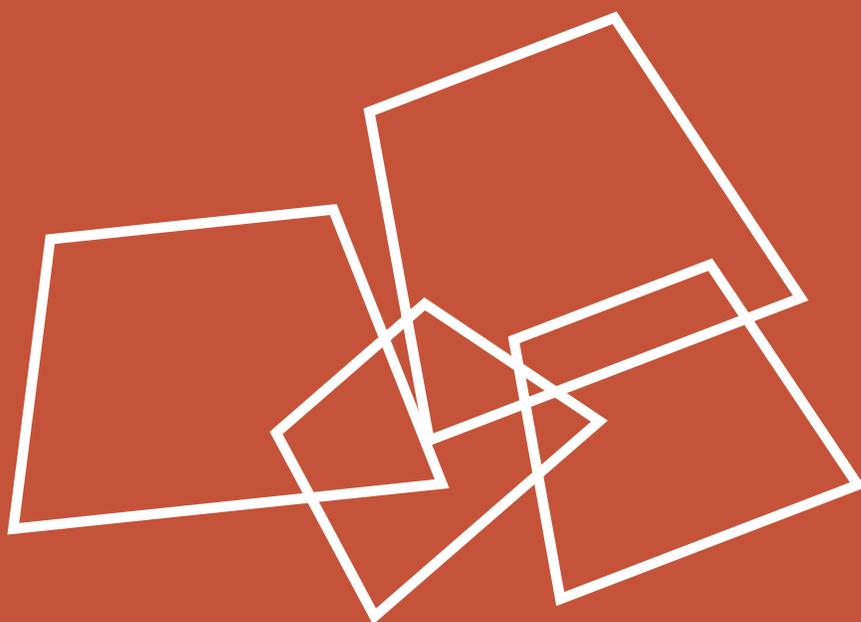


Capitalizing on Potential: Scaling Early College High Schools

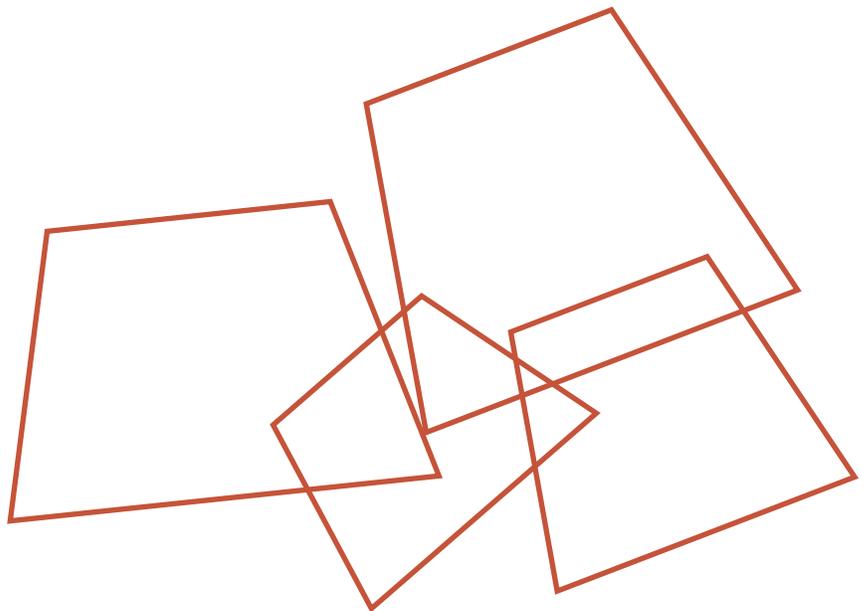
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A State Policy Brief
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Introduction

We live and work in an interconnected world with a truly global economy, driven by nimbleness and innovation. It is increasingly clear to those paying attention that our international success depends on the transformation of our education system. Our continued ability to compete as a nation—and for states, regions, and communities to attract growth industries, create jobs, and attract and retain talent—demands a fresh approach to the way we view college and career readiness. The one-size-fits-all approach of the past and present will not ensure our future success. Our discussions of college and career readiness today have been pigeon-holed by narrow discussions of standards and assessments. These discussions are important, but to be clear, learning structures and outcomes are equally important. Our nation must embrace, more broadly, more personalized, student-centered approaches to teaching and learning that blur the lines between traditional K-12, higher education, and workforce silos. These approaches need to capitalize on rapidly emerging technologies to help all learners master critical competencies and social and emotional skills and to incentivize students to complete college credit, in a robust way, while still in high school. To paraphrase Louis Pasteur, French chemist and microbiologist, change is chance which favors the mind that is well prepared. Our global economy is one that is rapidly evolving and reshaping. We need all of our students and thus all of our graduates ready to propel our nation forward.

How do we do this? First, we need to look at our goals. As a marker, Lumina Foundation, the nation's largest private foundation focused solely on increasing Americans' success in higher education, has articulated an aggressive goal for 2025 in the following way, "To increase the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025."¹ President Obama has articulated a similar goal for the nation, that the nation would once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.² To put this into context, the current percentage of Americans between the ages of 25 and 64 with a two- or four-year degree is 38.7 percent. We also know that 65 percent of U.S. jobs will require some form of postsecondary education by 2020. To reach this goal, the nation must produce 62 million high-quality degrees and credentials over the next decade. If we continue at our current rate, the U.S. will produce around 39 million two- and four-year college degrees by 2025, leaving a gap of 23 million.³ How do we close the gap? To state the obvious, we need to increase the number of individuals successfully navigating high school, matriculating, and completing a post-secondary program. Nationally, we are rapidly becoming a majority-minority nation and low-income, minority students will graduate with a college degree at less than half the rate of their higher income counterparts. If the trend is not reversed, the United States' global economic innovation and strength could be threatened. The aforementioned is why we need to focus on low-income and first-generation students, and racial and ethnic minorities. One excellent way to do that is through Early College High Schools.⁴

"Change is chance which favors the mind that is well prepared. Our global economy is one that is rapidly evolving and reshaping. We need all of our students and thus all of our graduates ready to propel our nation forward."

