



November 2022

## Where Are They Now?

A Study of Dual Enrollment Students  
in the Kern Community College District

By Career Ladders Project  
and Kern Community College District



CLP

Career Ladders Project

## Acknowledgements

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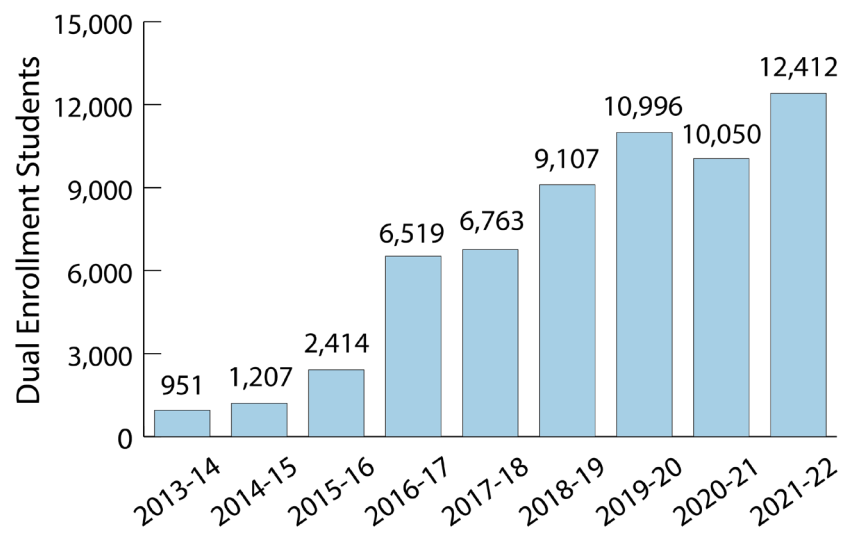
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## Introduction

Dual enrollment<sup>1</sup> across the Kern Community College District (KCCD) has grown dramatically in the past nine years. In 2013–14, there were fewer than 1,000 dual enrollment students at the district’s three colleges—Bakersfield College, Cerro Coso Community College, and Porterville College.<sup>2</sup> By the 2021–22 academic year, there were more than 12,000 dual enrollment students.

The rise coincided with a large population increase in the county, the district’s move to implement reforms that streamline and recenter student needs using a guided pathways framework, and a concentrated effort by Bakersfield College to increase access to college through dual enrollment in the service areas with the lowest overall postsecondary attainment rates. In addition to the substantial growth in access, high school students are succeeding in their college courses; dual enrollment retention<sup>3</sup> and success<sup>4</sup> rates at all three colleges are upwards of 90% and 80%, respectively.

KCCD Dual Enrollment Headcount by Year



- 1 For the purposes of this report, “dual enrollment” refers to any time a high school student is enrolled in a college course, including when high school students enroll in college classes on the college campus or when students take college classes at a high school location.
- 2 These three colleges in KCCD are referred to as “Kern colleges.” Taft College, which is also located in Kern County, is not in KCCD’s service area.
- 3 [Retention](#) is defined as students enrolled on census and completed the course for a grade of A, B, C, D, F, P, NP, or I.
- 4 [Success](#) is defined as students enrolled on census and passed the course for a grade of A, B, C, or P.

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Long acknowledged as an effective acceleration strategy, dual enrollment has emerged as a powerful equity strategy when designed for the success of students who might not otherwise attend college. By designing dual enrollment for equity—from recruitment to the classroom experience—the community college practitioners at KCCD and its colleges hope to close college-going equity gaps and, ultimately, gaps in college attainment. Having successfully increased the number of students participating in dual enrollment, they wanted to understand how dual enrollment affects post-high school outcomes. The literature suggests that students are likely to continue on to postsecondary education and that students from underrepresented populations will see higher gains. To find out, staff from the Bakersfield College and KCCD Early College<sup>5</sup> teams, the Bakersfield College Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and the Career Ladders Project (CLP) teamed up to discover where these former dual enrollment students are now. The KCCD research team and CLP conducted a mixed methods study using quantitative data from administrative data systems and qualitative data collected from focus groups to gain insight into the subsequent trajectories of dual enrollment students.

