

Dual enrollment at the University of Alaska, 2018-2024

Dayna Jean DeFeo, Carolyn Tix, & Trang C. Tran

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Project scope

In 2019, ISER released a report about dual enrollment (DE) in Alaska, which identified areas of promise and opportunity around access and outcomes (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). In 2024, we were asked to update that report, focusing specifically on the Board of Regents' interest in the current state of DE and its capacity to provide access to students across the state, to support college matriculation and enrollment, and to promote student outcomes including retention and degree completion. This report was written in response to that directive.

Knowing that DE has a wide range of shareholders, in the summer of 2024, we met with Provosts and academic leadership across all three campuses of the University of Alaska (UA) system, and each campus' Offices of Institutional Research, and Dual Credit Coordinators. These meetings were intended to communicate the project aims, hear needs or priorities that could be incorporated into the project scope, and to gain insight to the nuances of dual enrollment activities and data management that would affect the data analysis and interpretation of those results.

This final report focuses on how these activities serve Alaska high school students, and details high school participation in the program, course performance, matriculation, and college outcomes.

What is dual enrollment?

Dual enrollment (DE) offers students the opportunity to earn college credit while they are still in high school. The first DE program was integrated at the University of Connecticut in 1955 (Rutkauskas & Grant, 2023); since then DE has been conceptualized as a means to support high school-to-college transitions and provide more equitable access to college. These opportunities expanded across the nation and grown to include a variety of program models (National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships [NACEP], n.d.a; Thomas et al., 2013).

Dual enrollment is available and regulated by policy across the nation. The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) reported in AY2017-18 one-third of high school students participated in DE during their high school years, and that 82% of students in the nation attended a high school that offered DE courses (NCES, 2020). In 2022, the Education Commission of the State (ECS) reported 48 states and the District of Columbia have state-level dual enrollment policies addressing quality, implementation, and accountability requirements for DE programs (ECS, 2022). These include guidelines for access, eligibility and admissions, recruitment and outreach, regulations of course type and content, funding, tuition and fees, course transferability, as well as qualifications and professional development of faculty and instructors (see An & Taylor, 2019; Horn et al., 2016; Mann, 2023; Zinth & Barnett, 2018).

Because there is so much variability in how DE programs are administered, it can be difficult to study their outcomes. Research on DE programs finds that a variety of factors influence the quality and success of DE programs, including partnerships (Cassidy et al., 2010; Farrell & Seifert, 2007; Fink, 2024), leadership (Martinez et al., 2018), policy (Pretlow & Wathington, 2013; Spencer & Monday, 2024), funding (Duncombe & Mann, 2022; Zinth, 2019), program structure and implementation (Kim, 2012; Piontek et al., 2016; Wozniak & Bierlein Palmer, 2013), and shareholders' and participants' perceptions of the programs (Hanson et al., 2015; Witkowsky & Clayton, 2019). Notably, access to programs and the specific aims of these activities vary across the nation, states, and even within districts (Karp et al., 2004; Taylor & Lichtenberger, 2013; Rivera et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2021), and across student socioeconomic backgrounds (Spencer & Maldonado, 2021). DE students receive variable advising or ancillary academic support for their DE experience (Hebert, 2001); they take courses in different locations, such as in their high schools or on college campuses (Arnold et al., 2017; D'Amico et al., 2013; Ryu et al., 2024), and across a variety of modalities of online or face-to-face learning (Edwards et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2021). As a result, DE experiences are far from homogenous, and researchers caution careful interpretation and extrapolation of findings around DE participation (see Edwards et al., 2011).

The evidence for DE outcomes is mixed. Some meta analyses and large-scale quantitative studies have provided empirical evidence that DE participation has positive impacts on academic achievement in high school (Karp et al., 2007; Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2017), high school graduation (Lee et al., 2022; NACEP, n.d.b), college entry and placement (Giani et al., 2014; Karp et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2022; NACEP, n.d.b), postsecondary GPA and credit accumulation (Allen & Dadgar, 2021; IES, 2017; Jones, 2014), first-to-second year matriculation (Giani et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2022), course and degree completion rates (Giani et al., 2014; IES, 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Phelps & Chan, 2016; Shapiro et al., 2013; Velasco et al., 2024), time-to-degree completion (Allen & Dadgar, 2021; Marks & Lords, 2011; NACEP, n.d.b; Xu et al., 2019), and career outcomes (Phelps & Chan, 2016). These relationships were statistically significant even when researchers controlled for students' demographic characteristics. At the same time, there are studies reporting conditional impacts (Spencer & Monday, 2024), insignificant differences, or inconclusive results regarding DE and student learning outcomes (Hemelt et al., 2020; Speroni, 2011).

Proponents of DE highlight a host of advantages, including lowering tuition for a postsecondary degree, reducing college cost and debt, offering academic and social support that aids college aspiration, high school-to-college transition, college readiness, matriculation, scholarships, and reducing time-to-degree completion (An & Taylor, 2015; Burns et al., 2019; Hu, 2025; IES, 2017; Kim & Bragg, 2008; Wang et al., 2015). Advocates have also emphasized that DE programs provide access and alternative learning pathways for traditionally underserved groups (An, 2013; Bragg et al., 2006; Hughes et al., 2012; Hutchins et al., 2019). Other scholars have noted that DE boosts rigor and engagement for high performing students.

Critics of DE voice concerns about its potential role in reproducing inequities in postsecondary education. Researchers have noted examples where DE participation may limit students' involvement in other valuable learning opportunities (Witkowsky et al., 2020), and that struggling in DE courses could harm students' chances of securing financial aid or being competitive for postsecondary opportunities. Others have voiced concerns regarding transferability of earned credits and course quality (Witkowsky et

al., 2020), challenging oversimplified claims that such programs necessarily reduce college costs and time to graduation. While recognizing the ubiquitous availability of DE across the nation, scholars have identified gaps in access and quality (see Giani et al., 2025; Hooper & Harrington, 2022; Pretlow et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2022), especially on the dimensions of parents' education levels, family income (Museus et al., 2007; Taylor, 2015), student race and ethnicity (Fink, 2021a; Museus et al., 2007; Taylor, 2015; Velasco et al., 2024), geographic location (Harmon & Johnson, 2024; NCES, 2019), and disability status (Fink, 2021b). To better interpret the mechanisms and impacts of DE on diverse educational outcomes across learner groups, researchers have increasingly employed robust methodological approaches—including those that support causal inference and those that qualitatively contextualize DE offerings, participations, as well as opportunities and challenges that students face.