What is an Early College High School?

Simply put, the best way to prepare students for success in postsecondary education is to provide them with college experiences and success while they are in high school. Currently, many options exist for students in this space, including Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and online, virtual options. These are a great start, but often these programs are the elusive and exclusive opportunities for high performing and/or more affluent students. Given the data just presented, we cannot meet our national goals without fully educating all of our students, particularly our first generation, minority, and low-income students. Often, Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and other options become classroom or individual possibilities. Early College ups the ante by being a school-wide approach focused on all students.

By definition, an Early College High School is a whole-school transformation approach that targets students at risk of dropping out of school. An Early College High School approach blends high school and college work to enable students to graduate with a high school diploma and an associate degree, or 60 college credit hours toward a baccalaureate degree. At its essence, Early College High Schools replace remediation with acceleration, more engaging, rigorous instruction, and individualized supports to prepare students for college and careers. Many times, Early College High Schools are collocated on a college campus (two-year or four-year), giving students great access to not only college coursework but also collegiate environments. Typically, Early College High Schools are smaller, more personalized learning environments (around 100 students per grade level).

Early College High Schools benefit from a fundamentally bold idea that rather than reducing our expectations of students through remediation, students will rise to higher expectations through increased academic rigor. Moreover, by coupling high school and a college experience, students and their families have the opportunity to save time and money toward a postsecondary credential.⁵



“Early College High Schools benefit from a fundamentally bold idea that rather than reducing our expectations of students through remediation, students will rise to higher expectations through increased academic rigor.”

To further clarify the differences between traditional dual enrollment and Early College High Schools, see the chart below:⁶

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS	DUAL ENROLLMENT	EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL
Student Grade Level	Students typically begin in grades 11-12.	Students typically begin in grade 9.
Eligibility Criteria	Students must demonstrate academic potential through GPA, test scores, teacher recommendations, etc.	Students are typically not required to meet academic eligibility criteria to participate.
Target Population	Mid- to high-achieving students.	Students not being well-served by traditional high schools such as low-income, minority, and/or at-risk students.
Curriculum/ Course Selection	Students select individual courses that earn them high school and postsecondary credit if recognized by the institution of higher education.	The school is designed as a coherent unit, with high school and college-level work blended into a single academic program.
Credit Accumulation	Students may earn some postsecondary credit. Some states set a cap on the maximum number of postsecondary credits a student may earn while still in high school.	Structures are established so that students may earn a technical certification, an associate degree, or enough credit to enter a four-year institution as a junior.
Area of Program Focus	Students may take courses in core and elective subject areas.	Postsecondary courses may be focused on a specific area, such as health sciences or engineering.
Guidance and Supports	Students may or may not receive guidance and support from high school and/or secondary staff.	All students receive guidance and supports including typically comprehensive wraparound services.

Results

Early College High Schools not only enable more students, particularly low-income and minority students, to experience both rigorous high school and college coursework, but the approach also leads to improved student outcomes. Currently, Early College High Schools are a national movement serving over 80,000 students in 280 schools. It is not just about breadth but depth as Early College High School students are outperforming their peers nationwide:

- 90% of early college students graduate, compared with 78% nationally.
- 94% of early college graduates earn some college credit while in high school.
- 71% of early college graduates immediately enroll in college, compared with 68% nationally, and 54% of low-income students nationally.
- 30% of early college graduates earn an Associate's degree or postsecondary certificate along with their high school diploma.
- Early college graduates earn an average 38 college credits for free.⁷

For context and full disclosure, KnowledgeWorks' subsidiary, EDWorks, focuses on designing, implementing, and sustaining Early College High Schools in partnership with local education agencies and institutions of higher education. EDWorks is a national school development organization that has launched or supported more than 30 Early College High Schools. In EDWorks' sites with multiple graduation 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 30-55 hours of college credit while still in high school. Furthermore, EDWorks' Early College High School students pass the state math and reading assessments with scores well above the state average, and the Early College High Schools report an average graduation rate of greater than 91 percent.⁸

Purpose of this Policy Brief

The purpose of this policy brief is to examine the enabling policies and funding structures that support the growth and, in particular, the scale of Early College High Schools. The policy brief will focus on the enabling and sustaining policies in states with a particular emphasis on Early College High Schools: North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas. It will also examine how these states have been able to expand and sustain their respective networks. Additionally, this policy brief will provide a survey of state-level funding structures that support Early College High Schools, as well as examine federal funding sources that allow for support and alignment to the goals of Early College High Schools. This analysis includes alignment to workforce and STEM as Early College High Schools provide a platform for integration of workforce priorities, STEM outcomes, and postsecondary credentials. Lastly, this policy brief is not designed to be comprehensive or definitive. Its purpose is to provide a survey of key issues, enabling policies, and funding structures that support the scaling of Early College High Schools at a state level.

Policy Barriers



To better understand enabling policies that assist and provide a catalytic force to scaling Early College High Schools, a quick examination of the policy barriers is helpful. Historically, when examining the policy barriers that blocked the growth of Early College High Schools, there was a focus on dual enrollment or dual credit restrictions. However, 47 states and the District of Columbia currently have statutes and/or regulations governing one or more common statewide dual enrollment policies. Three states (Alaska, New Hampshire, and New York) leave dual enrollment policies to the discretion of local districts and/or postsecondary institutions/systems.⁹ But policy barriers still exist with varying levels of progress in various states. The barriers can be broken down in the following groupings:

College eligibility requirements: The bottom line is that students in Early College High Schools should be able to progress to and through college courses as they are ready based on clear standards and subject-specific assessments. However, some states limit the number of college courses high school students take or restrict access based on minimum cumulative grade point averages, SAT, or ACT scores. The latter generally blocks access to ninth and tenth grade students, most of who have not yet met those bars – and who research shows CAN be successful in college courses given the right motivation and supports.¹⁰