Located in the southern part of California’s Central Valley region, KCCD is one of the largest community college districts in the nation. KCCD and its three colleges—Bakersfield College, Cerro Coso Community College, and Porterville College—serve approximately 50,000 students annually in an area that covers parts of five counties and is roughly the size of West Virginia. The regional economy is closely linked to agriculture and petroleum extraction, and there is also a strong military and aviation presence. In 2017, a majority of the population in KCCD’s service area identified as Hispanic/Latino (53.9%) or white (34.3%). Median household income was about one-third lower than the California state average (\$45,496 compared with \$67,169). And the percent of families living below the poverty level was much higher than the statewide average (19.7% compared with 11.1%). All three Kern colleges are Hispanic-Serving Institutions.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>5</sup> “Early college” in KCCD refers to all opportunities to earn college credit while in high school, including high school articulated credit and community college courses regardless of modality.

<sup>6</sup> [Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#) have enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25% Hispanic students.



## The California Context

Before answering the question “where are they now,” it’s important to understand the California context, which poses a number of data collection challenges. California community colleges are open access institutions. There are no exam scores or minimum GPA required for admission. High school students who want to take community college courses only need to secure parental permission and a recommendation from their high school principal.

When high school students take a community college course in California they are given a “part-time special admission” enrollment status. This enrollment status is the primary way they are identified in the college’s management information system (MIS). When students graduate high school and matriculate to the community college, they are no longer designated as special admission students. Finding historical data for students who participated in dual enrollment becomes challenging because that identifier has dropped off.

California also lacks an integrated data system connecting K-12 with postsecondary education. There is no single identifier that follows students through their educational journey, and student records aren’t easily exchanged between high schools, community colleges, and four-year universities.





## Students in the Quantitative Data Set

The quantitative data set includes all students from KCCD’s feeder high schools who enrolled in at least one college course while in high school and who graduated high school between 2016 and 2021. This population frame yielded 21,073 students from 126 high schools. The majority of students were Latinx<sup>8</sup> (68%) followed by white (21%). All other racial groups reported were under 10%. The population was majority female (57%) with 41% males.

## Quantitative Methods and Data

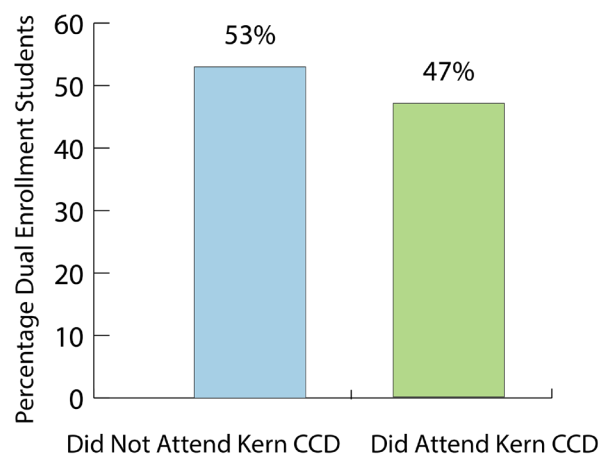
The research team used a combination of internal district data and external National Student Clearinghouse data to connect K-12 and postsecondary education for former dual enrollment students. The KCCD research team had college student ID numbers for all past dually-enrolled students, independent of the MIS system. They cast a wide net and included all students who had taken a college course while in high school and who graduated high school between 2016 and 2021, regardless of modality or program. They used these ID numbers to determine: 1) how many college units each student completed while in high school, and 2) how many students subsequently continued post-high school at any Kern community college. They were also able to disaggregate this data by race and gender.

The KCCD research team then used National Student Clearinghouse data to determine which students attended two-year and/or four-year colleges after high school (i.e., post-dual enrollment).<sup>7</sup>

## Quantitative Findings

**Quantitative Finding 1. *Nearly half (47%) of former dual enrollment students attended a Kern college after they graduated high school.*** This finding counters the widely held belief among community college practitioners that dual enrollment students do not continue on as students at the community college.

