

Purposeful Dual Enrollment: **Expanding College and Career Opportunity**

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Community College Research Center

March 11, 2026

NCII Rural Guided Pathways 2.0

A blue-tinted photograph of several students walking away from the camera on a college campus. They are carrying backpacks and walking along a path next to a modern building with large windows. The text is overlaid on the center of the image.

The Challenge:
**Fewer High School Graduates Enrolling
in Community Colleges**

College-going rates for high school graduates dropping

FIGURE 1. PERCENT OF RECENT HIGH-SCHOOL COMPLETERS ENROLLED IN COLLEGE: 1960 THROUGH 2022

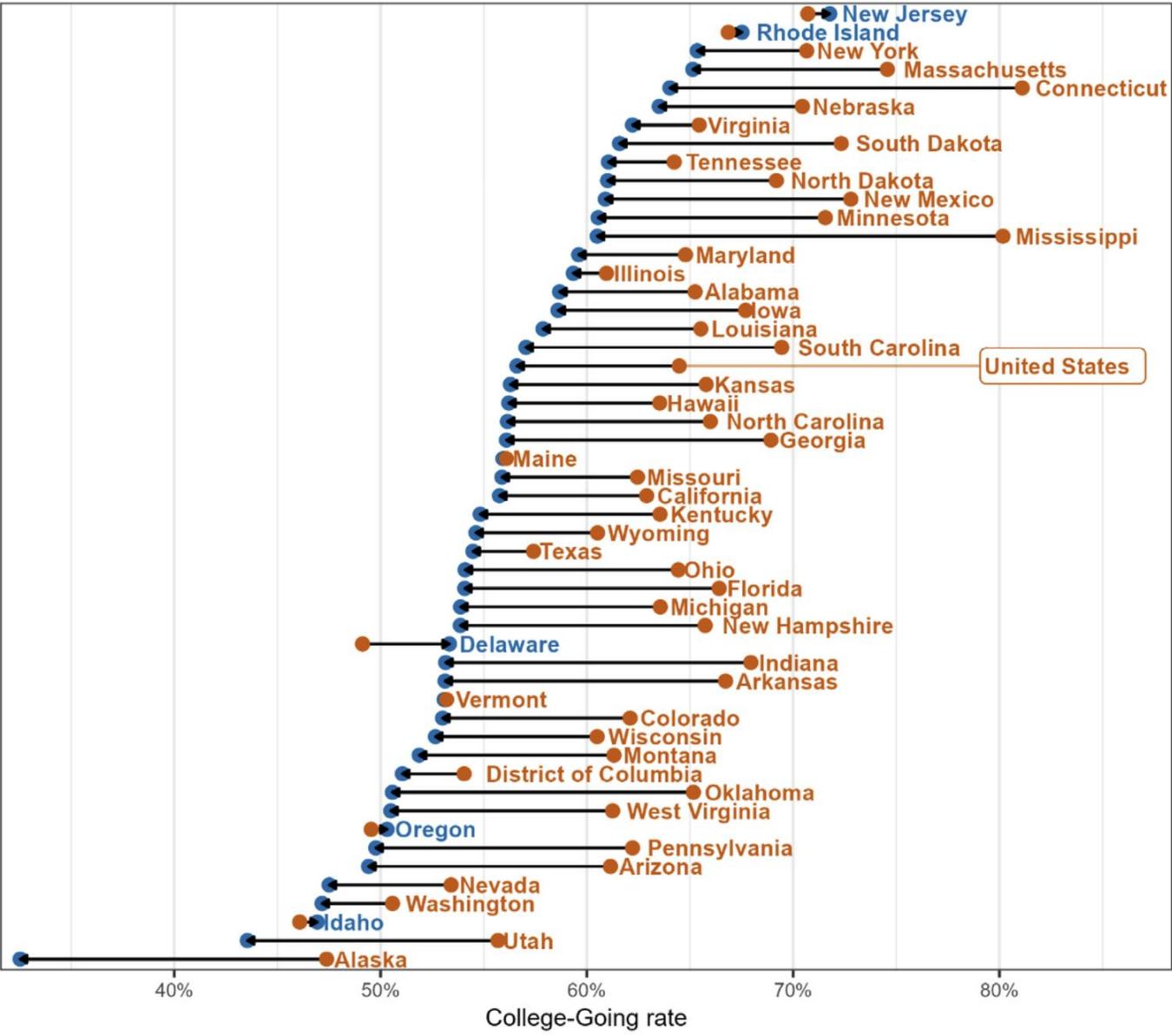


Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Digest of Education Statistics 2023, Table 302.10.



Hunkerstorm, 2025

FIGURE 7. PERCENT OF RECENT HIGH-SCHOOL COMPLETERS ENROLLED IN COLLEGE, 2022 VERSUS 2010, BY STATE



Many states show double-digit declines in the past decade

Fall Semester

- 2010
- 2022



Hunkerstorm, 2025



Sources: 1. Lane et al. (2024). 2. NCES IPEDS Fall Enrollment Survey, 2006–2022 final release ef[year]a files.

Fall Enrollment Trends by Sector and Age

IPEDS Data, 1997-2023

Sector (CCRC Definition)

- Community colleges
- Public four-years
- Private not-for-profit four-yea..
- Private for-profits
- Other public two-years, less-t..
- Other private not-for-profits

