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Expanding Opportunity:

A Regional Landscape of Dual Enrollment
in the Northern San Joaquin Valley

By Career Ladders Project

Funded by the WE Will! K-16 Workforce and Education Collaborative

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Career Ladders Project
678 13th Street
Oakland, CA 94612
www.careerladdersproject.org

Introduction

The Northern San Joaquin Valley is a growing, diverse region with a strong agricultural base and expanding sectors in healthcare, manufacturing, and logistics. According to [TeamCalifornia](#), the median age of the region in 2025 was 36 and the diversity index is almost 88—meaning there is an 88% chance that any 2 people selected out of 100 residents will be a different ethnicity from each other. Its young and varied population highlights the importance of initiatives like the WE Will! K-16 Collaborative, which strengthens transitions from high school to college and connects students to high-growth career pathways—aligning with the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office [Vision 2030](#) goals to increase postsecondary attainment and close access gaps.



The WE Will! K-16 Workforce and Education Collaborative, a Phase 2 initiative funded by the Regional K-16 Education Collaborative Grant Program, brings together colleges, high school districts, and industry partners to develop occupational pathways that integrate accelerated degrees, credentials, and work-based learning. Serving Merced, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin Counties, the partnership addresses systemic barriers and expands opportunities for underrepresented students. By aligning education with workforce needs, WE Will! promotes equitable outcomes, robust K-16 pathways, and student success through four key pillars:

1

Transition

Increase the number of under-resourced high school students that transition to and through a community college to a four-year institution.

2

Affordability

Increase dual enrollment offerings, participation, and course completion along with FAFSA/CADAA completion for under-resourced students in the region.

3

Work Based Learning

Increase the number of students participating in quality WBL experiences in critical industry sectors.

4

Readiness

Improve college and career readiness by: increasing A-G completion rates, increasing A-G approved course offerings, and increasing CTE pathway completion rates.

The purpose of WE Will! commissioning this landscape was to provide a high level overview of the dual enrollment partnerships within the tri-county region and to highlight past and current work that aligns with the four key pillars. The information gathered from districts across the region will serve as a resource for the regional collaborative as they set goals and plan for the future.

Career Ladders Project (CLP) conducted the following activities to collect the information summarized in this landscape.

- Spring 2025: CLP produced a digital survey that was distributed to districts in the tri-county region to collect data from the 2024-2025 school year.
- Fall 2025: CLP designed a [protocol](#) and conducted virtual discussions with districts in the tri-county region.
- Spring 2026: CLP analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data collected through the digital survey and the virtual discussions. Findings are included in this landscape.

Dual Enrollment Partnerships

The Northern San Joaquin Valley tri-county region is served by two state universities, a private university, three community colleges, three county offices of education, 31 high school districts, and several charter schools. Dual enrollment is firmly established across the region as a strategy for increasing college access and momentum. While participation and scale vary, districts consistently report strong student outcomes, growing institutional commitment, and expanding infrastructure.

Approximately half of the dual enrollment partnerships between districts and local community colleges operate under CCAP (College and Career Access Pathways) agreements. CCAP legislation (see Ed Code 76004) allows courses to be offered on high school campuses, during the school day, and closed to the general public, providing students with accessible and structured college-level learning experiences. While CCAP legislation extends to continuation high schools and adult education sites, fewer than 25% of these alternative sites currently offer dual enrollment, highlighting a potential gap in access for historically under resourced populations. Additionally, two of the three counties provide dual enrollment opportunities for youth enrolled in juvenile court schools, further expanding access for students with unique educational circumstances.

Beyond community college partnerships, several high schools in the region also collaborate with UC Merced and CSU Stanislaus to offer dual enrollment. These partnerships demonstrate the region's commitment to creating pathways that connect high school coursework to postsecondary opportunities, while also signaling areas where access could be broadened, particularly for continuation, adult, and alternative education students.

Overall, there is a strong foundation of dual enrollment opportunities in the region, with room to expand offerings, align pathways with regional workforce needs, and ensure that all students have access, support, and success in their early college experiences in alignment with the goals of Vision 2030.