Figure 1. KCCD Attendance After High School

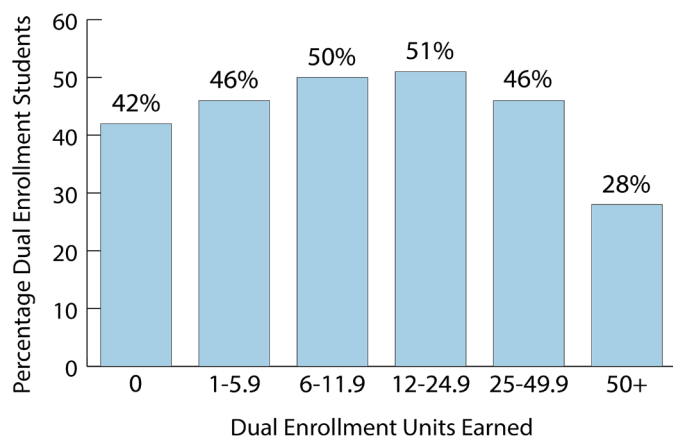


7 Although results were limited to institutions that participate in the [National Student Clearinghouse](#) data collection, the National Student Clearinghouse reports that participating members cover 97% of post-secondary enrollments.

8 The terms Latinx and Hispanic/Latino are used interchangeably.

**Quantitative Finding 2. *The likelihood that dual enrollment students will continue on to a Kern community college increases as they earn more units until it peaks at 51% for those who earn between 12 and 24.9 college units while in high school.*** Students who earned more than 50 college units were least likely to continue on to a Kern college. A possible reason could be that these students already had earned a college degree or certificate, or had enough units to make transfer to a four-year institution a more viable option.

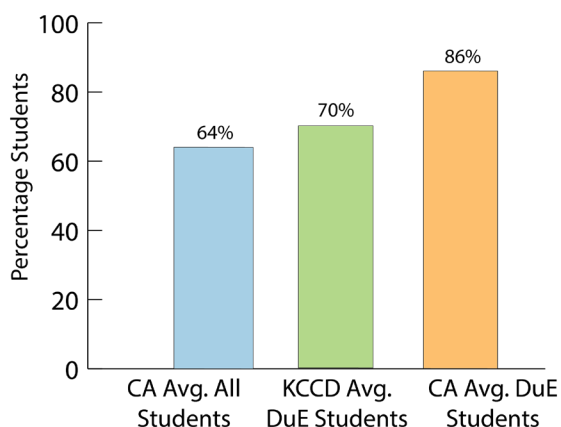
**Figure 2. Likelihood of Attending a Kern College After High School**



**Quantitative Finding 3. *Seventy percent (70%) of former dual enrollment students attended a postsecondary institution after high school inclusive of both two- and four-year institutions.*** Compared with the college-going rate for all high school students (both dual enrollment and non-dual enrollment), KCCD’s college-going rate for dual enrollment students (70%) is higher than the California average of 64% for all high school graduates. It is possible that, among the 30% who did not attend college after high school, some students had already earned associate degrees or certificates. The KCCD former dual enrollment college

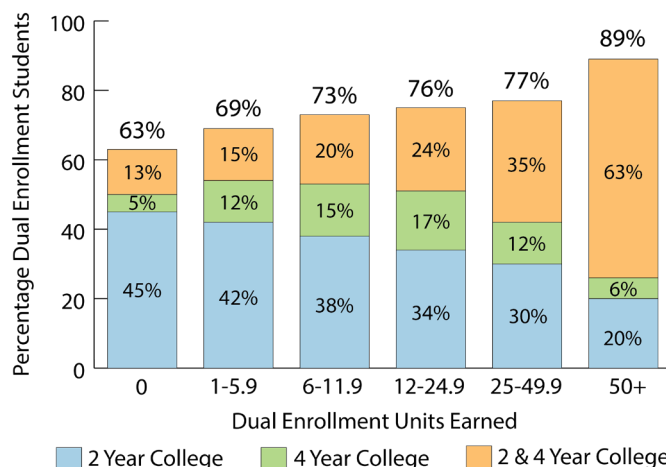
attendance rate is lower than the statewide college attendance rate for dual enrollment graduates which stands at 86%.

