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WORKING TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE FUTURE IN CALIFORNIA DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in California's community college Dual Enrollment (DE) programs. The study investigates how DE staff describe an understanding and commitment towards equity for Black and Latinx students in DE programs and how staff engage in equitably aimed praxis to serve Black and Latinx students through practices and collaborations between feeder high schools. Using a Critical Policy Analysis lens, the research highlights how Black and Latinx students are prioritized through equitable practices focused in advising and outreach. However, not all DE staff prioritize Black and Latinx through practices. Despite this, scant instances reveal that collaborative efforts between DE programs, high schools, and districts improve DE services and outcomes, though majority of K-12 partners are absent from collaborative efforts led by DE programs. The study emphasizes the need for increased collaboration between K-12 partners and integrating equitable approaches to DE outreach and advising to engage and recruit Black and Latinx students. This research advances the conversation of equity in DE programs and offers insights for addressing participation gaps among Black and Latinx students.

Keywords: Community College, Dual Enrollment, Equity, Collaboration, School Districts, High Schools

INTRODUCTION

Dual enrollment (DE), also known as concurrent enrollment, is rapidly growing throughout the United States allowing high school students to enroll in college-level courses through partnerships between K-12 districts and community colleges including universities (Cohen et al., 2014). Students who enroll in DE courses are more likely to enroll in community college, transfer, and attain a credential, particularly benefiting racially minoritized students (Garcia, 2014; Speroni, 2011). According to the Community College Research Center (CCRC), using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, estimates that participation in community college DE programs grew from 163,000 to 745,000 participating students between 1995 and 2015 (Fink et al., 2017). Various iterations of DE exist, with research pinpointing 38 different terminologies across the nation (Williams & Perry, 2020). Despite the

diverse terminology and program structures, engagement in DE with community colleges stands out as the most widespread choice (Hooper & Harrington, 2022).
DE Participation

Despite the notable benefits and exponential growth in DE participation in the last decade, racially marginalized students are found to be participating less than their White counterparts. (Adcock, 2016; Taylor et al., 2022). Researchers at the CCRC examined approximately 950 DE programs, finding that on average, only 7% of Black and 8% of Latinx students participated in DE compared with 12% of White students (Lamiell, 2020). Similarly, in 2019, a longitudinal study involving 23,000 high school first-year students nationwide revealed significant disparities in DE participation. The findings indicated that 38% of White and Asian students participated in DE, while only 27% of Black and 30% of Latinx students did so (Williams & Perry, 2020). Recent data reveals that DE has not translated into an equitable opportunity for Black and Latinx students. DE has potential to improve post-secondary readiness among Black and Latinx students who long have been systemically disadvantaged from higher education opportunity, although it requires exploring how DE can close equity gaps (Weissman, 2020; Welner & Oakes, 2005).

Study Background

California faces a challenge where, at the current rates, only about a third of its 9th graders will attain a bachelor's degree, further exacerbating economic disparities, particularly among Latinx, Black, and low-income Californians (Gao & Johnson 2017; Johnson & Cuellar Mejia 2020a). According to the Public Policy Institute of California, approximately 55% of Black and Latinx high school graduates enroll in one of three California public high education systems, in comparison to 68% of white students and 86% of Asian students (Ugo, 2023). Considering geographic location, the Bay Area boasted the highest college enrollment rates among graduates at 72%, while the Inland Empire and San Joaquin Valley reported the lowest rates at 53%. Southern California and the Central Coast both recorded rates of 67%, and the far north followed closely at 59%, aligning with the statewide average (Ugo, 2023).

DE programs, offering California high school students the opportunity to engage in college-level courses, play a crucial role in expanding educational opportunities and remedying state-wide college readiness concerns (Pompelia, 2020). Participation in DE is often associated with elevated high school completion rates, improved college readiness, and overall academic achievement (Berger et al. 2014; Edmunds et al. 2015). In confronting California's post-secondary education challenge, the implementation of DE emerges as a pivotal strategy to improving post-secondary attainment (Education Commission of the States, 2019).

DE Participation in California

DE aligns with Vision 2030 of the California Community College system, the plan places emphasis on equitable access, support, and success. This plan prioritizes equitable socio-economic mobility for underserved communities by broadening DE pathways for high school students (California Community Colleges, 2023). Similarly, the state legislature allocated $100 million in the 2022-2023 state budget to initiate the Golden State Pathways Program, an effort intended to strengthen K-16 collaboration among California's higher education systems and K-12 system. This initiative aims to amplify the momentum of DE as a strategy for enhancing the pipeline into and through college (Rodriguez et al., 2023). Recent research reveals that the percentage of California high school seniors taking DE courses has increased from 11.3 percent in 2015–16 to 18.2 percent in 2018–19 (Friedman et al., 2020).

Despite the systemic backing of DE, California researchers have raised concerns about the stark differences in the participation of Black and Latinx students in California DE programs when compared to White and Asian students (Friedman et al., 2020). More specifically, the most recent data shows that the participation of Black and Latinx students in DE has merely grown from 9 to 16 % between 2015 and 2019, while participation among Asian students has risen from 18 to 26% (Friedman et al., 2020). This underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students raises concerns for racial equity, as it is forecasted in California that in the next 10 years, Black and Latinx students will graduate high school and enroll in community college far less (Rodriguez & Gao, 2021). Despite DE's anticipated role in remedying state college readiness concerns, it is exacerbating the problem by not equitably serving Black and Latinx students (Rodriguez et al., 2023).

DE Practices Potentially Playing a Role in Black and Latinx Student Participation

Although DE is intended to address college readiness concerns in California, its promise falls short as Black and Latinx students are not participating compared to their White and Asian peers. The extent to which program practices or collaborative efforts contribute to the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students remains uncertain. Within DE program scholarship, a subset of qualitative scholars has been interested in the racial implications of the program; its design and potential impact to address racial inequity (Hooper & Harrington, 2022). Emerging research finds that DE is rather fostering inequities among Black and Latinx students due to flawed practices (Nelson & Waltz, 2019). For example, Unlu and Edmonds (2019) address how community colleges and high schools' inadequate advising and support hinder the matriculation and navigation of dual enrollment for Black and Latinx students, while an earlier study by Farell and Seifert (2017) revealed that the failure to inform these students about DE opportunities leads to misconceptions and equating DE with Advanced Placement courses. Considering the repercussions of these inequitable outcomes, they potentially play a role in why only 16% of Latinx and Black students in California participate in DE (Friedman et al., 2020). Without the necessary equitable support and changes to California community college DE programs, Black and Latinx students are unable to reap DE's stated benefits and engage in DE opportunities.