Transfer rules: States need a clear, formalized statewide articulation of transfer rules and transfer agreements to ensure that graduates from Early College High Schools can transfer their college credits to four-year institutions of higher education and shorten the time to earn a degree.¹¹

Funding: Funding structures for Early College High Schools and their students should promote blurring the lines between K-12 and higher education and help students avoid remedial courses. In most states, high school students are ineligible for college financial assistance. Furthermore, in many states K-12 school districts lose funding when students enroll in college-level courses. This creates a bottom line disincentive that discourages high schools from entering into partnerships with institutions of higher education to create Early College High Schools. Moreover, the escalating cost of higher education (including room and board, books, etc.) creates a gap between per-pupil K-12 funding and the cost of college-level course work.¹²

Autonomy and Support: Early College High Schools need greater autonomy, often including separate state school identification, to assist in the design of the learning structure and supports that blur the lines between a traditional high school and postsecondary environments. Currently, few states explicitly grant this autonomy and support to schools or school districts.

Quality, Rigor, and Fidelity: Often, state policy unintentionally blurs the lines between dual enrollment and Early College High Schools by not establishing definitional language and supports to ensure quality, rigor, and fidelity of implementation. This can lead to uneven implementations or confusion in the field on what truly constitutes an Early College High School.

Enabling Policies

Enabling policies can simply be defined as policies that enable the establishment, growth, and/or navigation of one or more of the previously enumerated policy barriers. For the purposes of this paper, enabling policies will be examined in various categories to allow for greater illustration of the myriad of options at policymakers disposal as well as to demonstrate how policies can be combined to create greater catalytic movement and sustainability. The enabling policies are organized into the following four categories:

-
- **Definition:** Policies that clearly define what constitutes an Early College High School, often including types of students, size, coursework, etc.
 - **Extension:** Policies that extend the role of dual enrollment and allow greater opportunities for the development of Early College High Schools.
 - **Compulsion:** Policies that compel school districts and/or institutions of higher education to partner or create agreements to develop or to improve articulation and transfer agreements.
 - **Quality Assurance:** Policies that offer backstops or guardrails to ensure quality of implementation and rigor of course offerings.
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Definition

Policy language that is definitional in nature helps to describe the characteristics and attributes demanded by a state for Early College High Schools. It is illustrative of priorities around student populations; roles of schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education; location; and goals for the Early College High School. Definition language can also serve as a monitor on both quality and rigor with references to size of school, outline of coursework, or goals of coursework (e.g. high school diploma and up to an associate's degree, etc.).

When examining the three states (North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas) with heavier concentrations of Early College High Schools, there are some themes evident in their respective definition language and state-level priorities. Each state's statute, definition, and analysis will be presented on the following page:

Definition

North Carolina

§ 115C-238.50A



1(a) Cooperative innovative high school. – A high school approved by the State Board of Education and the applicable governing Board that meets the following criteria:

- (a) It has no more than 100 students per grade level. This criterion shall not apply to a regional school as defined in G.S. 115C-238.61.
- (b) It partners with an institution of higher education to enable students to concurrently obtain a high school diploma and begin or complete an associate degree program, master a certificate or vocational program, or earn up to two years of college credit within five years.
- (c) It is located on the campus of the partner institution of higher education, unless the governing Board or the local board of trustees for a private North Carolina college specifically waives the requirement through adoption of a formal resolution. This criterion shall not apply to a regional school established as provided in Part 10 of this Article.

North Carolina accounts for Early College High Schools under the policy language of a cooperative innovative high school. This is telling as it calls for open partnership and cooperation between school districts and institutions of higher education. The language mandates size at “no more than 100 students per grade level” and thus ensures a small learning environment with greater personalization. North Carolina overtly outlines the goals that the high schools are to partner “to enable students to concurrently obtain a high school diploma and begin or complete an associate degree...certificate or vocational program... or two years of college credit in five years.” A couple things stand out in the aforementioned language. First, there are multiple postsecondary options available to students in these schools. Second, there is alignment between K-12, higher education, and the workforce. Lastly, there is an extended time period allotted to students and schools. The statute also mandates that the school be located on the campus of the institution of higher education. This allows, as discussed previously, for students to access not only college coursework but also the college environment. The definition does not mention an expressly targeted student population.

Definition

Ohio

§ ORC 3313.6013 F (2)



“Early college high school program” means a program operated by a school district or school and an associated college that provides a personalized learning plan, which is based on accelerated curriculum and includes both high school and college-level coursework, and enables the following students to earn a high school diploma and an associate degree, or the equivalent number of transcribed credits, upon successful completion of the program:

- (a) Students who are underrepresented in regard to completing post-secondary education;
- (b) Students who are economically disadvantaged, as defined by the department of education;
- (c) Students whose parents did not earn a college degree.

Ohio’s definition for Early College High Schools was recently changed in the state’s revised code during 2014 through HB 487. The revision comes after the state established a full network of Early College High Schools and further expanded that network through its Race to the Top Grant.¹³ The definition is based on the work in the state and is thus influenced by emerging coherence in the field. It calls for “a school district or school and an associated college” to be part of the Early College High School. The language allows for school districts or a school, including charters, to partner with an institution of higher education. It compels the partners to provide a “personalized learning plan” for each student that is driven from an “accelerated curriculum and includes both high school and college-level coursework...to earn a high school diploma and an associate degree, or the equivalent number of transcribed credits.” By requiring a personalized learning plan, Ohio compels schools to make sure that students have a plan designed around their strengths and interests, thus increasing engagement. Ohio also overtly calls out the target student population, enumerating underrepresented, economically disadvantaged, and first generation students. The definition is silent on the issues of location, size, and length of program.

Definition

Texas

§102.1091.