**Figure 3. College Attendance, Dual Enrollment Students and All Students**



**Quantitative Finding 4. *Overall post-high school college attendance increased with the number of dual enrollment college units earned.*** Four-year college attendance increased significantly with the number of dual enrollment units. KCCD students that took a sizable number of units were more likely to go directly into a four-year college after high school graduation.

**Figure 4. Two- or Four-year College Attendance by Dual Enrollment Units Earned**



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**Quantitative Finding 5. College-going access for African American and Latinx former KCCCD dual enrollment students<sup>9</sup> is higher than both the California average<sup>10</sup> and the national average<sup>11</sup> for high school students (see Figure 5).** Additionally, looking at the representation of African American and Latinx students provides a helpful frame of reference, as shown in Figure 6. The representation of Latinx students in KCCCD dual enrollment is eight percentage points higher than their representation in the local high school population. And Latinx students who participate in dual enrollment also attend college at a higher rate than the state and national average. While the representation of African American students in dual enrollment is two percentage points lower than their representation in the local high school

population, those who do access dual enrollment in high school are also attending college at higher rates than the state and national average.

Figure 6. Representation in KCCCD Service Area

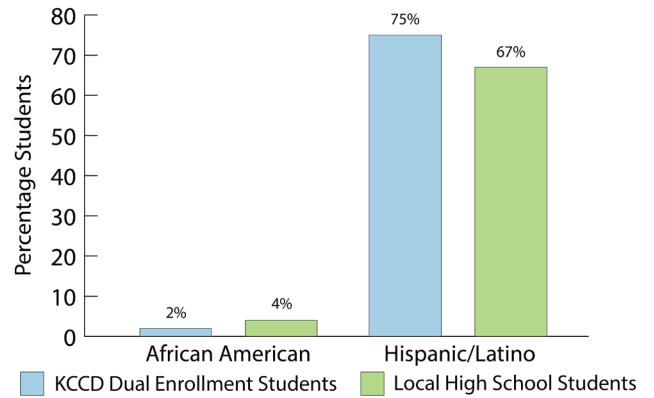
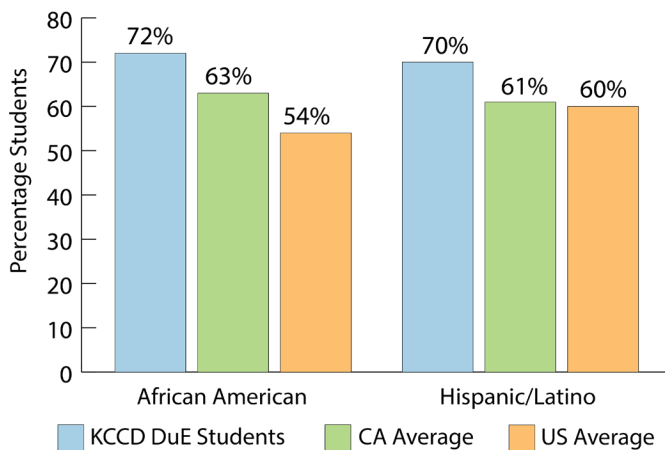


Figure 5. College Attendance for African American and Hispanic/Latino Students



## Qualitative Methods and Data

CLP and the KCCCD research team collaborated to design a focus group protocol. CLP trained staff from the Bakersfield College Office of Institutional Effectiveness on how to conduct a focus group, as well as basic coding of focus group transcripts. After going through the Institutional Research Board (IRB) process, the research team conducted both virtual and in-person focus groups. CLP moderated the focus groups and Institutional Effectiveness staff took notes. KCCCD Early College staff were intentionally not included in the facilitation of focus groups due to their familiarity with students and potential to influence participants' responses.

9 The group of KCCCD dual enrollment students includes the average for all students who took a college course in high school and graduated high school between 2016 and 2021.

10 California Department of Education, DataQuest. Retrieved 10/27/22, from: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/DataQuest/DQCensus/CGRLoc.aspx?aggllevel=state&cds=00&year=2017-18>.