Identifying Equity in DE

Historically, reforms in community colleges have overlooked and failed to address barriers that hinder educational equity for racially minoritized students, such as whiteness, racism, and failing to institutionally commit to equity, ultimately disregarding the unique realities of these students (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Felix, 2021). Gilborn (2005) suggests that reforms ignoring systemic inequities, race and racism perpetuate white supremacy, which Leonardo (2009) defines as exerting absolute control over minoritized groups. Although white supremacy is not explicit in the California Community College 2030 plan, caution is needed to avoid color-evasive DE practices that reinforce the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in California DE programs.

The term "equity" has become more prominent in community college reform discourse, yet Bensimon (2018) posits that equity is not a rhetorical prop to be "sprinkled into educational discourse as a means of signaling progressive values. Instead, the authentic exercise of equity requires explicit attention to structural inequality and institutionalized racism and demands system-changing responses" (p. 97). Ultimately, equity aids in understanding racially minoritized and underrepresented students who have been systematically disadvantaged in higher education (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Harper, 2012). Bensimon emphasizes that equity demands "achieving racial proportionality in all educational outcomes and in critically assessing whiteness at the institutional and practice levels. It is about acknowledging and

addressing racism in our educational systems. It is a word, at its core, that seeks the kind of racial justice that groups were fighting for 50 years ago when Change was founded" (p.98). In line with equity, this study utilizes Bensimon's (2018) definition of equity to highlight the necessary transformation across California DE programs. While the mention of equity is often diluted in community college reform discourse and within the DE context, it is necessary that I explicitly contextualize how I operationalize equity for this study (Duncheon & Hornbeck, 2023; Felix & Trinidad, 2020).

This study intends to identify program practices and collaborations that center equity and prioritize serving Black and Latinx students. It also acknowledges flawed practices and DE program scaling challenges that impede the participation of these students to advocate for systemic reform. To garner this information, the study offers insights from a sample of DE programs across California. Precisely, among each program, DE coordinators, advisors, and directors participate to comprehend how equity is understood by community college DE staff in the DE context, and its role in the reform of practices as well as prioritization of Black and Latinx students, if at all. Additionally, the study explores barriers to scaling DE programs across the state, increasing staff involvement, and enhancing collaborations.

Concerned by the underrepresentation and neglect of Black and Latinx students in DE programs, I explore outreach, collaboration, and recruitment efforts led by community college DE staff. To understand these domains mentioned, I utilize Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) as my guiding framework. This lens facilitates understanding which students benefit and who are disadvantaged within the distribution of DE services and collaborations (Young & Diem, 2014). CPA is pivotal in identifying inequalities and advocating for equitable changes to DE resources and collaborations (Young & Diem, 2014). Through the study examining a sample of the states' top twenty DE programs with both the highest and lowest enrollment, this enables understanding structural program differences in recruitment, advising, outreach, active involvement, and collaboration dynamics among community college DE programs, both within individual and multiple-campus community college districts. The purposeful sampling approach allows for understanding how structural program differences play a role in the participation or underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students (Cresswell, 2014) . After, I highlight the significance of my study. Next, I offer the literature review, my theoretical framework, and methodology. Last, are the results, discussion, and implications.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

While overall DE scholarship including existing research surrounding Black and Latinx students in California DE programs is focused on participation through a quantitative approach, it is critical not to overlook its implementation aspect through qualitative methodology by exploring how community college DE staff, including collaborations, play an instrumental role in reforming practices and improving accountability to achieve equity. This study addresses concerns for equity in DE program implementation the purpose of this study is twofold. First, this study examines how California DE directors, coordinators and advisors describe and commit towards equity for Black and Latinx students. In doing so, I explore how DE staff engage in equitably aimed praxis within DE services and supports as they serve Black and Latinx students. Second, this study explores the nature of collaboration between community college DE programs, school districts, and feeder high schools. Last, how these collaborations address equity for Black and Latinx students. To this end, this study responds to the following research questions:

1. How do DE program staff, describe an understanding and commitment towards equity for Black and Latinx students in community college DE programs?
2. How do community college DE program staff engage in equitably aimed praxis within DE programs to serve Black and Latinx students?

3. What is the nature of collaboration between community college DE programs, high schools, and school districts?
4. How do these collaborations address equity for Black and Latinx students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review initiates by introducing the concerns surrounding DE, such as access disparities and inequitable program practices that disadvantage racially minoritized and underrepresented students. Additionally, it discusses the lack of collaboration between school districts and community colleges, which impacts student support and awareness of DE opportunities. The review emphasizes the need for equity-centered reform across practices and enhanced collaboration to fully realize the potential of DE in improving college readiness and access for racially minoritized and underrepresented students.

Concerns to Dual Enrollment Access

Despite DE's notable benefits, concerns have emerged about unequal access to DE. Spencer and Maldonado (2021) find that white middle and upper-income students are more likely to participate in DE than any other students. In an earlier study, Miller et al (2017), suggest students from higher-income backgrounds experience several privileges when enrolling into DE such as, having higher-average achievement, family social capital, and the ability to pay for fees in states that mandate students to pay DE fees. These privileges lead to increased DE participation among higher-income students. Contrastingly, in Texas, high schools with high enrollment of Black low-income students tend to have lower DE participation, although White students are the most prevalent group participating in DE (American Institutes for Research, 2011). In line to student income background, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2018), reveals that high-poverty high schools serving predominantly low-income students are less likely to offer DE. Rivera et al (2019) suggest the availability of DE in high schools is influenced by state and local funding sources. Spencer and Maldonado (2021) further emphasized that barriers to accessing DE are significantly associated with school poverty levels and the absence of robust legislative support for DE programs. The literature underscores that, despite the advantages of DE, disparities in access persist due to school poverty levels and insufficient state and local funding, disproportionately impacting racially minoritized and underrepresented students.

