

UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS OF DUAL ENROLLMENT STUDENTS



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DEDICATION

There have been many people who have supported me over the past three years. I cannot begin to express how grateful I am to all those who have played a role in my educational journey.

To Anthony Fisher, my partner in all things, best friend, editor, stats tutor, technical support, dog walker, cook, and all of the million other ways that you have supported me throughout this program and in everything I do. There are no words...

To my parents, Jackie and Tim Corkhill, you have been my greatest and most tireless champions in each and all of my endeavors in life...but you probably should have believed me as a child when I said I wanted to grow up to be a professional student.

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Finally, to my grandparents, Alfred and Jean Christensen. Though you may no longer be with us, you remain an indelible presence in my life and all that I do. I think you would have gotten a kick out of having Dr. Corkhill in the family...at least once the shock wore off that I paid private university tuition.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

My partner organization is a public community and technical college system in the southern United States, using the pseudonym SCTCS. Each year, approximately 120,000 students enroll at one of the 40 institutions within the SCTCS system and it is the largest higher education provider in the state. Central to the mission of SCTCS is to prepare students to be a part of a highly-educated, highly-skilled workforce. With a number of targeted programs to encourage enrollment, SCTCS colleges hope to reach students of all backgrounds to promote a college-going and career-ready culture. One growing population within SCTCS institutions is Dual Enrollment, a program enabling high school students to take college classes that will count towards both their high school and college credentials. Over the past five years, participation in Dual Enrollment at SCTCS institutions has grown to almost 20% of the system's overall enrollment. This growth can be attributed, in part, to the availability of a state-funded Dual Enrollment grant in which eligible students are able to take classes at little cost to themselves and their families. However, financial assistance is not the only motivation for students to enroll and persist through Dual Enrollment.

Nationwide, Dual Enrollment participation continues to grow. Advocates of Dual Enrollment programs point to increased success for students who participate, specifically those from traditionally underrepresented populations (Nelson & Waltz, 2019). Three main benefits that are often identified are: easing the transition between high school and college, encouraging high school students to take more challenging coursework, and increasing college retention rates (Pretlow & Washington, 2014; Nelson & Waltz, 2019). There remains a growing consensus that expanded access to Dual Enrollment programs needs additional attention (Williams & Perry, 2020; Taylor, 2015). Even with so many states offering funding to support Dual Enrollment initiatives, there are barriers that students encounter when enrolling and persisting through the program. With this in mind, SCTCS looks to better understand the motivations of Dual Enrollment students who enroll in order to encourage and expand participation and persistence to a broader population.

In this study, I used a college choice conceptual framework to look at factors that may contribute to enrollment growth within the context of SCTCS's state-funded model of the current Dual Enrollment program design. A mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating institutional enrollment data from SCTCS, population data from the American Community Survey, and interviews of college staff at SCTCS institutions who work with Dual Enrollment students. The aim is to better understand the Dual Enrollment population of students participating at an SCTCS institution, in order to make recommendations on how to expand access and encourage participation and persistence for students.

I sought to answer these questions with findings and recommendations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the demographics of high school students participating in Dual Enrollment through SCTCS institutions?
2. Why do students participate and persist in Dual Enrollment at SCTCS institutions?
 - a. What academic factors contribute to participation and persistence?
 - b. What institutional factors contribute to participation and persistence?
 - c. What economic factors contribute to participation and persistence?

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

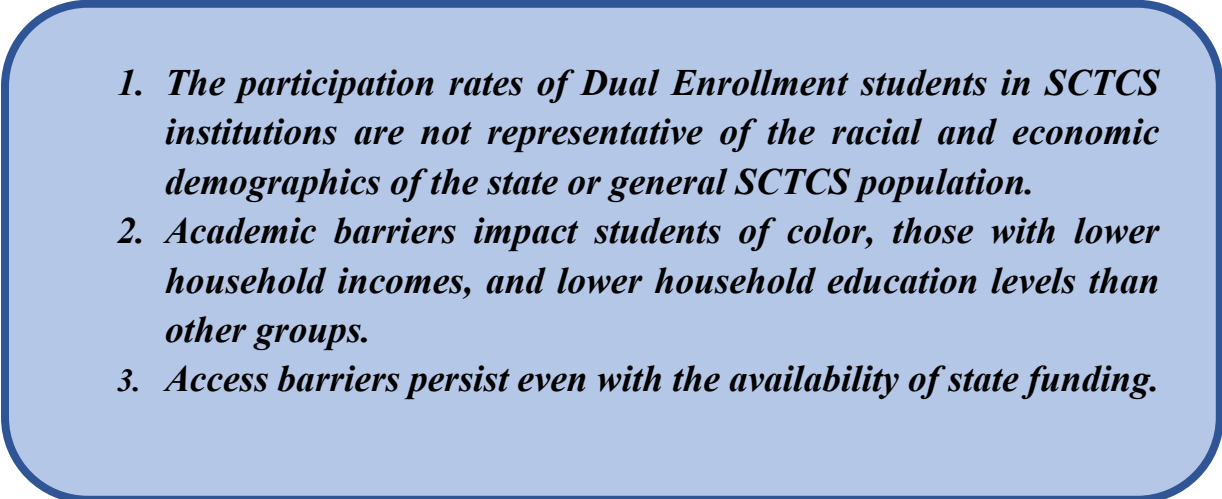
- 
- 1. The participation rates of Dual Enrollment students in SCTCS institutions are not representative of the racial and economic demographics of the state or general SCTCS population.***
 - 2. Academic barriers impact students of color, those with lower household incomes, and lower household education levels than other groups.***
 - 3. Access barriers persist even with the availability of state funding.***

Figure 1: Key Findings

Approximately 73% of the state’s residents identify as White, 17% as Black or African American, 6% as Hispanic or Latino, and 2% as Asian (ACS, 2019). This is similar to the overall SCTCS enrollment, with approximately 71% identifying as White, 15% as Black, 7% as Hispanic, and 7% as other. Both the state and general SCTCS demographics differ from the Dual Enrollment population. Using SCTCS institutional data, Dual Enrollment students identifying as White were represented in student headcount at a higher rate, at 81% than the population. Representation of students identifying as Black or African American and Hispanic had lower enrollment rates than the statewide demographics at 7% and 4% respectively. Additionally, disparities continued to

emerge when looking at participation rates based on household income and family educational attainment. Student success rates also began to diverge based on race and socio-economic background.

Interviews with college staff from SCTCS institutions across the state indicate the importance of the role of the high school counselor and school district support in encouraging enrollment. This relationship was referenced with more frequency than any other external influence in participating in Dual Enrollment. Those students who most often participated and with higher success rates were part of a high school culture that emphasized Dual Enrollment as a pathway to college.

An impediment to success identified by interviewees were financial challenges. Though state funding is available to eligible students through grants focused on both general education and career and technical education, additional costs such as textbooks and transportation to a college campus, were commonly identified as a barrier to success.

The recommendations for increasing participation and persistence are drawn from the student college choice conceptual framework. The recommendations are as follows:

1. Expand student participation to focus on recruiting a diverse student body and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds by strengthening partnerships between the SCTCS institutions and the local school systems to advise students on the availability of Dual Enrollment and the funding available to students.
2. Increase the student performance through academic and student support interventions.
3. Expand access by mitigating financial barriers not provided by the state-funded grants.

INTRODUCTION

My partner organization, SCTCS, is a public community and technical college system in the southern United States, and is the largest higher education provider in the state. With 40 community and technical colleges located statewide, SCTCS institutions reach nearly all of the counties in the state. Primary to its mission, SCTCS institutions provide opportunities for students to enroll in academic courses to transfer into the state's university system, or occupational courses designed to prepare students to be workforce ready.