Operational definitions

Community type

- Urban - Cities and communities within one hour's ferry or driving time to a city with amenities, such as hospitals and shopping centers
- Rural hub - On-road communities more than one hour's driving time to a city with amenities, and communities accessible only by plane but that serve as transportation centers for the region
- Remote rural - Off-road communities with small populations accessible by plane from rural hubs

Course type

- Career and Technical Education (CTE) - Courses typically applied to a specific career field, such as culinary arts, education, health, information technology, manufacturing, and welding
- Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) - General education courses typically applied to a 4-year liberal arts degree, such as communications, English, history, world languages, and psychology
- Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) - Includes natural sciences, technology and computer science, engineering, and mathematics courses such as introduction to statistics, precalculus, and advanced algebra
- Other - Courses that did not fit into the three main categories, such as college studies, developmental education, physical education, and region-specific courses

School type

- Alaska public neighborhood schools - Government-funded schools run by local school boards that serve all residents within district boundaries
- Homeschools - Education provided independent of the public school system; for our analysis this may include home instruction or correspondence programs, but it excludes private schools. As some homeschool students can also enroll in public neighborhood schools for specific classes or recreational activities, for the purpose of our analysis, a student's school affiliation was determined by the high school designated in the UA institutional database

School characteristics

- Title I school - A public neighborhood school that enrolls a high proportion of students from low-income families
- Economically stable school - A school that does not meet the school-wide threshold of low-income students to receive additional federal support

Methods & scope of analysis

This analysis used 7 years of enrollment reports (summer 2017 through spring 2024) from University of Alaska (UA) institutional databases. We include all students who had college credit transcribed before their high school graduation date; for those whose records were missing a high school graduation date, we inferred graduation data to include students who attempted college classes when they were 17 or younger and not matriculated in a UA institution. Using this operational definition to identify DE students, we analyzed what courses they took, who participated, and how they performed on the dimensions of age, gender, race, community type, and high school Title I status.

Our analysis includes 11,519 students who attended Alaska public neighborhood high schools and 1,790 students who attended an Alaskan homeschool program. Our data excludes students who attended high school out-of-state; students in Alaska boarding schools, correctional facilities, or private schools; Alaska GED students; and those with missing high school data. Because homeschool students constitute a significant proportion of Alaska's dual enrolled high school youth (13%), they are addressed separately on page 14. A more detailed accounting of the data cleaning and parameters for the analysis are available upon request.

How is dual enrollment administered in the UA system?

The literature notes that there are a variety of models for dual enrollment (see Allen et al., 2023; Fink 2023, 2024; Schaller et al., 2025), and UA is no exception. To better understand the context for DE within the UA system, we began our analysis with a catalog review and web searches around UA's publicized dual enrollment programs and opportunities. Table 1 provides a broad overview of programs currently advertised for high school students, and demonstrates that eligibility requirements, program scope or emphasis, available support services, costs, and course offerings differ significantly across programs. For programs that offer students an on-campus college learning experience, high school partnerships also have varying transportation support options. Additionally, students in areas with a variety of supported programs may be able to participate in more than one program at a time to maximize their credits or tuition support and emphasis. This variation provides students with many valuable opportunities, but can simultaneously present challenges for analyses that seek to study these activities.

Beyond UA DE programs, UA catalogs note that high school students can receive college credit for prior learning experiences, through the International Baccalaureate program, or through Advanced Placement testing.

Table 1: Overview of DE programs at UA, 2024-2025

Program name	Program description	Grades	Eligibility criteria	Geography*	Cost for students	Program focus	Institution
AHEAD	Early admission with advising support for seniors taking in-person college classes	12	3.0 GPA	Fairbanks area	Full cost of in-state tuition	General studies	UAF
AK Advantage	Virtual middle college	9-12	.	Statewide	40% of in-state tuition	Lower division courses applicable to UAF or UAS degrees or transferrable, including CTE	UAF & UAS
AK Middle College School	District provides support while students take full-time online, in-person, or evening courses	11-12	GPA, good attendance, writing & math placement	Anchorage SD	\$0	Selected certificate & degree programs	UAA
AK Native Science & Engineering Program (ANSEP) Acceleration Academy	Full-time early college program for high school students	9-12	.	Statewide	\$0	Science & engineering	UAA
AK Native Science & Engineering Program (ANSEP) Summer Acceleration Academy	Summer early college program on the UAA campus	8-11	Math placement	Statewide	\$0	Science & engineering	UAA
Educators Rising	Coursework and hands-on learning for students who want to be teachers	9-12	.	Participating SDs statewide	.	Education	Statewide
Kenai Peninsula College Concurrent Enrollment	Students take classes at their high school and receive college credit at a discounted rate	9-12	.	Kenai Peninsula Borough SD	\$25/credit	Selected courses identified by KPBSD & KPC	KPC
Kenai Peninsula College Jumpstart	Discounted tuition program for high school students	11-12	.	Kenai Peninsula Borough residents	1/3 of college tuition for up to 6 credits/semester	Any discipline	KPC
Kenai Peninsula Middle College School	Students earn high school and college credits for courses offered through KPC	11-12	2.5 GPA, math & writing placement	Kenai Peninsula Borough SD	\$0 for up to 6 credits	General ed. & courses for specific certificate & degree programs	KPC
Matanuska-Susitna Middle College School	Students take courses full-time on a UA campus with support & resources from their school district	11-12	Writing & math placement, student maturity, 2.0 GPA	Mat-Su Borough SD	\$0 for 2-16 credits	College readiness skills & college-level academics	UAA
North Star College	Middle college for students wanting an on- campus experience	11-12	2.5 GPA, on track for high school graduation, lottery application	Fairbanks North Star Borough SD	\$0 for 7-15 credits/semester	Any discipline, general ed. courses	UAF
Rural AK Honors Institute (RAHI)	On-campus college experience for rural & AK Native students with dorm living, courses, and activities	11-12	3.0 GPA, reading placement, identify as AK Native or rural	Statewide; emphasis on rural	\$0	Any discipline; emphasis in science & teaching careers	UAF
Tech Prep	Students earn credits towards a college certificate or degree by completing approved high school classes	9-12	.	Participating SDs statewide	.	CTE	UAF