Across DE programs, there are access barriers constraining the participation of underrepresented students and flawed practices producing inequities. For example, Farell & Seifert (2007) found that in Arizona, access is negatively impacted through junior high school students needing to pass an entrance exam focused on math, reading, and writing to be admitted into DE. The exam is a form of gatekeeping for students who otherwise are not college bound and enrolled in college preparatory coursework. Additionally, Arizona high schools by law, must inform students and families about DE opportunities, yet several high schools were found to provide incorrect information. For instance, Latinx students described DE as being equivalent to AP courses (Farell & Seifert, 2007). Similarly, in Hawaii, racially minoritized students and families are less familiar about DE opportunities, the process to registration, and as a result underrepresented in DE (Osumi, 2010). To this end, two studies centered on the participation of Black students in Virginia and Ohio found that Black students are not familiar with the benefits of DE and consider it an opportunity only for white students (Davis, 2019; Rarig, 2019). The literature reveals that flawed DE practices have contributed to excluding and failing to support racially minoritized students. To actualize the full potential of DE programs, DE staff must weave equity into the reform of practices and supports to ensure that students historically excluded from higher education opportunity are equitably served and included.

While community college DE programs operate alongside high school sites, research indicates that the failure to collaborate has been linked to students not receiving the essential support needed to thrive in DE. High school counselors play a pivotal role in supporting high school students interested and enrolled in DE, however, they are often overburdened with administrative duties and have a limited understanding of DE (Kanny, 2015). The potential support of community college DE staff can help alleviate the administrative burdens of high school counselors, although Roach et al (2015) find that high schools and community college DE programs operate in silos. When drawing from literature on DE practices, by high schools and community college DE programs not collaborating, it potentially unravels why Black and Latinx students are not made aware of DE opportunities, and not provided the needed support.

Understanding the context: Dual enrollment in California

California is tasked with preparing more than 1 out of 10 public school students in the nation for post-secondary education (Munoz et al., 2022). In 2015, Assembly Bill 288 was signed by the California legislature, which established College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP), to encourage school district and community college district DE partnerships to expand DE opportunities for students who may not be college-bound and underrepresented across higher education (Kurlaender et al., 2021). Despite California's legislative backing to DE, over 3 in 4 of California's 72 community college districts fail to adequately enroll Black and Latinx students (Education Trust-West, 2022). While a subset of scholars has documented the shortcomings of DE practices, this study aims to identify equity-focused strategies that can advance the participation and success of Black and Latinx students (Davis, 2019; Farell & Seifert, 2007; Rarig, 2019; Roach et al., 2015).

Data Collection

I interview DE directors, coordinators and advisors across several community colleges, seeking to build a sample from California's 116 community colleges. Interviews are valuable tools for understanding how individuals construct meaning and navigate their social environment, particularly when it comes to aspects of their experiences that may not be readily observable (Lamont & Swidler, 2014). This provides insight into the outreach, onboarding, and service efforts for Black and Latinx students. I sample from the state's 20 highest and lowest enrolled DE programs, which allows me to identify program differences across regions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and single as well as multiple-campus community college districts. I interview directors and coordinators since they are essential to the operations of DE, while advisors work directly with students, parents, and on high school campuses. By interviewing DE staff, I explore challenges and successes in advancing equity for Black and Latinx students through DE programs.

The recruitment process began by identifying the top 20 community college DE programs with the lowest and highest enrollment for the 2021-2022 academic year. To gather this information, I drew from state-level data on dual enrollment programs offered by the California Community Colleges system. The data were then sorted based on enrollment. Once the community colleges were identified, I proceeded to craft a recruitment email tailored to dual enrollment staff members. The focus was on individuals occupying positions such as directors, coordinators, and advisors. Once staff members expressed their interest in participating interviews were scheduled. The final sample included eight participants (n=8) who were based from five different community college DE programs, as noted in Table 1.The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and followed a semi-structured format, allowing for flexibility and in-depth exploration of topics. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. In the interviews, I aimed to learn about how staff define equity, how equity is integrated into DE services and supports, and to what extent

collaborations with K-12 school districts are a catalyst to improving the participation of Latinx and Black students

Table 1. *Participants*

Name	Community College	Region/County	Role	Race	Gender
Adrian	Diamond College	Southern California, San Bernadino County	Advisor	Latinx	Male
Nevea	Diamond College	Southern California, San Bernadino County	Advisor	Latinx/ Black	Female
Devin	Alpine College	Northern California, Yuba County	Director	Black	Male
Solano	Las Palmas College	Southern California, Los Angeles County	Coordinator	Latinx	Male
Mary	Las Palmas College	Southern California, Los Angeles County	Director	Latinx	Female
Heather	Vine College	Central California, Fresno County	Director	White	Female
Dion	Great Plains College	Southern California, Los Angeles County	Director	Black	Male
Layla	Great Plains College	Southern California, Los Angeles County	Advisor	Black	Female

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Policy Analysis (CPA)

This study is guided by CPA. CPA helps to capture the major "winners and losers" through the distribution of resources in policy design and implementation across systems and sites (Young & Diem, 2014). Rather than traditional policy perspectives that are criticized as rational, race evasive, and fail to consider external factors, CPA provides critical perspectives central to identifying race and inequality factors (Anyon,1980; Foucault, 1972; Levinson et al., 2009). CPA exceeds the limitations of linear frameworks, as it interrogates the nature of resource distribution (Pusser & Marginson, 2012). For example, this perspective has led to asking, "Who benefits?,", "Who wins?", "Who loses?," and "How do low-income and minoritized students fare as a result of the policy?" across systems and sites of implementation, or who gets what, when, and how (Bacchi, 1999; Dumas & Anyon, 2006; Forester, 1993; Marshall, 1997; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). To this line, critical perspectives assist with thoroughly examining policy and contributes to the development of more effective policies and practices. (Anyon,1980; Foucault, 1972; Levinson et al., 2009). Legal scholars have taken the tenets of CPA and used them to interrogate discriminatory practices affecting racially minoritized students in education (Young & Diem, 2014).