Select a State/Territory

All

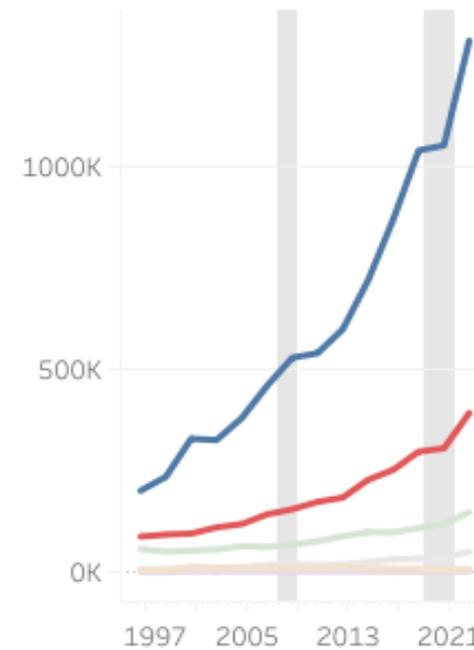
Select an Institution

All

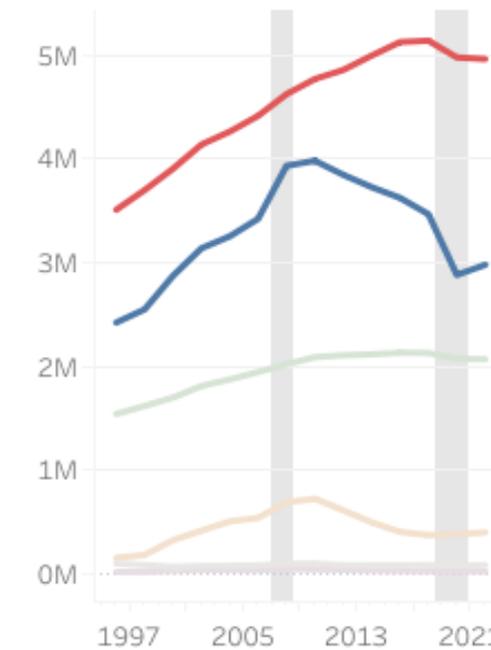
Fall Undergraduate Enrollments

Detail for student age

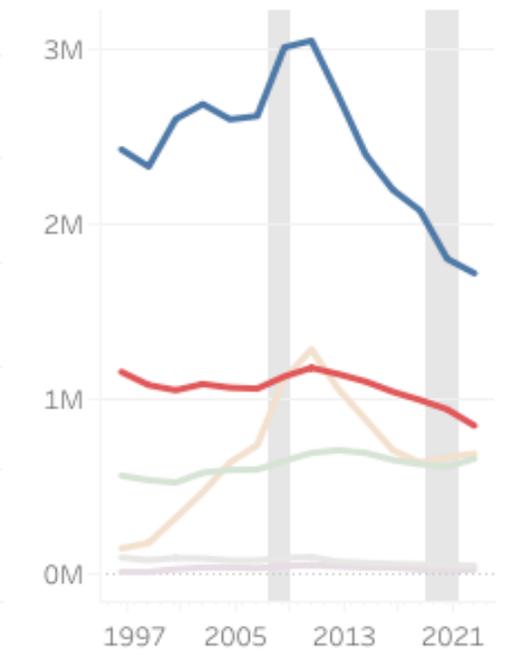
Age: Under 18



Age 18-24



Age 25+



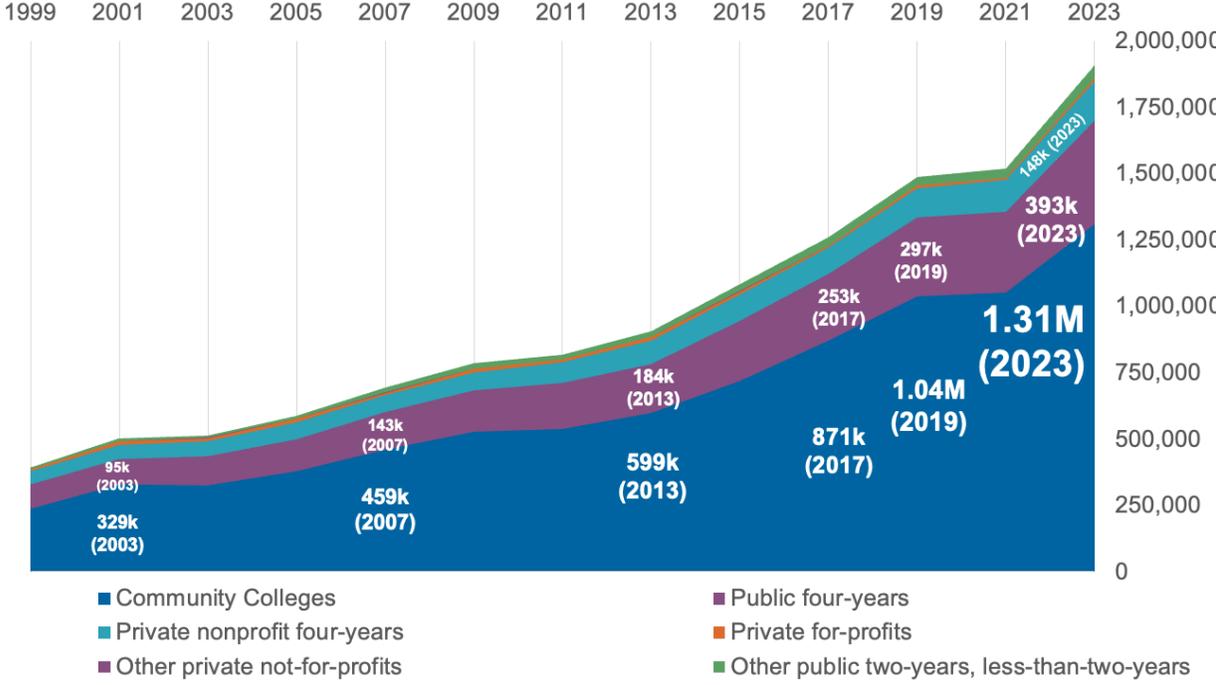
Steady increases in dual enrollment students have not translated into increased enrollment in community colleges by recent high school grads.



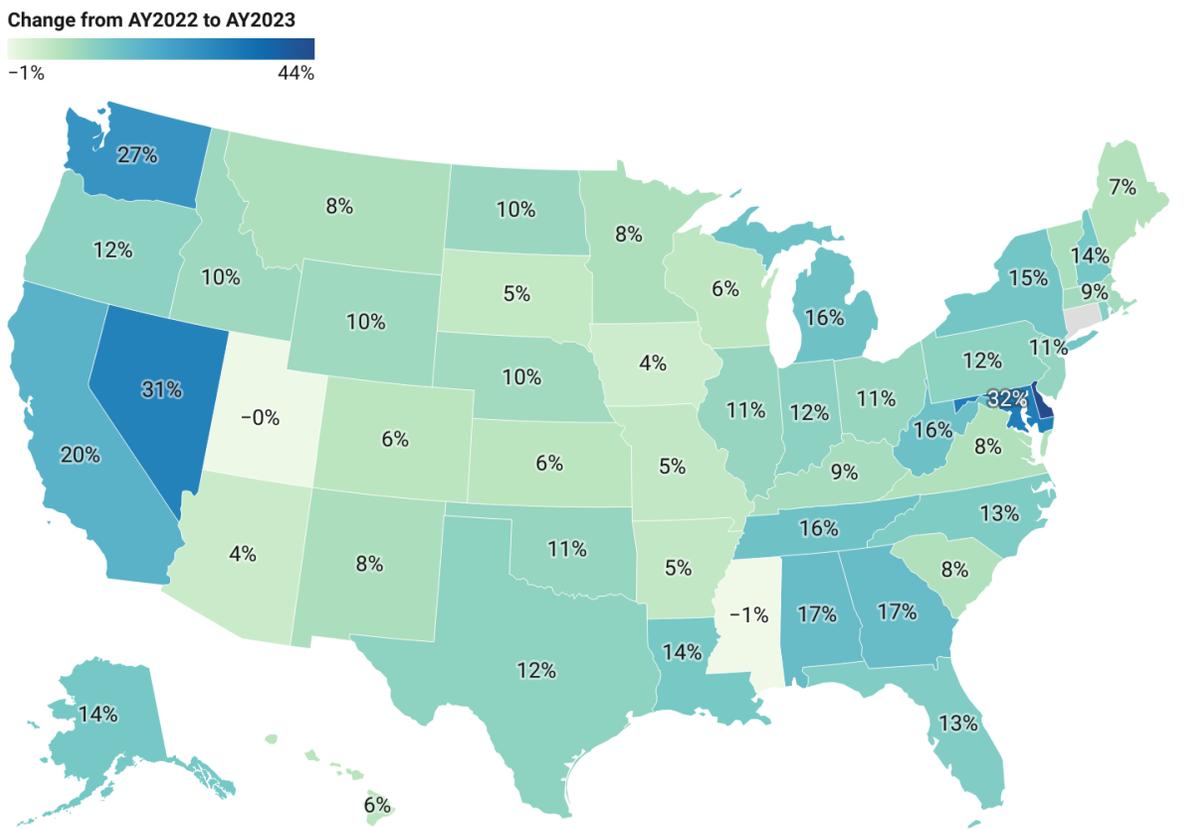
The Opportunity:
**Dual Enrollment Widespread and
Potentially Effective
(Though Access Uneven)**

