

Early College High School Initiative

Core Principles

Sponsored by
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

In Partnership with
Carnegie Corporation of New York
The Ford Foundation
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Coordinated by



Early College High Schools: *Core Principles*

Education beyond high school is more critical now than ever before. A high school diploma and at least some college credit are absolutely essential for full participation in today's economy. A four-year college graduate earns 70 percent more than a high school graduate does. Even one year of post-secondary education increases lifetime earnings. The unemployment rate for high school dropouts is four times the rate for college graduates.

Yet far too few youth make it all the way through to a Bachelor's degree. Although nearly three-quarters of high school graduates begin some form of further education, over half who enter a two-year or four-year college fail to complete a degree; one-third never even make it to the second year.

The statistics are even more alarming for minority and low-income students. Only 18 percent of African Americans and 10 percent of Hispanics complete a four-year college degree by age 29, compared with 34 percent of whites. The numbers are even lower for Native-American students: only three in five will graduate from high school, and of those less than 3 percent will go on to earn a Bachelor's degree. In contrast, upper-income students are seven times more likely than low-income students to earn a Bachelor's degree by age 24.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, with Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, has provided funding to establish over 150 early college high schools by 2008. The Early College High School Initiative draws on lessons learned from the expe-

riences of dual-enrollment programs, middle colleges, small schools, studies of time wasted in the senior year, and existing examples of institutions combining high school and college.

Benefits of Early College High School

From the perspective of many young people, high school is boring and its purpose is unclear. It takes too long to get a diploma, and there are few incentives to do well because college seems both too expensive and out of reach.

Early college high schools:

- Make higher education more accessible, affordable, and attractive by bridging the divide between high school and college;
- Provide needed guidance and support from adults through the first two years of college;
- Facilitate the transition of motivated students to higher education; and
- Demonstrate new ways of integrating levels of schooling to better serve the intellectual and developmental needs of young people.

Early college high schools are small, autonomous schools where:

- Students earn an Associate's degree or two years of college credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school;
- Mastery and competence are rewarded with enrollment in college-level courses, and the years to a postsecondary degree are compressed; and
- The middle grades are included or there is outreach to middle-grade students to promote academic preparation and awareness of the early college high school option.

Beyond Alignment: The Rationale for the Early College High School Model

The final years of high school and the first two years of postsecondary education constitute a developmental period that should launch students through their early adulthood into further education and work. Nonetheless, many students drop out of high school or leave school during the first semesters of college. The problem is particularly acute for students who are highly motivated but have not received the academic preparation necessary to meet high school standards, students who are English language learners, students whose family obligations keep them at home, and students for whom the cost of college is prohibitive.

In high school, many of these students take non-challenging, repetitious classes. Although they may meet high school exit standards and enter college, there is a substantial gap between those standards and the preparation needed to succeed in credit-generating college courses. Thus, the first semester of college can be particularly difficult. In addition, many high schools and postsecondary institutions lack resources to provide students with sustained guidance and support.

Over the last decade, policymakers have sought to improve the transition to postsecondary education in a variety of ways:

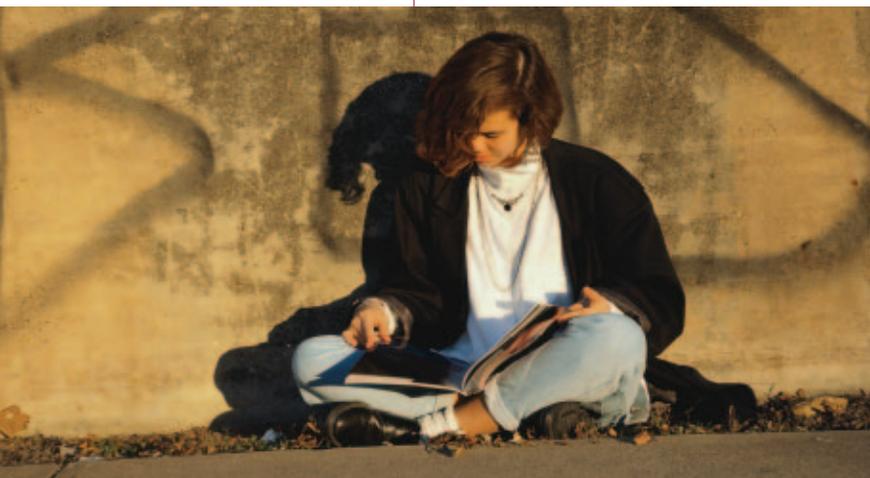
- By beginning college awareness and academic preparation as early as middle school;
- By setting higher standards for high school graduation; and
- By ensuring that each student has an adult to provide advice and guidance.

In addition, there is now general agreement that advancement to college should depend upon academic competence rather than the accumulation of credit hours.