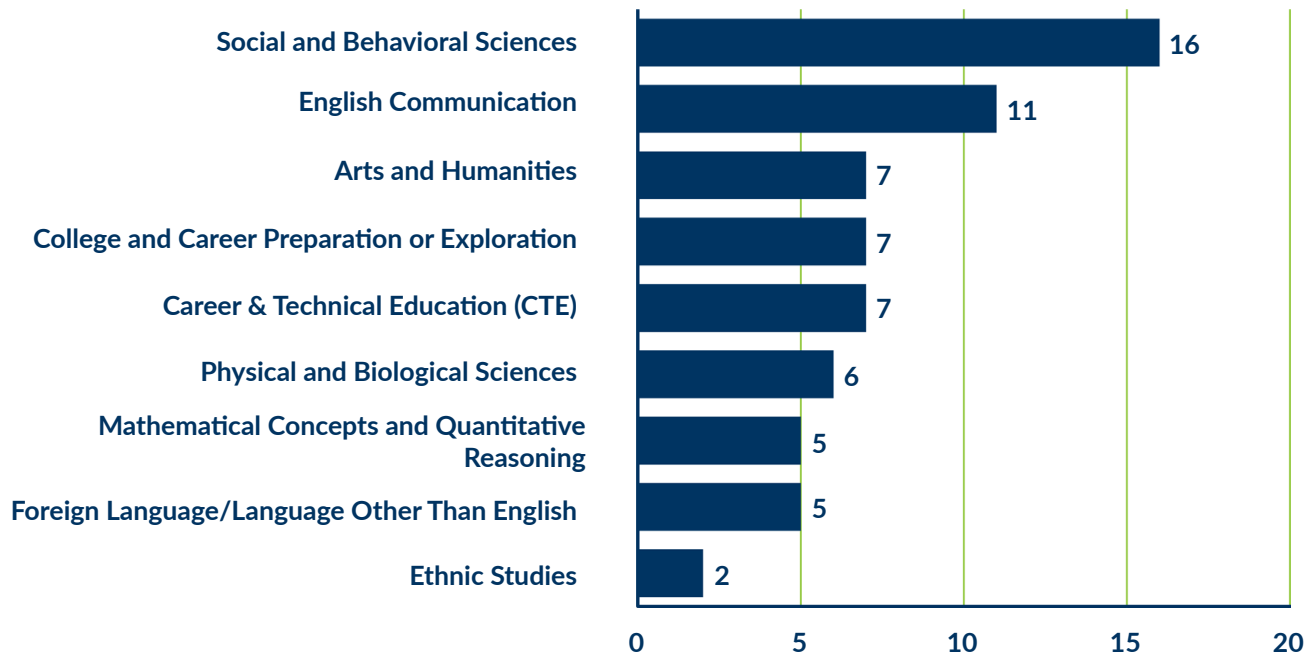
Access

Dual enrollment participation continues to grow across the Northern San Joaquin Valley region. During the 2023–2024 school year, over 10,000 students participated in dual enrollment—a 13% increase from the prior year. The majority of students (approximately 85%) access college courses from their high school campus or online, while the rest of the students attend courses on a college campus.

Across the region, more than 220 dual enrollment course sections are offered annually, primarily during the school day, with some sections available after school or online. Most courses are taught by college faculty; however, eight districts reported offering dual enrollment courses taught by approved high school instructors. An additional six districts described a collaborative instructional model in which a college faculty member partners with a high school instructor to support students through the course.

