Swim Digital Group Launches National Dual Enrollment Research Study, Offering $30,000 Grants to Up to 12 Colleges

The First Mile Study will examine how colleges connect dual enrollment students to career pathways, establishing the field's first shared benchmark.

TAMPA, FL, UNITED STATES, October 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Swim Digital Group today announced The First Mile Study, a national research initiative examining how community and technical colleges connect dual enrollment students to the career ahead, from a student's first interest through the close of the first college term. Swim will select no more than 12 colleges for the inaugural cohort and will fund a $30,000 Research Partner Grant for each. Together, these Research Partners will build the field's first shared benchmark of this stage of the student journey.

Dual enrollment is one of the most promising on-ramps into higher education, yet many of these students do not continue after high school, and many never resurface at another college. Between a student's first dual enrollment course and the first day of a college term, responsibility passes between high schools and colleges, and across enrollment, student services, and workforce teams. Each handoff is a point where momentum can be lost. For many students, the reason to keep going is a career they can see. The field has invested heavily in making college affordable. Far less is known about whether students understand why they are there.

"As a field, we have done a great deal to help students afford college, and that work matters. But paying for college does not tell a student why they are there," said Trimeka Benjamin, President and CEO of Swim Digital Group. "We lose dual enrollment students at alarming rates, and many never resurface at another college. They just stop. We need to understand why, and whether the students who belong in dual enrollment ever learn it is an option. The career market is

competitive, and our students need every advantage we can give them. That is what this study is for."

The study is organized around three questions. The first is access: how students who belong in dual enrollment learn it is an option, and who is never reached. The second is experience: where, and from whom, dual enrollment students encounter the connection between coursework and career, on campus and off. The third is transition: which institutional practices between high school graduation and the first college term keep these students enrolled, and which lose them. Areas of inquiry include how high schools and colleges communicate dual enrollment opportunities; how clearly students see wages, demand, and career outcomes tied to their coursework; when students first encounter employers, work-based learning, or career advising; how dual enrollment credit carries into a program of study; and how enrollment, student services, and workforce teams coordinate the transition into the first term.

Each Research Partner will receive an assessment of its own dual enrollment pathway, from first interest through the first college term; a private briefing for its president in May 2027 on the college's fall 2026 dual enrollment results; an institutional action brief identifying priority improvements across enrollment, student services, and workforce functions; participation in two research convenings with peer institutions, one at the start of the study and one at the close; and recognition in the study's national white paper, or anonymous participation if preferred.

Swim is funding the study because the field has no shared benchmark for this stage of the student journey, and building one depends on colleges willing to contribute their data. Each Research Partner's investment is $30,000. Swim covers the remaining half of the $60,000 participation cost through a Research Partner Grant, awarded in recognition of the data and time each college contributes. The cohort is limited to 12 colleges to allow deep, comparable assessment across a balanced sample of college size, region, and student population.

Findings will be published in a national white paper in July 2027, giving college leaders, high school partners, workforce boards, and employers evidence-based practices for connecting dual enrollment students to the career ahead. Research Partners will also be invited to an optional implementation cohort in fall 2027 to put the findings into practice with Swim. The cohort is separate from the study, with its own scope and fee.

Applications are open to community and technical colleges nationwide through January 15, 2027. Swim encourages enrollment, student services, and workforce leaders at each college to apply together. Learn more and apply at https://swimdigitalgroup.com/first-mile-study/

About Swim Digital Group
Swim Digital Group is a higher education consulting firm specializing in change management, strategic enrollment management, and organizational transformation for community colleges. Swim partners with institutions through embedded execution, staying with the work until it belongs to the college.

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This press release can be viewed online at: https://www.einpresswire.com/article/949122003

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