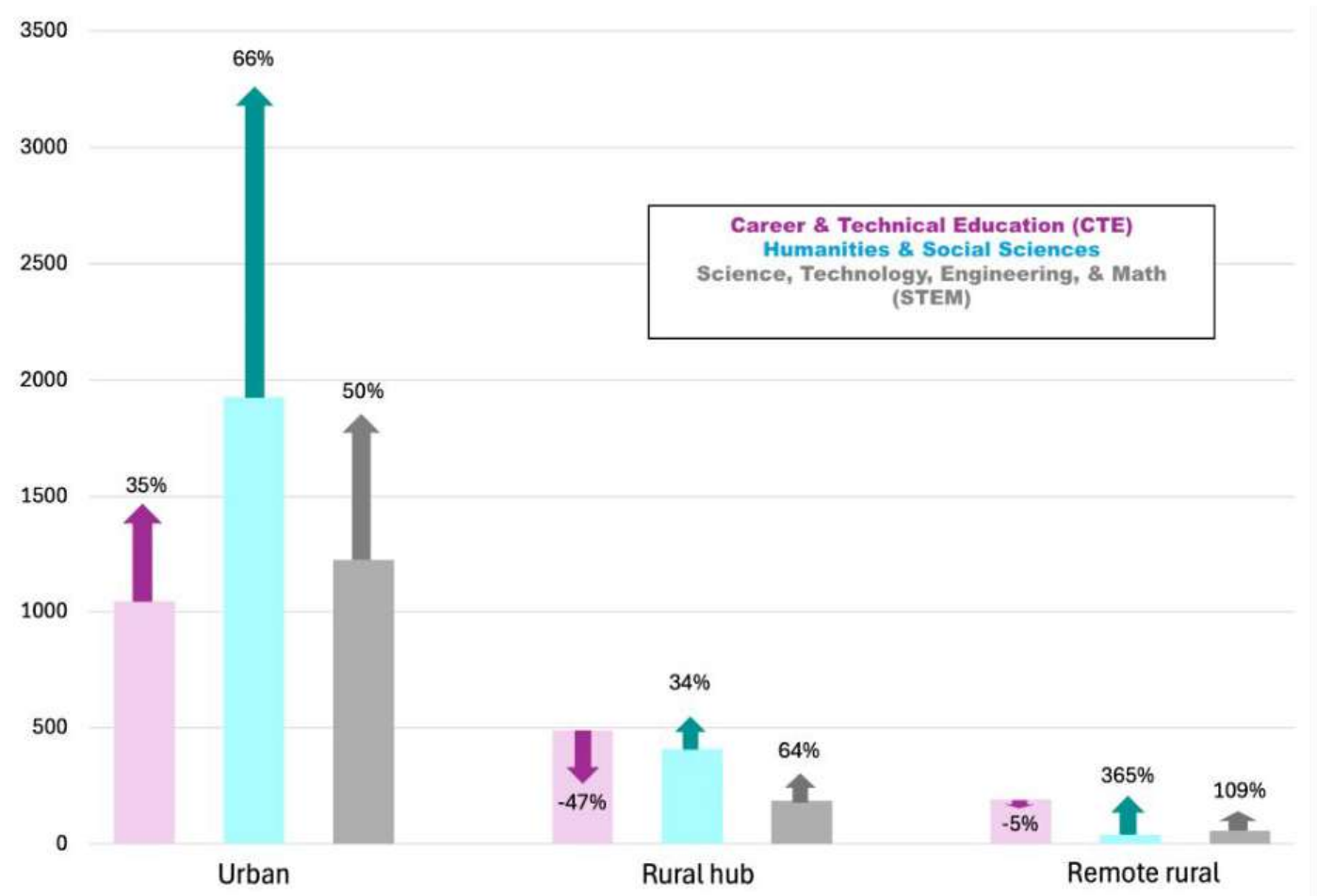
A review of catalog and websites for the 2024-2025 academic year yielded a variety of DE options for high school students via the UA system. Table intended for analysis purposes; it reflects catalog and website content at the time of the analysis, and information is subject to change. Some program-specific intricacies have been truncated or not included in this chart for brevity. Readers interested in DE programs should contact campuses directly. "." Indicates information was not available in public documents.

What DE courses are offered, and where?

We analyzed UA student data, tracking student enrollments across courses over time. With this approach, we are able to see which students participated in different DE courses, but that does not necessarily reflect what courses or opportunities may have been available to students. However, examining the course types by locale allows us to explore which DE courses have been taken up by high school students across the state.

Between 2018 and 2024, the number of different classes taken by high school students across Alaska increased by 50%, from 515 unique courses in 2018 to 772 unique courses in 2024. Students in urban schools enrolled for a wider variety of courses than students in rural hub or remote rural schools; urban students took more than twice as many different courses than rural hub students, and 2.5 times as many different courses as remote rural students.

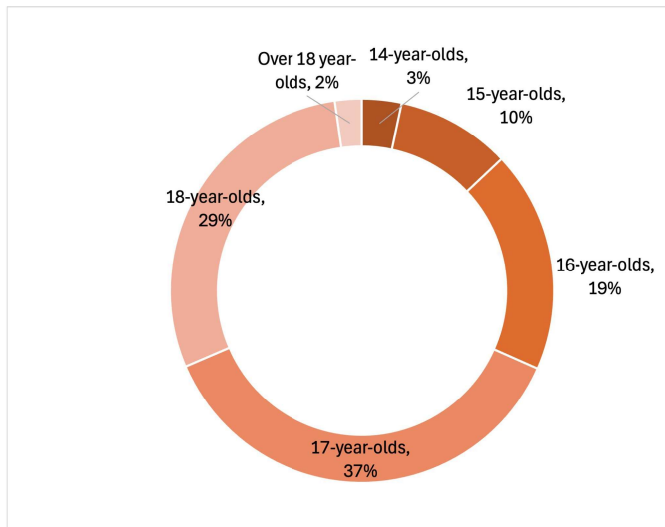
Figure 1. Change in DE enrollments by type and location, 2018-2024



Who participates?

Between 2018 and 2024, two-thirds (66%) of DE students were 17 or 18 years old when they took their DE class. Sixteen and 15-year-olds account for another 19% and 10% of enrollments, respectively (see Figure 2). Though 14-year-olds make up only a small percentage (3%) of DE student enrollments between 2018 and 2024, their participation increased by 36% in that 6-year period; their increase in enrollments was larger than any other age group.