Using CPA in the DE Context

Drawing from the foundations of CPA enables me to interrogate: 1) how DE coordinators and advisors describe "who wins and who loses?" through DE services and supports; 2) explore how equity is centered in DE efforts to engage Black and Latinx students; 3) how community college and school district collaborations hinder or advance the participation of Black and Latinx students in DE programs (Bacchi, 1999; Dumas & Anyon, 2006; Forester, 1993; Marshall, 1997; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). These critical questions contribute to understanding inequality factors across the distribution of DE resources and partnerships.

Positionality

As a non-traditional scholar, I experienced the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline, which resulted in being denied the opportunity to learn and engage in college-going conversations. Throughout my K-12 journey, I frequently observed that students participating in AVID and Honors courses had privileged access to these discussions while those like myself and my peers, situated on the margins of opportunity, were excluded. This phenomenon is formally known as college tracking. Through my scholarship, my commitment rests in advancing critical college access scholarship so that students like myself can have equitable access to DE. Drawing from both personal and professional experiences as a former staff member in various college access programs, I investigate the practices that either impede or promote the involvement of racially minoritized students in the college-going process.

In this study, my aim was to understand how DE staff describe or simply mention Black and Latinx students in the context of DE practices and collaborations. Initially guided by Critical Race Theory, specifically, the tenant of critique of liberalism and permanence in racism, I aimed to understand the race-neutral dynamics in DE practices and equity interpretations of DE staff. Additionally, how these practices, interpretations, and collaborations dismiss race or favor dominant groups.

Limitations

Although the study's data is drawn from California DE programs serving high school partners with both CCAP and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreements, the focus of this study was not on a specific agreement type. Instead, it addresses equity issues and the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students, which are relevant to both agreement types in California.

DATA ANALYSIS

Background of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a qualitative approach that involves critically examining and interpreting how discourses shape and reinforce social inequalities (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA shares similarities with discourse analysis (DA) in examining the influence of language on social phenomena, although CDA heightens language as a power resource while seeking to understand socially shared knowledge and ideologies (Willig, 2014). This qualitative approach focuses on analyzing discourses that perpetuate power abuse, injustice, and inequality, aiming to uncover implicit power relations between groups, individuals, or institutions (Gee, 2011; Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The driving force behind CDA is addressing pressing social issues, with the goal of promoting change through critical understanding (Van Dijk, 1993).

For educational researchers exploring the relationship between educational practices and social contexts, CDA offers a valuable approach. For example, McNair (2005) combines Critical Race Theory (CRT) with CDA to examine Scholastic book order forms, which serve as promotional tools for children's books. McNair's textual and semiotic analysis revealed a notable absence of books authored by and centered around people of color. Moreover, the catalog included a "classics" section, the section unveiled that the book offerings were predominantly written by white authors. Multicultural books, when included, were often marginalized on the order form or highlighted only during special occasions like Black History Month.

Braiding CPA and CDA to Understand Dual Enrollment

During the interviews, I documented thorough notes specifically highlighting aspects related to race and equity. Following the discussions, I reviewed my notes to identify potential open codes. Next, I had the interviews professionally transcribed using Otter.

In order to make sense of the interviews, I utilized my theoretical perspective to formulate guiding analytic questions. The analytic questions, when paired with CDA, provide a focused lens to what will be interrogated in relation to inequalities and oppression in the DE context. To help craft the analytic questions, I engaged in a reflexive process that required conceptualizing the utilization of CPA in DE. This process reaffirmed the justification for using CPA and facilitated the identification of how this framework could effectively analyze the interviews conducted, which contributed to identifying three analysis objectives.

In what follows, I present the three analysis objectives that were developed. One, I use CPA to identify which students benefit and are neglected across DE. The aim is to examine racialized discourse surrounding students and related factors, such as culture, family, and community. Second, I examine how equity is a catalyst across efforts to improving the participation of Black and Latinx students. The aim is to understand how staff interpret equity, and to what extent does it inform reform, furthermore, identify potential resistance. Third, I seek to gain insights into the collaborations between community college and K-12 districts, specifically, how they work towards improving the participation of students and center equity, if at all. The aim is to understand how participation is being addressed through collaborative efforts, how equity is being centered, as well as to identify resistance that may arise from both parties involved and other entities such as parents, school administrators, and community college administrators.

After engaging in the reflexive process, this practice helped garner insight into how CPA can contribute to interpreting the data through a CDA approach. By drawing from the analysis objectives, I developed two sets of analytic questions centered on participation and equity. The participation questions consisted of "which students does DE benefit?" and "which students are underrepresented across DE?". The equity questions entailed "how is equity centered in DE efforts?" and "how do community college and school district collaborations hinder or advance the participation of Black and Latinx students in DE programs?" Through the process of coding interviews on NVivo, I used the two sets of analytic questions including the participation and equity open codes as a deductive approach to make sense of the data. Luke (2002) posits that merely relying on a linguistic and text analytic metalanguage is insufficient for the practice of CDA. According to Luke (2002), CDA requires a broader theoretical lens to fully comprehend the intricate interplay between language, power dynamics, and social structures embedded within texts and discourses. Through braiding CPA with CDA, this approach elucidates the meaning of data, but it also contributes to adopting a critical lens to deciphering the relationships between discourse and power in the DE context.

FINDINGS

The findings reveal the necessity of collaboration between school districts, feeder high schools, and community colleges, variance to equity interpretations, impact of personalized student engagement, and specialized outreach. These insights help understand how equity is advanced and how it can be enhanced to ensure access and participation for Latinx and Black students.

Equity: DE Opportunities, Supports, and Equal Starting Points for all Students

Participants at Diamond College and Alpine College revealed diverse interpretations on equity that shape the function of DE programs. Adrian explains that defining equity in the DE context means providing opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds, ensuring they have the necessary support systems in place, and providing an equal starting point. Adrian stated, "So defining equity in dual enrollment to me would be that you would allow opportunity for students from any background, whether it be ethnicity, race, gender, religion, creed, socio-economic status, to have the opportunity to take a dual enrollment course with the appropriate supports." Adrian also highlighted the value of providing an equal starting point for students who may be hesitant or uncertain about DE. This approach allows them to gain familiarity with college expectations and coursework before fully committing to DE. Adrian explained, "A pass or no pass can really help some students who are questioning, should I start a college course... so I think that's making it a little bit equal so they can have an equitable start."