A growing population within the nearly 120,000 students enrolled annually in SCTCS institutions are high school students participating in Dual Enrollment, a program for eligible students to take college classes that will count towards both a high school and postsecondary credential. The population of Dual Enrollment students enrolled through SCTCS institutions has nearly doubled over the last decade and now make up nearly 20% of the overall system-wide enrollment. This growth can be attributed, in part, to the availability of state funding for Dual Enrollment, a grant program that provides tuition to eligible students. SCTCS has also dedicated staff at each institution and through systemwide initiatives to support postsecondary opportunities for high school students to encourage growth in these programs.

Dual Enrollment is a nationwide phenomenon. While there are several mechanisms in place for high school students to earn college credit, Dual Enrollment is one of the most prominent options because students can enroll with a college while still in high school. Unlike credit by examination programs like Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB), students are creating a college transcript and earning credit. While there is no national naming standard, and may be referred to by any number of monikers, I will use Dual Enrollment to refer to college classes secondary students take that will count towards both high school and college credential requirements (Nelson & Waltz, 2019; Williams & Perry, 2020). By taking classes that will count towards both high school and college requirements students can accelerate time to graduation. In this model, participation has grown nationwide. More than 1.4 million high school students are enrolled in Dual Enrollment programs with more than 80% of high schools represented (Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013). Students participating are typically white, from middle to upper income households, and are academically high achieving. Recent emphasis has been placed on expanding access to Dual Enrollment programs, and 23 states have enacted legislation to encourage this growth (Williams & Perry, 2020). Advocates for this expansion focus on the academic and psychological benefits for students to participate, especially those traditionally underrepresented in college (Taylor, 2015).

Because of the state's commitment to program availability and growth to students statewide, funding was reaffirmed through the Dual Enrollment grant and an additional grant launched in Fall 2020 that provides financial assistance for targeted career and technical programs. The Dual Enrollment grant funding provides eligible students in 11th and 12th grade tuition for two classes per semester. The new grant for career and technical education (CTE grant) is a funding initiative to promote targeted, high-demand career pathways and provides additional funding beyond the original grant. Students must apply to be awarded these grants, and eligibility is dependent on meeting and maintaining academic requirements. This expanded funding is part of a statewide strategy to increase postsecondary access and it aligns with a nationwide trend to promote postsecondary attainment and workforce readiness through Dual Enrollment (Zinth & Barnett, 2018).

Reducing financial barriers through the grants is one way to encourage greater participation, but there may be other challenges that students face when attempting to enroll and persist through Dual Enrollment, particularly for traditionally underrepresented populations (Roughton, 2016). As the primary provider of Dual Enrollment in the state through the community and technical colleges, SCTCS looks to understand the current population and their motivations for participating in order to strategize ways to reach a broader population of students who have otherwise not enrolled. I will focus on identifying and understanding the recent enrollment and persistence trends and the student motivations to enroll in SCTCS institutions in order to promote increased participation.

RESEARCH RATIONALE

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

SCTCS is the governing authority of the state's two-year, public education system. There are 40 colleges within the system, that are open-access, two-year institutions offering academic and industry credentials for in-demand careers. Each year, approximately 120,000 students enroll within this public-college system.

There are many initiatives that SCTCS is invested in, ranging from K-12 partnerships to nontraditional, adult learning avenues. One of the fastest growing populations with SCTCS institutions is the Dual Enrollment program, where students can take college courses while still enrolled in high school. This is a state-funded program, where eligible 11th and 12th grade students can receive grants for the cost of tuition. Through this funding, the program has grown significantly and Dual Enrollment students account for nearly 20% of the entire SCTCS population. In Academic Year (AY) 2018, more than 19,000 students participated in Dual Enrollment through community colleges and 5,000 students participated through the technical

colleges within the SCTCS system (Data & Research, 2019). Students primarily enrolled in academic courses, with a much smaller percentage pursuing programs related to Career and Technical Education (CTE), or programs that prepare students to enter the workforce. This distinction in participation between academic and occupational classes is consistent with national trends, where the majority of students are taking general education courses designed to transfer into a four-year college or university (Hughes, Rodriguez, Edwards, & Belfield, 2012).

Effective for the Fall 2020 semester, eligible students had reaffirmed access to classes funded by the state through the Dual Enrollment grant. Additionally, a new legislative initiative was passed that provides additional grant funds to Dual Enrollment students pursuing high-demand fields that are vital to the economic future of the state. The expectation is that this additional funding will translate into continued growth in the Dual Enrollment program for both academic and occupational programs of study.

SCTCS has several programs and initiatives for secondary students to receive college credit, either through articulated credit or credit by examination, in addition to the Dual Enrollment program where students are enrolled in college classes while still in high school. These classes can be taken at a college campus, online, or through concurrent enrollment where

a college class is offered on the high school campus as part of the school day. Each of these learning modalities are part of the Dual Enrollment program, where students are simultaneously enrolled in a high school and college, with the courses showing on both transcripts.

The Associate Vice Chancellor (AVC) oversees the postsecondary opportunities for high school students with all of the state’s SCTCS institutions. Through this division within the Office of

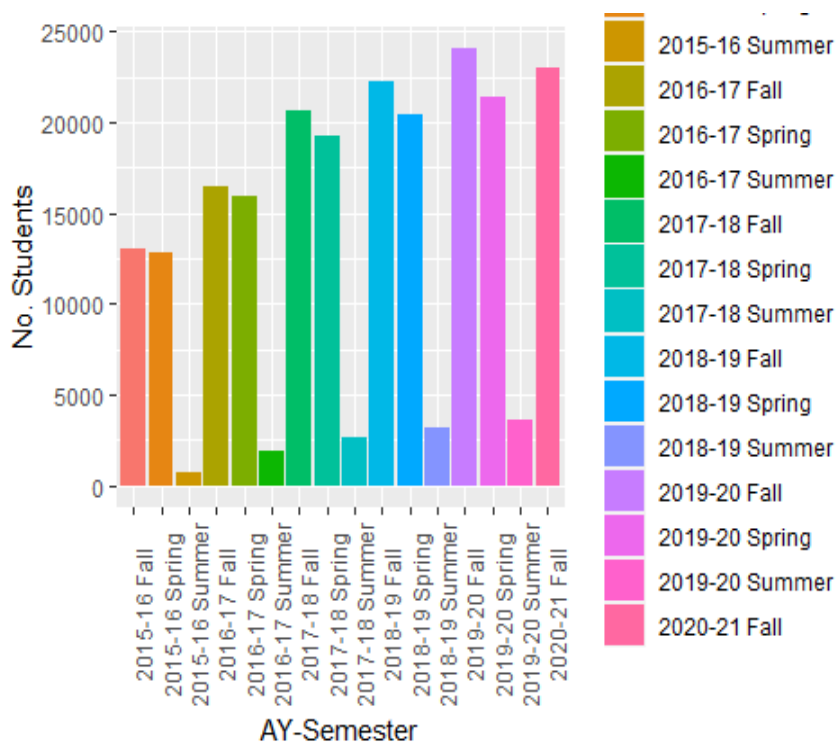


Figure 2: Enrollment Rates AY 2016-2020

Academic Affairs, the AVC has oversight regarding the Dual Enrollment program at SCTCS institutions. As part of the AVC's team, there is a group of regional coordinators who act as liaisons between the system office, each SCTCS institution, and the local school systems. Their role is critical in maintaining accountability and continuity with the Dual Enrollment program statewide. At the local level, each community or technical college administers the Dual Enrollment program within the parameters outlined at the state level regarding eligibility and funding. There also may be additional requirements or processes that are unique to their own institution or with the partner school system. These expectations are outlined through articulation agreements at the local level. The staff at the local SCTCS institutions work with the partner high schools and families to enroll and support students participating in the Dual Enrollment program. Any findings from this study will be shared with both the AVC for dissemination to any relevant stakeholders. It is the intention that these findings and recommendations will contribute to decisions related to recruitment and retention efforts, specifically for reaching traditionally underrepresented students.