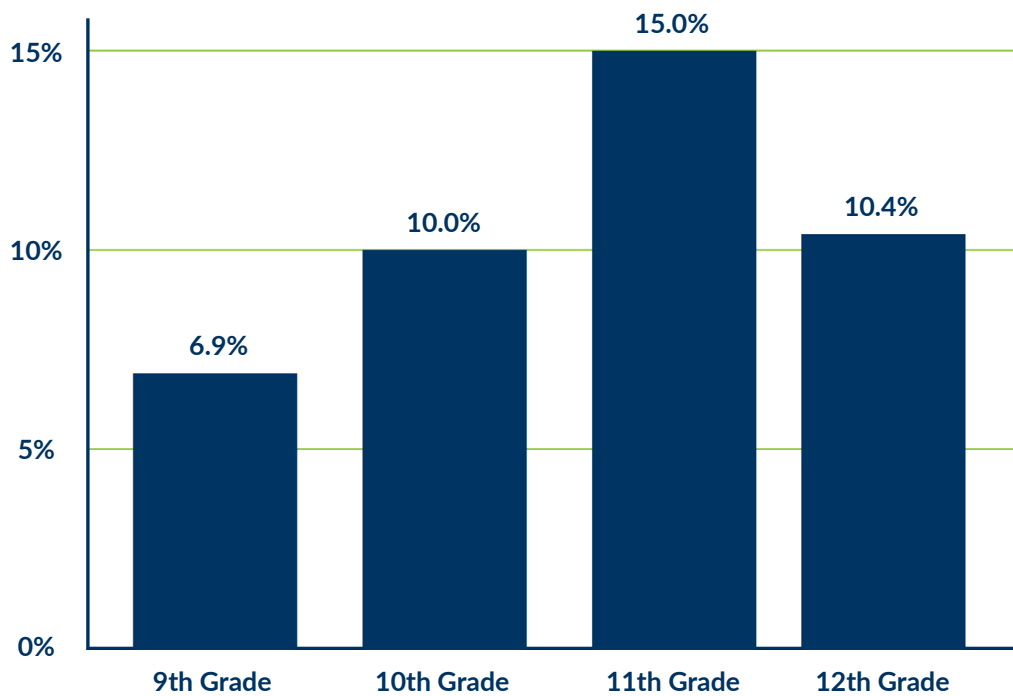
Access to dual enrollment varies by grade level. While most districts report that dual enrollment is open to 11th and 12th grade students, fewer allow participation in earlier grades: 12 of the 17 districts offering dual enrollment permit 10th grade participation, while only 10 districts allow 9th grade students to enroll. The most commonly offered dual enrollment subjects across districts are Social and Behavioral Sciences and English and Communication, while Ethnic Studies is offered the least.

Subjects Offered, 2023-2024

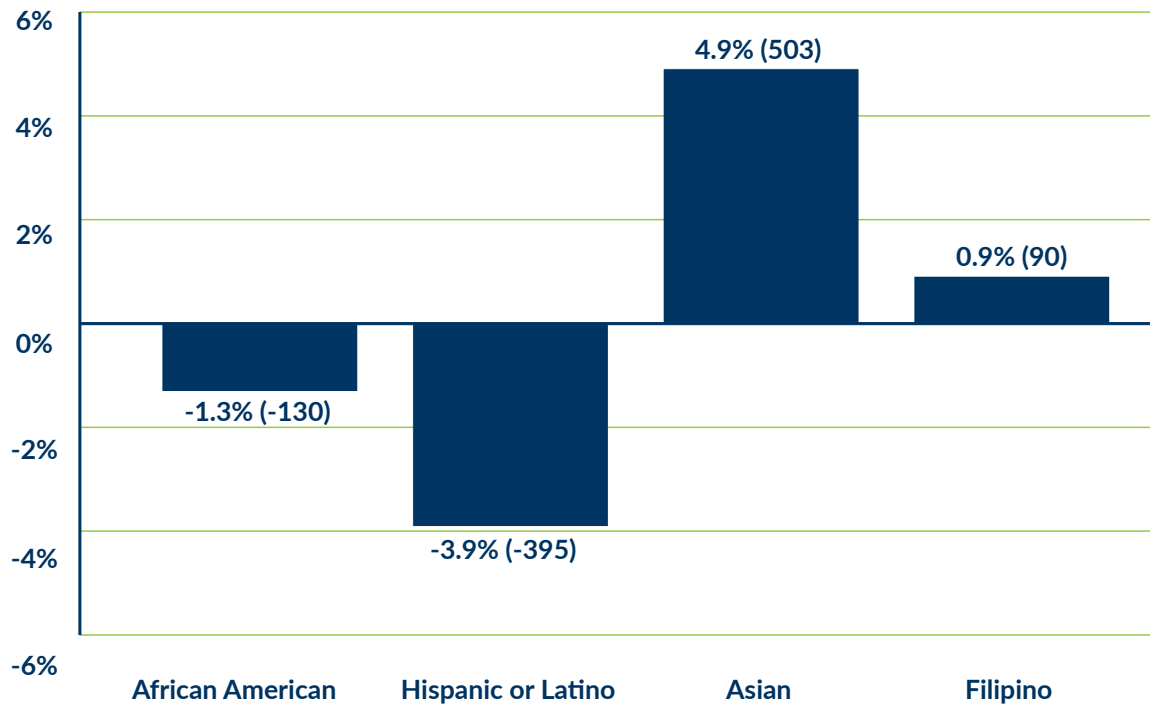


Despite overall growth in participation, data indicate persistent access gaps. There is a notable decline in participation during students' 12th grade year, and students who identify as African American or Hispanic/Latino are underrepresented in dual enrollment participation, while Asian and Filipino students are overrepresented.