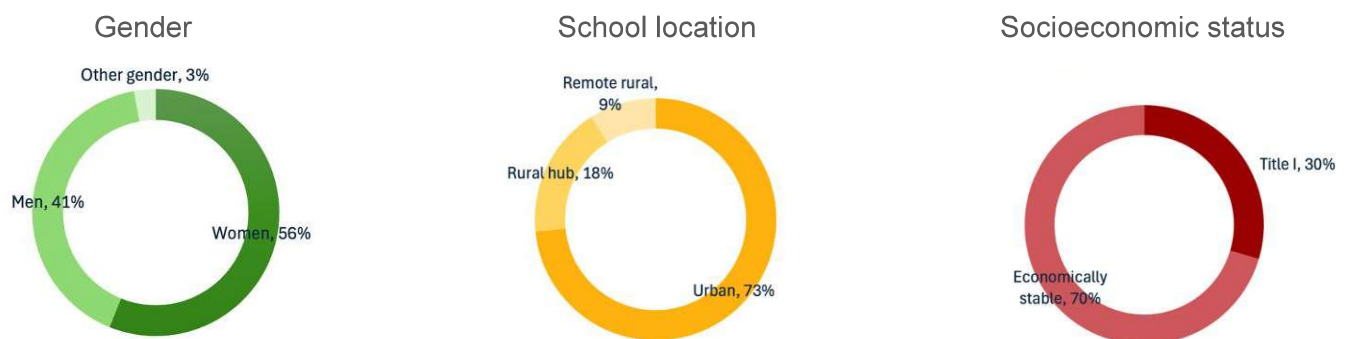
Figure 2. Headcount by age, all enrollments 2018-2024



The shades of orange used in this figure get lighter with age; the darkest orange indicates the percentage of DE participants who were 14 years old when they took a class, and the lightest shade shows the percentage of students who were over 18. Seventeen and 18-year-old students, who are likely to be high school upperclassmen (juniors and seniors) comprise the majority of DE enrollments statewide.

Figure 3 depicts total headcounts from 2018-2024 by gender, school location, and Title I status. Women participate in DE at a higher rate than men and other genders. Statewide, 76% of Alaska high school students attend urban schools, 15% attend in rural hubs, and 9% attend in remote rural schools, and the DE student participation by school locale is similar at 73%, 18%, and 9%, respectively. Statewide, 26% of Alaska high school students attend Title 1 high schools, and 30% of DE students are enrolled in Title I schools. These figures indicate that students in Alaska's rural hub, remote rural, and Title 1 schools are proportionally represented in dual enrollment.

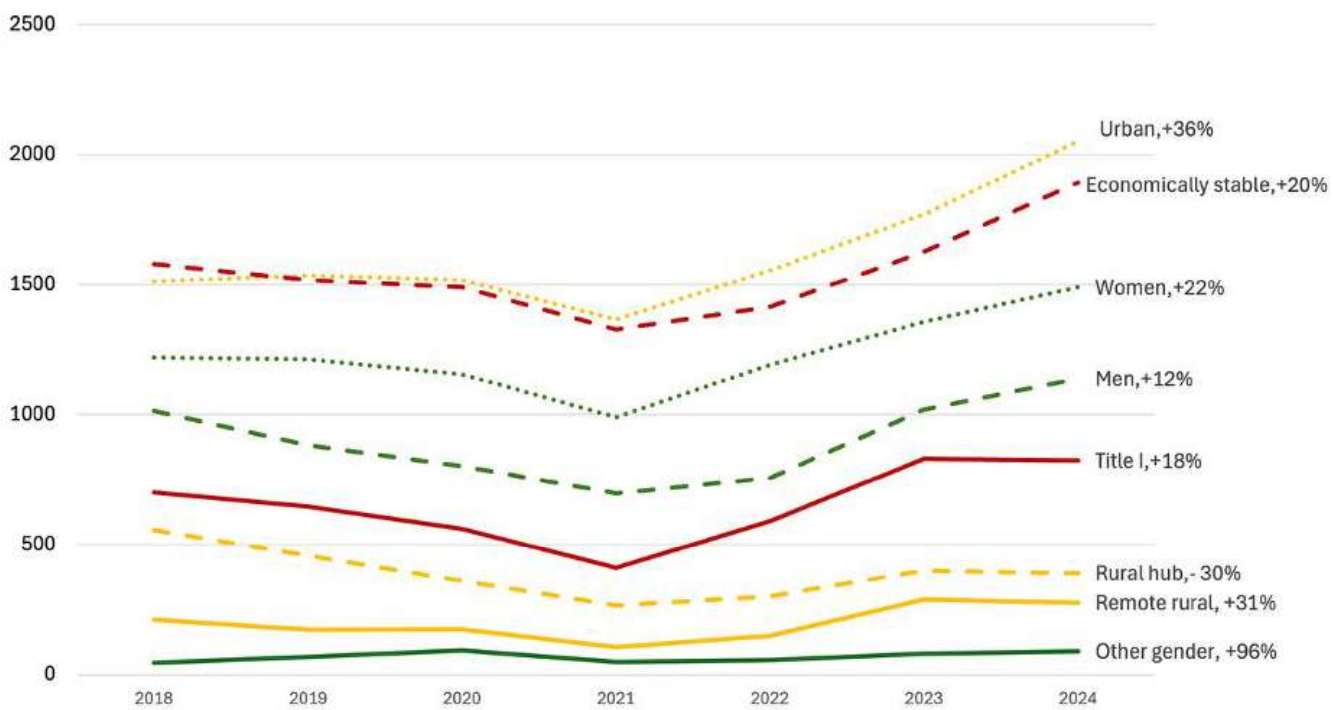
Figure 3. Headcounts by demographic features, all enrollments 2018-2024



Statewide, DE students are more likely to be women, to attend urban high schools, and to attend economically stable high schools. Participation by school location and socioeconomic status is similar to the statewide distribution of Alaska high school students.

Figure 4 shows how participation in DE changed between 2018 and 2024, by demographic group. There was a decline in participation amongst all groups in 2021, possibly because of the COVID pandemic. Since 2021, all groups have grown enrollments to exceed pre-pandemic numbers, with the exception of rural hub schools, which experienced a 30% decline in total enrollments since 2018. UA administrators suggest that this decline may reflect an inability to deliver CTE courses online during the social distancing requirements of the COVID pandemic.