IDENTIFYING THE PHENOMENON

Though the Dual Enrollment population has grown, and is poised to continue its upward trajectory with SCTCS institutions with the expanded grant funding, there remains unequal representation of student participation. Traditionally, Dual Enrollment participation has most often been white, high achieving students of middle to high socioeconomic status. In response to the homogenous participation, there has been a growing call for creating equity in access to Dual Enrollment programs for all students (Bailey & Karp, 2005; Xu, Fink, & Solanki, 2019). By understanding the students enrolling, SCTCS can move forward with targeted recruitment and retention efforts to reach a broader student base.

With the expansion of the Dual Enrollment funding model, including additional resources through the Dual Enrollment and CTE grants, the state is creating increased financial opportunities to increase access for high school students to participate in the program. With this in mind, SCTCS looks to have a fuller understanding of the Dual Enrollment students who have been participating and their motivations for enrolling and persisting through the program. If the financial burden is lessened through the grants, SCTCS looks to gain insight into other factors that motivate students and the barriers that they may encounter. These findings will inform future recruitment and retention efforts at both the community and technical colleges within the SCTCS institutions, with a focus on expanding access to underrepresented student populations.

FRAMING THE STUDY

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are several different acceleration models for students to gain college credits while still in high school. One of the most prominent and popular options is through Dual Enrollment, where students enroll with a college while in high school. The classes they take will count towards both the high school and college requirements and can accelerate time to graduation. Though program designs may vary, generally, Dual Enrollment is available to students at a college campus, through an online program, or in the high school as part of the student's school day (Pierce, 2017). These initiatives are popular for students and their families as a way to take advanced coursework, better prepare students for the rigors of college, and with a reduced financial obligation. Most states have created a funding model where students are able to participate in Dual Enrollment at little to no cost to themselves or their family either through state budgetary allocations or through local arrangements between the college and school system (Zinth, 2019). With these funding models, participation has grown nationwide. More than 1.4 million high school students are enrolled in Dual Enrollment programs with more than 80% of high schools represented (Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013). Despite this nationwide enrollment growth, participation trends have remained homogenous. As nationwide enrollment has grown, so has an emphasis on expanding access to a broader student population.

Traditionally, students participating in Dual Enrollment are white, from middle to upper income households, and are academically high achieving. They come from families who have college backgrounds, and advanced coursework like Dual Enrollment is an expectation that is instilled in the student before high school begins. Conversely, Black and Latinx students, and students without a college-educated parent, participate at much lower rates (Williams & Perry, 2020). This can be due to a lack of awareness on college programs and availability to participate, but research also suggests that majority Black/Latinx schools and schools in low-income areas have fewer resources to offer advanced coursework (Williams & Perry, 2020). This limits participation for students, even those who are interested and academically capable of pursuing Dual Enrollment. To combat these enrollment trends, recent emphasis has been placed on expanding access to Dual Enrollment programs to a broader student population and 23 states have enacted legislation to do just that. Advocates for this expansion focus on the academic and psychological benefits for students to participate, especially those traditionally underrepresented (Taylor, 2015).

An increase in access to Dual Enrollment allows more students to benefit from the program. The literature on these programs suggests that Dual Enrollment provides challenging coursework to students, participants have higher GPA's, and they are less likely to need remediation when

enrolling in college (An, 2015). Because the high school and the college work in partnership, the research suggests that students are better prepared for the expectations of postsecondary work. This can especially benefit the high school senior, reducing the likelihood of the “senior slump” and keeping them engaged in their studies (Brophy & Johnson, 2007). There is also an understanding that because students have begun college coursework prior to high school, they are entering college better prepared for academics and the other expectations of collegiate life.

Advocates also point to increased exposure to students who may otherwise not have had access to college (Bailey & Karp, 2005). The research suggests that these benefits extend beyond the academic, as it helps ease the transition between high school and college by structuring the Dual Enrollment program with a school district and postsecondary partnership. There is research to indicate that Dual Enrollment programs can offer a bridge for students to college (Pierce, 2017) and can be a tool for families who do not have college experience to guide their children themselves (Roughton, 2016). By having an experience through Dual Enrollment, students have additional supports through the high school and college partnership, with multiple stakeholders involved in the process. This socialization to cultural expectations of college allow for students to be better prepared for the transition because of the exposure that they have had through these programs. Participation in career-focused programs also has the benefit of improved academic performance, especially for traditionally underrepresented student populations, and a direction for students into a career pathway they may otherwise have not been exposed (Hughes, Rodriguez, Edwards, & Belfield, 2012).

Access to Dual Enrollment programs can also mitigate financial barriers to college. While there are a number of funding models designed nationwide, most share the commonality that costs to the student are reduced or eliminated completely (Pierce, 2017). These states that have made efforts to remove financial barriers see a larger proportion of minority and low-income students participate. Those states or local programs that combine financial access with classes offered at the high school campus saw an increase of 81% and 184% in participation of low-income and students of color, respectively (Zinth, 2019). Research suggests that students who are of a low-socioeconomic background benefit more from Dual Enrollment than those who are of a higher economic background (An, 2013). One reason can be due to a “warming-up effect,” where students who otherwise have not had exposure to college are able to participate (Taylor, 2015). This can be an encouragement to students and their families.

While much attention has been focused on the benefits for students participating in Dual Enrollment programs and the policies that drive it, less is known about the student motivations for choosing to enroll. There is evidence that high school students participating already perceive themselves as college bound and Dual Enrollment is a natural progression (Kanny, 2015). That self-perception can be critical, as it can also be an indicator for future success (An, 2015). They

are high achieving and are pursuing the program to continue to accelerate their learning (An, 2015). Other studies have indicated that students are looking at using Dual Enrollment as a way to gain exposure to the expectations of college (Kanny, 2015). There is still much to learn about the student experience. By understanding the motivations and barriers that students encounter, college and high school staff can support them during their time enrolled, as well as give insight into methods to reach new students.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To frame this study, elements of Perna's (2006) conceptual model of student college choice were used (See [Figure 3](#)). Though Perna created this model with a traditional student in mind, viewing the Dual Enrollment student within this context can assist with understanding their motivations for enrolling. While Perna's framework includes financial considerations of cost investment and potential outcomes similar to that of the human capital investment models, these are nestled within each of the four layers and include other factors that contribute to a student's college choice. The first layer focuses on the student's internal factors with layers two through four focusing on external factors

The first layer, habitus, is an internal examination of the student and focuses on the student's demographics, social, and economic background, as well as their own self-efficacy and personal experiences. This snapshot of the student contributes to the understanding of why they are motivated to enroll. This first layer is central to the student experience and is the foundation for their decision-making process. For the Dual Enrollment student at an SCTCS institution, understanding of the program, familiarity with the enrollment process, and resources available to them through the Dual Enrollment grant factor into their decision to participate. This layer also incorporates a student's values and beliefs on whether college is worth the time and investment to enroll.