(3) Early College High School (ECHS)--A school established under the Texas Education Code (TEC), §29.908, that enables a student in Grade 9, 10, 11, or 12 who is at risk of dropping out, as defined by the TEC, §29.081, or who wishes to accelerate completion of high school to combine high school courses and college-level courses. An ECHS program must provide for a course of study that, on or before the fifth anniversary of a student's first day of high school, enables a participating student to receive both a high school diploma and either an associate degree or at least 60 credit hours toward a baccalaureate degree.

Texas' Early College High School definition in Texas Education Code first outlines its target student population in both grade levels, with a focus on students at risk of dropping out of high school. Texas continues to define its target population with an interesting nuance by including a student "who wishes to accelerate completion of high school to combine high school courses and college-level courses." The language does two things. First, it allows for the expansion of the student target population to include students that could be high achieving but not underrepresented, economically disadvantaged, or first generation students. This allows for greater flexibility in implementation and expansion of the program in the state. Additionally, Texas inserts language to discuss the acceleration of high school, not necessarily only the fusing of high school and college coursework. The language articulates the goal of the Early College High School to allow students to graduate with a "high school diploma and either an associate degree or at least 60 credit hours toward a baccalaureate degree" within a five year period. Much like Ohio, Texas does not stipulate the size or the location for the Early College High School. Definitional language carries significant power. It can expand or restrict the program based on targeted student population; it can establish the goals for the coursework and compel potential alignment to workforce priorities; it can mandate partners, location, and size; and most importantly, it makes quality assurance and accountability more focused.

Extension

Policies can help to extend the reach of current dual enrollment and Early College High Schools by allowing for greater geographical reach or allowing schools and districts greater flexibility to establish an Early College High School. Texas and North Carolina have the most robust statewide networks of Early College High Schools with 107 and 76 schools respectively. Even these states have expanded their initiatives to work with selected districts or geographies as a way to strategically expand with an eye on both reach and sustainability. Other states are making inroads. Rhode Island has experimented with Early College High Schools that act as a blend and an accelerator towards four-year college

completion. The Legislature in Rhode Island charged the Office of Higher Education with developing a four year program that could graduate students in three years. This is possible because as with an Early College, the high school curriculum and college coursework is combined. This program starts in the junior year of high school, allowing students to start a pathway to complete their college core courses at a public institution of higher education.¹⁴ One of the state's most established programs is at Rhode Island College. Called the Early Enrollment Program (EEP), it has awarded college credits to thousands of students. Nearly 50 high schools in Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts offer EEP courses to nearly 1,400 students annually.¹⁵

Three states took advantage of the federal Race to the Top grant program to build or extend their state's Early College High Schools. Ohio added five new Early College High Schools with their grant.¹⁶ Massachusetts launched Early College High Schools with their grants, focusing on aligning Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) into their Early College High School designs.¹⁷ New York launched the Smart Scholars program in 2010 and, with it, established or supported more than 20 Early College High Schools with lead partners the State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY). Through the Smart Scholars Early College High School Program, institutions of higher education partner with school districts to create Early College High Schools that provide students with the opportunity to earn a minimum of 20, and up to 60 transferable college credits while still in high school.¹⁸

One of the longest established dual enrollment programs in the country was the Running Start Program in the state of Washington. The specific statute follows: Running Start was designed to provide Washington students access to postsecondary education while still in high school. The program allows for attendance at certain institutions of higher education in the state and the simultaneous earning of high school and college/university credit.

Extension

Washington

§RCW 28A.600.310 (1)



Eleventh and twelfth grade students or students who have not yet received the credits required for the award of a high school diploma and are eligible to be in the eleventh or twelfth grades may apply to a participating institution of higher education to enroll in courses or programs offered by the institution of higher education.¹⁹

Running Start was initiated by the Legislature as a component of the parent and student Learning by Choice Law in 1990.²⁰ Under the law, students in eleventh and twelfth grades are allowed to take college courses at Washington's community and technical colleges and at the following four-year institutions: Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Washington State University, and Northwest Indian College. Running Start students and families do not pay tuition, but they do pay for college fees and books.²¹ Recently, the Running Start Program was extended to allow districts in Washington and community colleges in Idaho and Oregon to enter into cooperative agreements to allow eleventh and twelfth grade students to earn high school and postsecondary credit.²² This expansion allowed for a regional, multi-state impact to the dual enrollment policy.

The state of Ohio recently rewrote its dual enrollment policy as a way to extend the benefits to more students and, in addition, overtly link Early College High Schools into the policy. As part of HB 487,²³ the state revised the previous dual enrollment policy, known as Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), and created the College Credit Plus program under which, beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, a secondary grade student who is a resident of the state may enroll at a college, on a full- or part-time basis, and complete nonsectarian, non-remedial courses for high school and college credit.²⁴ The law compels that each public high school must develop pathway opportunities to allow for students to earn between 15 and 30 transcript credits; the pathways must be developed with at least one institution of higher education; and the pathways must be published as part of the official offerings for the high school. College Credit Plus takes some of the underpinnings, without the aligned supports and interventions, from Early College High Schools and offers them to the broader high school population in the state. The law also calls for alignment with the Ohio's current and future Early College High Schools.²⁵

Compulsion

Policy often compels entities to act in a way that they would not normally do. Such is the case in education policy, especially in situations where entities are being asked to work across traditional silos (e.g. K-12, higher-education, early childhood, etc.), to blur the lines between silos, or to implement a new program or process. Within the Early College High School and related dual enrollment policy areas, the compulsion policies break down into two distinct groupings: 1) what the institution of higher education needs to do or provide, and 2) what the school district or school needs to do or provide. Why is this policy important for a discussion of enabling or scaling Early College High Schools? It is important because it directly speaks to roles and responsibilities, as well as to what processes need to be in place to support the Early College High School or the student seeking to earn both high school and college credit simultaneously.

To examine compulsion policies, both for institutions of higher education and for school districts, more closely, each state's statute, policy language, and analysis will be presented on the following page:

Compulsion

North Carolina



2011 legislation directs the North Carolina Community College System, University of North Carolina (UNC) General Administration, and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities to develop a plan for articulation of a college transfer certificate to all UNC institutions and participating independent colleges and universities. North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, Inc. must also be included in the development of the plan if it chooses to participate. College transfer certificates must require the successful completion of 30 credit hours of college transfer courses, including English and math, for qualified high school juniors and seniors.