Figure 4. Unduplicated headcount of DE participants by year, 2018-2024

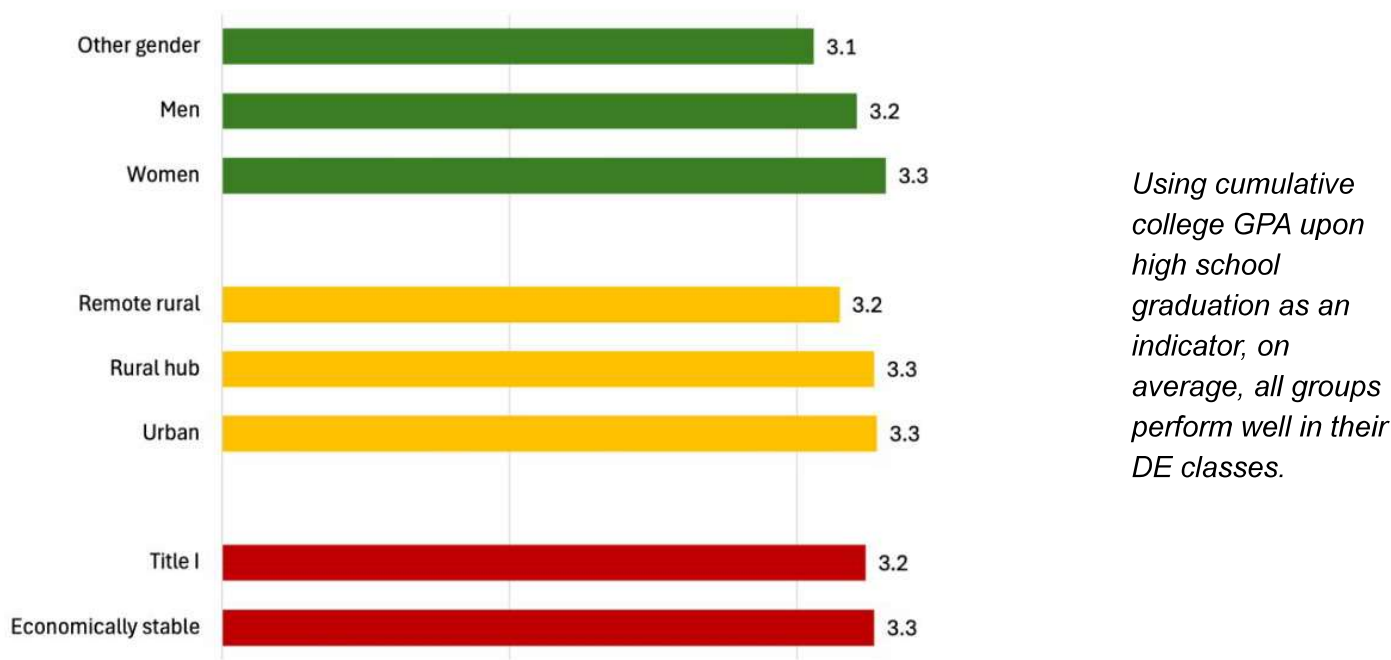


Participation in DE has grown statewide since 2018, and has increased for all subgroups except rural schools, which have not returned to pre-pandemic enrollment numbers.

How do students perform in their DE classes?

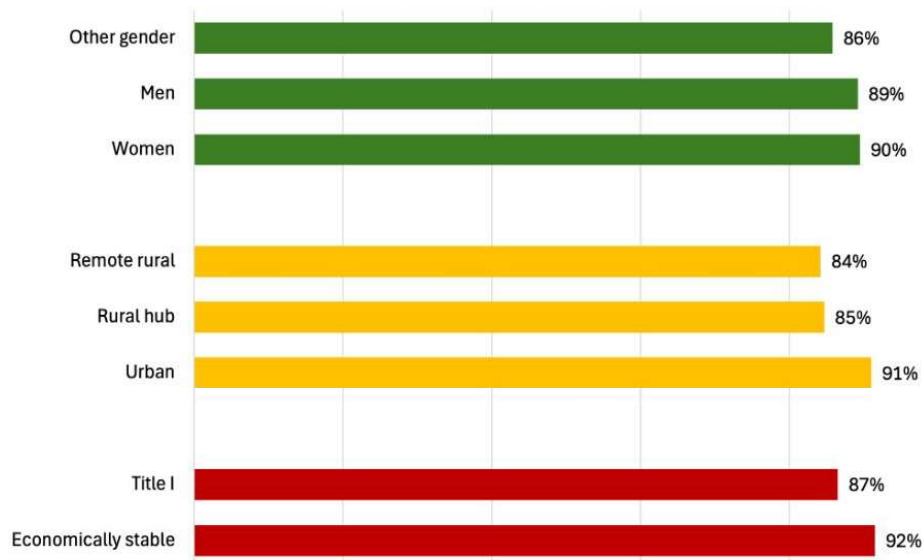
On average, all student groups perform well in their DE classes. Upon their high school graduation, the average cumulative GPA of a DE student is 3.3, and there was little variation in the average by gender, community type, or the high school Title I status (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Average cumulative college GPA upon high school graduation, 2018-2024



The statewide completion rate for DE students (i.e., the percentage of credits earned with a passing grade of with grades A, B, C, D, or P) was 89% between 2018 and 2024. Students attending urban high schools and students attending economically stable high schools had completion rates of 91% and 92% respectively, whereas students attending rural hub, remote rural, and Title I high schools had lower completion rates than their urban and economically stable counterparts (see Figure 6).

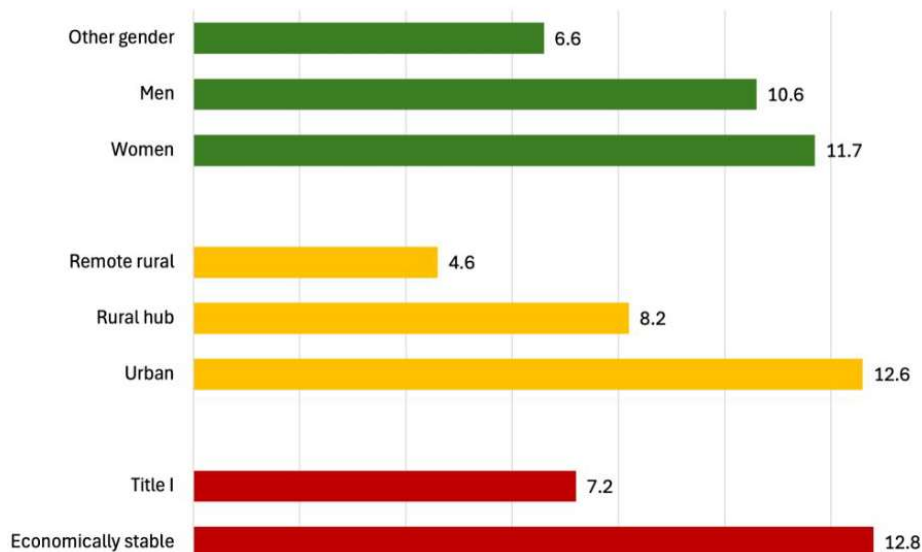
Figure 6. Average completion rate upon high school graduation, 2018-2024



Students from minoritized groups had lower completion rates, on average, than their counterparts.