However, Adrian also raises concern regarding the equity perspective of select feeder school districts. They explain, "From what I see, I'm not sure how comfortable they're going to be with centering equity in DE. If you talk about equity they start shutting down and so I'm sure that we're going to tread very lightly in those discussions, and there's not going be a lot of attention brought by them. If we do it's going to be almost seen as an attack and then maybe could be taken by them as not wanting to partner with the college anymore". Nevea acknowledged that high school students cannot be treated the same as adult students, and stressed the need for additional attention and resources. Nevea explained, "We can't just enroll them and say good luck... in order to make it fair, we do have to give them that a little extra attention to help them, and that's when they start to succeed. We can't just drop them off."

Equity: A Bridge between High School and Community College Requires Intentionality

In contrast, Alpine College participants viewed equity in DE as a pathway to social justice through education. They recognized the exclusionary nature of higher education and the need to address the systemic barriers that limit access. Specifically, DE was described as a tool to bridge the gap between secondary and higher education, providing academic, cultural, and social support. Devin explained DE as "helping folks move towards high school graduation as well as knocking out those college classes... an academic on-ramp for students into higher ed, but also like a cultural and social on-ramp". Devin also acknowledged that certain groups, such as first-generation students, immigrants, non-native English speakers, and students with disabilities, face additional challenges in navigating the higher education system. They believe that DE can help mitigate these challenges by providing early exposure to college resources and a better understanding to higher education systems. Devin shared their personal experience as a first-generation college student and emphasized the potential benefits of early exposure to college classes and campus resources. They stated, "if I had been introduced to those to college classes earlier, and in how to…I think my journey would have been all the more smoother."

Devin emphasized the responsibility of educators and practitioners to address disparities and make sure that all students can leverage DE as a tool for educational advancement. They stressed that without

intentional action, existing disparities would only be perpetuated. Devin explains, "I think that we have to be very intentional... about making sure that everyone is accessing dual enrollment, everyone is leveraging it as a tool. Because if not, we're just replicating, perpetuating the disparities already at play."

Equity: Leveraging College-Going Dispositions of Black Students to Enhance Black Student-Focused Engagement

Nevea's interpretation of equity does not center race, although race is acknowledged when discussing student engagement as it is informed by the attitudes and experiences related to higher education and DE held by black students. Nevea explains that black students share not being inclined to pursue both DE and higher education, since conversations related to the domains are not discussed in the household, therefore, students are less inclined to engage in college going discussions. Nevea states, "Black students tell me, going to college wasn't taught in my house and that their parents know nothing about it. So their parents need education about it. As for the students, their spirits are kind of broken, because they develop this core thought, that I cannot achieve college before they even graduate high school." To this line, Nevea notes that these students have difficulty responding to what their post-high school plans are, since they have never been asked. This notion resonates to Nevea given they identify as Black and Latina, Nevea explains, "Within our communities these things are not talked about. I've had a lot of conversations with people from my background about we were not given the opportunity to go to college, it was always about going to the workforce or joining the military."

While Nevea acknowledges the dispositions of Black students, it informs how they engage students through outreach efforts. They take a personal and genuine approach to build rapport with students by sharing the obstacles they have encountered through navigating higher education, and resources they utilized to overcome barriers. Nevea explains, "I'm just honest with them during my presentation, I let them know about my background, I'm Hispanic and African American, I know your barriers, I know what's being said to you, I know your core mind thought because I had that, I let them know that you can succeed". Although they emphasize the necessity of personalizing engagement and acknowledging the intersectionalities of students, since it helps connect with students. Nevea states,

> You have to personalize it, because why are you gonna sit there and listen to a person if it doesn't apply to you? These kids are just gonna hear me and say she's an advisor from the college, she's smart. I don't talk to them, I talk with them. So it's a conversation and we talk together. Yeah, I'm an advisor, I have a degree, but I'm still Black, I'm still Hispanic, I understand what you go through. But let me tell you how to break this core mindset, and envision yourself. With these students you can't talk at them, you have to have a conversation with them to make them feel included, and make sure you are not overlooking or giving them orders.

Practices: Family and Community-Focused Outreach

Findings reveal that DE programs center family and partner with community based culturally focused organizations to propel student and family engagement and recruitment. Mary states that orientations are intended to serve both students and parents, as they explain,

> We bring students, the parents, we walk them through CCC apply applications, and we let the parents know this is a big step in their student's life towards the pursuit of higher education. And one of the critical areas we focus on is educating parents what DE is, and

that they should hold schools accountable with regard to DE, and request more support
from schools and the school district we are partnering with.

Subsequently, Devin utilizes a culturally-focused approach to engage with families. They emphasize that traditional open-house events can be overwhelming for families from marginalized backgrounds. To effectively recruit and inform Latinx students and families, Devin partners with the local Latino community council, since they have existing relationships and a presence within the community. Similarly, Heather employs a cultural-focused approach to engage Black families. They collaborate with community-based organizations dedicated to serving black youth and families, which garners access and the opportunity to recruit students into DE.

Outreach Efforts in Spanish

Findings reveal that Diamond and Alpine College are cognizant to language barriers that potentially hinder Latinx student and family engagement, as a result they facilitate orientations, advising sessions, and campus tours in Spanish. Adrian explains that Spanish-speaking advisors were identified and assigned to support Spanish-speaking families at orientations and advising sessions. Recently, they recognized, there was a need to offer campus tours in Spanish for families, which advisors have been integral in leading. Nevea notes, "We don't want our Spanish speaking parents to miss out on essential important information". Similarly, Devin shares outreach being led in Spanish to engage Latinx families. Although, they note there is a need to provide multilingual outreach for Eastern European families that are underrepresented in the community.