Dual enrollment has doubled in the past decade and grew 13% in the past year from 2.5 to 2.8 million

Growth of Dual Enrollment, Fall Enrollments 1999-2023



One-Year Growth of Dual Enrollment, 2022-23 to 2023-24

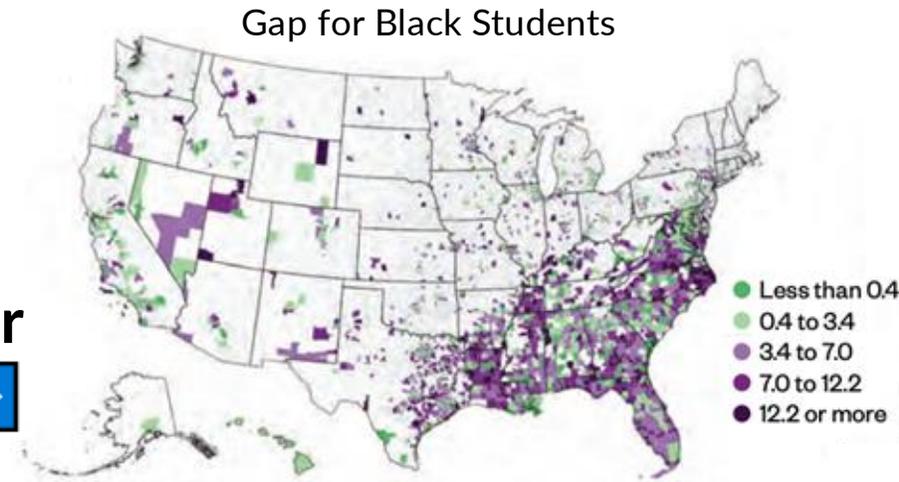


Connecticut excluded from this analysis due to known issues with underreporting in AY2022 that appear to be corrected in AY2023

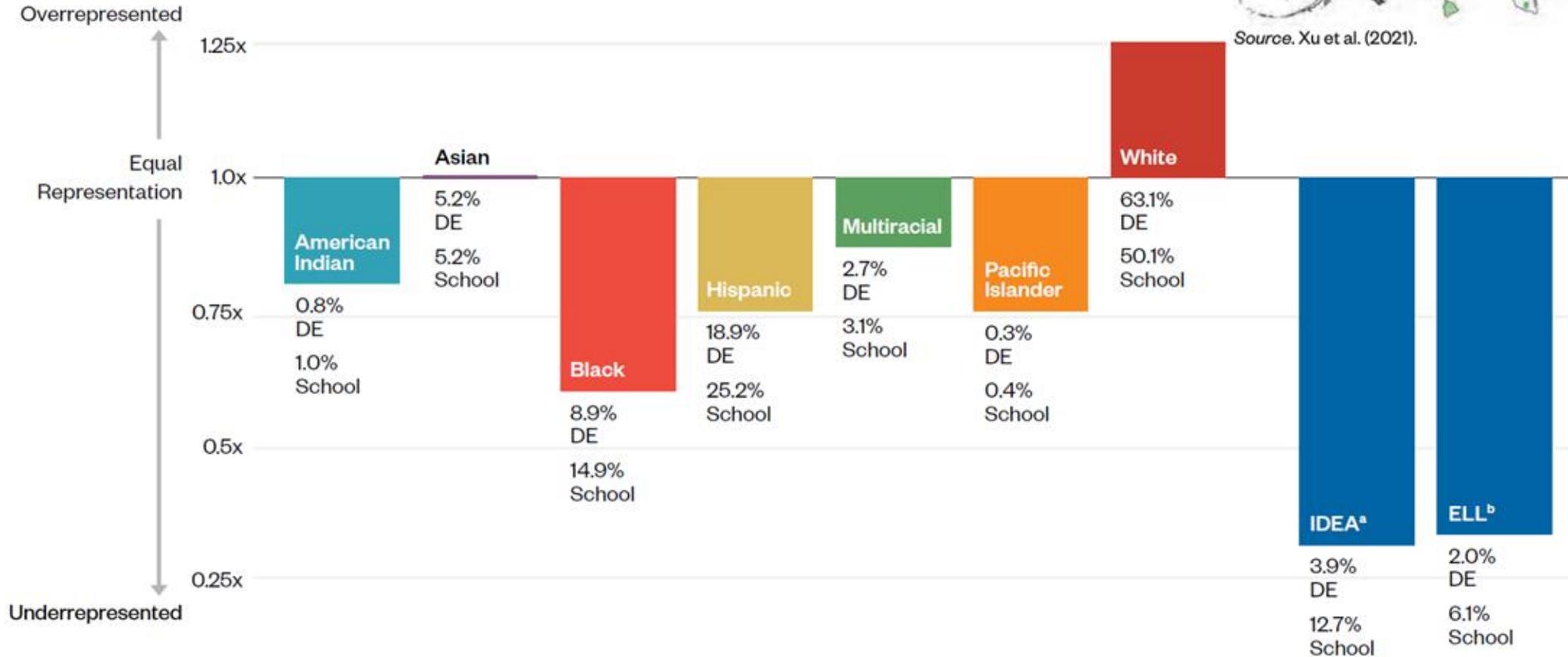


Programs of Privilege: Access to DE is uneven, gaps are widespread,

but 1 in 5 districts have closed gaps for Black and Latino students →



Source: Xu et al. (2021).



