

Dual Enrollment Reaches Down

Efforts grow to lift youth not bound for college into college courses, and toward higher ed.

By Angela Swinson Lee

"We want students who aren't on their way to college," said Daniel Voloch.

That's an odd thing to hear from a college official; Voloch is coordinator of the College Now Program at Hostos Community College in New York, and he was speaking at a recent forum in Washington about dual enrollment.

"Let's put them in college," he said of the non-college-bound.

Increasingly, that is the focus of some dual enrollment programs, in which high school students take college courses for college and high school credit.

Traditionally, dual enrollment has been a privilege of the academically advanced and financially well-off, but efforts are increasing to provide the same access to youths who aren't considered strong college material.

The result of those efforts, according to recent research: More youths with moderate academic records and low incomes are staying in college longer and getting better grades. And a movement is under way to expand dual enrollment to more career and technical education students, who have often been viewed as not needing to be prepared for college.

The data are limited and the findings are narrowly focused, but they offered reason for hope at a forum about dual enrollment hosted in Washington this fall by the nonprofit American Youth Policy Forum.

"Many students will be the first in their family to attend college," Voloch explained. "Dual enrollment gets students familiar with college."

Dual enrollment programs are typically administered jointly by high schools and colleges, with youths attending classes at college campuses or high school teachers being approved to teach the courses themselves. About 813,000 high-school students took college-credit classes in the 2002-03 school year – roughly 12 percent of juniors and seniors – according to the U.S. Department of Education.

At least 42 states have policies that allow dual enrollment, and some are considering changes that would make the program accessible to more youths, according to a report, *Dual Enrollment Students in Florida and New York City: Postsecondary Outcomes*, published by the Community College Research Center.

While the report focuses on well-developed programs in Florida and New York, initiatives to expand dual enrollment beyond the top students also exist or are being developed in Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine,

North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas and Utah, according to Joel Vargas, program director for the nonprofit Jobs for the Future.

At the very least, dual enrollment prepares participants for the demands of college and allows them to enter college with credits already in hand, which can save them on college tuition, according to the report.

But several things remain unclear, such as whether dual enrollment increases the likelihood that participants will go to college.

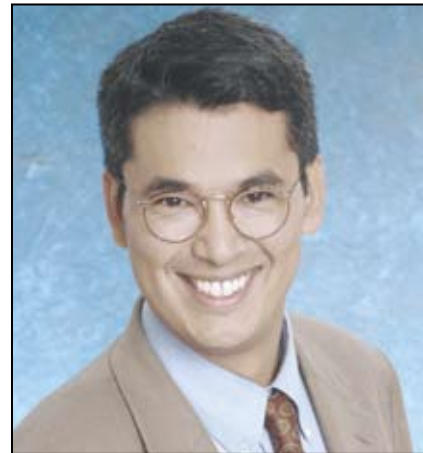
The paucity of data "is the one thing that has prevented us in making progress in this area," Thomas Bailey, director of the Community College Research Center, told the forum.

Nevertheless, he said, "I continue to be very enthusiastic about this."

Florida and New York are already doing some things recommended by the report, which include easing eligibility requirements, making college courses free (at least for low-income youth) and conducting more outreach to underserved populations.

community colleges and state universities to offer it to high school students who met certain requirements. The state has two sets of admission requirements: Students applying for the academic courses must have a 3.0 grade-point average; students who plan to enroll in career and technical certificate programs through dual enrollment must have a 2.0 grade-point average.

The recent report found indications that the program helps youths



Vargas: Dual enrollment initiatives are spreading to more states.

stay in college once they get there. Dual enrollment participants were 5.4 percent more likely than nonparticipants of similar backgrounds – age, race, gender, English proficiency and citizenship – to remain enrolled in college two years after completing high school. Three years after completing high school, the dual enrollment students had an average grade-point of 2.91, compared with an average of 2.35 among those peers.

After significant enrollment gains for several years, however, dual enrollment program participation has leveled off over the past five years. Florida education officials say they don't know why, but the flat enrollment compelled them to re-examine the eligibility requirements, said Heather Sherry, director of the Office of Articulation for the Florida Department of Education.

For example, in addition to grade-point average requirements, youths must pass a college placement exam to participate. Sherry said the state initiated a pilot program that offers alternative measures to determine eligibility requirements, such as a high school assessment test.

Sherry said the adjustments must be agreed upon by the school system and the community college.

The state is also examining how students are informed about the program, to see if it can attract more youths. "There is a group of students who meet eligibility requirements, but haven't expressed interest" in dual enrollment, Sherry said. "Maybe they don't feel like they can do it."

Of the 32,196 students enrolled in the dual enrollment program for the 2006-07 school year, 9 percent were black, 10.7 percent were Hispanic and 72.3 percent were white, according to the state Department of Education.

New York: Targeting Minority Boys

New York City's College Now program, created in 1983, aims for youths who don't appear to be college-bound. The collaboration between the city high schools and the City University of New York (CUNY), which has 17 campuses, attracts 30,000 students a year.

The program is coordinated by CUNY, with the city paying the tuition for the students and the colleges lending them textbooks.

Researchers found that those who took two or more college courses through dual enrollment were more likely than their peers to attend college full time. College Now participants were 9.7 percent more likely than nonparticipants (of the same gender, high school achievement and socioeconomic status) to pursue a bachelor's degree, as opposed to an associate's degree.

The College Now data include only students who graduated from any of the 19 vocational schools in New York City and enrolled in CUNY in 2001 and 2002.

The benefits appear strongest for males, low-income youths and students with lower grades, according to the report.

CUNY begins recruiting youths for the program in ninth and 10th grades for college courses that typically are taken during the junior and senior years of high school. College Now began the Black Male Initiative in 2005 as a response to data showing that a disproportionate percentage of the dual enrollment participants was female.

"We saw that we were losing too many young men before they got to the 11th grade," Voloch, the College Now coordinator at CUNY's Hostos Community College, told the forum in Washington.

The initiative tries a variety of tactics, including targeting black males without a high school diploma to enroll in GED classes oriented to college preparation.

The College Now program regularly follows up with students and faculty, providing such help as time management and study skills for students and professional development for teachers.

The study can be found through the search box at www.postsecondaryresearch.org.

Angela Swinson Lee is a freelance writer based in Washington.

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– Daniel Voloch

Florida: Changing Criteria

Each year, about 32,000 high school students participate in Florida's dual enrollment program, all for free. Colleges count the high school students in their enrollment figures, which affects how much state funding the colleges receive.

Dual enrollment began in Florida in 1987 when state law required all com-