11 National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Immediate College Enrollment Rate. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved 10/27/22, from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cpa>.



## Focus Group Approach and Sample

Using the access and persistence rates found in the quantitative component of the project as the springboard to the qualitative approach, the research team designed the focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of the student experience. The focus group protocol centered on three guiding questions for former dual enrollment students: 1) where are you in your academic and professional journey, 2) how did your dual enrollment experience influence where you are now, and 3) what recommendations do you have to make the dual enrollment experience better for students? (See Appendix A for the focus group protocol.)

Participants were recruited via email by the Director of Early College programs, who is a familiar and trusted institutional agent for dual enrollment alumni (see Appendix B for the focus group recruitment letter). The recruitment letter explained that participation was completely voluntary, anonymity would be preserved, and informed consent forms would be required. It also described duration and modalities of the focus groups, and the compensation that participants would receive. There were five focus groups with a total of 54 participants; two focus groups were conducted in-person and three virtually via Zoom web conferencing. Participants represented 22 high schools and graduating classes from 2016 – 2021. Participants were majority Latinx (40%), followed by white (27%), and multi-ethnic (20%). All other groups were less than 10%. Participants skewed female at 70%, with 30% reporting as male.

“[Dual enrollment] definitely helped me in college because it helped provide the layout of how I wanted to study in college.” (Student)

One participant explained, “I’m working full time [at an elementary school], but my job’s very flexible. So, during my lunches or during my prep time, they just let me go on to my classes and work on my homework.”

## Qualitative Findings

**Qualitative Finding 1. *Participants are in or near completion of their postsecondary education or training.*** Participants described attending a variety of postsecondary institutions such as Bakersfield College, California State University Bakersfield, University of California Los Angeles, and the University of Phoenix. Most students reported making progress toward a career goal consistent with their dual enrollment aspirations. The students who were pursuing a different goal shared that they were making progress toward a certificate or degree leading to gainful employment.

Dual enrollment served both an introductory and exploratory function in guiding students’ academic and career pathways. “The first dual enrollment class I took was an introduction to veterinary science and that kind of just laid out my career for me.” Another participant described how dual enrollment helped support their future college-going, “[Dual enrollment] definitely helped me in college because it helped provide the layout of how I wanted to study in college.”

When trying to understand “where students are” in their academic trajectories, the tendency is to consider where they are currently attending college or how they’ve progressed in

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gaining education or training toward their career goals. But there is also the opportunity to understand where students are in terms of their academic mindsets. One participant shed light on this idea, “[dual enrollment] definitely helped me with responsibility.”

**Qualitative Finding 2. *Participants expressed a high level of familial capital<sup>12</sup> and intergenerational influence.*** Participants expressed that they received support from their families, even when family members did not fully understand what they were attempting. One student shared, “[my parents] didn’t even know [dual enrollment] was a thing...I kept taking classes and they were chill with it and encouraged me to continue with it.” Participants also cited cost savings from dual enrollment as an important factor for their families.

Families supported participants in a number of ways, “[My parents] were actually pretty supportive.

Several of my classes they had to drive me to, and my mom used to just sit in the parking lot and wait, because I couldn’t drive and they were nighttime classes, so they didn’t want me over here by myself. So, they were really supportive in that way.”

Participants also expressed how their dual enrollment experience influenced younger family members. “I was taking college classes as a high schooler and as for my younger siblings, now they’re in high school and they’re taking college classes while in high school. And, my cousins are too, so a lot of my family looked up to me as a model for what to do as they were

going through high school and taking college classes.”

**Qualitative Finding 3. *Where a student goes to high school can dictate their opportunities.*** Many participants expressed frustration at limited offerings of dual enrollment courses and limited opportunity to take courses. “The only classes we were able to take on [the high school] campus are the online classes. And those were very limited. If you wanted to do any other required college classes, you had to go to [the college] during these certain times.”

They also expressed displeasure with the lack of knowledge about dual enrollment opportunities. “I didn’t even know it was an option until my junior year of high school. I would’ve probably been taking them from

eighth grade if I knew it was an option.”

