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**Contact:** Chancellor's Office: (209) 575-6509, [publicaffairs@yosemite.edu](mailto:publicaffairs@yosemite.edu)

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### **Modesto Junior College continues to expand ways for high school students to take college classes**

MODESTO, CA. – Modesto Junior College has made significant progress in the past year in increasing the number of high school students taking college-level classes, with plans to add more courses and students in the next school year.

At their Dec. 13 meeting, trustees of the Yosemite Community College District – which includes MJC as well as Columbia College – heard an update about the dual enrollment program. Dual enrollment courses give students free access to earn college credits while they're still in high school.

In the fall 2023 semester, nearly 2,200 high school students participated in the program. With the spring semester still to come, that number is expected to go up. By comparison, in the entire 2022-23 school year, 2,281 high school students enrolled in MJC courses.

The dual enrollment classes are offered under a College and Career Access Pathway (CCAP) agreement between MJC and a local high school district. For the 2023-24 school year, MJC added three districts – Oakdale, Denair and Gustine – to a lineup that already included Modesto City Schools, Turlock, Ceres, Patterson, Riverbank, Hughson and Aspire.

“We have had steady upward growth,” Angelica Guzman, MJC’s dean of enrollment services, told trustees. She said MJC is “reaching a saturation point where we’re really working with every high school district in the area in some capacity.”

The CCAP designation is important, not just academically but also financially – per-unit fees are waived for high school students and their high schools provide their college textbooks. Even the book cost is declining as increasing numbers of college courses are taught using free online resources. CCAP agreements are good for five years before they must be renewed by the high school district and YCCD board.

All the CCAP classes are held on high school campuses. High school students can access them in three ways:

- A college instructor comes to their campus to teach.

- A high school teacher who is qualified to teach college-level courses teaches the class.
- A college instructor teaches online or via video-conferencing with the assistance of an on-site high school teacher.

Derrick Saenz-Payne, who teaches U.S. history at Ceres and Central Valley high schools, is a high school instructor who is qualified to teach college courses. He told trustees that the rigor of college-level courses helps make high school students “better readers, writers and thinkers.”

The board also heard from one of Saenz-Payne’s students. Caleb Overman, a junior at Ceres High, has already taken two CCAP courses.

“I feel I’m getting a more in-depth understanding of aspects of U.S. history than I would in a regular class,” Overman said. “With the amount of reading required, I enjoy having to work harder that I would in a regular class, to learn more and better understand the content being taught.”

Kayla Himmist, a Ceres teacher has been assisting an MJC instructor since 2020, said some of her students have been able to take as many as five college classes before they graduate from high school. Not only do the courses help get them “college-ready,” but they also engender loyalty to MJC.

“Many of those students attend MJC because of their experience,” Himmist said.

Dual enrollment also continues to thrive at Columbia College, trustees were told. There were 676 high school students from Tuolumne County, Calaveras County and eastern Stanislaus County taking Columbia classes in the 2022-23 school year; this year, that number is projected to top 700.

Melissa Raby, Columbia’s vice president of student services, said the college has CCAP agreements with all of the local high schools.

“We have had significant success with dual enrollment courses and students,” she said. “The program is working. The courses are helping students reach college and succeed.”

At MJC, 76.5% of high school students earn an A, B or C grade in their college classes. That is known as the success rate. 88.8% of high school students finish the course. That is known as the retention rate, and surprisingly, it is slightly higher than the rest of the MJC student population.

Columbia has even better numbers: 87.8% success rate and 93.8% retention rate.

YCCD board members clearly were happy with what they heard during the dual enrollment presentation.

“Where we were last year versus where we are today is incredible,” said Trustee Jenny Nicolau.

Trustee Milton Richards said he appreciated the perspective of a high school student. He believes dual enrollment classes are a way to “equalize the playing field” for all high school students who want to get into college.

“The key is preparing them, to getting them to think more critically,” Richards said. “It’s opening up those doors for them, those opportunities, so they have a chance to succeed.”

**- YCCD -**