Accountability and Active Involvement by School Districts and Feeder Higher Schools

Active involvement and accountability between educational institutions was found to be crucial for supporting student success. At Las Palmas College, stakeholders from partner school districts, including principals, high school counselors, adjuncts, DE specialists, student services advisors, and directors, actively participated in biweekly workgroup meetings. Solano explained, "And what we do is we talked about how we can support faculty in the classroom, expand early alerts, add supplemental instruction, or help students access resources in the library's Student Success Center". This collaborative approach ensured that all stakeholders took accountability for student success and worked together to support students. To this line, Mary states,

> Our counselors also meet with students to do a comprehensive ed plans that takes the student from beginning to end, so that they understand that they're receiving a certificate or a degree by the time they complete the program. So it's totally about ensuring that everyone takes accountability for student success. And we all hold each other accountable to make sure that our students receive those certificates degrees at the end.

Similarly, Nevea at Diamond College notes that high school counselors and principals from select school districts are actively involved in quarterly DE meetings, and engaged in conversations pertaining to equity. Nevea explains that schools also have to keep students accountable, "At one of our high schools, the principal, every Friday pulls students from class and has them open their Canvas to view their grades. If students are not passing their courses he has discussions with students and introduces them to resource available at the college."

School Districts and Feeder High Schools Absent from Collaborative Efforts

Challenges were identified at Diamond College and Alpine College regarding the limited involvement of feeder high schools and school districts in promoting equity and addressing retention issues. Nevea emphasized the need for greater involvement, saying,

> I would like all high schools to be involved, not just some, because when they're more involved, we see a higher retention rate and a higher pass rate for Black and Latinx students... it's depending on the staff and district, unfortunately. Without the active support of the high schools and districts, students are not going to be successful.

Moreover, Nevea states that K12's involvement calls for needed supports, as they explain, "the high schools enroll students, drop them off to the community college, but there is no retention supports in place by the schools and often students DE grades are not being checked". They conclude by explaining that often school staff are not adequately informed about the function of a community college, Nevea states, "Schools have an understanding that community college is easier than a university, and so they think they could just put students in classes, and they're going to be successful, which is not the case when the student is not college ready. So I do feel they have an interest helping students get college credit, but they're doing to make their high school have better stats to be recognized, and be able to say that their kids are getting dual enrollment credit."

According to Devin, to increase participation and address equity gaps requires the active involvement of high school counselors and staff members, since they interact directly with students and assist in building schedules. However, the limited involvement of district partners and feeder high schools was acknowledged, potentially due to resource constraints and staffing issues. Devin states, "I'll be honest with you, they aren't super involved, and I think it is a bandwidth issue. Most school district and high school teams supporting DE are understaffed right now, I also know, a lot of my counterparts at different colleges have only one or two DE staff supporting the high schools."

DISCUSSION

This analysis on California DE programs reveals how equity is understood and engaged by DE staff across practices to address the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students. Subsequently, the analysis shares the nature of collaborations among school districts, high school sites, and DE programs. The findings of this study highlight how Black and Latinx students are "winning" and "losing" through equity-focused and flawed DE practices including collaborative efforts between high schools (Young & Diem, 2014).

DE Opportunities, Equal Starting Points, and Increased Supports for "All" Students

In seeking to understand how DE staff describe an understanding and commitment towards
equity for Black and Latinx students, the study unveiled diverse interpretations to equity within the DE context. Significantly, the majority of equity interpretations of DE staff did not prioritize or mention Black and Latinx students. However, there were scant instances where Black and Latinx students were mentioned and prioritized by DE staff. The majority of understandings diverge from what education equity scholars share about equity encompassing the interrogation of racially minoritized and underrepresented students who have been systematically disadvantaged in higher education (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Harper, 2012). For example, Adrian's equity interpretation focused on DE providing opportunities and an equal starting point for all students. Adrian raises a potential effective recommendation, advocating community colleges to offer a pass-no pass grading option. He suggests that this option can be beneficial

for students that are interested in taking their first DE course. Additionally, Adrian posits that there is a significant difference in equity understanding between DE staff and high school staff from their feeder high schools. This example is insightful for DE staff, as it emphasizes the need for alignment in how DE program staff and high school partners understand equity and prioritize the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students.

Intersectionality and Belonging to the Community Facilitates Understanding the Educational Challenges of Black and Latinx Students

Despite the majority of equity interpretations by DE staff did not prioritize or mention Black and Latinx students, there were a few insights that centered these students. Nevea offers a unique perspective on equity, particularly in serving and prioritizing Black students. This perspective is shaped by her intersectionalities, such as her racial identity as both Black and Latina, as well as growing up in the same community as her students' and her personal encounters with similar socioeconomic challenges. Nevea's shared experiences resonate when discussing the educational challenges Black students face, they explain, "Within our communities these things are not talked about. I've had a lot of conversations with people from my background about we were not given the opportunity to go to college, it was always about going to the workforce or joining the military.". Given Nevea's intersectionalities, she also shares being cognizant to the challenges faced by Latinx students and families. They share, "we don't want our Spanish speaking parents to miss out on essential important information". Nevea's distinct perspective resonates with Bensimon's concept of equity (2015), as her intersectionalities offer a nuanced comprehension of the systemic inequities faced by Black and Latinx youth in her community that hinder them from accessing higher education opportunities (Salazar, 2021).

Providing Support on Both Sides of the Bridge

Nevea offers insight into their observation to the role of high school partners in DE partnerships, highlighting a significant gap in DE supports within high schools. They highlight high school students are being often left unsupported by their high schools' upon enrolling in DE courses. Nevea describes this transactional process as students being, "dropped off and wished good luck". Through Nevea's equity understanding, they advocate providing students additional support within high schools to improve student success in DE. This instance emphasizes the crucial role of high schools in DE partnerships and underscores the importance of feeder high schools offering essential services to support students. Nevea's observation aligns with the findings of Roach et al. (2015), who emphasize that high schools frequently operate independently, failing to provide necessary support for DE students. Drawing from Nevea's insight, the future of DE rests in ensuring support on both sides of "the bridge", while services and supports are offered by DE programs, these mechanisms must also be available in high schools to improve DE outcomes and ensure equity.