The largest discrepancy in high school DE performance is in the area of credit accrual. At the time of their high school graduation, on average, urban students earn almost three times as many credits as remote rural students, and one-and-a-half times as many credits as students who attend high schools in rural hubs. Students who attend economically stable high schools earn nearly twice as many credits as students who attend Title I high schools. On average, women earn one credit more than men (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Average college credits earned upon high school graduation, 2018-2014

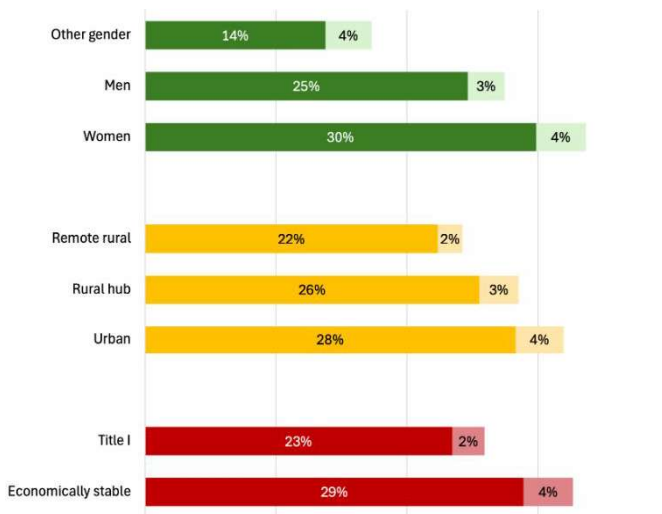


Women, students who attend urban high schools, and students who attend economically stable high schools earn more DE college credits than their counterparts.

How many DE students attend a UA college after they graduate high school?

Overall, about a quarter of DE students matriculate at a UA institution within a year of their high school graduation, and another 3% attend within two years. Attendance rates are lower for men and students who identify as other genders, students who attended high school in a remote rural and rural hub community, and students who attended a Title I high school (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Percent of DE students who attend UA within 1 or 2 years from high school graduation, 2018-2022

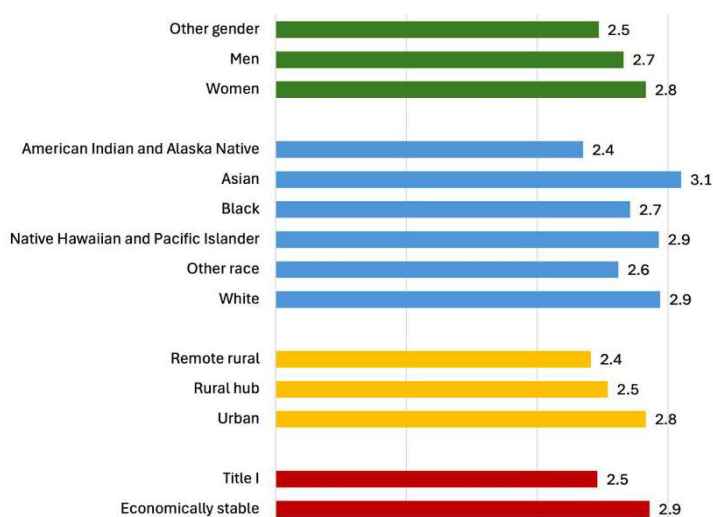


The darker bars in this figure depict the percentage of DE students who matriculate at a UA institution within a year of their high school graduation, the lighter bars are the percentage of students that matriculated two years after high school graduation. Minoritized student groups have lower rates of matriculation than their counterparts.

How do DE students perform when they matriculate at UA?

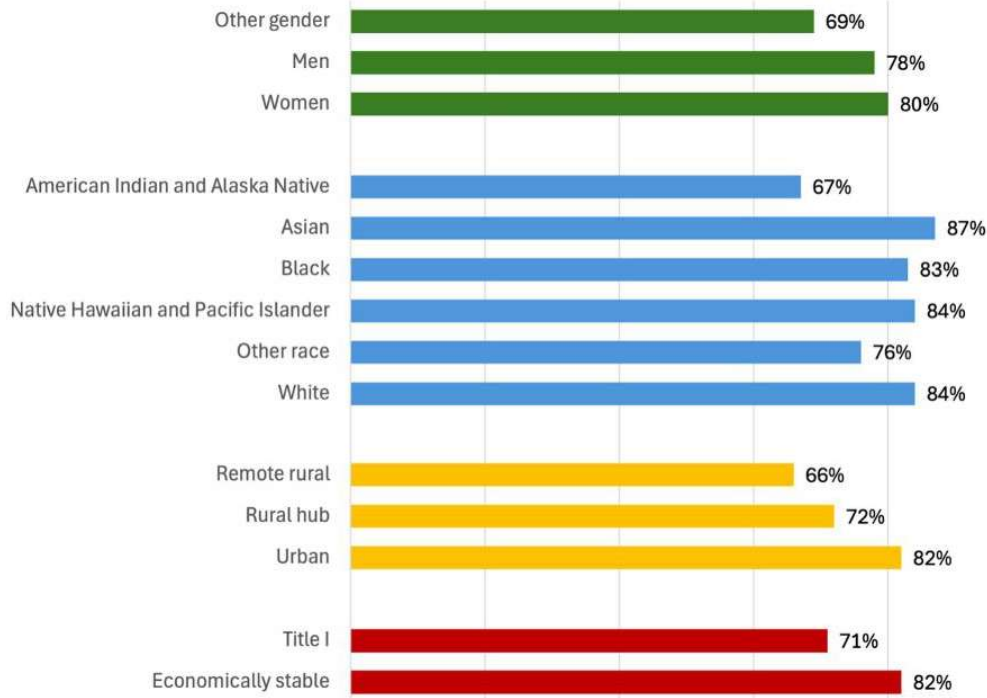
Upon enrollment at UA, differences between demographic groups in average GPA, completion rates, and credit accrual that existed during high school become more pronounced (see Figures 9, 10 and 11, respectively).