Strong research base showing that DE can work as a lever for expanding college access & attainment

+ DE benefits Black, Latino, low-income, and high school CTE students

WWC Intervention Report
 A summary of findings from a systematic review of the evidence
 February 2017

Dual Enrollment Programs

Progress Description
 Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to take college courses and earn college credits while still attending high school. Such programs, also referred to as dual credit or early college programs, are designed to boost college access and degree attainment, especially for students typically underrepresented in higher education. Dual enrollment programs support college credit accumulation and degree attainment via at least three mechanisms. First, allowing high school students to experience college-level courses helps them prepare for the social and academic requirements of college while having the additional supports available to high school students. This may reduce the need for developmental coursework. Second, students who accumulate college credits early and consistently are more likely to attain a college degree. Third, many dual enrollment programs offer discounted or free tuition, which reduces the overall cost of college and may increase the number of low socioeconomic status students who can attend and complete college.

Research¹
 The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) identified five studies of dual enrollment programs that fell within the scope of the Transition to College topic area and met WWC group design standards. Ten studies met WWC group design standards without reservations, and three studies met WWC group design standards with reservations. Together, these studies included 77,288 high school students across the United States.

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for dual enrollment programs to be medium to large for its student outcome domains—degree attainment (college), college access and enrollment, credit accrual (pre-high school, and general academic achievement (high school)). The WWC considers the extent for dual enrollment programs to be small for the following student outcome domains: staying in school (middle, attendance (high school), and general academic achievement (college). There were no dual enrollment programs in the four other domains eligible in the Transition to College topic area, so this report does not report on the effectiveness of dual enrollment programs for these domains. (9 Inclusion Summary (p. 8 for more details of effectiveness by domain).)

Effectiveness²
 Dual enrollment programs were found to have positive effects on students' degree attainment (college access and enrollment, credit accumulation, completing high school, and general academic achievement school), with a medium to large extent of evidence. For the staying in high school, college readiness, and college access (high school) domains, dual enrollment programs had potentially positive effects with a small to medium extent of evidence.

Dual Enrollment Programs February 2017 Page 1

Reviews & Meta-Analyses

Research Priorities for Advancing Equitable Dual Enrollment Policy and Practice

AUTHORS JULY 2022

Jacqui L. Taylor, Taryn Gloria Allen, Brian P. An, Christine Demerick, John A. Edmunds, John Fink, Matt S. Goan, Michelle Hudson, Alexander Hu, Barbara F. Tolobinsky, Mike Chen

**Chapter 3
 A Review of Empirical Studies on Dual Enrollment: Assessing Educational Outcomes**

Brian P. An and Jason L. Taylor

3.1 Introduction

More than ever, high school students in the United States have educational goals. That is, most high school students expect to attend college and complete a bachelor's degree. In 2000, 80% of high school seniors planned to earn at least a bachelor's degree (Reynolds, Stewart, Macdonald, & Sisco, 2006). Not surprisingly, the percentage of high school students that enrolled in college immediately after high school also increased, from 9% in 1979–80 to 69% in 2015 (Choi, 2017; Stegoff, 1991; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). However, enrolling in and expecting to finish college does not mean that students will graduate from college. In 2014, approximately 81% of first-time students who enrolled at four-year institutions returned the following year (NCES, 2017). The persistence rate continues beyond the early college years. The transition from high school to college therefore is not successful for many students. Although high schools often maintain a "college for all" ethos, many

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A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Dual Enrollment Research

Tracey King Schaller¹, P. Wesley Rounton¹, Mark Allen Partridge¹, and Reanna Berry¹

Abstract
 Given the current surge in student participation in dual enrollment programs, an updated synthesis of literature relating to how these programs impact students is warranted. Furthermore, while there are qualitative literature reviews relating to dual enrollment and student outcomes, there has not been a quantitative synthesis of literature relating to the findings of this research. Accordingly, we conduct a quantitative literature review involving the academic outcomes of higher education enrollment, persistence, performance, and degree attainment. Using meta-analytic techniques, we find that across the 162 study effect sizes included in our analysis, participation in dual enrollment programs was positively associated with grade point average (GPA), total earned college credits, college enrollment, early persistence, degree attainment, and full-time attendance. Also, we find negative associations between dual enrollment and time to graduation and total semesters enrolled in college, indicating these programs can help students graduate college more quickly.

REPORT | OCTOBER 2024

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

Tatiana Velasco | John Fink | Maribel Borkaya | Davis Jenkins
 Community College Research Center



JOURNAL OF EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS PLACED AT RISK (JESPAR)
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2022.2100994>

Should Students Falling Behind in School Take Dual Enrollment Courses?

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ABSTRACT
 This study examined the effect of dual enrollment on the postsecondary enrollment and degree completion for students who attended public high schools. We employed a propensity score matching design to control for selection bias arising from DE participation and with a bounds test. The results showed that students who participated in dual enrollment had a higher likelihood of enrolling in college within four and eight years of high school graduation, respectively, compared to those who did not take DE courses. This evidence suggests that dual enrollment contributed to a reduction in educational attainment and degree attainment for students at risk of not attending college. On the other hand, students who were racial/ethnic minorities and students from low-income families were less likely to participate in DE programs but were also less likely to experience participation effects on college degree attainment. These findings stress the need for higher education institutions and partnering school districts to provide more supports for underserved students for participating in a successful transition into college.

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 TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The Impact of Dual Enrollment on College Application Choice and Admission Success

Vivian Yuen Ting Liu
 The City University of New York

Veronica Minaya
 Community College Research Center
 Teachers College, Columbia University

