

# TAKING COLLEGE COURSES IN HIGH SCHOOL: A STRATEGY FOR COLLEGE READINESS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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States and school districts are searching for strategies to raise the college and career readiness of high school graduates—imperative in an era when postsecondary credentials are the key to good jobs, better pay, and stronger economies. The creation and implementation of higher graduation standards aligned to college and career expectations is the most visible and emblematic effort by states to ensure students are prepared to succeed after high school, but it is far from the only one. A policy strategy of increasing interest is the practice of providing students with the opportunity to take college courses while in high school, known as dual enrollment.

States and school districts have been searching for ways to raise rates of college readiness and success among students, and particularly among groups that are underrepresented in college. Providing students with the opportunity to take college courses in high school, known as **dual enrollment**, is one promising strategy. The theory behind dual enrollment is that enabling high school students to experience real college coursework is one of the best ways to prepare them for college success.

JFF's research contributes to this field by analyzing longitudinal data following Texas students for six years after high school graduation. This enabled us to examine not only whether students attended college but also whether they completed a degree. Another distinguishing feature of this study is that it uses a rigorous research methodology to ensure that it compares students who are similar aside from their participation in dual enrollment. This greatly increases the certainty that the better college outcomes observed for students who participate in dual enrollment are not due to other factors—for example, the possibility that dual enrollees are already more likely to have higher academic achievement.

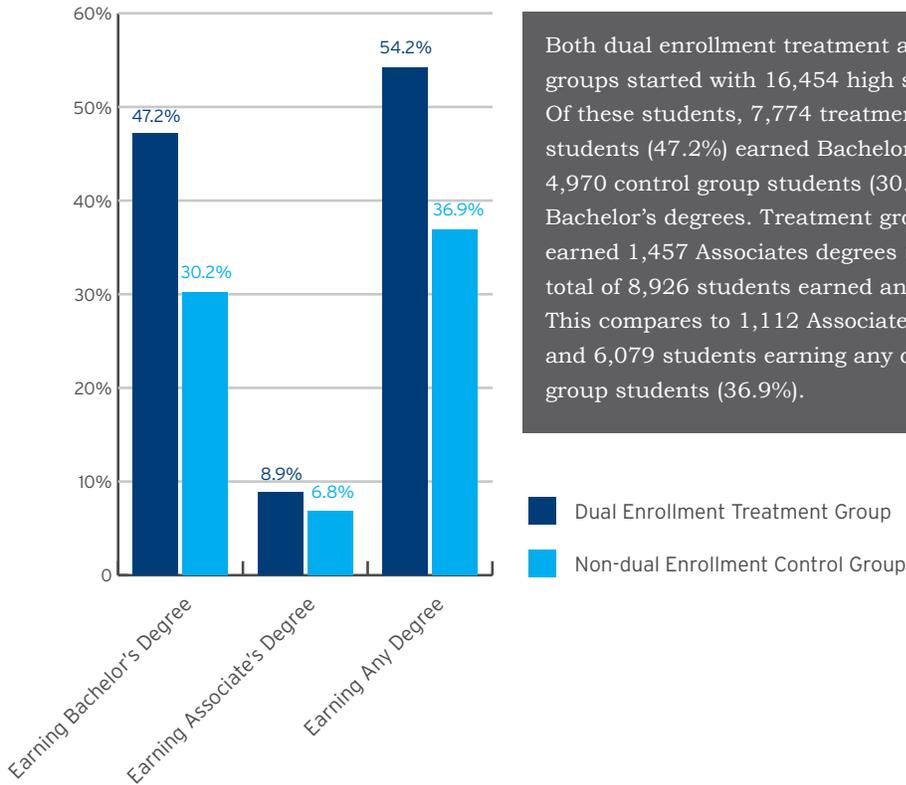
JFF's examination revealed very promising results. High school students who had completed a college course before graduation (defined here as dual enrollees) were nearly 50 percent more likely to earn a college degree from a Texas college within six years than students who had not participated in dual enrollment (see *figure on back*).

Overall, students who completed college courses through dual enrollment were significantly more likely to attend college, persist in college, and complete an Associate's degree or higher within six years (see *table on back*). These findings held for all racial groups as well as for students from low-income families. In fact, dual enrollees from low-income families were particularly more likely to attend a four-year college in Texas after high school.

When considered alongside other recent rigorous research on dual enrollment, this study has important implications for policymakers:

- > Encouraging the dual enrollment of high school students in college courses is a way to enhance their readiness for college, including those from low-income groups and other groups underrepresented in college.
- > State policy should ensure that low-income and underrepresented students can take advantage of the benefits of dual enrollment. This can be accomplished by providing more preparation, support, and accelerated learning strategies for these populations.
- > More research on dual enrollment could enable policymakers to make better strategic use of limited resources by determining which types of college courses and pathways have the strongest association with college-going outcomes.

**COLLEGE COMPLETION RATES FOR STATISTICALLY MATCHED COLLEGE ENROLLEES, TEXAS, 2004 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATING CLASS**



Both dual enrollment treatment and control groups started with 16,454 high school graduates. Of these students, 7,774 treatment group students (47.2%) earned Bachelor's degrees, while 4,970 control group students (30.2%) earned Bachelor's degrees. Treatment group students earned 1,457 Associates degrees (8.9%), and a total of 8,926 students earned any degree (54.2%). This compares to 1,112 Associate's degrees (6.8%) and 6,079 students earning any degree for control group students (36.9%).

**DUAL ENROLLMENT PARTICIPANTS VS. STATISTICALLY MATCHED NON-DUAL ENROLLMENT STUDENTS, TEXAS, 2004 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATING CLASS**

	DUAL ENROLLMENT PARTICIPANTS WERE
<b>Impact on Enrollment</b>	2.2 times more likely to enroll in a Texas two- or four-year college
<b>Impact on Persistence</b>	2.0 times more likely to return for a second year of college
<b>Impact on Completion</b>	1.7 times more likely to complete a college degree

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