

Accelerate ASU partners gather to expand dual enrollment for high school students

School leaders shared strategies to strengthen early college pathways and improve student success

By Samantha Becker, ASU News
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What does it take to make early college access possible for every student?

That question brought educators to Arizona State University on March 5–6 for the second annual [Accelerate ASU Partner Conference](#), organized around the theme “Every Student, Every Path.”

Since its launch, [Accelerate ASU](#) has partnered with more than 550 high schools. Nearly 30,000 high school students have taken ASU college courses through Accelerate ASU and ASU’s Universal Learner Courses, which are designed by schools and colleges across the university.

Held in Tempe, the conference convened administrators, counselors and teachers working to embed ASU college courses into high school systems across the U.S. and internationally.

An accessible pathway to college courses

Accelerate ASU is one of the nation’s largest university-led dual enrollment providers. Learners can enroll in more than 75 ASU [Universal Learner Courses](#) taught by university faculty, with no GPA, transcript or application required. Learners choose whether to add the course to their transcript based on their final grade, creating a structured, low-risk entry point to college-level work.

James Arndt, principal of Accelerate ASU partner [Camelback High School](#) in Phoenix, opened the conference, urging educators to rethink who has access to advanced coursework. He envisioned this year’s keynote address as a call to action, encouraging educators to make dual enrollment’s benefits available to a wider number of students.

“I’m really (challenging) people to disrupt the systems that don’t serve every kid,” Arndt said. “The thinking used to be that we don’t have the staff, we don’t have the resources — but with Accelerate ASU, that’s just not true. The resource is right there that makes it possible, so quit making excuses. Let’s disrupt the systems that are not serving every kid and make college accessible now.”

Arndt also stressed the outsized impact of dual enrollment in shaping a teen’s future, especially when comparing the cost of dual enrollment to typical college courses. [Research from Helios Education Foundation](#) shows that students in dual enrollment programs are twice as likely to attend college — and once they enroll, they are also more likely to complete their degree.

“When access expands, your students will rise to the challenge,” Arndt said. “There are a hundred things to do as a principal every day. The question is, am I brave enough to move dual enrollment from No. 98 to No. 1? You can build a system of scarcity or abundance.”

Building community and sharing growth stories

In the conference’s opening panel March 5, students, teachers and school leaders shared how Accelerate ASU is shifting beliefs about what’s possible, with the flexible nature of Universal Learner Courses opening doors for students who have historically been left out of college-level opportunities.

Rio Stinger, school director and co-founder of Accelerate partner [Vita High School](#) in Phoenix, reflected upon the positive outcomes he’s seen in his dual enrollment students.

“We have implemented ULCs over the last couple of years, and it’s actually helped students not only graduate, not only get advancement to college, but actually believe that they’re capable of something more, when, for their whole lives, growing up, they maybe never thought they were ever going to go to college,” Stinger said.

Stephanie R., a senior at [ASU Prep Academy](#), echoes the clarifying impact Universal Learner Courses have had on the direction of her life.

“Before I started taking these courses, I definitely was one of those students that wasn’t really sure where I was going to go,” she said. “It also taught me soft skills — whether that was public speaking or even communicating with other people. It taught me how to grow.”

Refining dual enrollment practices for student success

Friday’s packed agenda included breakout sessions detailing the use of data to encourage student engagement, strategies to support diverse learners and an introduction to the resources available in ASU’s new online partner portal.

Megan DeFrancesco, client relationship manager for ASU’s [Professional Educator Learning Hub](#), introduced four offerings available to educators and school districts. Designed by faculty at ASU’s [Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation](#), the packages address systemic challenges facing districts across the country.

“We truly believe that schools thrive when every adult who touches learning has meaningful opportunities to grow,” DeFrancesco said.

The day kicked off with veteran partner educators sharing valuable lessons learned about best practices around dual enrollment. Jaime Smith, founder and CEO of Accelerate partner [Online G3](#), emphasized the importance of maintaining ongoing communication with students, recommending the use of a shared, living document to track course progress and gather student feedback.

The [Kamehameha Schools Hawai'i](#) network, an Accelerate ASU partner, received the 2026 Accelerate ASU Partner of the Year award for its intentional evolution, culturally responsive approach and commitment to continuous improvement.

Isaac Keoua Vigilla, dean of studies at Kamehameha Schools Hawai'i High School, described his school's success with shifting to a more structured onboarding process for students, offering ASU's courses in [self-leadership and productivity](#) and [career exploration](#) as foundational classes to prepare students for college-level learning.

Inspiration for sparking change, removing barriers

Reflecting upon their takeaways from the conference, educators shared the value of coming together with like-minded leaders grappling with the same larger goals.

Torrie Levins, director of admissions and strategic partnerships at Accelerate ASU partner [Homeschooling for College Credit](#), echoed this sentiment.

"It's a forced moment of presence — you leave your everyday, close the laptop and you're just challenged to think differently," Levins said. "We have different problems to solve, but that core desire to build future leaders and remove barriers is exactly the same. I left much more motivated, excited and with more personal connections to help our students and families."

Educators say they are heading back to their school communities with fresh ideas, effective strategies to implement and a new community of dual enrollment providers to lean on.

[Marco Serrato](#), vice president of [ASU's Learning Enterprise](#), capped off the sessions March 5 by drawing a parallel between ASU's charter and the key goals of the conference.

“We believe within ASU that academic quality shouldn't be measured through scarcity,” Serrato said. “ASU has been [ranked No. 1 in innovation for 11 years in a row](#). I would say, if there's one reason why we've been able to achieve that, it is because we believe in continuous improvement all the time. That is precisely what you all are doing here.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Accelerate ASU Partner of the Year awardees (from left): Lisa Correa, assistant principal, Kamehameha Schools Maui; Isaac Keoua Vigilla, dean of studies at Kamehameha Schools Hawai'i High School; Zandra Ah Choy-Agusen, digital learning coordinator, Kamehameha Schools Kap?lama; and Gina Bella Mataafa, learning success coach, Kamehameha Schools Maui. Photos by Aaron Ghena/ASU

Text image(s)



James Arndt, principal of Camelback High School, delivers the keynote address.



K-12 leaders share dual enrollment insights at the second annual Accelerate ASU Partner Conference.



Meg Grothman, director of national partnerships at ASU Prep, has some fun with the audience.



Jaime Smith, founder and CEO of Online G3, speaks at the conference.



Torrie Levins, director of admissions and strategic partnerships at Homeschooling for College Credit.



(From left) Maggie Eubanks, head of schools, Palmetto Bay Academy Schools; Urooj Ahmed, ASU program coordinator and student counselor, Baitul Hikmah Academy; Aerial Merritt, associate director of college counseling and global initiatives, Mount Vernon School; and Edgar Salmingo Jr., director of early college and online learning, Archdiocese of Los Angeles speak during the conference.