Di Xu
 University of California, Irvine

December 2022
 CCRC Working Paper No. 129

REPORT | OCTOBER 2025

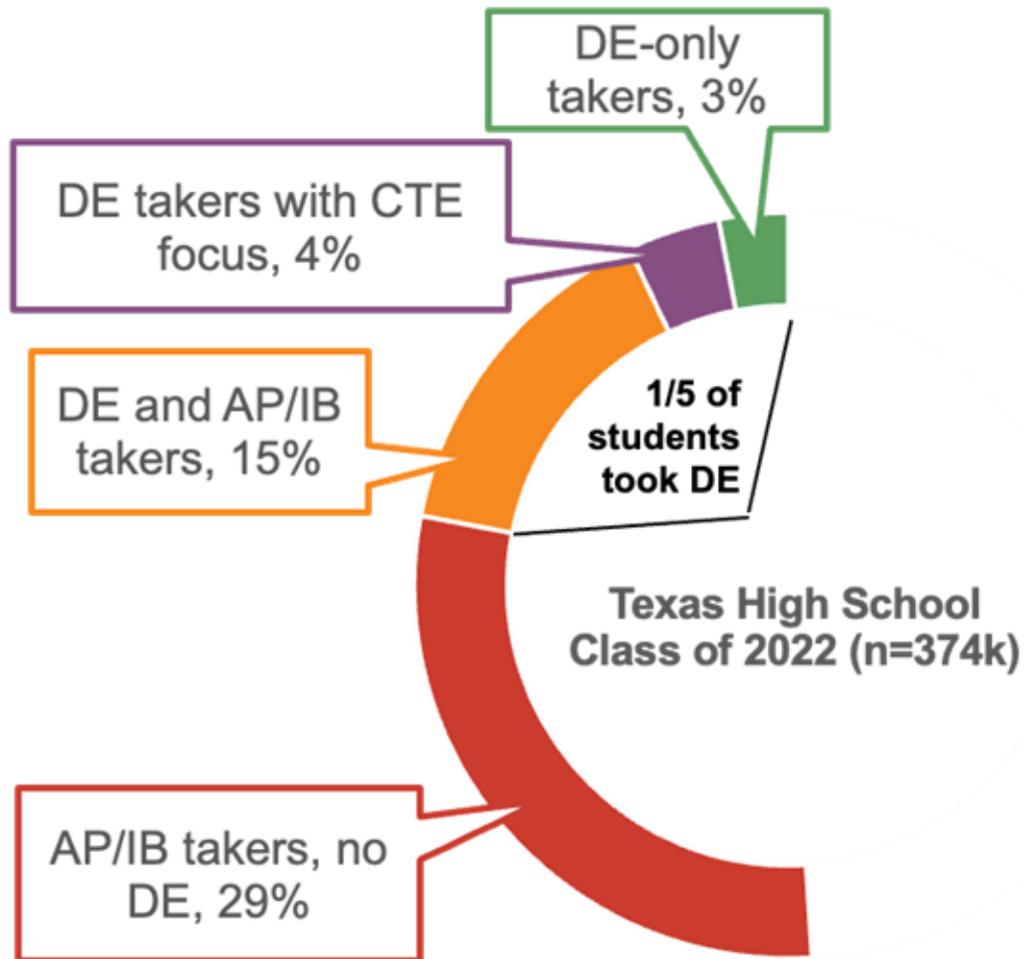
Promising Combinations of Dual Enrollment, AP/IB, and CTE
 The College and Earnings Trajectories of Texas High School Students Who Take Accelerated Coursework

Tatiana Velasco | Wonsun Ryu | Lauren Schudde | Karissa Grano | Davis Jenkins | John Fink



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Promising Combinations, Untapped Potential



Promising Combinations of Dual Enrollment, AP/IB, and CTE

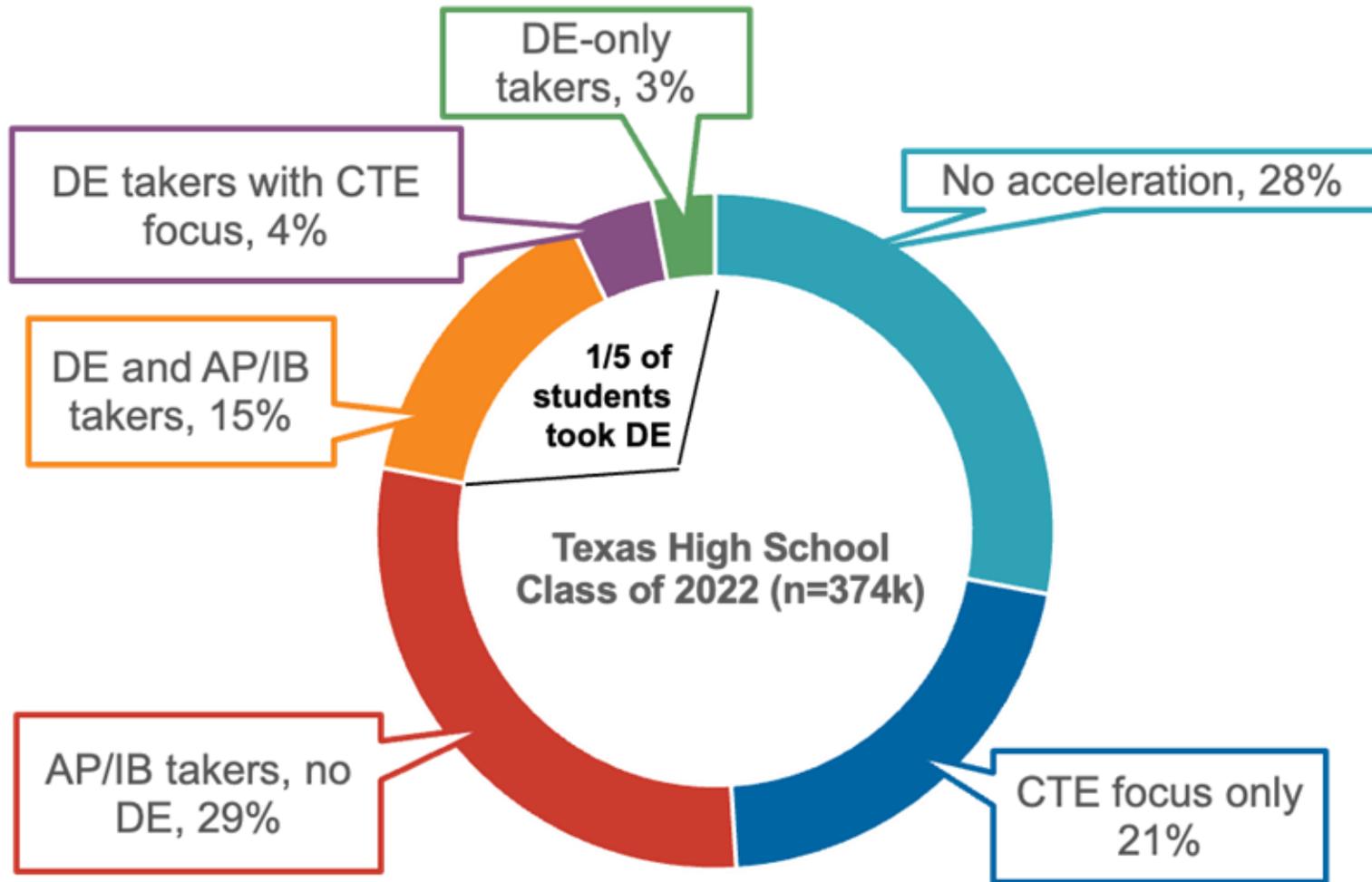
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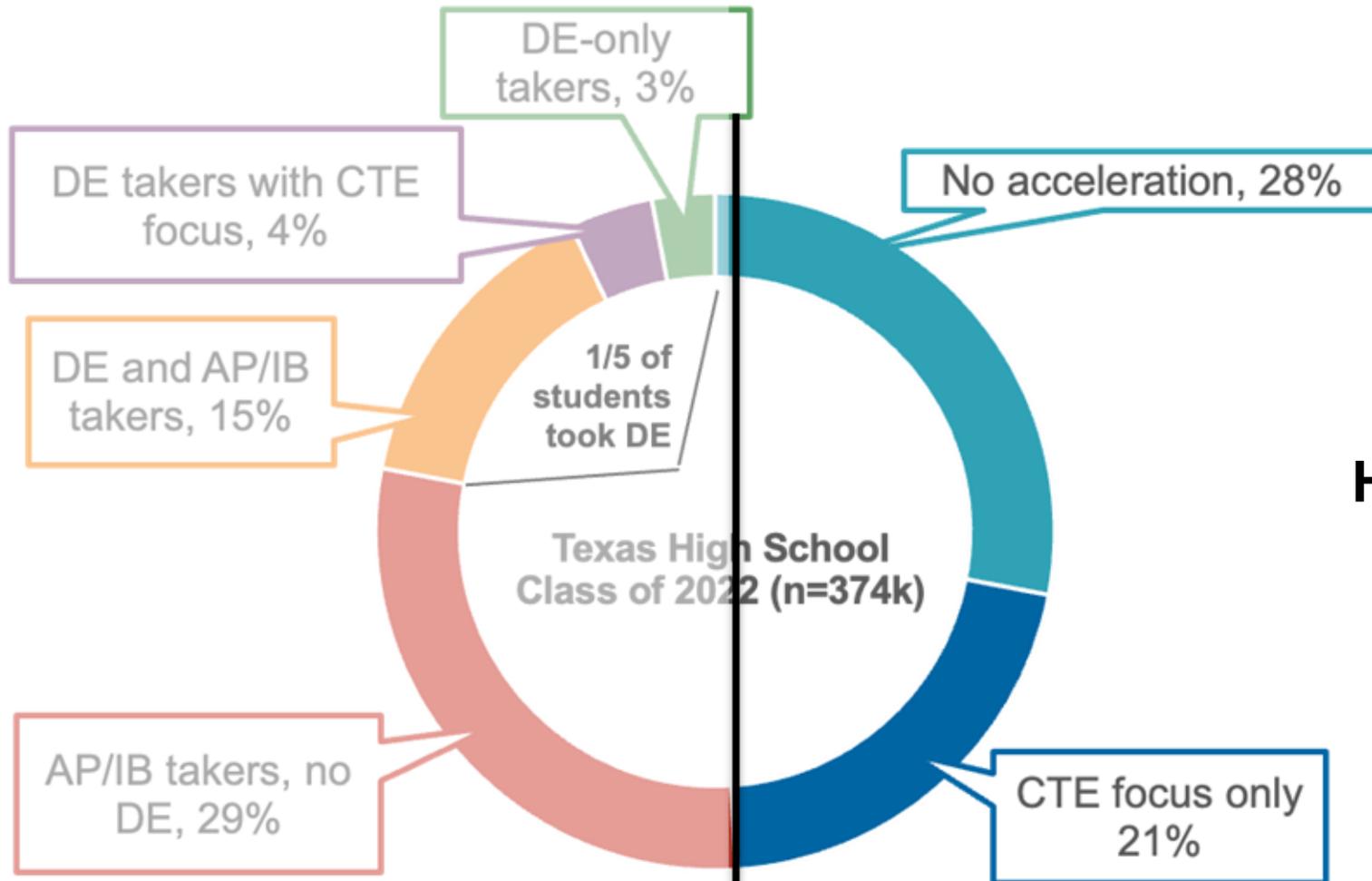
Velasco et al., 2025

