



THE EDUCATION TRUST

HOW DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS Can Help Close Equity Gaps in Louisiana

BACKGROUND

Despite having high [aspirations](#), and through no fault of their own, [research](#) shows that Black and Latino students, English learners ([ELs](#)), and students from low-income backgrounds graduate high school and matriculate at college at [lower rates](#) than their wealthier White and Asian peers; and they are less “ready” for college and postsecondary career opportunities. Inequitable policies, practices, and systems make college and career opportunities inaccessible for many students who wish to engage in more advanced coursework, while often leaving those students who manage to matriculate woefully underprepared for success. [Research](#) has identified many of the barriers that limit college access and preparation and career opportunities for members of these student groups; chief among them is inequitable access to dual enrollment programs, which allow high schoolers to take advanced courses for college credit while still in high school.

Dual enrollment courses help prepare students for success in college and careers and have many other benefits. First, Louisiana’s [dual enrollment](#) courses *meet the same level of rigor* as those courses taught to traditional college students. Second, [students](#) from low-income backgrounds who take dual enrollment courses *have better first-year college GPAs* than their peers from high-income backgrounds who participated in dual enrollment programs. Third, dual enrollment courses *save students money* by shortening the time to degree/credential completion. And, fourth, [dual enrollment](#) participation *increases the likelihood of attaining any postsecondary degree* and a bachelor’s degree by approximately 10 percentage points. Given such positive benefits, access to dual enrollment opportunities must be made available to all students, especially Black and Latino students, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds.

LOUISIANA: The Pursuit of Equitable Access to Dual Enrollment

In partnership with the College in High School Alliance, [The Education Trust](#) framed policy and programmatic considerations that stakeholders should strive to implement to promote and [ensure equity](#) in how students access and complete dual enrollment programs. Most important, policymakers [must remove all barriers](#) that restrict access for Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds. In Louisiana, **access to dual enrollment courses is based on composite ACT scores, along with other academic performance metrics (such as grade point average), which can create barriers for the state’s most underserved students.**

These [eligibility requirements](#) make dual enrollment inaccessible to most of the state’s students. Average ACT scores have steadily fallen in recent years, and, in 2020, were at their lowest level since 2013. What’s more, last year’s average composite score of 18.7 is below the minimum score of 19 that is required for dual enrollment. Disaggregated data reveals even wider divides for Louisiana’s historically underserved students — Black (16.5) and Latino (17.6) students, English learners (14.2) and students from low-income backgrounds (17.1) scored markedly lower on the ACT than their wealthier White (20.5) and Asian (23.3) peers. Black and Latino students, English learners, and students from low-

income backgrounds often have less access to institutional supports that foster success, whether on the ACT or more generally. The composite score cutoff is one of several gatekeeping requirements potentially standing between students of color and access to college preparatory opportunities through dual enrollment: Students must also have minimum ACT subscores of 18 in English and 19 in Math, *as well as* a minimum overall high school GPA of 2.5. Such eligibility criteria — when coupled with inequitable school resources to support success —needlessly exclude students who might benefit from dual enrollment courses as they prepare for college and career opportunities.

Louisiana should emulate states such as [Delaware](#), [Illinois](#), and [Washington](#), which have enacted more equitable policies, like automatic enrollment or requiring multiple pathways into dual enrollment programs.

A CALL TO ACTION

TO PROMOTE GREATER ACCESS TO DUAL ENROLLMENT COURSES FOR ALL STUDENTS IN LOUISIANA, WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING:

- 1 Remove the ACT composite and subscore requirements that are **barriers to dual enrollment opportunities for most Louisiana students**, but especially the state’s Black and Latino students, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds.
 - a. Or, if the ACT remains an eligibility requirement, **ensure that all students have access to high-quality preparation courses** and that schools have the resources needed to provide high-quality support for ACT success.
- 2 [Expand access](#) to high-quality dual enrollment programs by creating **multiple pathways into the courses** that allow students to qualify through one or more of the following: 1) the successful completion/fulfillment of prerequisites, and 2) demonstrated proficiency (through exam scores or GPA) in the subject area in which they seek to be dually enrolled.
- 3 Require schools to **automatically enroll students who meet eligibility requirements** and give students and families the option to opt out.
- 4 Report **disaggregated data** on the number of students who are eligible for dual enrollment programs, the number of students who are dually enrolled, the number of students passing dual enrollment courses, and students’ average ACT scores, including subscores.
- 5 Revise the accountability system, so that **schools are incentivized to provide underserved students opportunities** to enroll and succeed in dual enrollment programs.

The pursuit of educational equity in dual enrollment will require thoughtful actions that make access a reality for Black and Latino students, English language learners, and students from low-income backgrounds. To learn more, visit The Education Trust’s website and review our [guide](#) on making dual enrollment equitable.