While the first layer was an internal examination, the subsequent layers look at other factors that influence a student's decision to enroll in college. As the model expands from layer two through four, Perna's framework focuses on external factors. For the Dual Enrollment students at SCTCS institutions, these external factors can be parental involvement, the role of the school counselor or other high school mentor, the marketing and awareness of the program and the partner college, as well as other factors, such as interest in courses offered at the college, costs borne to the student that are not provided for in the state-funded grants, and access to classes at the college campus.

Layer two, the social and community context, which Perna identifies as the organizational construct, can either promote or prevent college choice. For the Dual Enrollment student, this structure is created by both the high school and college staff working with the student and family. This relationship is critical, as both students and parents can be encouraged or discouraged based on these relationships (Pierce, 2017). Support from a counselor, teacher, or mentor can be more of a determining factor for a student to pursue a challenging curriculum, even more than their own self-efficacy, especially for female students (Stearns, Bottia, Davalos, Mickelson, Moller, & Valentino, 2016). That connection between a parent and school staff members can be just as important. Parents who identify with the school professional are more likely to advocate for and encourage their child to take advanced coursework (Grissom, Kern, & Rodriguez, 2015).

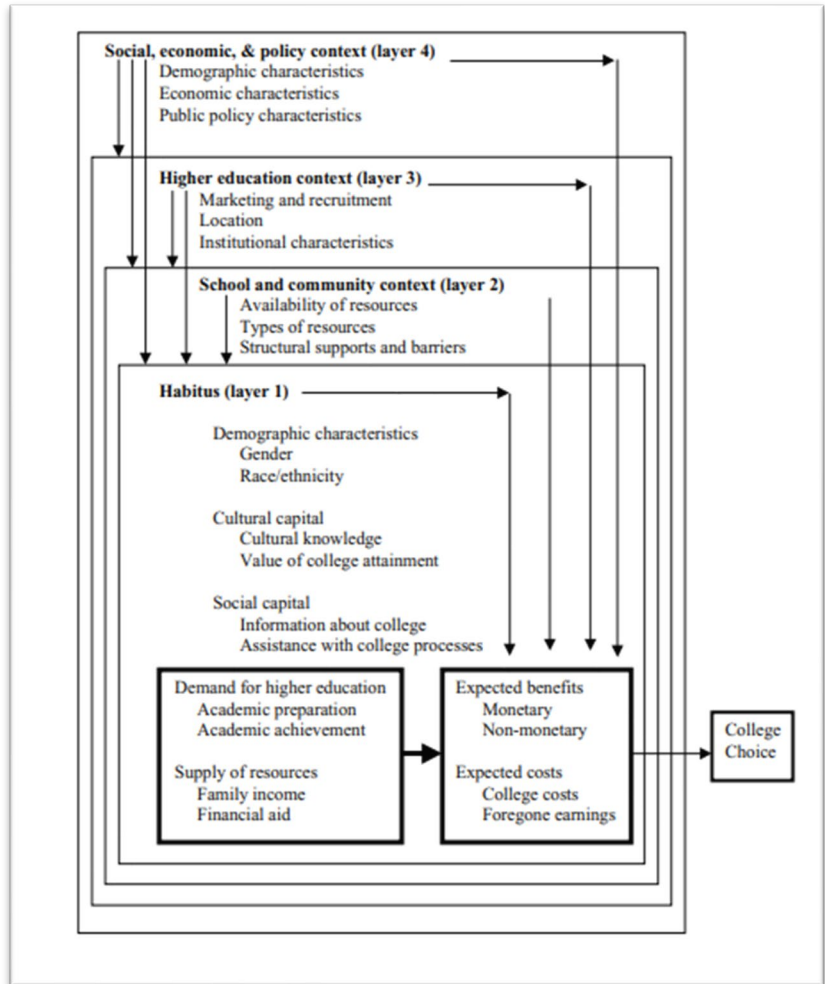


Figure 3: The Conceptual Model for Student College Choice. Adapted from “Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model,” by L. Perna, 2006, Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research, XXI

Layer three focuses on the higher education context. This can be through the outreach and marketing efforts the colleges make. Perna also emphasizes the role of institution and location of learning. Especially for the Dual Enrollment student, this awareness of a college and access to it, is critical in their ability to participate. Some high schools offer Dual Enrollment courses on their campus as part of the school day and may contribute to the idea of a college going

culture. Understanding the role of the college in how it engages with and is available to, the high school student is an important aspect of participation in the Dual Enrollment program.

The fourth, and outermost layer, focuses on the policies that influence college choice. For the Dual Enrollment student, that includes the state funding that may be available to them and can drive participation. However, there are other policy elements beyond financial rules that can impact a student's decision to enroll. At the state and/or local level, requirements can be put in place that determine eligibility. These requirements can be age, grade, and academic metrics, just to identify a few. These regulations ultimately determine who can participate in Dual Enrollment.

The research questions and design emerged from Perna's model with a focus on understanding the high school student within the capacity of their engagement with their school, college, and state Dual Enrollment stakeholders and how this forms their perception for enrolling. Reviewing these dynamics within the context of the SCTCS Dual Enrollment initiatives will support their focus on how to expand participation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Using the literature and conceptual framework as the foundation, I looked to better understand the motivations of high school students to participate and persist through Dual Enrollment programs at SCTCS institutions. By gaining a clearer picture of the motivations of students, there can also be a better understanding of what they encounter that may create a barrier to their participation and persistence. The findings from this study may help inform SCTCS institutions on strategies that may mitigate barriers and promote expanded participation in Dual Enrollment.

I aimed to examine these key questions:

1. What are the demographics of high school students participating in Dual Enrollment through SCTCS institutions?
2. Why do students participate and persist in Dual Enrollment at SCTCS institutions?
 - a. What academic factors contribute to participation and persistence?
 - b. What institutional factors contribute to participation and persistence?
 - c. What economic factors contribute to participation and persistence?

I developed these research questions guided by Perna's (2006) conceptual model of student college choice, as it relates to the academic, institutional, and economic factors that impact participation and persistence in Dual Enrollment.

METHODS

For this study, I utilized a mixed-methods approach. In the first phase, SCTCS provided institutional data dating back to Academic Year 2016, to determine enrollment and persistence trends. In the second phase of the study, I interviewed SCTCS college staff from several different institutions that work with Dual Enrollment. Participants volunteered to be interviewed and were invited from a statewide working group of SCTCS staff who work with high school programs. The interviews focused on the staff member's experiences of working with Dual Enrollment students, specifically the student interest, persistence in the program, and any challenges they perceive students encountering that create barriers to success. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the SCTCS college staff's perceptions about the motivations that students (and other stakeholders) have for participating in the Dual Enrollment program, what outreach efforts are utilized to connect with students, and what barriers they perceive discourage students from participating and persevering in the programs. Semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to express their experiences and perceptions openly and created opportunities to explore discussion topics as the interviews developed. Because this project was undertaken during COVID-19, all interviews were conducted virtually using web conferencing platforms.

DESIGN & DATA COLLECTION

Institutional data dating back to Academic Year 2016 was collected from SCTCS's Office of Policy and Strategy. To receive this data, I sought approval through SCTCS's institutional IRB protocols. The student ID was deidentified and protected the anonymity of the student. The fields that were included in the data set included:

Gender, race, college attended, term enrollment, placement test mechanism, placement test score, credits attempted, credits earned, course enrolled, letter grade, course modality, location of learning, and zip code.