Strong, clear articulation and transfer agreements are essential to the success of Early College High Schools. Students must know that when they graduate from the Early College High School, the college credits that they have accumulated will transfer for credit towards a degree. This is a foundational element. Above, North Carolina compels its public institutions of higher education to “develop a plan for articulation of a college transfer certificate to all University of North Carolina institutions and participating independent colleges and universities.” Additionally, the state outlined the parameters for the transfer certificates and some course offerings for the high school students, “College transfer certificates must require the successful completion of 30 credit hours of college transfer courses, including English and math, for qualified high school juniors and seniors.”

Compulsion

Texas



The institution of higher education in closest geographic proximity to a public high school rated as substantially below the state average in the number of graduates enrolling in higher education institutions must enter into an agreement with that high school to develop a plan to increase students’ college-going rates. Under the plan, the institution must actively engage with local school districts to provide access to rigorous, high-quality dual credit opportunities for qualified students as needed.

The state of Texas compels institutions of higher education to engage with local school districts that are substantially below average in college-going graduates. This is an interesting way to mobilize opportunities for Early College High Schools or an expansion of dual enrollment. The institutions of higher education must enter into an agreement “with that high school to develop a plan to increase students’ college-going rates.” Furthermore they must provide access to, “rigorous, high-quality dual credit opportunities for qualified students.” This policy language not only compels the institution of higher education to enter an agreement based on both school performance and geography but also to provide rigorous academic opportunities for students.

Compulsion

Washington



Each institution of higher education, including technical colleges, must deposit a minimum of 3.5% of revenues collected from tuition and services and activities fees in a locally-held institutional financial aid fund. Moneys in the fund must be used only for specified purposes, including to provide financial aid to high school students enrolled in dual credit programs. Moneys from this fund may be used for all educational expenses related to a student’s participation in a dual credit program including tuition, fees, course materials, and transportation.

The state of Washington uses state law to compel the state’s institutions of higher education to financially support high school students in not only accessing but also paying for dual enrollment activities. By compelling institutions of higher education to invest a minimum of 3.5 percent of their revenues from tuition, services, and fees, the state is able to “provide financial aid to high school students enrolled in dual credit programs...used for all educational expenses related to a student’s participation in a dual credit program including tuition, fees, course materials, and transportation.” Washington’s approach signals that increasing college-going and completion is a major priority for the state.

Compulsion

Ohio



Each district, community school (charter school), and nonpublic high school must provide information to all students in grades 8-11 about the dual enrollment programs the district or school offers. Information provided must include (1) program eligibility, including freshman status as locally determined, and acceptance by college; and (2) program options, including enrollment in college courses for college credit, or both high school graduation and college credit, and financial arrangements for tuition, books, materials, and fees for each option.

Texas



Districts must annually notify parents of students in grades 9-12 of opportunities to earn college credit, including through dual credit programs and joint high school and college credit programs. The notification must include the name and contact information of any public or private entity offering a college credit program in the district. A school district may provide this notification on the district's website. In addition, during the first school year a student is enrolled in a high school, and again during each successive year of enrollment in high school, a school counselor must provide information to the student and the student's parent on the availability of programs in the district under which a student may earn college credit, including Advanced Placement programs, dual credit programs, joint high school and college credit programs, and International Baccalaureate programs.

Both the state of Ohio, through its new College Credit Plus program, and the state of Texas focus on one of the key issues in dual enrollment and Early College High School policy. Promoting awareness through notifying students and parents of dual enrollment options is a significant issue especially for low-income, minority, first-generation, and English Language Learner students. For example, the state of Ohio compels, "Each district, community school (charter school), and nonpublic high school must provide information to all students in grades 8-11 about the dual enrollment programs the district or school offers." Moreover they even compel what information school districts must provide, including program eligibility and options as well as financial aid opportunities. Texas also compels school districts to notify parents and provides even more details for notification which must include, "the name and contact information of any public or private entity offering a college credit program in the district. A school district may provide this notification on the district's website. In addition, during the first school year a student is enrolled in a high school, and again during each successive year of enrollment in high school, a school counselor must provide information to the student and the student's parents on the availability of programs in the district under which a student may earn college credit."

Compulsion

Washington



2013 H.B. 1642 encourages each local board to adopt an academic acceleration policy for high school students, under which the district automatically enrolls each student who meets the state standard on the high school statewide student assessment in the next most rigorous level of advanced courses offered by the high school. Students who successfully complete such an advanced course are then enrolled in the next most rigorous advanced course, with the objective that students will eventually be automatically enrolled in courses that offer the opportunity to earn dual credit for high school and college. Districts must notify students and parents regarding the academic acceleration policy and the advanced courses available to students, and provide parents an opportunity to opt out of the academic acceleration policy and enroll a student in an alternative course.

The state of Washington continues the policy trend of compelling notification of students and parents of academic acceleration policies afforded in the state. However, the state takes it a step further by mandating “each local board to adopt an academic acceleration policy for high school students, under which the district automatically enrolls each student who meets the state standard on the high school statewide student assessment in the next most rigorous level of advanced courses offered by the high school...will eventually be automatically enrolled in courses that offer the opportunity to earn dual credit for high school and college.” This policy enforces rigor for students and makes dual credit courses foundational for a student’s path through high school. However, there is a concern here as well. Many Early College High Schools target students that are at risk of dropping out and may not, at least initially, exhibit a strong academic resume. The above policy could, inadvertently, sidetrack students that may excel in the comprehensive environment of an Early College High School.