Figure 9. Average first semester college GPA of DE graduates, 2018-2024



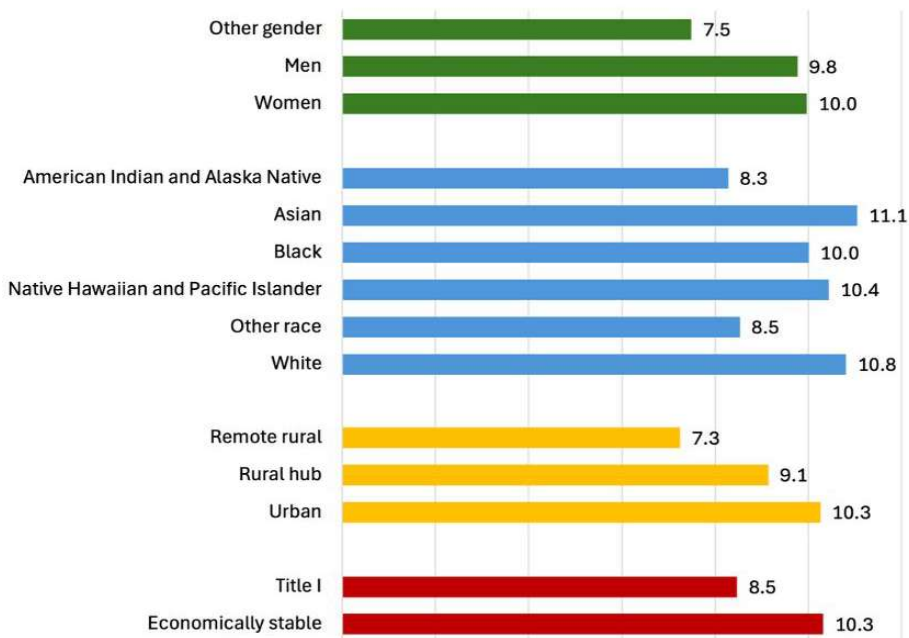
In their first semester at a UA institution, average GPAs differ among demographic groups.

Figure 10. **Average first semester completion rate of DE graduates, 2018-2024**



In their first semester at a UA institution, average completion rates differ among demographic groups.

Figure 11. **Average first semester credits earned by DE graduates, 2018-2024**

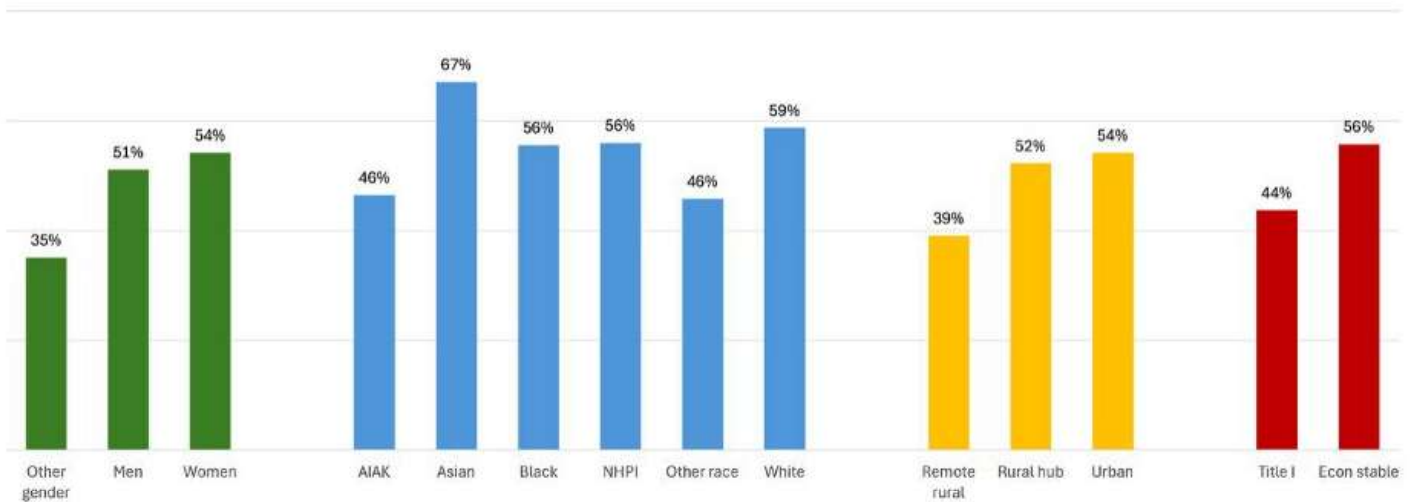


In their first semester at a UA institution, students from minoritized groups earn fewer credits, on average, than their counterparts.

How many matriculated DE students continue into a second year at UA?

Of the 2,691 students who graduated between 2018 and 2022 and attended a UA campus within two years of their graduation, 1,422 continued (53%) for a year at UA.^[1] Performance gaps for minoritized student groups show a similar pattern to other performance metrics (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. **Fall-to-fall continuation rate for DE graduates upon college matriculation, 2018-2022**



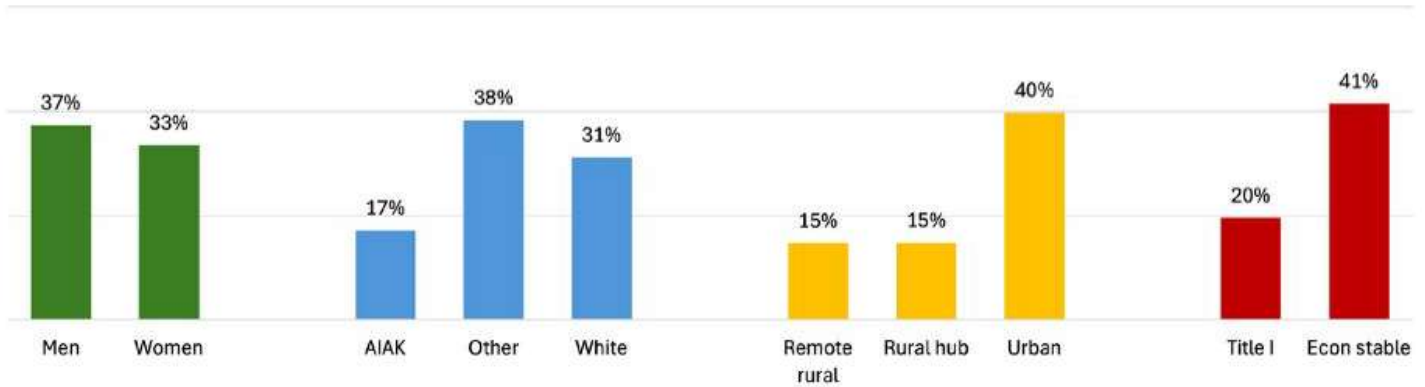
The rate at which students continue into a second year at UA differs by student demographic characteristics.

