dual enrollment, can help potential students feel more comfortable trying dual enrollment.
- Networks. Get the word out about dual enrollment and the supports available for foster youth with local foster youth networks and support providers such as county child welfare agencies, Foster Family Agencies (FFA), Independent Living Programs, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), transitional housing providers, and Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP). Messaging should include a responsive contact to whom providers can refer students directly.
- Foster youth-specific events. Dual enrollment staff can participate in events sponsored by community partners for foster youth, such as those noted above, to help get the word out that foster youth are welcome and supported in dual enrollment.
- General recruitment events. When the college holds or attends general recruitment events, such as a college fair at a local high school, include messaging that makes foster youth feel welcome and supported in dual enrollment. For example, presentations should note how students not living with parents would obtain necessary permissions.
- One-on-one recruitment. Work with foster youth or care providers to set appointments and meet directly with foster youth.

Support and Retention

- Individual support. Ensure that college staff have regular one-on-one meetings with foster youth in dual enrollment to make sure students know how to access Canvas, understand how to contact and communicate with the instructor, and know how to access tutoring appointments if needed. Staff who are responsible for these one-on-one check-in meetings may be student support personnel, counselors, or foster youth specialists. These check-ins are especially crucial in the beginning of the semester before the withdrawal deadline.
- Group support. Provide support for groups of foster youth to strengthen peer networks, including orientation workshops, financial literacy workshops and group setting for tutoring or study sessions may be an effective way to meet student needs.
- Understand and support different types of need. Assign specific college staff to support various types of need for foster youth in dual enrollment. Examples include: college-specific support with the application and enrollment process, choosing courses, navigating instructional software platforms like Canvas, communicating with instructors, financial support, academic support and mental health support. Foster youth may also have unique support needs such as court appearances, changing placements, navigating family relationships, and the complexities and stigma involved with providing documentation like school transcripts.

Appendix B

	Chabot College				Compton College				Riverside City College			
	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021
Total # of dual enrollment students	359	412	536	334	1,323	1,259	830	Not available	685	647	127	Not available
Course success rate for dual enrollment students	56%	76%	97%	Not available	73%	73%	Not available	Not available	86.5%	89.4%	94.8%	Not available
Total # of potential dual enrollment students who are foster youth supported to enroll	Not available	1	2	2	Not available	9	Not available	37	4	9	2	15
Total # of dual enrollment students who are foster youth	Not available	1	2	2	Not available	4	1	7	2	4	0	2
Total # of dual enrollment students who are foster youth who finished the course(s)	Not available	0	0	0	Not available	4	1	7	2	4	0	2
Course success rate for dual enrollment students who are foster youth	Not available	-	-	-	Not available	75%	100%	79%	100%	75%	-	100%

Appendix C

Chabot College				
	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021
Total student headcount	12,204 (100%)	13,822 (100%)	6,494 (100%)	11,454 (100%)
Total foster youth headcount (% of total headcount)	198 (1.62%)	192 (1.39%)	102 (1.57%)	186 (1.62%)
Total dual enrollment headcount (% of total headcount)	359 (2.94%)	412 (2.98%)	536 (8.25%)	334 (2.92%)
Foster youth in dual enrollment	Not available	1	2	2
Course success rate of foster youth in dual enrollment	Not available	*	*	*

Student headcount from Datamart report, run date January 23, 2022. All other data is self-reported by college.

* *Students withdrew*

Appendix D

Compton College				
	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021
Total student headcount	4,670 (100%)	4,135 (100%)	2,229 (100%)	Not available
Total foster youth headcount** (% of total headcount)	10 (0.21%)	6 (0.15%)	0	Not available
Total dual enrollment headcount (% of total headcount)	1,323 (28.33%)	1,259 (30.45%)	830 (37.24%)	Not available
Foster youth in dual enrollment	Not available	4	1	7
Course success rate of foster youth in dual enrollment	Not available	75%	100%	79%

Student headcount from Datamart report, run date January 23, 2022. All other data is self-reported by college.

** The total foster youth headcount is based on individual students identifying themselves as foster youth, therefore it may not reflect all current or former foster youth.

Appendix E

Riverside City College				
	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	Fall 2021
Total student headcount	20,606 (100%)	18,642 (100%)	8,967 (100%)	Not available
Total foster youth headcount (% of total headcount)	481 (2.33%)	452 (2.42%)	244 (2.72%)	Not available
Total dual enrollment headcount (% of total headcount)	685 (3.32%)	647 (3.47%)	127 (1.42%)	Not available
Foster youth in dual enrollment	2	4	0	2
Course success rate of foster youth in dual enrollment	100%	75%		100%

Student headcount from Datamart report, run date January 23, 2022. All other data is self-reported by college.



Career Ladders Project promotes equity-minded community college redesign. We collaborate with colleges and their partners to discover, develop, and disseminate effective practices. Our policy work, research, and direct efforts with colleges lead to system change — and enable more students to attain certificates, degrees, transfers, and career advancement.

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