Promising Combinations, Untapped Potential



Velasco et al., 2025

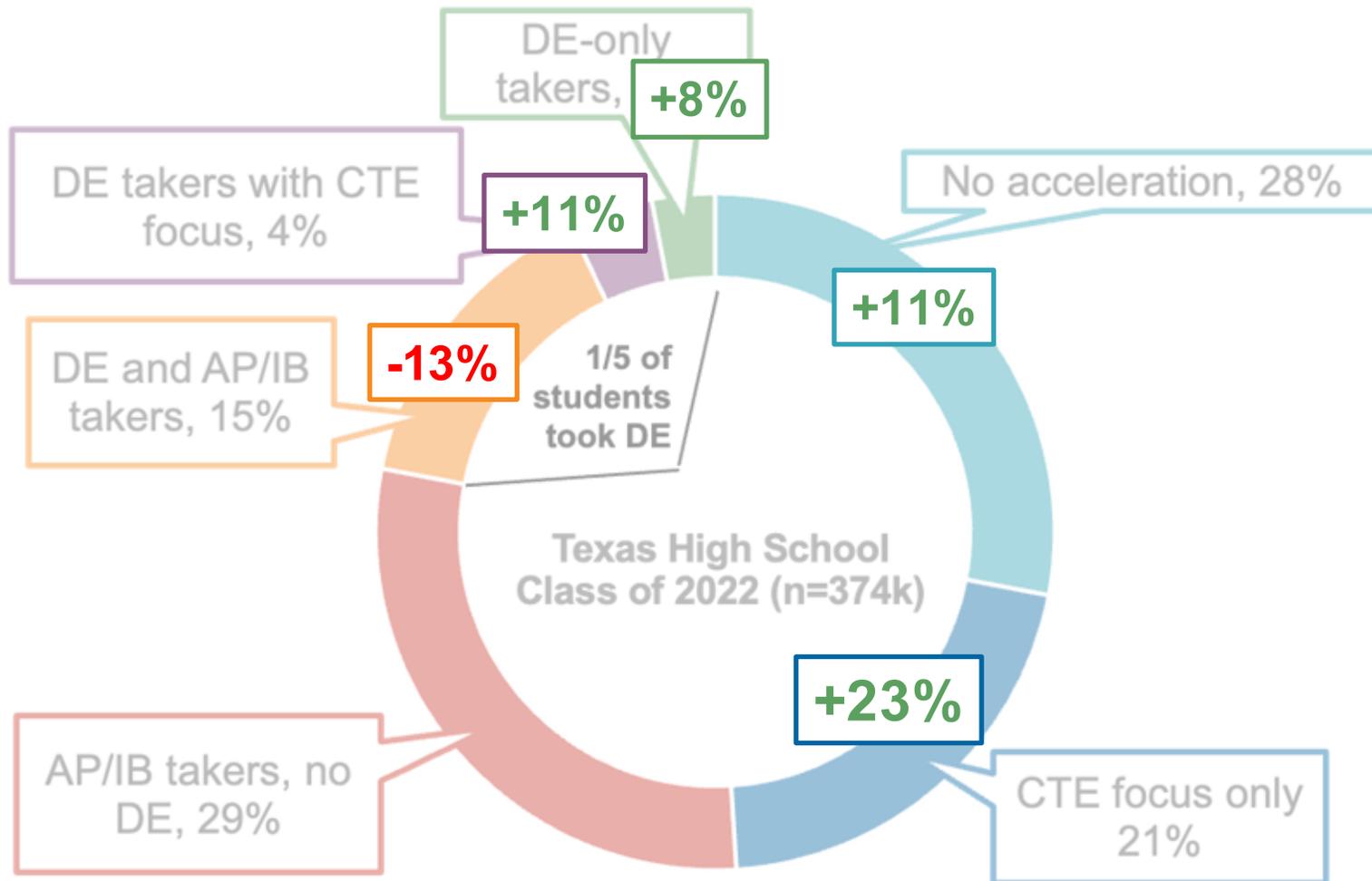
Promising Combinations, Untapped Potential