Dual Enrollment Participation by Grade Level, 2023-2024



Dual Enrollment Representation Gaps, 2023-2024 Percentage and Student Count



(Source: Career Ladders Project's Dual Enrollment Access Gap Tool)

In response to these trends, WE Will! convened regional partners in April 2025 to review participation data and identify gaps by age and ethnicity at the school-site level. High school and college teams analyzed their local data and identified potential strategies to improve access, including:

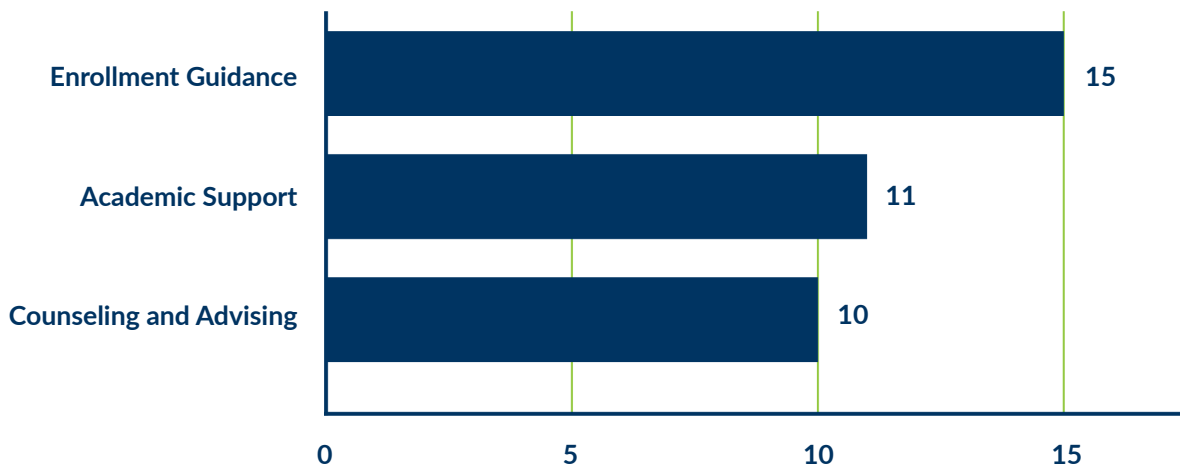
- Clarifying and expanding pathways to support continued participation in 12th grade.
- Increasing parent and community outreach, particularly within Black and Latino communities.
- Providing additional supports for English Learner students.



Support

As dual enrollment expands across the region, districts are pairing increased access with intentional student support services. Based on survey data and interview responses, districts identified enrollment guidance, counseling and advising, and academic support as central strategies for helping students succeed in college-level coursework. Many districts reported offering more than one type of student support, indicating a layered approach designed to address both access and academic success.

Support Services Offered by College Partners (Out of 17 Responses)



The college enrollment process was consistently highlighted as one of the most significant barriers for students participating in dual enrollment. Districts described enrollment as complex and unfamiliar, reinforcing the importance of hands-on guidance to ensure students are able to successfully access courses.

“A lot of our students don’t know how to navigate the college system, so the enrollment support is critical. Without it, many of them wouldn’t even make it into the class.”

Districts emphasized that these supports are not viewed as optional add-ons, but as essential infrastructure, especially for students navigating postsecondary systems for the first time. Together, these supports reflect a regional emphasis on pairing access to dual enrollment with the guidance and resources students need to persist, succeed, and continue into postsecondary education.

“We’ve learned that just giving students access to college classes isn’t enough. The counseling and academic support are what help them stay in the class and be successful.”

These findings reinforce the role of student support services as critical levers for successful dual enrollment implementation across the region.

Success

Students in the Northern San Joaquin Valley region demonstrate strong outcomes in dual enrollment programs. Across the region, average success rates in dual enrollment courses range from 85% to 95%, reflecting consistent achievement in both high school and college-level coursework. All districts report offering dual credit for at least some of their dual enrollment courses, allowing students to earn both high school and college credit. Some districts have formal equivalency lists to clarify which courses will count toward high school credits. Notably, a small group of students from districts across the region have leveraged these opportunities to complete an associate degree before graduating from high school.