Having institutional data allowed me to develop an understanding of the Dual Enrollment student demographics, their academic success, and their persistence in participation. SCTCS institutions do not track the household income or the parents' educational attainment. Because research indicates that parental and family background is a predictor of student success in postsecondary pursuits, this was a gap when developing a student profile and interpretation of motivations for participating. In the absence of student-level data, I instead used the student's zip code to make predictions on the family background. To do this, I brought in data from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) and accessed tables related to household income and

educational attainment for zip code tabulation areas (ZCTA). All quantitative analysis was conducted using the R Project for Statistical Computing.

The next phase was to interview SCTCS college staff members who work with Dual Enrollment students to gauge their perceptions about student participation and persistence. Those who were interviewed were volunteers to this study. I first presented the scope and purpose of this Capstone to a High School Programs Advisory Committee meeting in February 2021. This virtual meeting was attended by staff of SCTCS institutions who work with Dual Enrollment students. After the introduction, recruitment emails were sent to the group members asking for volunteers ([Appendix A](#)).

From those participation requests, eight individuals volunteered to participate, and ultimately seven were interviewed. Though invitations were sent to all members of the committee that included both community and technical colleges, only staff from community colleges volunteered. Six women and one man participated in one-on-one, semi-structured, virtual interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were held via a web-conferencing platform. All interviews were recorded with the exception of one, due to technology issues. Notes were taken during that interview in lieu of a transcribed meeting. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interview questions ([Appendix B](#)) were tied to the research questions and guided by the conceptual framework, in order to create a cohesive study design (Maxwell, 2013).

The methods and the data that was collected were both informed and developed by Perna's (2006) conceptual model of student college choice. This first layer focused on the internal examination of the student's demographic background, where institutional data was utilized to create a student profile of those participating in Dual Enrollment. Research Question 1 drew from this institutional data in order to understand the high school student demographics of students enrolling in SCTCS institutions. Institutional data, and the data from the ZCTA of the American Community Survey, also tied to Research Question 2, but also incorporated the qualitative analysis from the staff interviews. This research question was informed by the first layer, but additionally draws on external factors that may contribute to a student's experience, specifically, as it relates to the academic, institutional, and economic variables that impact participation and persistence in Dual Enrollment.

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA TYPE	DATA COLLECTION
What are the demographics of high school students participating in Dual Enrollment through SCTCS institutions?	Quantitative	Institutional Data and ACS 2019 Data
Why do students participate and persist in Dual Enrollment at SCTCS institutions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What academic factors contribute to participation and persistence? • What institutional factors contribute to participation and persistence? • What economic factors contribute to participation and persistence? 	Quantitative & Qualitative	Institutional Data, ACS 2019 Data, and Staff interviews

Figure 4: Data Design Matrix

DATA ANALYSIS

I conducted a quantitative analysis of institutional data and ACS data using the R Project for Statistical Computing. A student demographic profile was created using institutional data for race, gender, course enrollment, and earned grades. Combining the institutional data with ACS data for area household income and household educational attainment by zip codes, trends began to emerge about participation and persistence of Dual Enrollment students. Outputs were used to create a statistical analysis and data visualizations.

I conducted a qualitative analysis of the interviews after all were completed. Immediately following an interview, I reviewed the recording to transcribe the responses and saved for analysis after all had been completed. After the initial review of the transcripts, additional readings focused on determining possible codes and categories. As patterns emerged, themes were defined using the initial codes. As the analysis continued, three primary themes revealed as common across all interviews, with overlapping sub-themes and key words emerging (see *Figure 5*). Notably absent from the themes was the perception of student performance. Academic success and academic performance was not a common theme from the interviews.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES AND KEY WORDS	SCTCS STAFF STATEMENTS
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concurrent Enrollment Opportunities • Transportation • Funding available/limits on funding • Placement testing and entrance mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Offer more classes on the high school campus...Students cannot get to the college” • “Getting the grant is great, but the student cannot afford the textbook...”
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School district level advisement campaigns • College-going culture at high school • Confusion/lack of understanding GIVE Grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Students need to be advised beginning in middle school to create a college going culture.” • “There is just a general lack of awareness about the grants...no one even used the [new CTE] grant”
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of counselor and school to encourage participation • Parents as advocates, family expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Students do well when the school and the parents both set an example that Dual Enrollment is expected”

Figure 5: Themes and Sub-Themes from Analysis

The themes that emerged contributed to answering Research Question 2. The findings incorporate these themes, with the quantitative analysis from the institutional data and the ACS data for household income and educational attainment, to provide a better understanding of the Dual Enrollment student enrolling with SCTCS institutions.

FINDINGS

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What are the demographics of high school students participating in Dual Enrollment through SCTCS institutions?

FINDING 1:

The participation rates of Dual Enrollment students in SCTCS institutions are not representative of the racial and economic demographics of the general student population or of the state.

Overall Dual Enrollment headcount participation dating back to Academic Year 2016 was not aligned with statewide and SCTCS demographics, with White students overrepresented and Black and Hispanic students underrepresented when compared to the overall state population and the overall SCTCS enrollment trends. This is similar to nationwide trends where the Dual Enrollment population shares are unequally represented by White students at a disproportionate rate to other racial groups (Williams & Perry, 2020). This enrollment rate refers to headcount only. Participation rates by courses attempted are addressed in [Finding 3](#).

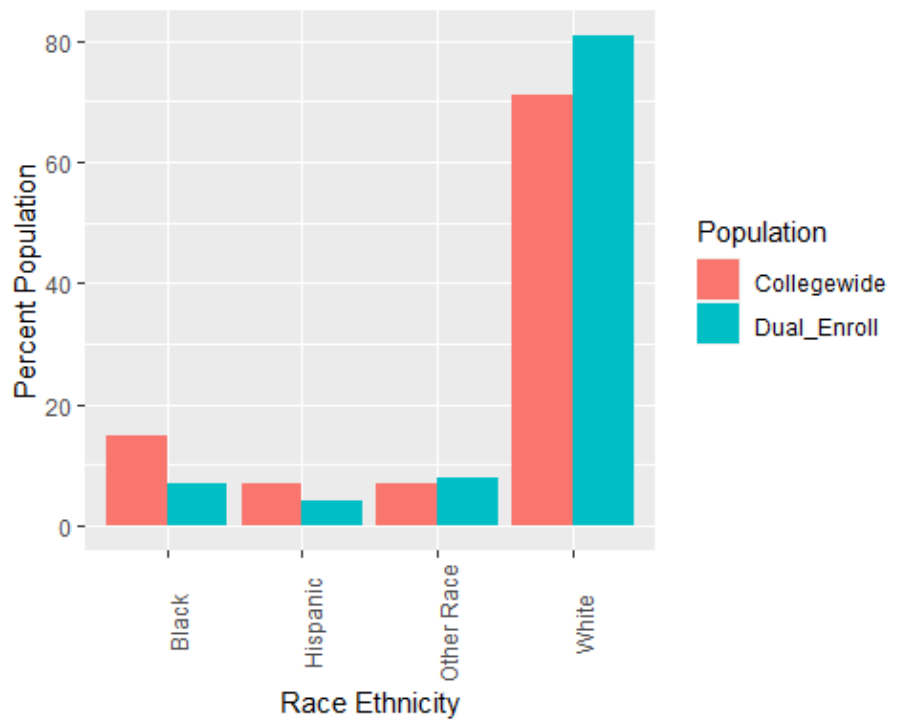


Figure 6: Student Participation Percentage by Race

An additional disparity in participation is student participation by household income. In the state, the median household income is \$53,000, however, students living in households above the median income far exceed those below it. Without access to interventions, these disparities become cyclical, with approximately only 26% of college students in the lowest income quartile completing a college degree by age 25 (An, 2013). Similarly, families with the highest household education levels had a disproportionate participation rate.