Half of Texas HS Students did not take DE or AP/IB

Overrepresented:
Men, Black, & low-income students
 56-57% men (51% baseline)
 14-18% Black (13% baseline)
 62-65% low-income (54% baseline)

Earnings advantage strongest among HS CTE students one year after HS



Promising Combinations of Dual Enrollment, AP/IB, and CTE

The College and Earnings Trajectories of Texas High School Students Who Take Accelerated Coursework

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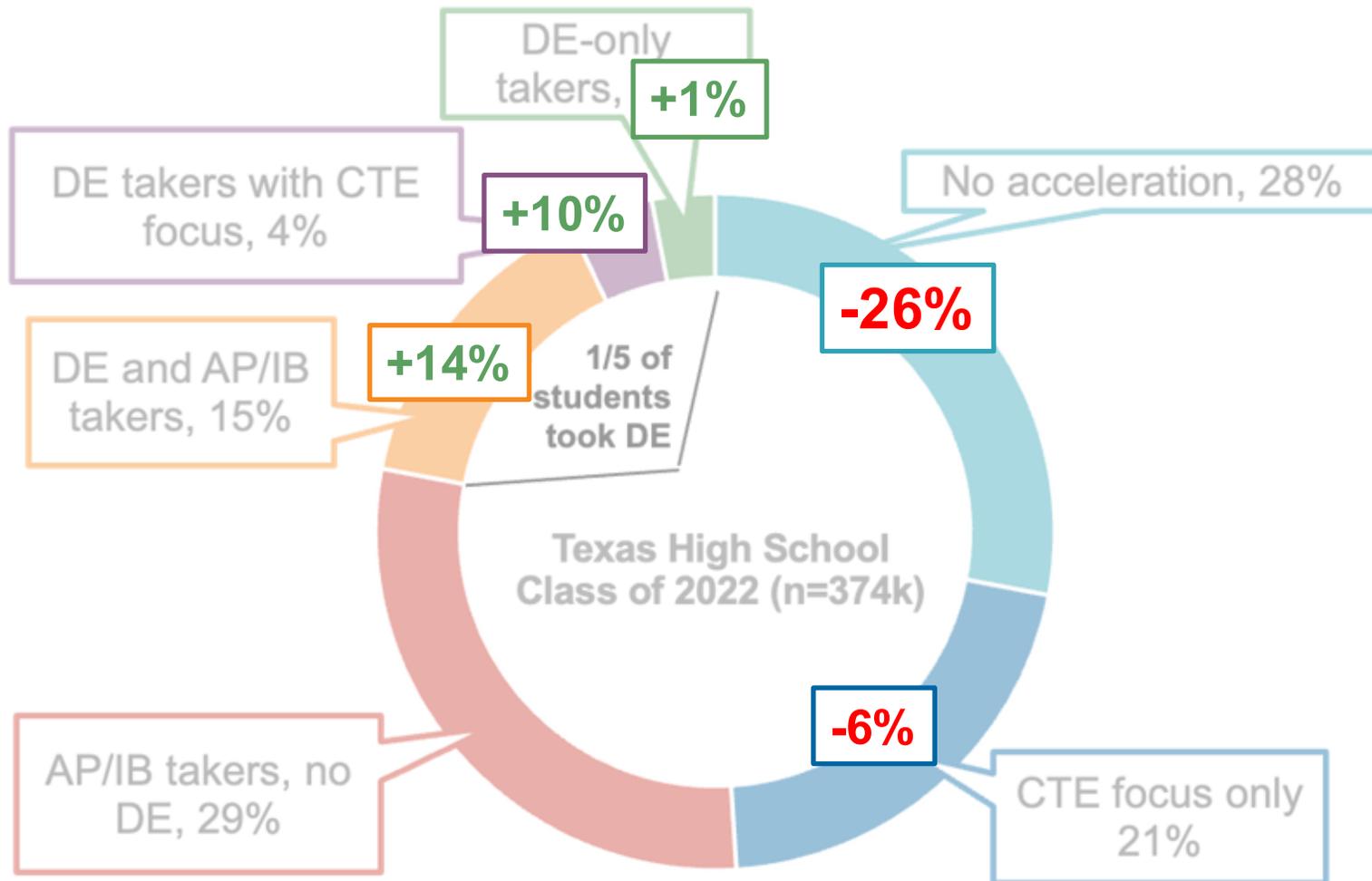


