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WHO TAKES DUAL ENROLLMENT CLASSES? *a research brief*

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a MERC research Brief

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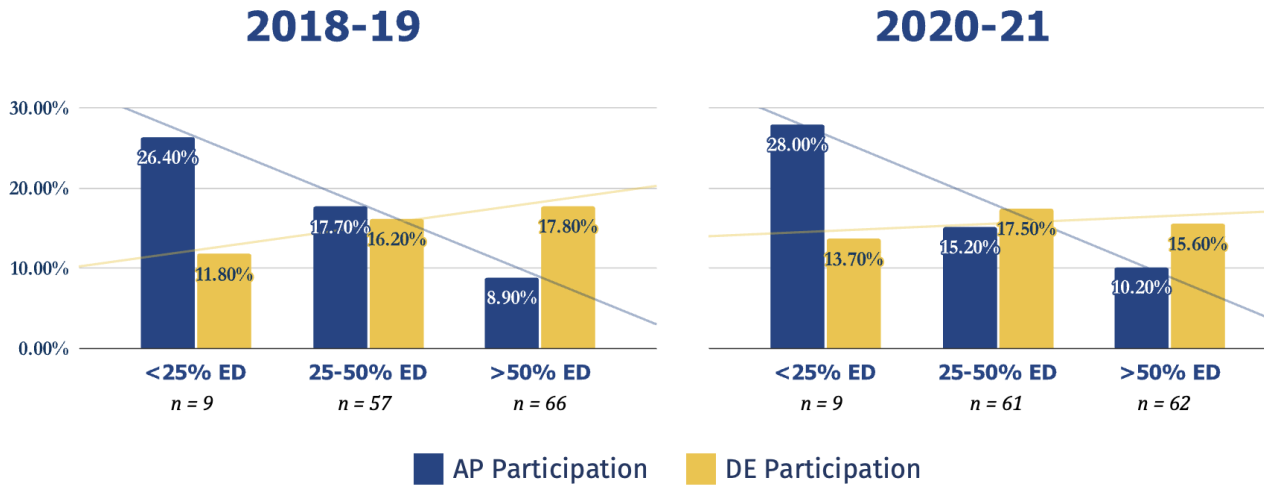
WHAT ARE DUAL ENROLLMENT CLASSES?

According to the most recent [Governing Principles for Dual Enrollment Between Virginia's Public Schools and the Virginia Community College System](#), Dual Enrollment (DE) classes are offered to high school students through partnerships between public school divisions and (most commonly) community colleges. The purpose of these classes is to “encourage rigorous educational pursuits; promote a wider range of course options for high school students; and advance access to and success in higher education and the workplace.” They also provide high school students the opportunity to meet graduation requirements while simultaneously earning college credit, offering an efficient and economical option for students planning to pursue postsecondary education. Additionally, Dual Enrollment classes are intended to help students become oriented towards the expectations of college-level coursework. Depending on the nature of the partnership within each school division, students may take Dual Enrollment classes within their home school or division or on campus at a partnering community college. There are clear benefits to taking Dual Enrollment classes, with longitudinal research showing that students taking DE in high school are more likely to attend college, persist in college, and take a full-time course load, increasing the likelihood of earning a degree within four years (Kremer, 2020).

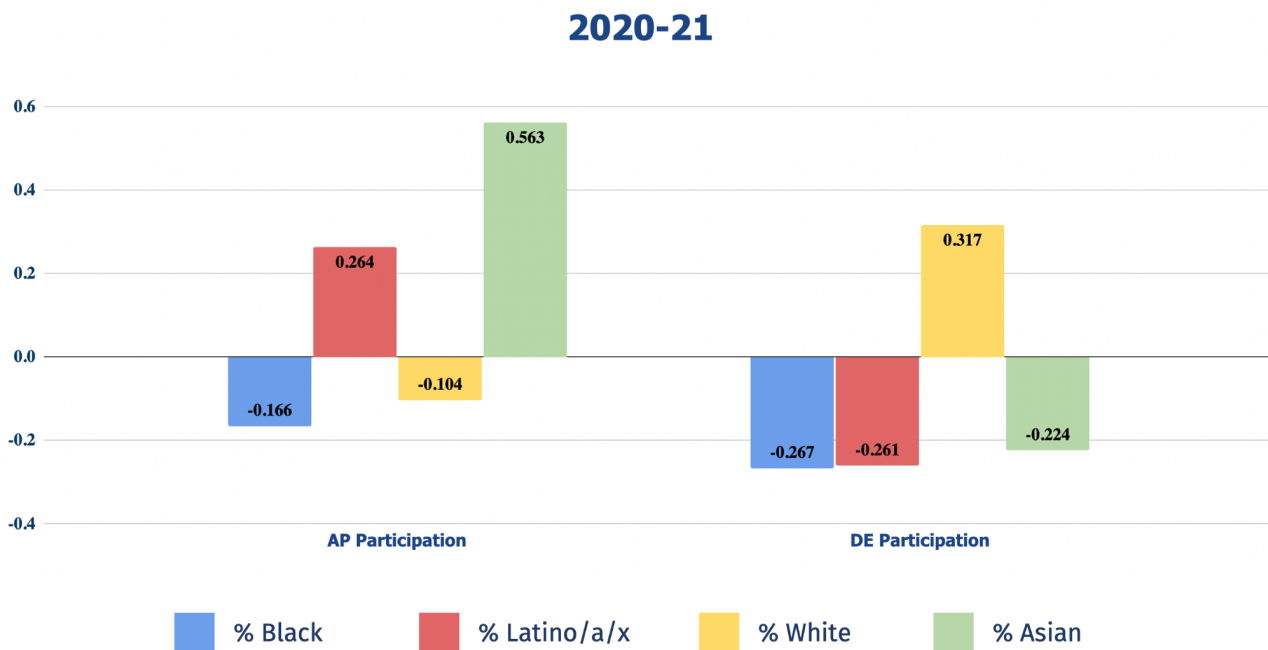
WHO TAKES DUAL ENROLLMENT CLASSES?