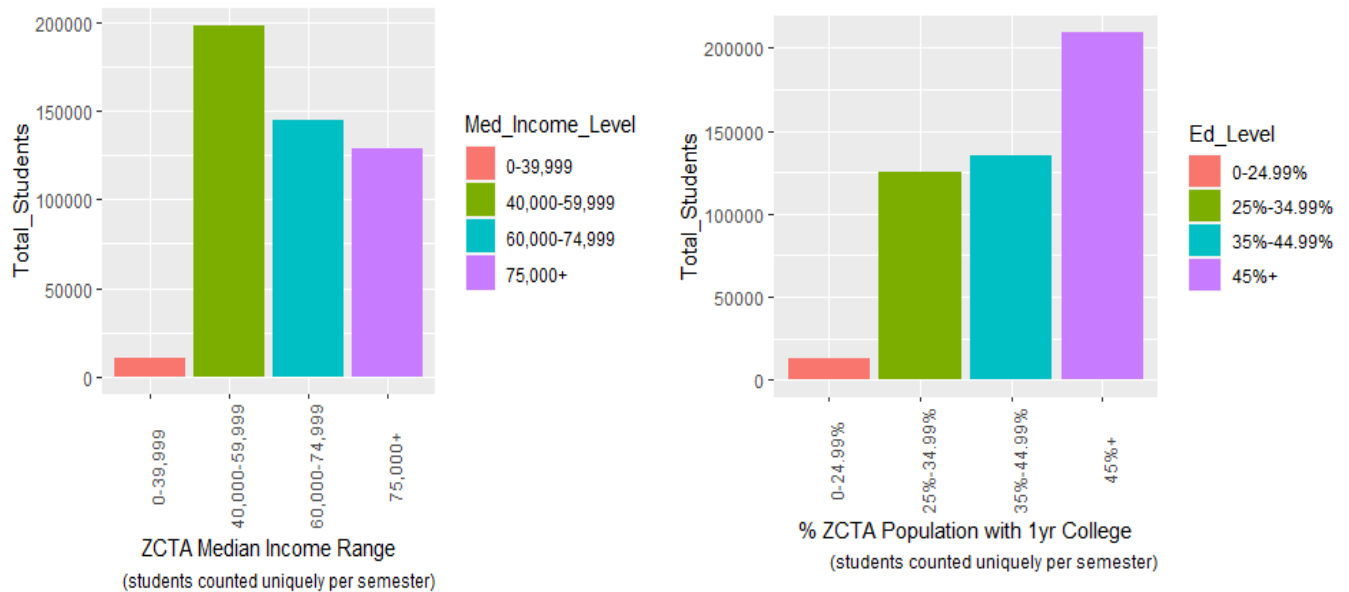


Figure 7: Student Participation by Household Income and Education Level

RESEARCH QUESTION 2:

- Why do students participate and persist in Dual Enrollment at SCTCS institutions?
 - What academic factors contribute to participation and persistence?
 - What institutional factors contribute to participation and persistence?
 - What economic factors contribute to participation and persistence?

FINDING 2:

Academic barriers impact students of color, those with lower household incomes, and lower household education levels more than other groups.

Academic disparities also emerge based on race and household income. White students have GPAs that are significantly higher than any other identified racial group, with Black students having the lowest academic performance. Both of these indicators contradict much of the research surrounding Dual Enrollment and those who advocate for its expansion, where participation has resulted in positive outcomes for historically disadvantaged students, including those from racial minorities and of lower socio-economic status (Nelson & Waltz, 2019). [Figure 8](#) identifies the student GPA by race and household income.

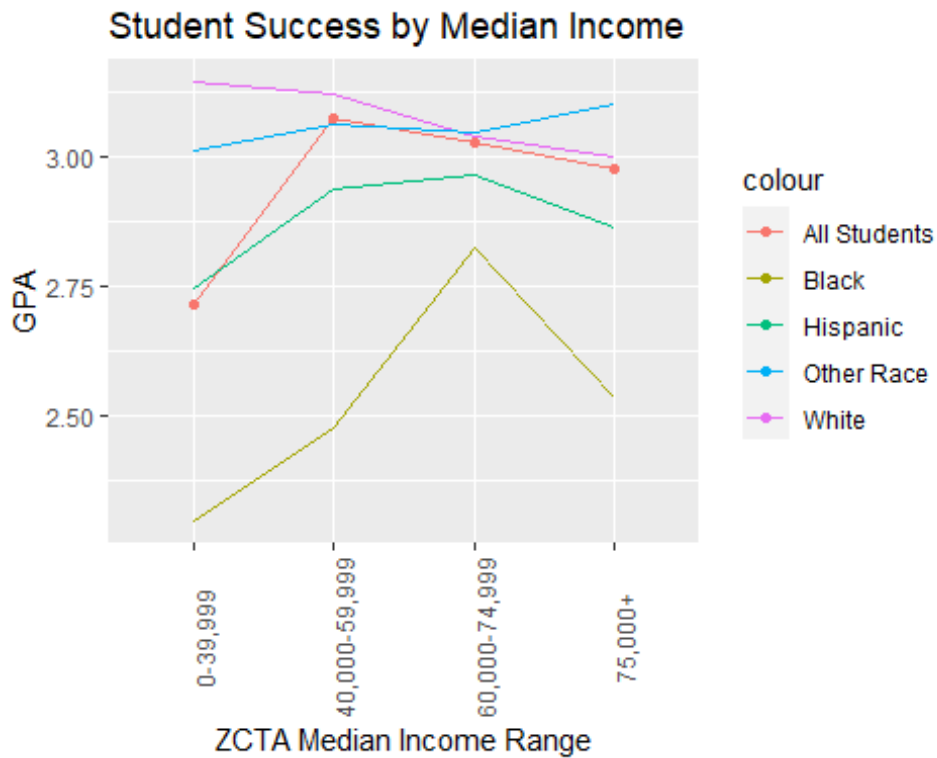
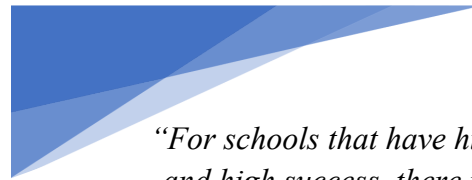


Figure 8: Student GPA by Race and Income

Themes that emerged from the interviews that explain this disparity in participation and success centered on the expectations of the student early on, involving both the high school and parents. Additionally, interviewees identified as most successful those school districts that coordinated outreach efforts to all high school students working in collaboration with the individual high schools and SCTCS colleges to reaffirm the message that Dual Enrollment opportunities were available to them. Similarly, interviewees identified those who were not successful as most often those without the high school and parental supports in place, and just generally not prepared for the rigors of taking college classes while in high school. These relationships were key in supporting the student success. When the relationships were lacking, students were not as prepared for the academic rigors of classes when compared to their peers.



“For schools that have high participation and high success, there is an expectation beginning with the 8th grade parent night, that students have the opportunity to take DE classes. From the outset it is expected that they participate and do well. Everything is mapped out as part of their high school plan.”

SCTCS College Staff Member

FINDING 3:

Access barriers persist even with the availability of state funding.

Students without the assistance of a high school counselor or a parent who is knowledgeable about college, are more likely to be unaware of Dual Enrollment as an option, or be unprepared for the rigors of the program.