Dual enrollment also appears to support students' postsecondary trajectories. Of the districts that provided estimates of their percentages of students matriculating to college after high school, they reported an average of 43% of dual enrollment students attending community colleges and 50% of dual enrollment students attending four-year universities. These figures suggest that dual enrollment programs not only enable immediate academic success but also provide a strong foundation for continued higher education, supporting students in accessing a range of postsecondary options aligned with their goals.



Strengths and Opportunities

The Northern San Joaquin Valley region has built a strong foundation for dual enrollment through collaborative partnerships, innovative program structures, and intentional student supports. The following section highlights the region's key strengths and emerging opportunities, showing how local and regional efforts are expanding access, improving student outcomes, and creating pathways for continued growth.

Strengths

Strong Cross-System Partnerships: Districts consistently emphasized the strength of collaborative relationships between secondary and postsecondary partners. Over time, alignment has improved around expectations, communication, and shared processes, resulting in smoother implementation and increased trust across systems. These partnerships have expanded access and created new opportunities for students that would not have been possible through isolated efforts.

“Our partnerships have opened doors for students that simply weren't available before, and those relationships continue to strengthen each year.”

Expanded and Impactful Course Offerings: Programs offer an increasingly robust mix of academic and career-focused coursework, including general education, transferable courses, and aligned career pathways. In some sites, students are able to earn substantial college credit—or complete significant portions of degree or certificate requirements—while still in high school. This breadth and depth of offerings has expanded access to postsecondary pathways and accelerated students' progress toward their educational goals.

“For a school our size, the number of college courses available to students—and the support built around them—is something we're really proud of.”



Intentional Student Supports and Readiness Structures: Many programs have intentionally designed student support structures to promote college readiness and persistence. These include dedicated counseling, facilitated or cohort-based classes, and structured on-campus support periods. Together, these supports help students navigate college systems, manage academic expectations, and succeed in rigorous coursework. This is particularly helpful for students who may be the first in their families to pursue postsecondary education.

Dedicated Leadership, Staffing, and Infrastructure: District-level commitment is evident through the creation of specialized roles, targeted staffing models, and sustained administrative backing. Districts frequently cited leadership support—from site administrators to district leadership and governing boards—as critical to program stability, continuous improvement, and long-term sustainability.

“*The support from leadership has been tremendous. From site administration to the district and board level, there’s a shared commitment to making this work for students.*”

Growing Awareness and Regional Learning Culture: Districts reported that awareness of dual enrollment opportunities is growing among students and families, with interest emerging earlier in the academic pipeline. Word-of-mouth promotion, middle school outreach, and peer influence are helping build momentum. At the same time, participation in regional collaboration and professional learning has strengthened practitioner knowledge, clarified policy and implementation requirements, and fostered a culture of shared learning across districts. This combination of community demand and regional learning continues to support program growth and improvement.

Opportunities

Expansion of Pathways and Early Access: There is strong interest in expanding dual enrollment into additional career sectors and academic disciplines, while developing more structured pathways that begin earlier in the educational pipeline, including middle school-to-high school transitions. Districts identified opportunities to increase on-campus, facilitated, and supported course offerings, particularly for students who may not thrive in fully independent or online college environments.

Further alignment of dual enrollment coursework with regional workforce needs, industry certifications, and postsecondary transition requirements would strengthen pathway coherence, improve college readiness, and increase the affordability of postsecondary education by allowing students to earn college credit earlier.

“*We’re excited about how much more we can offer students as we continue to expand pathways and align courses with their interests and goals.*”

“The goal is to keep building so students graduate with college credit, confidence, and real choices about what comes next.”

Increased Staffing and Instructional Capacity: While current funding has enabled program growth, districts emphasized the importance of strengthening long-term staffing and instructional capacity to sustain and scale dual enrollment efforts. Opportunities exist to improve scheduling alignment, cross-system coordination, and implementation timelines to reduce barriers to student participation.

Programs also identified the need to expand the pool of qualified instructors for college-level coursework through credentialing pathways, institutional partnerships, and alternative instructional models. Increased instructional capacity would support pathway expansion and strengthen connections to high-quality, work-based learning experiences in critical workforce sectors.