DE as a Tool for Everyone and Potentially Furthering Existing Inequities

In contrast to the equity understanding of DE staff at Diamond College, Devin at Alpine College stands out for his intentional efforts to build a bridge between feeder high schools and DE programs. Devin highlights the exposure to college and the readiness benefits that DE provides for minoritized students, describing them as "academic, cultural, and social on-ramps.". Despite acknowledging the benefits of DE, he heightens attention to the existing inequities that DE can further perpetuate if not leveraged as a tool for everyone. Devin's equity understanding aligns with Bensimon's definition of equity (2018), as there is emphasis in "explicit attention to structural inequality and institutionalized racism and demands system-

changing responses" (p. 97). When considering California DE participation data, this specific case urges DE staff to scrutinize racial disparities, understanding which racial groups benefit from DE and which face disadvantages. This examination must also involve an exploration of how current DE practices either support or harm students.

Cultural, Family, Community, and Spanish-focused approaches to DE Advising and Outreach

Existing DE literature has unveiled flawed program practices that impede the participation of Latinx and Black students, as reflected in the college-going dispositions shared by Black students with Nevea. Specifically, Black students describe feeling that DE opportunities are not meant for them, aligning with findings by Davis (2019) and Rarig (2019) regarding reasons for Black students' lack of participation in DE.

However, this analysis highlights instances of DE staff engaging in equitably aimed praxis to serve Black and Latinx students. For example, Nevea's advising approach is informed by the college-going dispositions of Black students. In turn, they center their intersectionality's such as, bi-racial identity, low-income status, having been raised in Southern California's desert region, and being a first-generation college graduate to identify with Black students from their community and inspire them. Notably, they emphasize the importance of inclusive conversations, personal connections, and a non-directive approach to address the college-going challenges faced by Black students. These intersectional and student-centered advising strategies showcase a commitment to equity and prioritization of Black students.

Mary underscores the importance of prioritizing both students and parents through DE outreach. They facilitate inclusive orientations, allowing both students and parents to learn about DE, navigating community college enrollment applications, and encourages parents to support students in their DE endeavors. Similarly, Devin adopts a culturally-focused approach, recognizing that traditional open-house events may overwhelm marginalized families. To effectively recruit and inform Latinx students and families about DE opportunities, Devin partners with the local Latino community council as they have an existing presence in the community. Alike, Heather engages Black students and families using a culturally-focused approach, collaborating with community-based organizations dedicated to serving black youth and families. Devin and Heather both employ equitable praxis to serve Black and Latinx students by collaborating with community-based cultural organizations to recruit and inform students and families about DE opportunities. Last, Devin, Nevea, and Adrian share showcase addressing language barriers that hinder Latinx students and families from engaging in DE. Adrian shares having Spanish-speaking advisors conduct advising sessions, offering translation support during orientations, and leading campus tours in Spanish. Nevea emphasizes their commitment to promoting equity for Latinx students and families by ensuring that Spanish-speaking families do not miss out on essential information.

Absent and Actively Involved K-12 Collaborators

While examining the collaborative nature between DE programs, feeder high schools, and school districts, the analysis reveals a majority lack of participation by K-12 stakeholders, while only a few are actively engaged. Nevea observes that not all feeder high schools are involved in collaboration efforts, although Devin shares that K-12 stakeholders are not involved due to being understaffed. However, Nevea emphasizes the importance of involvement from high school partners, noting that when they are engaged, Black and Latinx DE students exhibit improved course pass and retention outcomes. They underscore that students will not succeed in DE unless school district partners and feeder high schools "buy into" engaging in collaboration efforts.

Adrian expresses concerns regarding the inaccurate perceptions held by feeder high school staff regarding the role of community colleges and DE. Some staff members perceive community college as easier than a university and believe that all participants in DE automatically succeed. These findings support Roach et al (2015) notion on school districts and DE programs operating in silos. Additionally, they build on Kanny's (2015), argument that high school counselors possess a limited understanding to DE. The findings contribute that feeder high school staff lack understanding to the function of community college and DE. Consequently, this further obstructs students understanding of DE and community college, as noted by Farell & Seifert (2007). While the majority of K-12 stakeholders are not involved, Nevea's insight heightens that the involvement of K-12 stakeholders is crucial to the success of Black and Latinx students.

Although the majority of K-12 stakeholders are not involved in collaborative efforts at Diamond College, Mary offers insights into the active engagement of their K-12 counterparts at Las Palmas College. Mary explains that various staff members from their school district partners, including those from feeder high schools, convene bi-weekly to explore ways to enhance DE services, support systems, and student experiences. They note a prevailing "sense of accountability" among all participants dedicated to supporting DE. Similarly, there is a mutual commitment to holding each other accountable, driven by the shared goal of ensuring DE students graduate high school with multiple credentials. This insight is crucial for DE staff, underscoring the significance of prioritizing accountability and shared commitment in collaborative efforts. Moreover, this finding underscores the importance of ensuring that staff, ranging from the district to feeder high schools, convene bi-weekly to deliberate on DE improvement strategies.

IMPLICATIONS

What Lessons Can We Take Away From These Equitable DE Practices?

The equitable practices identified in this study highlight the engagement of DE staff in equity-driven praxis and the prioritization of Black and Latinx students. These findings offer valuable insights for DE staff and address a gap in DE literature regarding equitable practices, particularly in ensuring equity and advancing the participation of Black and Latinx students. Considering the braiding of CPA and CDA, there is growing evidence of DE staff prioritizing Black and Latinx students through outreach and advising efforts. Additionally, there is emerging indication that collaborative efforts involving K-12 stakeholders, spearheaded by DE programs, contribute to ensuring comprehensive support for students and actively enhancing DE programs and services. However, these instances are not apparent among all the DE sites examined.

To address the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in California DE programs, equity scholars share that embracing equity-mindedness can initiate dialogues aimed at examining and dismantling practices that disadvantage racially minoritized students (Bensimon, 2018; Ching, 2023). Additionally, this engagement enables enhancing DE practices and supports. Although, historically, the definition of equity has evolved due to the ever-changing nature of reform demands in the community college, with staff holding diverse understandings informed by trainings and exposure to institutional commitment to equity (Ching, 2023; Felix, 2021). Bensimon (2018) informs researchers and DE staff that while equity is often mentioned in the DE context, there is a need to authentically exercise equity rather than mentioning it as a rhetorical prop for progressive values (Bensimon, 2018). Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that California DE programs are implementing equitable practices to advance the participation of Black and Latinx students, offering promise in addressing statewide college attainment concerns.