Quality Assurance

Assurances of quality are essential to multiple aspects of implementing an Early College High School approach or even ensuring rigor in an expanded dual enrollment program. The quality assurance can be broken down in a few different ways. First, ensuring fidelity to the Early College High School approach and the tenets created in state statute is crucial. Second, ensuring the rigor of course content and student assessment, as well as the qualifications of instructors, is essential to high student achievement and credit accumulation. Furthermore, without strong quality assurances in place, ultimately questions around the legitimacy of the college credits could be called into question. Quality assurances require strong partnerships between school districts, or the Early College High School, and the institution of higher education. Furthermore, quality assurances require clear and transparent eligibility guidelines that allow students to take

college courses in specific subject areas as students prove their ability to handle work in those areas. Lastly, depending on the higher education governance structure, states can incorporate quality control supports and structures into state law or state regulations to ensure compliance by both school districts and institutions of higher education.²⁶

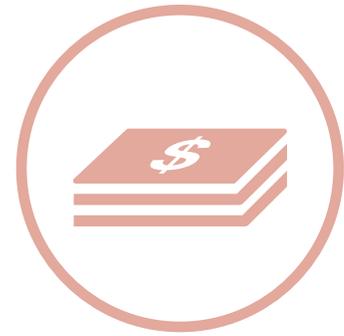
As previously mentioned, definitional policy language can be illustrative of priorities around student populations: roles of schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education; location; and goals for the Early College High School. Moreover, to ensure quality of implementation and fidelity to the spirit of the law, definitional language serves as a monitor on both quality and rigor with references to size of school, outline of coursework, or goals of coursework. North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas all have definitional language that outlines what constitutes an Early College High School as well as the guardrails for implementation and standards by which to judge a school's viability as an Early College High School under state law. One area for further policy exploration and implementation is to backstop state level Early College High School definitional language with a rubric that undergirds the definitional language with additional assurances and/or outcomes that each Early College High School should be driving towards. This could insert a level of continuous improvement into the quality assurance process.

Utah has a long-established, large-scale dual enrollment policy administered by their state higher education agency, the Utah Board of Regents. The program rules specifically lay out quality assurances, and while they do not specifically address Early College High Schools, the program rules do provide a model for program oversight that could be migrated to support Early College High School quality assurance. Utah accounts for student entry requirements, including quantitative academic measures (GPA, ACT, etc.) and qualitative measures (teacher recommendations, staff approvals, etc.). Additionally, the rules outline faculty preparation, including orientation and in-service training, with a focus on curriculum design, assessment criteria, and course and administrative requirements. Lastly, the state requires an assessment, including site visits and a mandated evaluation study to be completed every half-decade.²⁷

Ohio, through its recently passed HB487, increased quality assurances in its statewide dual enrollment program. In the state's move from Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), to College Credit Plus, Ohio mandated that the courses that students will access under the new program must: a) be the same as those offered on the college campus, b) be nonsectarian and non-remedial, c) apply towards a degree or professional certificate, and d) be taught by instructors who meet the Ohio Board of Regents academic credential requirements.²⁸

Funding Structures

Enabling policies can only move a state so far towards implementing and scaling Early College High Schools. Funding structures and aligned policies play a vital role in initiating, sustaining, and scaling any key policy initiative, including Early College High Schools. Early College High Schools carry their own unique cost burdens just as any program or initiative does. The costs for Early College High Schools can be broken down into start-up costs and ongoing costs that include faculty, tuition, books, fees, transportation, and comprehensive wraparound services. This section will be broken into three subsections: 1) funding barriers, 2) state funding structures, and 3) federal funding supports.



Funding Barriers

Some of the overarching funding barriers for early college include the following:

Funding Levels: Not all states award high schools and institutions of higher education the same amount of funding for early college students, known as level funding. Disproportional funding creates a disincentive for the school district and the institution of higher education. Some of the states that do provide level funding are Colorado, Michigan, Tennessee, and Texas.²⁹

Tuition Costs: Some states do not cover early college students' tuition and fees, which can deter student and family participation, particularly for low-income, first-generation students. Colorado, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas are some of the states that cover the cost of tuition and fees for Early College High School students.³⁰

State Funding Structures

As a start, states should encourage the flexible use of per-pupil funding and devise special programs to incentivize school districts and institutions of higher education to partner on establishing and supporting Early College High Schools.³¹ State dual credit policies should be structured to encourage substituting college courses for high school classes as this can reduce duplication, proving a more efficient system. The savings from these efficiencies should be reinvested back into the early colleges to provide wraparound services and student supports, including counseling, advising, and transportation. Some state policies promote shared services as a cost savings through shared facilities and resources. For example North Carolina and Tennessee call for Early College High Schools to share personnel, resources, and facilities between school districts and institutions of higher education to effectively use funding for high schools, vocational, and higher education.³² This also can increase ownership because each of the institutions has "skin in the game."

Once again, when examining the states with arguably the greatest levels of statewide scale of Early College High Schools, North Carolina and Texas, there are some themes evident in their respective funding structures that illustrate state level priorities. Each state's statute, funding structure, and analysis are presented on the following page:

Funding Structure

North Carolina

§ 115C-238.54.



Funds for cooperative innovative high schools.

(g) Students in cooperative innovative high schools that have a community college as their partner institution of higher education and were approved under G.S. 115C-238.51A(c) shall be included in calculations of budget full-time equivalent students for the North Carolina Community College System. Students in cooperative innovative high schools that have a community college as their partner institution of higher education and were approved under G.S. 115C-238.51A(b) shall not be included in calculations of budget full-time equivalent students for the North Carolina Community College System.

(h) The State Board of Education shall reimburse The University of North Carolina for tuition for courses taken by students at cooperative innovative high schools that have a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina as their partner institution of higher education and were approved under G.S. 115C-238.51A(c). Tuition payments shall not exceed the annual Board of Governors-approved undergraduate resident tuition rate calculated on a per credit hour basis and shall not include fees. In addition, the cooperative innovative high school students' credit hours shall be nonfundable under The University of North Carolina Semester Credit Hour Enrollment Change Funding Model. The State Board of Education shall not reimburse The University of North Carolina for tuition for courses taken by students at cooperative innovative high schools that have a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina as their partner institution of higher education and were approved under G.S. 115C-238.51A(b).