Participants also expressed concern about inconsistent

information received from the high school and the college. “Better communication between the college and the high school, at least like preparing, especially high school counselors. I would sometimes get really conflicting information ... it’d be nice if everyone was kind of on board with what the kids are doing and how this is going to affect you in the future.”

Participants wanted more dual enrollment classes, they wanted them offered earlier in high school, and they wanted the two institutions to provide more consistency in information through stronger communication.

“...a lot of my family looked up to me as a model for what to do as they were going through high school and taking college classes.” (Student)

<sup>12</sup> For an explanation of familial capital as one type of community cultural wealth, see Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8, 69-91.

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## Conclusion

The part of the study focused on quantitative analysis found that a high percentage of students who participated in dual enrollment in KCCD went on to further postsecondary education, either at a Kern college or a four-year university. Among students who successfully earned college units in dual enrollment, the likelihood of attending a Kern college after high school graduation increased steadily up through 24.9 units earned in high school. For students who completed 25 or more units, the likelihood of attending a Kern college after high school decreased, but the likelihood of attending a four-year university increased dramatically as the number of dual enrollment units earned in high school increased.

In the qualitative part of the study, former dual enrollment students reported that they were in or near completion of their college degree or training. They reported that their families had been largely supportive of them taking dual enrollment courses. They also noted that their dual enrollment experiences had influenced younger family members, including siblings and cousins, to attend college early. And they reported frustration with limited dual enrollment course offerings. They wanted to see more opportunities for dual enrollment and better communication between high school and college counselors.

The findings from this project were compelling. As suggested in the literature and as intended by the colleges, students who took dual enrollment courses in KCCD were more likely to continue on to postsecondary education—at a Kern college or at a four-year university—than those who didn't take dual enrollment courses. And, despite the limitations of available data, the quantitative analysis suggests that African American and Latinx dual enrollment students went on to further college enrollment at higher rates than the state or national average. Taken together, these findings underscore the potential for dual enrollment to change the educational and career trajectories for students and their families, and to improve overall college-going rates in communities with historically lower college attainment rates.

The mixed methods approach was particularly helpful in illuminating students' dual enrollment experiences and their subsequent educational journeys. Researchers from the KCCD research team, who work primarily with quantitative data, expressed that speaking with students emphasized the importance of access; their staff are now equipped to conduct focus groups for future studies. Hearing directly from former dual enrollment students provided an opportunity for the district and the colleges to center student voice, and for students to contribute their insights and recommendations for improvement. The addition of a qualitative approach helped tie in other ways of knowing, going beyond the numbers to deepen understanding and spark meaningful innovation. The lessons learned through this project will propel further improvements, as KCCD and its colleges continue to expand postsecondary opportunities for their communities through equitable dual enrollment.



We encourage college and high school practitioners to use the methodologies from this report and find out where your former dual enrollment students are now. Please feel free to use the focus group protocol, or modify it to meet your local needs. If you do conduct your own inquiry, please share the results with us. You can email your findings to [info@careerladdersproject.org](mailto:info@careerladdersproject.org).

# Appendix A: Dual Enrollment Alumni Focus Group Protocol

## Hosting the Focus Group

### In Person: Welcome Table/ Participant Survey

Set up a welcome table with nametags/name tents, markers, and pre-focus group demographic survey if using one. Include a welcome sign with the following instructions:

Please take a nametag/ name tent and write a pretend name that you would like to use for the duration of today's discussion.

**Virtual: Prepare a presentation slide to have up in virtual Focus Group, welcoming people as they join the focus group, and include the following instructions on how to change their name in Zoom.**

1. Select Participants, located in the bottom toolbar of the meeting window. Select "Participants."
2. Hover over your name and select "More" (desktop) or select your name (mobile).
3. Select "Rename."
4. Enter your desired name and click Rename (desktop) or Done (mobile).

## Focus Group Moderator Script

Thank you for agreeing to talk with us today. We have been asked to include student voices and experiences in discussions with college leaders and faculty about how the college can better serve students overall.

