

March 27, 2013

The Case for Early College High Schools

Compelling data show innovative approach helps historically underrepresented students thrive in their post-secondary careers.

For Education Professionals and Policy Experts



KnowledgeWorks®

College & Career Readiness for Every Student

March 27, 2013

The Case for Early College High Schools

Compelling data show innovative approach helps historically underrepresented students thrive in their post-secondary careers.

For Education Professionals and Policy Experts

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are now more than 250 early college schools in 28 states and the District of Columbia. Years of data show that Early College High School students have graduated from high school at a rate of more than 90 percent, consistently outperformed their peers who did not attend an early college high school, and earned associate and bachelor's degrees at historic rates. The concept of a high school student — possibly an English Language Learner and certainly economically disadvantaged — entering the ninth grade and being able to take college courses successfully may seem unbelievable. Yet, with the right supports, these young students are succeeding in college and beyond, at unprecedented rates.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Focusing On Historically Underserved Students	4
Aligning K-12 Education To Create 'College-Ready' Students	5
College Knowledge	6
Cost Savings To Students, Long-Term Economic Boon	7
Conclusion	8

IN PRACTICE


The Case for Early College High Schools For Education Professionals and Policy Experts

INTRODUCTION


Students in the United States have been afforded the opportunity to obtain college credits or advanced placement during high school for decades, but often those opportunities have not been afforded to students who have been underrepresented in higher education. In recent years, however, the emergence of early college high school has begun to expand those opportunities to historically underserved students. These schools, which enable high school students to earn a high school diploma and up to 60 hours of college credit while still in high school, tuition free, have become a game-changer in education, particularly as it relates to broadening academic opportunities for traditionally underserved students.

There are now more than 250 early college schools in 28 states and the District of Columbia. That number is expected to grow as the influence of early college high schools becomes more pervasive. The concept of a high school student – possibly an English Language Learner and certainly economically disadvantaged -- entering the ninth grade and being able to take college courses successfully may seem unbelievable. Yet, these young students are succeeding in their college courses. EDWorks, a school development organization that has launched or supported more than 30 early college high schools, reports that in its sites with multiple graduating classes, 79 percent of its students earn at least 30 hours of college credit, 33 percent earn 60 hours of college credit, and 40 percent earn 30 to 55 hours of college credit while still in high school.

The opportunity to earn tuition-free college credit while still in high school motivates students to achieve excellent results. According to Jobs for the Future, early college high school is a “bold approach, based on the principle that academic rigor, combined with the opportunity to save time and money, is a powerful motivator for students to work hard and meet serious intellectual challenges.” (Future, Early College High School Initiative, 2012)¹ Data show that students who attend early college high schools perform better academically than their peers and are more apt to persist in higher education:



These schools, which enable high school students to earn a high school diploma and up to 60 hours of college credit while still in high school, tuition free, have become a game-changer in education, particularly as it relates to broadening academic opportunities for traditionally underserved students.



¹ <http://www.earlycolleges.org/overview.html>

IN PRACTICE

The Case for Early College High Schools For Education Professionals and Policy Experts

- The median four-year graduation rate for early colleges in 2010-11 was 93 percent, compared to 76 percent for their school districts.
- 93 percent of early college graduates earned at least some college credits, indicating that they gained concrete knowledge about what it takes to succeed in post-secondary education (2010-11).
- Approximately 78 percent of early college graduates in 2010 enrolled directly in some form of post-secondary education after high school, 11 percentage points higher than the national average.
- 61 percent of early college students are eligible for free or reduced lunch -- a conservative estimate of the number of students from low-income families.²

It is also important to note that success in a post-secondary career has a direct correlation to economic development and job growth, and a number of private businesses and other organizations have successfully partnered with early college high schools not only to help introduce the college experience to students, but to also help students learn the skills needed for success in college and later into careers. This is particularly important, considering that employers will need 22 million new workers with post-secondary degrees by 2018, according to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, yet employers are expected to fall short by about 3 million workers. (Workforce, 2010)³

Considering the data, increasing the number of early college high schools in the United States will invest in the social, intellectual and economic future of the country, and create successful pathways for traditionally underserved students. There are several characteristics of early college high schools that make them a success. Key aspects that set them apart, however, are that they focus on historically underrepresented students in college, they align K-12 education in innovative ways, instill college knowledge, and they provide a more affordable pathway to higher education.