As both *Figure 9* and *Figure 10* indicate, there is unequal representation in course attempts by students of color and students with a household income above the median. Students above the median have more course attempts than those below it. Over a five-year period, Black students averaged 1.9 course attempts per semester—less than the two classes funded through the Dual Enrollment



“Parents create an equity issue when talking about students [participating], particularly students in our area who are ‘first generation college students,’ who may not have parents who are familiar with processes and opportunities...[it is] important that high school and college help make students more aware of opportunities.”

SCTCS College Staff Member

Grant. While White students averaged 2.2 course attempts per semester. Costs beyond the two course attempts per semester are the responsibility of the student.

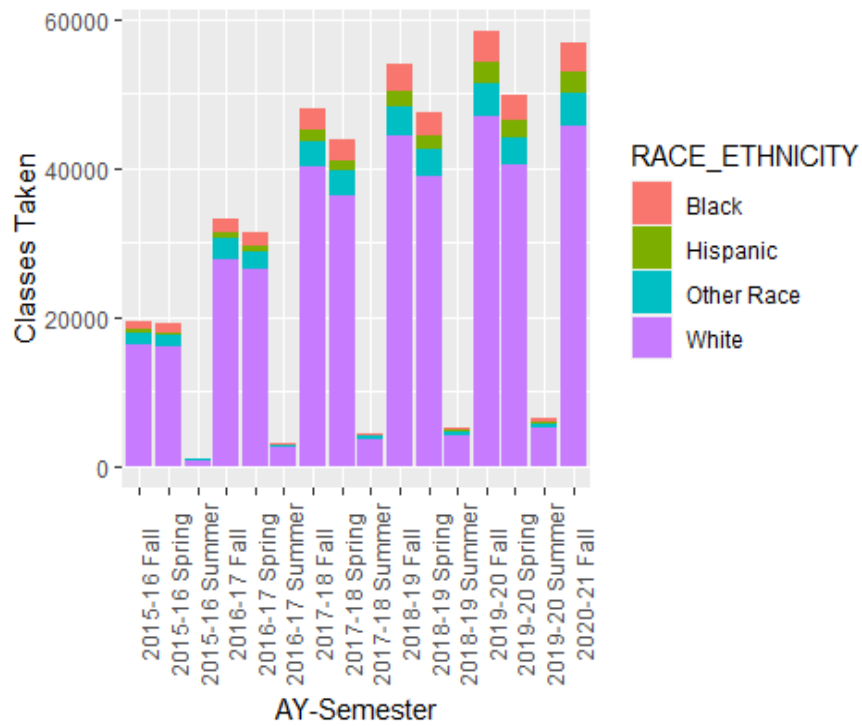
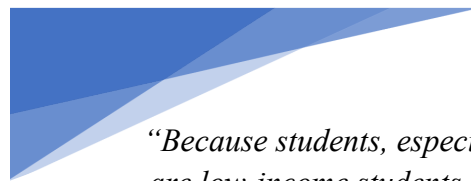


Figure 9: Course Attempts by Race

Similarly, students in the lowest quartile of household income had the fewest average course attempts had an average of 1.6 course attempts per semester, regardless of race. When addressing the financial challenges students may experience, despite the availability of the grant funding for tuition costs, funding remains an issue for students to participate. Reasons for lower course-level participation rates can be due to the out of classroom expenses, such as the cost of textbooks or lack of transportation to a college campus. There also is a lack of awareness on availability of the grants. As a new funding program



“Because students, especially in our area, are low-income students, they get the first two classes covered [by the grant], which is very helpful. [But] they cannot come up with the cost of the textbooks. Taking classes ends up not being an option.”

SCTCS College Staff Member

with few colleges enrolling students in eligible programs to receive additional grant money for career and technical education, students may be unaware of opportunities for them to participate.

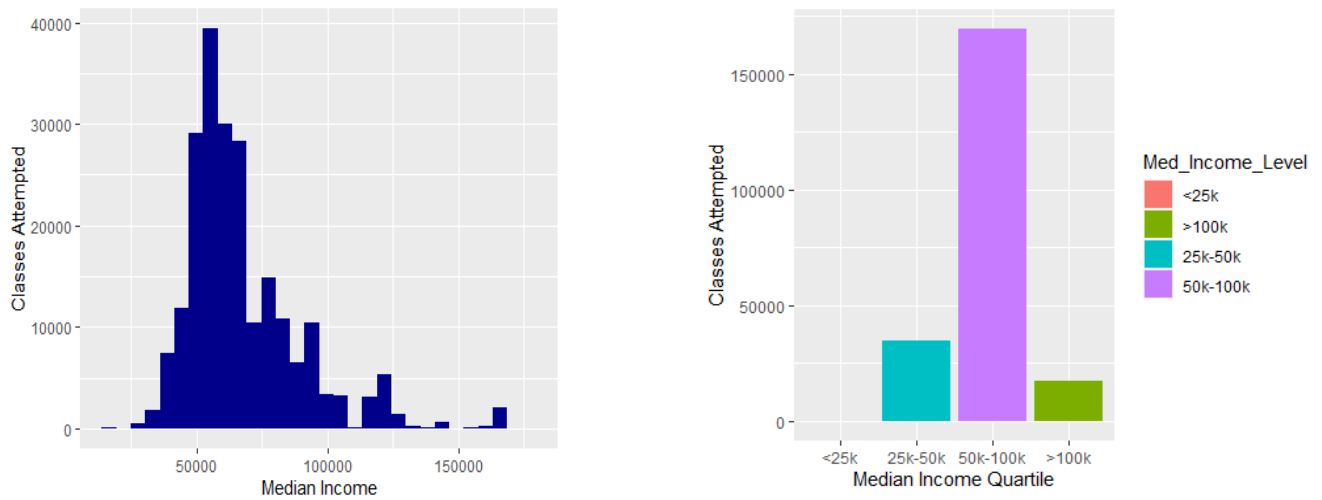


Figure 10: Course Attempts by Household Income

RECOMMENDATIONS

Results from the SCTCS institutional data and the ACS data created a profile of student participation that was not aligned to the statewide demographics of the population or that of SCTCS institutions. Unequal representation of students of color, as well as lower enrollment rates of students from households below the median income, create a disparity in participation. These findings align with the responses from the SCTCS staff that participated in interviews for this study. With these findings in mind, the following recommendations are presented to guide future recruitment and retention efforts, with a focus on expanding access to underrepresented student populations.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Expand student participation to focus on recruiting a diverse student body and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds by strengthening partnerships between the SCTCS institutions and the local school systems to advise students on the availability of Dual Enrollment and funding available to students.

The partnership of school districts and SCTCS institutions with the highest participation of Dual Enrollment students have a collaborative recruitment and retention effort. Within the student college choice conceptual framework, layer two focuses on the social and community context. With the Dual Enrollment student, this can be directly tied to the high school support and intervention. Layer three focuses on the outreach and marketing efforts, as well as institutional qualities. From the perspective of the Dual Enrollment student, this marketing can be in the form of recruiting and outreach, but also the role of the high school counselor or school designee in the process of promoting opportunities to the student. SCTCS can create recruitment materials that include students that are demographically reflective of the community that the local college serves as well as programs available that are relevant to the local economy. Colleges and school systems can partner for information sessions that present the Dual Enrollment benefits to the parents as stakeholders, citing reduced college costs and other tangible benefits.

