



California Community Colleges

SYSTEM WEBINAR SUMMARY:

Adult Learners and Dual Enrollment (May 2025)

This [webinar](#) focused on supporting adult learners through dual enrollment and ability to benefit. Guest presenters included Naomi Castro of Career Ladders Project, Sandy Goodman of World Education, and Alejandro Moreno of Santa Ana College School of Continuing Education.

What is the Landscape of Adult Learners?

- K-12 enrollment has declined at most K-12 school districts in California over the last 5 years and is expected to decline over the next decade in nearly all regions. The state is projecting a decline of over a half million students by 2031-32, reducing the traditional college-age population of students in our colleges.
- While traditional college student enrollment declines, we have opportunities to expand enrollment among older students and help to meet state workforce needs.
- Currently, nearly 500,000 adult students are enrolled in [Adult Education](#) programs, many of them pursuing high school diploma or equivalency certificates and representing a population that is underserved by our traditional programs.
- Several strategies can help us tap this potential, including adult education programs, apprenticeship, and dual enrollment.

How Can Dual Enrollment Opportunities Benefit Adult Learners?

- [Dual enrollment](#) allows an individual pursuing a high school diploma or equivalent the ability to attend a college part-time and earn college credit simultaneously. This applies to adult as well as minor students, as specified in 2019 legislation ([SB-554](#)).
- [College and Career Access Pathways](#) partnerships can include adult schools that are part of an eligible partner institution (i.e., a K-12 district, a charter school governing organization, or a county office of education).
- Adult Dual Enrollment (ADE) makes education more equitable, provides college experience opportunities, and accelerates students' progress in achieving their educational and career goals. It represents a college transition strategy for noncredit community college and adult school students, providing a bridge to certificate and degree programs. It aligns with other initiatives like Guided Pathways that are seeking to meet Vision 2030 goals. It also supports local economies and communities.
- ADE is growing, including adult school and special admit enrollees, and has increased by 18.5% since the passage of SB 554.

How Can We Beat Barriers to Dual Enrollment for Adult Learners?

- Adult students face several barriers to accessing dual enrollment opportunities:
 - Time is a barrier for busy adults who are often working, sometimes at multiple jobs, and raising children. Adults are challenged to fit courses into their schedules, especially when class times are unpredictable across terms and there are difficulties with limited parking and wait times for counseling.
 - Money is also a barrier, as adults may be worried about going into debt and about whether additional education will lead to a better job. Childcare availability and affordability are a dominating concern.
- [Ability to Benefit](#) (ATB) offers an opportunity to expand access to federal financial aid (e.g., Pell Grants and loans) for adult students; the federal regulation expands eligibility to students without a high school diploma/GED when they are enrolled in an [eligible career pathway program](#) (now defined the same across higher education and workforce policies and programs).
- While a Promise Grant can cover tuition and fees, living expenses like housing, food, transportation, and childcare are the primary affordability challenge for our adult students, so access to federal aid programs can be critical.
- California's [ATB state process](#) was approved by the U.S. Department of Education in July 2024, providing new options for determining ATB. To be eligible, students must be pursuing a high school diploma or GED, successfully complete a multiple measures assessment, be enrolled in an eligible career pathway program, and meet all other [federal financial aid eligibility requirements](#). Colleges must provide a holistic suite of support services for students.

What Resources Can Help Colleges Navigate ATB and ADE?

- National College Transition Network's [ATB resource page](#) provides guidance on relevant legislation and regulations as well as resources for practitioners. It includes a [checklist](#) for college's to use in meeting new federal ATB documentation requirements (implemented in January 2025).
- Career Ladders Project's [user guide](#) for ATB and ADE can help adult schools and community colleges partner to implement these transition strategies for adult students without a high school diploma/GED, including information about identifying and linking noncredit pathways with credit certificate and degree programs that lead to meaningful careers.
- California's approved ATB plan includes a community of practice of 10 colleges that will be helping the system develop models for ATB implementation and support systemwide expansion.
- The [Centers of Excellence](#) can help colleges identify local and regional labor market information required to meet ATB regulations.