(i) The State Board of Education shall reimburse private North Carolina colleges for tuition for courses taken by students at cooperative innovative high schools that have a private North Carolina college as their partner institution of higher education and were approved under G.S. 115C-238.51A(c). Tuition payments shall not exceed the highest undergraduate resident rate approved by the Board of Governors for The University of North Carolina constituent institutions and shall not include fees. The State Board of Education shall not reimburse private North Carolina colleges for tuition for courses taken by students at cooperative innovative high schools that have a private North Carolina college as their partner institution of higher education and were approved under G.S. 115C-238.51A(b). (2003-277, s. 2; 2005-276, s. 7.33(a); 2010-31, s. 7.21(b); 2011-145, s. 7.1A(j); 2012-142, s. 7.11(f).)

In reviewing the funding structure and policy language from the state of North Carolina, one theme is abundantly clear: it is fairly comprehensive. The funding structure accounts for equitable funding levels between both the high schools and the institutions of higher education. It also accounts for Early College High School students' tuition costs. The funding structure also overtly accounts for the various types of institutions of higher education in the state of North Carolina, including the North Carolina Community College System, the University of North Carolina, and private colleges and universities in the states that partner on Early College High Schools. The State Board of Education is compelled to reimburse the institution of higher education at the same level as a full-time equivalent student at the institution.

For the North Carolina Community College System, Early College High School students "shall be included in calculations of budget full-time equivalent students for the North Carolina Community College System." For the University of North Carolina, "Tuition payments shall not exceed the annual Board of Governors-approved undergraduate resident tuition rate calculated on a per credit hour basis and shall not include fees." For North Carolina private colleges and universities, "Tuition payments shall not exceed the highest undergraduate resident rate approved by the Board of Governors for The University of North Carolina constituent institutions and shall not include fees." In other words, private colleges and universities will be reimbursed as if they were part of the public University of North Carolina system. Moreover, it is important to note that the North Carolina General Assembly reimburses full-time equivalent costs to the community college system based on participation reports. However, state funds are not available to cover textbooks or fees. Fees are not waived unless the institution of higher education chooses to do so. The school district and community college determine how to pay for textbooks and whether/how student fees will be paid.³³

Funding Structure

Texas

§102.1091



Early College High Schools.

(d) Conditions of ECHS program operation.

(3) A student enrolled in an ECHS course for high school graduation credit may not be required to pay for tuition, fees, or required textbooks. The school district or charter in which the student is enrolled shall pay for tuition, fees, and required textbooks, to the extent those charges are not waived by the institution of higher education.

The policy language for the state of Texas is much leaner than that of North Carolina but just as effective at assisting school districts and institutions of higher education to partner and implement Early College High Schools. Texas' funding structure accounts for equitable funding levels between the partners implementing an Early College High School and also fully accounts for student tuition costs. In fact, Texas takes it a step further by covering not only tuition but also fees and textbooks. The statute states, "A student enrolled in an ECHS (Early College High School) course for high school graduation credit may not be required to pay for tuition, fees, or required textbooks." Furthermore, the statute puts the cost burden on both the school district and the institution of higher education: "The school district or charter in which the student is enrolled shall pay for tuition, fees, and required textbooks, and to the extent those charges are not waived by the institution of higher education."

To assist with the cost of implementing and sustaining an Early College High School in Texas, each school district receives an annual allotment of \$275 for each student in average daily attendance in grades 9-12. With certain exceptions, a district or campus must use the funds for any of five outlined purposes, including implementing or administering a program that encourages students to pursue advanced academic opportunities, including early college high school programs and dual credit, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses.³⁴

Texas creates another layer of incentive for community colleges in the state as these institutions can earn points towards their performance score and funding from serving dual enrollment students. Texas has designed performance-based funding around steps on a progression that helps at-risk students progress through important education milestones. Students can enter the system at any level of competency, and the college receives funding for getting them to the next level (e.g., completion of remediation, graduation), regardless of whether the student is in high school or college.³⁵

Simply put, funding structures matter. Coupled with strong definitional language, it is not by accident that Texas and North Carolina lead the nation in scaling Early College High Schools. Texas currently has 107 Early College High Schools while North Carolina has implemented 76. Why would these states invest in Early College High Schools when it takes a larger up-front investment and legislative action and coordination? Fundamentally, it's about student outcomes and economic development. Early College High Schools are improving the state's high school and college graduation rates and preparing students for high-skill careers by engaging them in a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum that compresses the number of years it takes to complete a two or four year college degree. Research tells us that this ultimately reduces the costs of college and allows students to save thousands of dollars in tuition, fees, and book expenses. Early College High Schools are a down payment on a student's postsecondary success and a state's viability in the 21st century.

Federal Funding Supports

Federal funding plays a role in supporting Early College High Schools across the country in various ways. Given the student population targeted by Early College High Schools, Title I funds can support some of the services at the schools. Moreover, Title II funds for professional development can be targeted to assist Early College High Schools with technical assistance and professional development for high school teachers, assisting with instruction and curriculum and assessment development, among other activities designed to improve teaching. Federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) have been used to transform low performing schools into Early College High Schools. Additionally, and mentioned previously, Race to the Top (RTTT) funds supported the growth of networks of Early College High Schools in both Massachusetts and Ohio.



However, the areas with the highest potential for accessing federal funding to support the scaling of Early College High Schools include career and technical education and financial aid.