FOCUSING ON HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED STUDENTS

Just on the outskirts of downtown Greensboro, N.C., where in 1960 a group of students started a movement to desegregate lunch counters in the South, sit two colleges serving predominantly minority students: tiny Bennett College, an all-girls liberal arts college; and North Carolina A&T State university, which boasts a top school of engineering. Both schools support early college high schools and are thriving. Greensboro is located in Guilford County, which sits in the middle of the state along Interstate 85. Guilford County Schools has the most early college high schools in North Carolina (nine) in a state that already leads the nation in the number of early college high schools – a fact that seems fitting in light of the region's history of social justice reforms. The first early college high school in North Carolina, the Early College at Guilford (associated with Guilford College) now

² <http://www.jff.org/sites/default/files/ECHSgetsResults-032912.pdf>

³ Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, <http://cew.georgetown.edu>

IN PRACTICE

The Case for Early College High Schools For Education Professionals and Policy Experts

boasts a graduation rate of 100 percent.

“Guilford County first introduced early college high schools in 2002 with success. The graduation rate in 2011 for all high schools in North Carolina was 77.9 percent and 91.2 percent for the early-college models, according to the North Carolina New Schools Project, a public-private venture, supporting early-college policy and strategy within its current portfolio.”⁴

The demographics of students in the Guilford County Schools reflect those found at other early college high schools in the country – these students are generally the first in their families to attend any form of college and are often poor and a member of an ethnic minority. Nationally, 77 percent of early college high school students are of color, (including 41 percent Hispanic and 25 percent African-American), 57 percent are from low income families, and 45 percent will be the first in their families to attend college.⁵

Nationally, 77 percent of early college high school students are of color, (including 41 percent Hispanic and 25 percent African-American), 57 percent are from low income families, and 45 percent will be the first in their families to attend college.⁵

ALIGNING K-12 EDUCATION TO CREATE ‘COLLEGE-READY’ STUDENTS

Years of work developing Early College High Schools have shown that students can’t succeed if all parties along the education continuum are not communicating. So K-12 and higher education are beginning to work together to help students be successful. According to EDWorks research, the challenge of achieving college level proficiency begins before students enter their freshmen year of high school. Students identified as candidates for early college high school tend to enter high school “multiple grade levels behind in core academic subjects, implying that very high rates of student achievement growth are required during the high school years (significantly higher than “one year” of learning per academic year) for those students currently entering high school.”

EDWorks notes that for future cohorts of K-12 students to achieve the “college ready” academic standard, substantially higher rates of student achievement growth per year will be required than occur today, in all years.⁶

⁴ Education Week, “Early College Model Brings Lessons, Results in NC,” Aug. 22, 2012 <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/08/16/01earlymiddle.h32.html?qs=early+college>

⁵ Jobs for the Future, 2012


⁶ EDWorks Research

IN PRACTICE


The Case for Early College High Schools For Education Professionals and Policy Experts

Personalized learning and flexibility are keys to success for EDWorks Fast Track students and students at other early college high schools. EDWorks notes that students who enter early college underprepared received a personalized education plan and a system of supports designed to ensure each student receives the assistance needed for college success. “Highly qualified and effective high school teachers ensure students are prepared to start and complete college courses as early as ninth grade. College advisors team up with high school teachers and students to provide a seamless transition from secondary to postsecondary school.”⁷

What’s more, students at early college high schools often participate in internships, externships, service learning and community involvement. This helps students experience real-world employment expectations, gain inroads into potential employment opportunities, and enhances the relationship between the community and the school.



Students who enter early college underprepared received a personalized education plan and a system of supports designed to ensure each student receives the assistance needed for college success.



COLLEGE KNOWLEDGE

One student who can attest the success of early college high school theory in practice is Terrance Truitt, who graduated from the Canton Early College High School with an associate degree by attending classes at Stark State College, earned a degree in 2012 in criminal justice from the University of Cincinnati with a 3.69 GPA at age 20, and was recently accepted into University of Cincinnati’s Lindner College of Business to earn a master’s in business administration. Truitt, who is African-American and the first in his family to attend college, said he found that the rigor, study habits and support he received at Canton made him better equipped for college than the juniors and seniors with whom he shared classes at the University of Cincinnati (UC). Truitt said, “When I came to UC, I was 18 years old, and I’m in class with 22-year-old students. They are learning how to write papers using MLA (Modern Language Association) style, and I’ve been doing this since my freshman year of high school. To me, in college, confidence is half the battle, really. It’s like when you take a test. You might know the answers in your head, but you may be nervous about it. Early college gave me the confidence that helped demystify specific college situations for me.”⁸

⁷ “A College Completion Agenda,” EDWorks, 2013

⁸ Huffington Post, “A Smart Way to Close Achievement Gaps, Succeed in College,” June 28, 2012

IN PRACTICE

The Case for Early College High Schools For Education Professionals and Policy Experts

As Truitt explained, in addition to the familiarity that can be attributed to being on a college campus in high school, the success of early college high schools comes from the fact that students become equipped with skills that help them navigate the complexities associated with real-world experiences.