Velasco et al., 2025

Earnings at age 19
Related to AP/IB, no DE

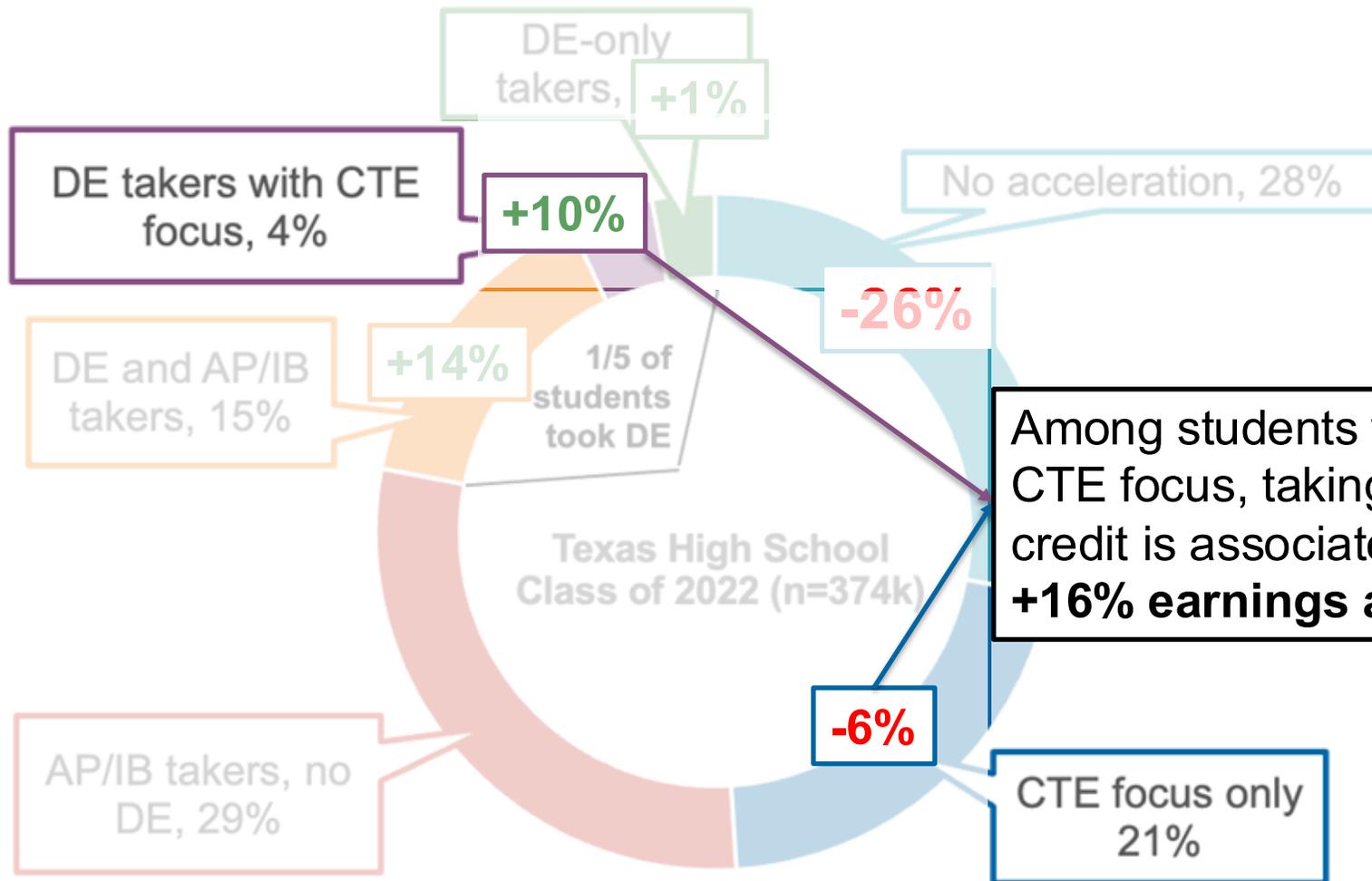
Regression-adjusted estimates of the average quarterly earnings by each age group. All estimates are in reference to “AP/IB takers, no DE” earnings. Controls: gender, race, income background, TAKS test scores, student ranking, and high school characteristics.

Earnings advantage shifts to students with dual credit six years after HS



Earnings at age 24
Related to AP/IB, no DE

Earnings advantage shifts to students with dual credit six years after HS



Among students with a HS CTE focus, taking dual credit is associated with a **+16% earnings advantage**

Earnings at age 24
Related to AP/IB, no DE



Velasco et al., 2025

A blue-tinted photograph of four students walking away from the camera on a paved path. They are wearing backpacks and casual clothing. The background shows a modern building with large windows and a staircase.

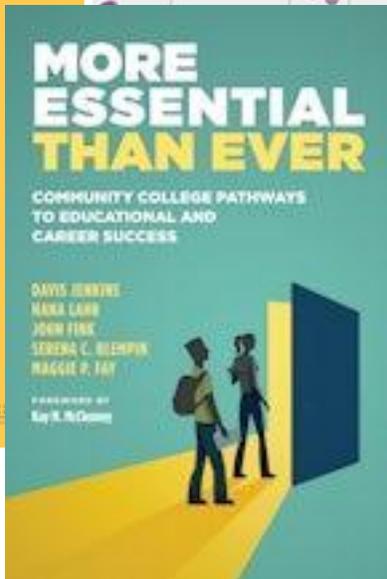
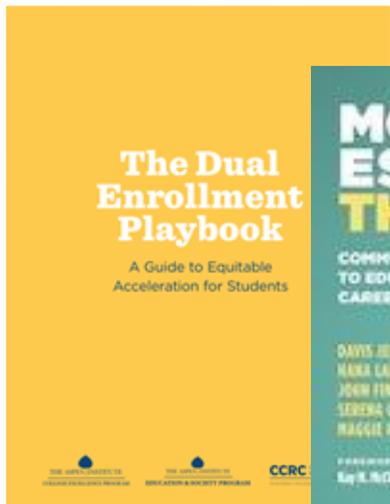
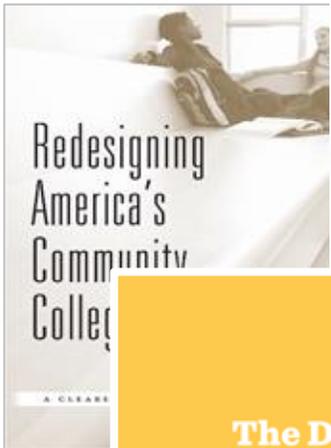
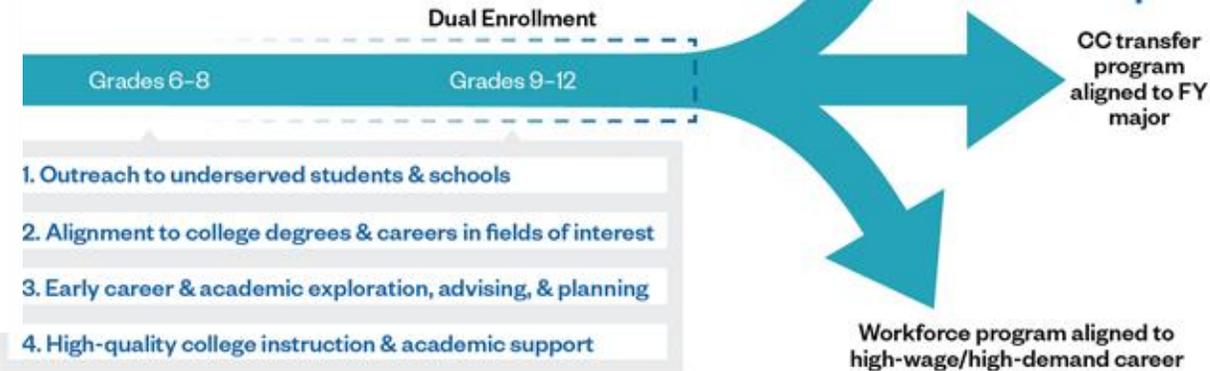
The Strategy:
**Redesigning Dual Enrollment to
Expand College and Career Success**

High-performing community college partnerships are extending their “guided pathways” reforms to DE

A National Movement: Colleges Implementing Guided Pathways



Dual Enrollment Equity Pathways (DEEP) Framework



Rethinking Dual Enrollment as an On-ramp to Career-Connected Postsecondary Pathways

Conventional Approach



“Programs of privilege”



“Random acts”



DEEP Approach



All – and especially underserved students



Designed to expand college and career opportunities

Nationally, nearly a third of high school graduates have taken dual enrollment

Another third earned 3+ credits in HS CTE with no dual enrollment

How can dual enrollment serve as an on-ramp to college and career opportunity for high school CTE students?