States, districts, and schools are beginning to fuse career and technical education, including STEM, to an early college approach by creating STEM Early College High Schools. One of the first STEM Early College High Schools was the Metro School in Columbus, Ohio. The school was established in 2006, when central Ohio school districts, Ohio State University, and Battelle created a “small” STEM school with an Early College pedigree. Metro School is the platform school for the Ohio STEM Learning Network (OSLN) and was the first higher education (The Ohio State University), business (Battelle Memorial Institute), and K-12 partnership for STEM learning in Ohio.³⁶ The state of Massachusetts launched six early colleges serving 13 districts based on the national exemplar offered by Metro School with the state’s RTTT funds.³⁷

A more sustainable pot of funding that creates the linkage to career technical education, and in particular STEM, is the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. The purpose of the Perkins Act is to provide individuals with the academic and technical skills needed to succeed in an ever evolving, knowledge-based economy. Federal resources have helped states ensure that their career and technical programs are academically rigorous and up-to-date with the needs of business and industry. The federal contribution to career and technical education through the Perkins Act is approximately \$1.3 billion annually.³⁸ Once again, Massachusetts takes advantage of aligning federal career and technical education funding, through Perkins, to support the state’s dual enrollment expansion. The state’s Career Vocational Technical Education (CVTE) Postsecondary Linkages Program supports students’ seamless and successful completion of CVTE programs of study that begin in high school and result in a postsecondary credential. Each local consortium is comprised of a lead agency that is a community college or a school district which has a Perkins Act Local Plan Chapter 74 approved program. Each consortium’s work is guided by a local advisory committee that assists in the planning and coordination to ensure the quality necessary to have a significant impact on students’ readiness for college, apprenticeships, and employment.³⁹ Currently 15 Postsecondary Linkage programs linked to Perkins postsecondary recipients have been developed

across the state of Massachusetts. CVTE also developed six new articulation agreements for specific vocational technical courses and is in the process of developing an additional seven articulation agreements in order to allow students to claim postsecondary credit in vocational technical coursework when they enter any Massachusetts community college.⁴⁰ The CVTE program is providing extension, quality assurance, and alignment to further strengthen not only the career technical alignment between secondary and postsecondary but also the foundation to potentially build future STEM Early College High Schools.

Other states are also aligning career and technical education with dual enrollment strategies and Early College High Schools:

- Connecticut is working on a process to make all of the state's community colleges dual enrollment programs. Currently, a majority of the community colleges are funded by the Perkins funded College and Career Pathways program.⁴¹
- The District of Columbia is actively looking to build a state-of-the-art career and technical education program that encompasses the following four tenets: accessibility to every student, alignment to state academic standards and industry standards, articulation with postsecondary programs, and reflective of local workforce development needs.⁴² As part of this new initiative, the District of Columbia wants the outcome to lead to a certificate or an industry-recognized credential and an associate's degree or higher.⁴³ The District of Columbia is actively exploring implementing Early College High Schools as part of the Perkins driven strategy.
- Lastly, Texas has created, with its Perkins reserve funds, the Career Technical Education Early College High School Grant program. This grant program is in partnership between the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Workforce Commission, and the Texas Education Agency and will fund four Early College High Schools in Dallas, Houston, Odessa, and the Rio Grande Valley.⁴⁴

The federal government invests billions of dollars into student-based financial aid programs. One of these programs could hold promise for Early College High School students. The Pell Grant Program provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and certain post-baccalaureate students to promote access to postsecondary education.⁴⁵ In January of 2015, President Obama announced a federal Pell Grant pilot program for high school students earning college credit. This pilot will help identify new approaches to enroll more traditionally underserved students in Early College High Schools and other dual enrollment programs.

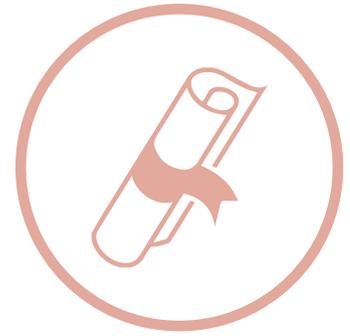
This effort is based on the premise that students in dual enrollment and Early College High Schools "will demonstrate that the use of Pell Grants by high school students to cover the costs of taking college courses, with proper stipulations, increases the efficiency of federal investment in higher education."⁴⁶ Furthermore, because of the structure and supports provided by an Early College High School, it is conceivable that Pell Grant dollars could bypass remediation, allowing students to earn more degrees in less time when they use financial aid to cover the costs of college courses as high school students. It is yet to be determined the full parameters of the pilot or its short or long term impact; however, it is a concept that holds promise for Early College High Schools and their students.

Conclusion

Scaling any education initiative at the state level is a difficult proposition demanding results, clear strategic vision, focused alignment of enabling policies, and the right funding structures. States must enact the right balance of enabling policies, accounting for policies that define, extend, compel, and maintain high quality implementation and fidelity. As previously stated, definitional language carries significant power. It provides the guardrails and the foundation for Early College High School growth. It is not an accident that the two states, North Carolina and Texas, with the most refined definitional language have also been able to meaningfully scale the approach with 76 and 107 Early College High Schools respectively. Moreover, a state must also implement the funding structure that addresses the following: equity (funding balance between high school and postsecondary); coverage for tuition, fees, and books; and allowance for key wraparound services, including counseling, advising, and transportation. In addition to state funding structures, states should look to capitalize on federal funding structures at their disposal, including but not limited to Perkins.

If states want to look at the most effective and efficient policies, they should look at the powerful combination of tight, clear definitional language and the funding structures put in place in North Carolina and Texas. Both states clearly define what an early college (or cooperative innovative high school in the case of North Carolina) is and account for target student population; establish the goals for the coursework; mandate partners, location, and size; and, by defining the approach, clearly make quality assurance and accountability more focused. Additionally, both states address tuition costs and the key funding barriers for school districts and higher education. North Carolina and Texas, because of this alignment between enabling policy and funding structures, have collectively implemented nearly 200 early colleges.

Scaling approaches like Early College High Schools is essential to our nation's long-term economic viability and is a vehicle to lift hundreds of thousands of low-income, first-generation students to new levels of accomplishment. Our world and our interconnected economy will continue to evolve and change over the coming decades. Change is chance, Early College High Schools help to better prepare the minds of tomorrow.



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About the Author



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