In early college high schools, college knowledge manifests itself in the classroom and the culture. Educator Tom Forbes, who was the founding principal of two early college high schools in Ohio, affirms Truitt's point of view, writing that a successful student is competent at "self-management," which includes setting priorities, planning, and mastering time management strategies.

Forbes also notes that "there are distinct dimensions of college knowledge, but their strategies, supports and activities can be addressed together." Cognitive strategies are approaches to work that "allow students to form problems, perform research, interpret words and results, communicate effectively, and operate with precision and accuracy. The better part of early college high school curriculum is devoted to mastery of this knowledge and these skills."⁹

To me, in college, confidence is half the battle, really. It's like when you take a test. You might know the answers in your head, but you may be nervous about it. Early college gave me the confidence that helped demystify specific college situations for me.

—Terrance Truitt

COST SAVINGS TO STUDENTS, LONG-TERM ECONOMIC BOON

One of the barriers to having access to higher education is cost. Getting a good education in the United States has become increasingly expensive, but one of the most important positive aspects of early college high schools is they are free for students and families. That is especially important as the cost of college continues to escalate and can become out of reach for families who can least afford to pay for college. Consider that the average cost of tuition for a four-year public, in-state college student is \$8,666. For an out-of-state student, that number rises to \$21,706, and for private school the number is upwards of \$30,000.¹⁰

The U.S. Department of Education notes that over the last 25 years, sticker price increases in public college tuition and fees have outpaced the growth in inflation by over 400 percent and the growth in health care costs by over 175 percentage points. Student debt has more than doubled over the past decade.¹¹

⁹ "Academic and Social Supports, Activities and Guidance to Accelerate ECHS Students in High School and College," 2013, Tom Forbes

¹⁰ College Board, 2013, <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/college-costs/college-costs-faqs>

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education

IN PRACTICE

The Case for Early College High Schools For Education Professionals and Policy Experts

It is imperative that more students in the United States are successful in college and graduate with degrees to help fill the jobs of the future. According to the U.S. Department of Education, a person with a four-year college degree generates about \$6,000 more in state, federal and local tax revenue than a person with a high school diploma. EDWorks notes that “a growing body of evidence links economic, community and national prominence to college degree attainment,” and notes that its Fast Track early college high school model and other similar approaches are a way to increase college completion levels while reducing the cost of college for families. “For an average annual per-pupil expenditure of \$10,591 (the national K-12 average) a Fast Track early college can become self-sustaining by the end of its second year of operation, with only 350 students.”¹²

CONCLUSION

Ten years ago, when the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others chose to commit more than \$30 million to establish early college high schools throughout the United States, the expectation was to increase successful outcomes for students who had been underrepresented in college. Years of data show that investment was well worth it, as those students have graduated from high school at a rate of more than 90 percent, consistently outperformed their peers who did not attend an early college high school, and earned associate and bachelor’s degrees at historic rates. Data also show a direct correlation to college graduation and the economy. Of the 47 million jobs expected to be created through 2018, two-thirds of them will require at least an associate degree.¹³

In 2009, The National Center for Education Statistics report on the achievement gap found that African-American and Hispanic students trail their white counterparts in reading and math by significant margins, even though they have registered some progress. For years, a number of organizations, from the Education Trust, to the Education Equality Project to other education initiatives have dedicated significant time and resources to the issue.

The proliferation of early college high schools, with their academic rigor, support, and long-term track record of success among students of color, represents a sound, long-term strategy that ought to be increasingly adopted.

¹² “A College Completion Agenda,” EDWorks, 2013

¹³ Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, <http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/>

IN PRACTICE

The Case for Early College High Schools For Education Professionals and Policy Experts



Byron McCauley

Senior Director of Public Relations
KnowledgeWorks

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Byron McCauley is senior director of public relations at KnowledgeWorks. He holds a master's degree in public relations from the University of Southern Mississippi, and a bachelor's degree in journalism from Louisiana Tech University. McCauley is a former columnist and editorial page editor for Gannett Co. Inc. and Advance Publications in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Ohio. He has also been a faculty member at the University of Cincinnati and the University of Southern Mississippi.



KnowledgeWorks®

ABOUT KNOWLEDGEWORKS

We are a social enterprise focused on creating sustainable improvement in student readiness for college and careers. Through our portfolio of school and community approaches, we provide innovative tools, training and assistance to school leaders, teachers and community stakeholders. The KnowledgeWorks portfolio includes three subsidiary organizations: New Tech Network, EDWorks and Strive.