“Our focus now is making sure these opportunities are sustainable so students continue to benefit year after year.”

Clear Communication and Outreach: Districts highlighted continued opportunities to strengthen communication and outreach by clarifying differences among program models, streamlining messaging for families, and ensuring students understand available options and pathways. Earlier and more consistent outreach, particularly in middle school, was identified as critical to increasing informed student decision-making and dual enrollment participation. Districts also noted that increasing parent and community awareness of dual enrollment opportunities is an important strategy for addressing access gaps.

Clear, accessible communication helps students and families better understand how dual enrollment supports college readiness, affordability, and successful postsecondary transitions.

“A lot of our students don’t know how to navigate the college system...”
“The more students see what’s possible through dual enrollment, the more interest we see in starting earlier and taking advantage of these opportunities.”

Regional Support from WE Will!

Increased Capacity and Confidence to Implement Dual Enrollment: Districts gained practical knowledge, clarity around policies and processes, and confidence navigating dual enrollment systems—particularly in response to changing legislation and requirements.

“I have learned a lot through the collaborative in regards to dual enrollment. The workshops really helped me understand the process and why this work matters.”

Stronger Partnerships and Regional Collaboration: The WE Will! K-16 Collaborative created structured opportunities for cross-system alignment, bringing K-12 and postsecondary partners together while shifting thinking from isolated district work to shared regional problem solving.

“We’re not just looking at our own district anymore. We’re looking across the region, seeing different ways people do things, and learning from that.”

Accelerated Program Growth and Innovation: Through professional learning, peer examples, and targeted support, districts have expanded course offerings, developed new pathways, strengthened student support models, and advanced long-term planning for sustainability and scale.

“Seeing what other schools are doing, what their barriers are, and how they’re creating progress has positively impacted our work.”

The Future of Dual Enrollment

The Northern San Joaquin Valley region sees dual enrollment as a foundational lever for educational attainment, economic mobility, and systems alignment, with a clear shift toward sustainability, scale, and shared ownership across partners. There is a collective vision of dual enrollment as a core strategy for transforming high school-to-college transitions for all students, ensuring that college access is not an add-on or limited opportunity for a small subset of students. The region appears to be moving toward a shared belief that dual enrollment should be:

- **An expected pathway, not an exception:** Dual enrollment is increasingly viewed as a normal part of the high school experience, something students encounter early, plan for intentionally, and access across multiple disciplines and pathways. There is a clear aspiration to move from isolated offerings to coherent, sequenced experiences that begin earlier and build over time.
- **Supportive and inclusive:** The vision emphasizes access with support. Districts consistently highlight the importance of counseling, facilitated instruction, and on-campus support to ensure students can succeed, especially those who might not otherwise see themselves as “college-going.” Success is reflected not just in access, but in completion and meaningful outcomes.
- **Aligned across systems and sectors:** Dual enrollment is seen as a bridge connecting K-12, community colleges, universities, and regional workforce priorities. There is strong momentum toward alignment:
 - Between high school graduation requirements and college credit.
 - Across academic and career pathways.
 - With workforce needs, industry credentials, and transfer goals.
- **Regionally coordinated and collaborative:** Rather than each district solving challenges independently, districts express a growing commitment to regional learning, shared problem solving, and collective progress. The vision is one of scaling what works through collaboration, with flexibility for local context.
- **Focused on long-term outcomes:** Ultimately, the region’s vision centers on students leaving high school with college credit, clear postsecondary direction, reduced time and cost to degree, and confidence navigating postsecondary systems.

Conclusion

As dual enrollment continues to expand across the Northern San Joaquin Valley, regional high schools and colleges are well positioned to strengthen transition by clarifying pathways that connect high school coursework to postsecondary programs, certificates, and degrees. By building on existing partnerships, aligning course offerings with regional workforce needs, and providing students with supported, structured learning experiences, schools and colleges can ensure students are prepared to navigate the educational pipeline with confidence and purpose.

Expanding access in sustainable ways also supports affordability, readiness, and work-based learning. Early outreach, clear communication, and facilitated college-level experiences help students and families make informed choices while fostering college and career readiness. Together, these efforts create coherent, high-quality pathways that allow students to earn college credit, explore career options, and develop the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in both postsecondary education and the workforce.