Matriculation in Dual Enrollment classes has increased dramatically in the past 20 years (An & Taylor, 2019). Still, national trends suggest that there are persistent racial and socioeconomic disparities in who participates in DE and [Advanced Placement \(AP\) classes](#), although the disparities tend to be more pronounced in AP (Museus et al., 2007; Xu et al., 2021). The 2015 federal [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) emphasized Dual Enrollment as a mechanism for increasing college and career readiness in K-12 students, but it is ultimately up to states and local divisions to determine whether to form the necessary partnerships to offer these classes (Malin et al., 2017). Recent research out of Texas suggests that early college programs in high school can help to promote matriculation in DE classes, but that these programs are less likely to serve underrepresented racial minority and low socioeconomic status (SES) students (Moreno et al., 2021). National trends tend to show the same thing, that Dual Enrollment expansion efforts often do not directly ameliorate enrollment disparities based on student demographics (Xu et al., 2021). [Policy changes in Virginia seeking to expand Dual Enrollment in 2005](#) led to more students matriculating directly into four-year college after graduation, but underrepresented racial minority students remained less likely to participate in Dual Enrollment than their White and Asian peers (Pretlow & Wathington, 2014).

School quality profile data from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) from 2018-19 (pre-COVID) and 2020-2021 (post-COVID) captures state-wide Dual Enrollment participation. The following figure depicts participation in AP and DE based on the percentage of students qualifying as “Economically Disadvantaged” (ED) in each VA division.



These data suggest that while AP participation drops precipitously as economic disadvantage increases, Dual Enrollment (DE) participation in higher poverty divisions (>50% ED) often exceeds DE participation in lower poverty divisions (< 25% ED). The following figure depicts how AP and DE participation correlates with the racial composition of the student body in a school division in the 2020-2021 school year based on VDOE data (note that coefficients can run from -1.0 for a perfectly negative correlation to 1.0 for a perfectly positive one).



These correlations suggest that as the percentage of Black high school students in a school division increases, the percentage of overall high school students participating in AP and DE courses decreases. While higher numbers of Latino/a/x high school students also tend to negatively predict overall DE participation, it tends to positively predict overall AP participation. This may be explained, in part, by the higher likelihood of larger suburban divisions to have higher numbers of Latino/a/x students as well as more availability of AP classes (Naff et al., 2021). Overall participation in Dual Enrollment tends to be predicted by the percentage of White high school students in a division whereas overall participation in AP tends to be predicted by the percentage of Asian high school students. Overall, this suggests that the higher the percentage of Black, Latino/a/x, and Asian high school students in a division, the lower participation tends to be in Dual Enrollment, whereas it tends to increase when there are higher numbers of White high school students.

Thus, participation in Dual Enrollment appears to be more predicted by race than by economic disadvantage, whereas participation in AP appears to be predicted by both.

WHAT STRATEGIES PROMOTE GREATER ACCESS TO DUAL ENROLLMENT?

According to Howley and colleagues (2013), there are several strategies that contribute to greater access to Dual Enrollment classes:

- Encourage shared leadership between K-12 and community college partners to ensure that both stakeholder groups are equally represented in the partnership
- Promote connection and communication between Dual Enrollment instructors and high school students to reduce any perceived barriers that they may feel towards college level faculty and coursework
- Engage in an ongoing review of any potential impediments to students' access to Dual Enrollment classes (including the elimination of any financial barriers)
- Expand communication about Dual Enrollment programming to families from all socioeconomic and racial backgrounds

Additionally, research suggests that when offering specialized programs like early colleges to increase access to Dual Enrollment classes, it is important to engage in targeted expansion to reach areas in the state with higher concentrations of poverty and racial segregation where students are more likely to be underrepresented (Moreno et al., 2021, Xu et al., 2021). Research clearly shows the potential benefits of Dual Enrollment for participating students, and data from Virginia indicates that it is often more accessible than AP for economically disadvantaged students. Still, there is opportunity for thoughtful program expansion to promote enrollment for underrepresented student groups.



CHECK OUT THE MERC PODCAST EPISODE ON THIS TOPIC



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