While this study provides evidence on how equity is being embedded into meso-level DE processes, there is a need to address systemic issues. The study's findings underscore the need for future guidance from the Chancellor's Office and reforms related to DE to prioritize equity and showcase equitable implementation. This is crucial to support DE staff including K-12 collaborators in improving the participation of Black and Latinx students through recruitment, outreach, onboarding, and advising, and to improve the fusion between DE programs and high schools to address statewide college attainment concerns (Rodriguez & Gao, 2021). Additionally, addressing existing inequities among emerging DE programs facing scaling challenges requires increased funding in the upcoming state budget. This funding can support less developed DE programs by facilitating the hiring of additional staff and K-12 partners providing comprehensive support at high school sites.

Moreover, there is an opportunity at the institutional level for community college staff and administrators to integrate DE into broader equity efforts as well as institutional planning, such as the 2025-2028 Student Equity Plan cycle. These efforts can serve as a starting point for engaging in equity-mindedness to urgently address the underrepresentation of Black and Latinx students and other underrepresented groups in DE (Felix, 2020, 2021; Salazar, 2023). Alike, there is potential to fuse DE with Guided Pathways to develop streamlined pathways that lead to degree completion and transfer. Last, Nevea's insights underscore the necessity for DE programs to offer seminars on college expectations and career exploration. These seminars can significantly aid students, particularly those with limited exposure to college-related and career-oriented discussions, in transitioning into DE.

It is necessary to note that these equitable practices are rooted in race, family engagement, class, and the transmission of navigational and social capital. College access scholarship reveals that these elements are evident in programs such as GEAR Up and AVID, designed to prepare and improve the enrollment of racially minoritized and underrepresented students in higher education (Gonzalez, 2017; Jayakumar et al., 2013; Loza, 2003; Swail & Perna, 2012). Smith (2008), shares that higher education privileges upper-class youth, yet the focus on race, family engagement, and the transmission of navigational and social capital in college preparation programs significantly contributes to advancing higher education pursuits for Black and Latinx students. While DE remains a mechanism grounded in privilege according to access and income (Rivera et al., 2019; Spencer & Maldonado, 2022), the equitable practices identified in this study contribute to the participation of Black and Latinx students in California DE programs. These practices address the deficiencies in outreach and advising within DE, highlighting the need for their integration to ensure equity for Black and Latinx students. Last, despite the significant lack of involvement from K-12 stakeholders in collaborative efforts, evidence suggests that their active participation contributes to enhancing DE programs and outcomes for Black and Latinx students.

Practice Recommendations

This paper offers practical recommendations based on the study's findings and specifically tailored for DE staff and K-12 collaborators.
1. Prioritize a Commitment to Equity for Racially Minoritized Students Systemically Disadvantaged in Accessing DE:
    - DE staff must prioritize a commitment to equity for Black, Latinx, and other racially minoritized students who have been long systemically disadvantaged in accessing DE opportunities.
    - Engage in equity-mindedness by actively facilitating dialogues that explore and dismantle practices disadvantaging racially minoritized students.

2. Align Equity Understanding between DE, High School Staff, and School District Partners:
    • Foster alignment between DE, high school staff, and school district partners in understanding and prioritizing equity.
    • Address potential disparities in equity understanding by providing clear guidelines and training to ensure a unified approach to supporting racially minoritized and underrepresented students.

3. Implement Equitable Praxis in DE Outreach and Advising:
    • Incorporate intersectional outreach strategies similar to Nevea's approach, considering factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and first-generation college status to identify with students.
    • Promote inclusive conversations, personal connections, and non-directive approaches during admission sessions to learn and address the unique challenges faced by Black and Latinx students in DE.

4. Address Language Barriers:
    • Implement inclusive outreach strategies to address language barriers, such as having multilingual advisors, offering family orientations in diverse languages, and conducting campus tours in various languages to accommodate the needs of racially minoritized students and families.

5. Promote Accountability and Shared Commitment:
    • Prioritize accountability among school district to feeder high school staff by convening regularly to discuss DE improvement strategies.
    • Foster a sense shared commitment to supporting DE and ensuring students graduate high school with a credential, transferable college credit, and advancing the success of racially minoritized students in DE.

6. Continued Examination of Racial Disparities:
    • Regularly scrutinize DE participation data to identify racial disparities and assess which racial groups benefit from DE and which face disadvantages.
    • Conduct ongoing evaluations of current DE practices to ensure they support students and contribute to equity rather than perpetuating existing inequities.

7. Encourage Equitable Practices Rooted in Culture, Race and Family Engagement:
    • Acknowledge the significance of equitable practices rooted in race, family engagement, and social capital in addressing deficiencies in outreach and advising within DE programs. This entails collaborating with community-based cultural organizations to recruit and inform Latinx and Black students and their families about DE opportunities. Additionally, it includes organizing orientations for both students and their families to explain the purpose of DE and guide them through the community college enrollment process before enrolling in a DE course. Moreover, conducting workshops to introduce students to college expectations and available services. These efforts can enhance social and navigational capital, as well as build student confidence in navigating and persisting in DE.

CONCLUSION

Obstacles to higher education for racially minoritized and underrepresented students persist, yet DE programs offer a potential solution to increase college enrollment and completion in California. However, California DE participation data reveals Black and Latinx students are underrepresented. The findings of this study showcase promising equitable practices, they also reveal disparities and misalignments that must be addressed. Devin reminds us that while DE can be an intervention for addressing the state's college completion concerns, we must be wary of reproducing inequities that deepen harm among racially minoritized and underrepresented students on the cusp of opportunity. He emphasizes, " we have to be very intentional... about making sure that everyone is accessing dual enrollment, everyone is leveraging it as a tool. Because if not, we're just replicating, perpetuating the disparities already at play." Moving forward, DE programs must draw inspiration from the effective strategies highlighted in this study, ensuring that collaborative efforts involve active engagement from all stakeholders. By embracing equitable praxis rooted in cultural responsiveness, family engagement, and dismantling systemic barriers, DE programs can serve as a catalyst for enhancing college readiness outcomes for Black and Latinx students. To fully harness the potential of DE, it is necessary to authentically integrate equity into the core of DE practices (Felix, 2020, 2021).

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