We want to remind you that this is voluntary and as we write up what we learn, we will not be using your names. So we ask that you create a pretend name. We want you to know that we think everything you have to say is important, and we are here to learn from you and your experiences after completing high school. Would it be OK to record the conversation, so that we can capture your ideas as you present them?

We would like to review some basic guidelines that will be used during our discussion:

- There are **no right or wrong answers** to the questions being asked today; all ideas are good ideas.
- Be respectful of others' desire to speak. Again, try not to talk at the same time and **if you have recently spoken, try to defer to others**, unless the comment is very important to you.
- We also welcome and **respect different points of view**. Please answer what you truly think, regardless of the other group members' opinions.
- If you are uncomfortable with a question, **feel free to pass**. You don't need to answer every question.
- We ask that you **share your honest feedback** so that the college can benefit from your opinions, and better serve you.
- For the purposes of this focus group, we will be using the term "dual enrollment" to refer to anytime a high school student took a college class. You may have also used the terms Early College, Concurrent Enrollment, or other terms.
- Are there any questions at this point? (Pause)

## Introduction

1. Let's go around, introduce yourself by sharing your pretend name, the high school you graduated from, and what was your favorite dual enrollment class?
2. How did your family respond to you taking college classes while in high school?

Probe:

Are there other people in your family who have gone to college, either before you started or after?

## Dual enrollment experiences

3. Where do you currently find yourself in your educational and career journey?

Probe:

- a. Are you studying or working in the major or field that you originally planned on studying when you were in high school? Can we see a show of hands? [Use the "raise hand" feature in Zoom (Virtual)] [Moderator speak aloud the number for transcripts]
  - b. If you changed your field of study or work, what made you change?
4. Thinking back to your high school-self, what type of student were you? How did that change, if at all, after you graduated high school?
  5. Were there any experiences from dual enrollment that influenced your transition to college or career after you graduated high school?

Probe:

- a. Did dual enrollment influence your decision to pursue college or where to go to college? Or if you didn't go to college after high school, did dual enrollment influence your career choice?
  - b. Did dual enrollment help you explore or decide on a major in college or your field of work?
6. Did participating in dual enrollment negatively affect your post-high school experience? In what ways?
  7. Do you think taking dual enrollment classes better prepared you for college math and English classes? If so, in what ways?
  8. Did you develop or realize your college and career plans more quickly by participating in dual enrollment? If so, in what ways?

## Closing

9. Is there anything that could have been improved in your dual enrollment experience to make it better?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share with us, that we may not have asked you about?

Thank you for your time, and for sharing with us about your experiences as a dual enrollment student. If there is anything else you would like to share, you can feel free to contact [insert contact name and email address here].

Created by Career Ladders Project and the Kern Community College District Early College Program. For more information or to share your findings, please email [info@careerladdersproject.org](mailto:info@careerladdersproject.org).

## Appendix B: Focus Group Participant Recruitment Letter

Hello,

My name is [Director], and I am the Director of the Early College program at Bakersfield College. I am emailing you because you participated in either dual enrollment or concurrent enrollment courses through Bakersfield College while you were in high school. I am looking for students and former students who would be willing to participate in a focus group. We are interested in learning about how your dual/concurrent enrollment experiences in high school may have affected your experiences after high school (in college, in your career, or other ways).

Participation in the focus group is completely voluntary and confidential. We are planning to write up the findings from the focus groups in a publication. We will not use your real name. The focus groups will be recorded. Participants will use a “pretend” name. The recordings and transcripts will only have that pretend name, not your real name.

The focus group should take no more than one and a half hours. An explanation of the study, including your participation and potential risks and benefits, is included in the attached Informed Consent form. Please read this over and sign and return to me. We will also review the form before we begin each focus group to make sure you understand what is involved.

If you are interested and available, please respond to this email and let me know which date(s) you are available to participate in from the list below. All participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card after participating.

Group #1- [Date, time, location: zoom or College site]

Group #2- [Date, time, location: zoom or College site]

Group #3- [Date, time, location: zoom or College site]

Thank you,

Director, Early College  
Bakersfield College  
Kern Community College District



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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