Dual Enrollment participation is also driven by a college-going expectation, from the high schools, families, peers, as much as it is self-driven by the student. Targeted efforts in the schools that have lower participation and success rates and tailoring recruitment and retention efforts to the specific population that is served, can improve enrollment and persistence. This can be recruiting for general enrollment, but a more tailored approach to programs of study and courses that are applicable to the student needs can increase participation. Dual Enrollment is promoted as a way to maximize the academic experience and shorten time to degree. By outlining the path for a student to complete a college credential, students can become more knowledgeable on the process and see the benefits to themselves. SCTCS can create specific materials, focused on the additional grant available for career and technical education. This can be done in partnership with the school systems to promote the in-demand fields that are eligible to students, and how they can enter the workforce with a high-paying job, can increase participation where they otherwise might not have enrolled and contribute to increased levels of academic success (Hughes, Rodriguez, Edwards, & Belfield, 2012).

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Increase the student performance through academic interventions.

One initiative that SCTCS is piloting with high school students transitioning into college after graduation is student success workshops. As one SCTCS staff member described it, to combat the “summer slide.” Similar support strategies can be implemented for Dual Enrollment students as they begin their time in the program. Students meet with advisors to assist in those administrative tasks to prepare them for the semester (i.e. registering for classes, getting their student accounts set up, receiving textbooks, etc.). Students who begin the semester prepared are more likely to be

successful in the term. Starting a college class behind schedule can create stress, contribute to academic decline, and program attrition.

Another strategy is to intervene through an Early Alert system to monitor student performance while enrolled in classes. When a student presents as falling behind, the college faculty reports the performance to the Dual Enrollment Coordinator at the college who then reports the issue to the high school counselor. Students would be required to meet with tutors or other academic support staff until they move back into good standing in the class. Having that interaction between the student and the various stakeholders invested in their outcomes can contribute to positive academic gains (Pierce, 2017).

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Expand access by mitigating financial barriers not provided by the state-funded grants.

While the grants available provide tuition dollars to eligible students, textbooks can create a financial barrier to participation. An expansion of the current state-funding model to include a textbook allocation may help alleviate some of the additional financial burden to the student. This could be through a system-level funding arrangement or through local level grants to students in need.

Another financial intervention could be through Interinstitutional Agreements between the SCTCS institution and the local school system that offsets costs to the student. Nationwide, 13 states have funding designs that include school district financial responsibilities to support Dual Enrollment students (Zinth, 2019). A model could be adjusted to align with the SCTCS Dual Enrollment program.

Finally, expanding concurrent enrollment opportunities, or classes taught on the high school campus as part of the school day, can increase participation. Having the course on the high school campus can mitigate barriers caused by transportation or student responsibilities outside of school. Programs using this model saw an increase of 81% in participation among low-income students and 184% increase among students of color (Zinth, 2019). Incorporating this design can expand Dual Enrollment opportunities to those most in need of these opportunities.

LIMITATIONS

My focus for this study was to better understand student motivations for participating in Dual Enrollment by using institutional data, American Community Survey data, and interviews with SCTCS staff who work with the high school students. Though these professionals have experience working with students and high school partners and have insight into the student barriers, their

opinions are secondhand evidence. A future study would incorporate data directly from students who have experienced firsthand a barrier that prevented them from being successful in a Dual Enrollment program.

While interviews were conducted with a sample of participants who work with Dual Enrollment students, those who volunteered did not necessarily represent a cross-section of the SCTCS institutions. While interpreting the data, clear themes emerged from the staff and their perceptions of the Dual Enrollment student experience, however, a future study may benefit from ensuring that interview participants from urban, suburban, and rural serving institutions, as well as equal participation from community and technical college staff, to ensure each area was represented. The experiences of students based on the region that they live, or the type of institution they attend, may have an impact on student motivation.

SCTCS institutions do not track family income or parents' educational attainment. In the absence of that student-level data, I utilized the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) and accessed tables on income and educational attainment for zip code tabulation areas (ZCTA). These methods are commonly utilized when making assumptions about population areas, but the study may have been stronger if student-level data related to family background was available.

CONCLUSION

This project was designed in partnership with SCTCS to better understand the Dual Enrollment student experience, what the student motivations are for participating, and what barriers they may encounter that could prevent their success in the program. Utilizing institutional data, community data through the ACS, and interviews with SCTCS staff, a thorough profile was created of the Dual Enrollment student that can help guide future enrollment and persistence campaigns.

The findings revealed important insight into the Dual Enrollment student that enrolls with SCTCS institutions. The demographic profile of race did not align with the overall population in the state or with the general population that SCTCS serves. Additionally, the success rates of White students is higher than all other racial groups, with Black students performing lower than all other racial groups, regardless of gender. Participation rates of students from the lowest household income are the lowest of the participating groups. Success rates among these subpopulations also drops when compared to other participating groups. Expanding access is important to ensure an equitable participation in these programs, however, it is equally important to support the students who are enrolled. Continuing to emphasize opportunities in the Dual Enrollment program through partnerships between SCTCS institutions, the K-12 school systems, families, and students, will contribute to a statewide college-going and career-ready culture for all high school students in the state.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear [INSERT NAME],

As a doctoral student in the Leadership & Learning in Organizations program at Vanderbilt University, I am inviting you to participate in a Capstone project about the Dual Enrollment program through [REDACTED] institutions. You have been identified as a potential interviewee for this study because of your position within [REDACTED].

Your participation in this study is extremely important to me and to [REDACTED] institutions, and will assist in understanding student motivations for participating in the Dual Enrollment program. Should you agree to participate, I will contact you to set up a web conference interview, or if you prefer, a phone call, at a time of your convenience. The interview or phone call should take about 45 minutes. Participation is voluntary and your response will be kept anonymous. You will have the option to not respond to any question that you choose. Participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with [REDACTED]. Agreement to participate will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate and that you are at least 18 years of age.

If you have any questions about the project, please contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Chris Quinn Trank at chris.quinn@vanderbilt.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, contact the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (615) 322-2918. Please print or save a copy of this page for your records.

Sincerely,



Kristin Jean Corkhill

kristin.j.corkhill@vanderbilt.edu

404.432.8982

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW INTRODUCTIONS

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this interview. You were invited to participate because of your role with [REDACTED] institutions and your involvement and experience with the Dual Enrollment Program. This Capstone is focused on better understanding the motivations of students who participate in the Dual Enrollment Program with [REDACTED] institutions. If we can better understand the student motivation, we may also be able to discover the barriers that they encounter that may prevent them from enrolling, persisting, or otherwise be successful in the program.

To assist with my note taking, I would like to record this meeting. The only individuals who will have access to these recordings will be myself, and my faculty advisors at Vanderbilt University, and all recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Please be advised: 1) your participation and responses will remain confidential; 2) your participation is voluntary and you can opt out of any questions or halt the interview completely at any point in our discussion.

This interview is scheduled to last approximately 45 minutes. I have scripted questions to begin discussion points, but may ask follow-up or additional questions based on a response that merits additional discussion. You are also welcome to share additional insight related to your experience working with the Dual Enrollment Program that is not explicitly asked in my questions.

Do you have any questions at this time? Given this information, are you comfortable with participating in this interview?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions:

1. Please share your professional position and experience working with high school students interested in Dual Enrollment programs.
2. How do students typically learn about Dual Enrollment?
3. What are typical outreach strategies to inform students about Dual Enrollment?
4. In your experience, what students are motivated to pursue Dual Enrollment?
5. Who is most influential in motivating a student to want to participate in Dual Enrollment? For example, can you describe the influence of self-efficacy, parents, friends, high school counselor, and/or college personnel?

6. Do students share feedback as to barriers they experience when enrolling with Dual Enrollment?
7. Are there any new initiatives related to Dual Enrollment? How do you promote them?
8. Are there any efforts to expand Dual Enrollment participation?
9. Where would you like to see the Dual Enrollment Program go from here?