How many DE students earn UA degrees within 6 years of graduating high school?

Thirty-five percent of the graduating class of 2018 who participated in DE and matriculated into the UA system earned a credential from UA within 6 years. White students, students who attended high school in urban communities, and students who attended economically stable high schools earned degrees at higher rates than their counterparts (see Figure 13). Though women performed higher than men in all other metrics reported in this paper, overall men attained credentials at a higher rate than women. However, men were more likely to earn certificates than women; a higher proportion of women earned Associate's and Bachelor's degrees than men.

^[1] Importantly, we did not calculate retention, which is operationalized by the National Center for Education Statistics' Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) and officially reported by the Offices of Institutional Research on each UA campus. We report the number of students who attended in a fall semester and returned for the following fall.

Figure 13. Percent of matriculated 2018 graduates who earned UA credentials within 6 years



Overall, 35% of the graduating class of 2018 that matriculated to UA earned a credential within 6 years; that percentage differed across demographic groups. The “Other” race category includes a combined total of all students who identified as Asian, Black, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, or Other races. Importantly, their identities and academic performance are not homogenous, but we are unable to disaggregate data for any group containing fewer than 10 students.

How do homeschool students fare?

Alaska homeschool students made up about 15% of DE participants between 2018 and 2024. During their DE participation, homeschool students have an average completion rate of 86%, compared to 89% to students who attend public neighborhood high schools. The average homeschool student’s college GPA at graduation is the same for public neighborhood students (both are 3.2), but upon graduation, homeschool students earn an average of 12.34 DE credits, which is higher than the average for public neighborhood school students, but comparable to the credits accrued by students who attend economically stable and urban high schools.

Only 31% of Alaska homeschool DE participants matriculate to UA within two years of their high school graduation, which is the same rate as public neighborhood students. As matriculated college students at UA, homeschool students performed similarly to public neighborhood high school students who attended urban or economically stable high schools. They earn an average of 10.3 credits in their first semester (about half a credit higher than the average public neighborhood high school student). Their first semester completion rate, 88%, was higher than any other demographic group (the public neighborhood school average was 79%), and their average first semester GPA was 3.2 (higher than the statewide public neighborhood school average of 2.8). 53% of homeschool students continued into a second year at UA, a figure that resembles the statewide rate.

Limitations of this analysis

This project was a preliminary descriptive analysis, and though it was done with integrity, it has limitations related to the dataset we used:

Missing data – Missing data and systematic omissions in student demographic and secondary academic data affected our analysis. For example, we were unable to report participation by race for students, and we had to impute some age and high school graduation data.

Limited data – The literature suggests that students who participate in DE classes may have different experiences depending on the course location (i.e., in a high school class, on a college campus, or online), instructor (i.e., a high school teacher who has been qualified as an adjunct, a graduate student assistant, or a full-time university faculty member), and program type (i.e., a middle college setting with academic support from their local school district, an intensive summer institute for high school students, or a college class that mixes dual and matriculated students). In our data, we were unable to reliably identify which program (or programs) students participated in, which limits our ability to assess specific programmatic features that support student outcomes. There is an opportunity to establish a common nomenclature and operational definitions across the UA system.

Scope includes only the UA system – Our analysis does not reflect all DE done in Alaska, nor all postsecondary outcomes. It excludes non-UA colleges (such as Iligsavik College and Alaska Pacific University) that may have offered DE credit. It also only explores college attendance outcomes at UA and excludes non-UA colleges and postsecondary programs that may have received DE participants as students following their high school graduation.

Final thoughts

Our descriptive analysis offers updated data around the scope and magnitude of UA's DE activities, student participation, and student outcomes. These data are good conversation starters, but do not illuminate all of the relevant variables or outcomes necessary for sound and informed policymaking. Ultimately, we encourage policy that builds on existing positive trends, and interrupts noted inequities.

Options may complicate data analysis, but these can be good for students. Though the variety of DE programs at UA presented a challenge for us as researchers, the literature consistently affirms that education is not a “one size fits all” approach, and that students benefit from a variety of approaches. The key is to ensure that across options, access is equitable, and this is especially important for programs serving traditionally marginalized or rural student populations (see Mehl et al., 2020; Museus et al., 2007; Rivera et al., 2019).

Additional data and research would aid us in better understanding the nuances of these programs. Outside of the noted limitations of the quantitative institutional dataset we used, especially around improving infrastructure and resources for a more comprehensive data system (see Southern Regional Education Board, 2020), there is opportunity to explore program administration including recruitment efforts, district partnerships, and targeted transition support (see also Cuellar et al., 2024; Fink et al., 2023; Hanson et al., 2015; Witknowsky & Clayton, 2020). Student perspectives around the benefits and barriers in their DE experience are also notably absent from secondary quantitative datasets, and would be a valuable complement for policymaking and programming (see also Tullock, 2024).

There is opportunity to develop policy and practices that increase access and support for rural students, students at Title 1 schools, and Alaska Native students. These descriptive data identify gaps in key outcomes, and suggest an area of policy opportunity to address noted differences in outcomes across student groups. As DE policy is developed at multiple levels (i.e., at the K12 school district level, within the UA system, and at the state level), it is important to note that not all students in the state have the same opportunities or requirements for their DE experience. Policies developed at any level must consider the multiple levels and layers of oversight that govern the DE enterprise.

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Authors

Dayna Jean DeFeo is a Research Associate Professor of Education Policy and Director of the Center for Alaska Education Policy Research at ISER. **Carolyn Tix** is a Research Professional at ISER. **Trang C. Tran** is a Research Assistant Professor of Education Policy at ISER.

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