Even with better alignment between high school and postsecondary academic requirements, and with options in high school for advanced academic work, the students for whom early college high school is intended face a confusing, sometimes daunting array of choices in attempting to enter postsecondary education. For that reason, while early college high school may eventually be a choice for many students, the small schools being created through this initiative focus on students for whom a smooth transition into postsecondary education is now problematic.

The partners in the initiative believe that encountering the rigor, depth, and intensity of college work at an earlier age inspires average, underachieving, and well-prepared high school students. In addition, early college high school helps reduce financial and admissions barriers faced by many low-income students. Early college high schools move several steps beyond aligning high school exit and college entrance standards. They are “existence proofs” or physical places where high school and college meet.

The partners in the initiative believe that encountering the rigor, depth, and intensity of college work at an earlier age will inspire average, underachieving, and well-prepared high school students to work hard and stretch themselves intellectually.



Attributes of Early College High Schools

Each early college high school develops a unique vision and a learning environment that represents community interests and student needs. However, all early college high schools share the following characteristics:

- Students earn an Associate's degree or two years of college credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school;
- Mastery and competence are rewarded with enrollment in college-level courses;
- The years to a postsecondary degree are compressed; and
- The middle grades are included or there is outreach to middle-grade students to promote academic preparation and awareness of the early college high school option.

Early college high schools also share the attributes of high-performing small schools:

- A common focus on key, research-based goals and intellectual mission;
- Small, personalized learning environments, with up to 400 students per school;
- Respect and responsibility among students, among faculty, and between students and faculty;
- Time for staff collaboration and for the inclusion of parents and the community in an education partnership; and
- Technology as a tool for designing and delivering engaging and imaginative curricula.

Attributes in Practice

All early college high school designs ensure that students prepare for and master college-level work. The challenge is not only to establish a small-scale, nurturing environment and



rigorous academic standards for high school but also to maintain this environment for the first two years of college-level work.

Shared Vision: Early college high school students, parents, staff, higher education, and community partners all share a common vision for student success: they value learning for its own sake and for the career choices it puts before young people. The vision is regularly reinforced and renewed. Expectations are clearly established for admission and for the standards and quality of work required in order for students to begin college-level courses, gain college credit, and demonstrate mastery. A letter of agreement or memorandum of understanding clearly articulates the vision of the participating school and higher education institution for student success, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the school and higher education and community partners.

Culture of Learning and Support: The consistent focus of the school is on instruction. The curriculum is language-rich and reinforces literacy development. The curriculum and instruction engage students in active inquiry. The purpose of practice and repetition is always clear to students. There are

Early college high schools have the potential to improve high school graduation rates and better prepare students for family-supporting careers by:

- Changing the structure of the high school years;
- Compressing the number of years to a college degree; and
- Removing financial and other barriers to college.

The challenge is not only to establish a small-scale, nurturing environment and rigorous academic standards for high school but also to maintain this environment for the first two years of college-level work.

ongoing opportunities for students to demonstrate in-depth understanding and application of their knowledge. The schedule provides time for students to work on high-level learning.

Teachers are certified in their fields or have attained mastery of their academic disciplines; professors work with teachers and attend collaboratively to student needs. Professional development enables teachers, professors, and other staff to continually reflect upon practice, improve instruction and student learning, and expand their own learning.

Early college high schools offer college courses taught in the high school or on a college campus. High school and college services, resources, and facilities are available and welcoming to students, including laboratory and arts facilities, academic support centers, information resources/libraries, and technology.

Focus on Outcomes: Teachers, professors, and staff have regular time to discuss student work, and there is continual assessment of individual student progress toward performance expectations. With faculty and advisor approval, all students formulate an academic plan, commit to it, and assume growing responsibility for their own learning. Students

demonstrate adequate academic progress through multiple measures of performance, such as standardized tests, performance assessments, portfolios, and real-world tasks. The school has clear criteria regarding completion of high school and college credits. There are rules for acceptable time to reach standards, for second chances, and for students who are not making adequate progress.

Placement testing policies and college-level expectations for reading, writing, and math are public and clear and meet nationally recognized benchmarks. Students complete high school requirements while achieving up to two years of college and/or an Associate's degree; an Associate's degree and high school diploma may be awarded simultaneously.

As a result of their enrollment in early college high schools, motivated students gain access to rigorous teaching and learning. The priority of this initiative is to serve low-income young people, first-generation college goers, English language learners, and students of color, all of whom are statistically underrepresented in higher education and for whom society often has low aspirations for academic achievement. The initiative will increase the number of those young people who attain an Associate's degree or two years of college credit and the opportunity to attain a Bachelor's degree. By changing the structure of the high school years and compressing the number of years to an Associate's degree, Early college high school also has the potential to save money for families and taxpayers and to better prepare students for entry into high-skill careers. Finally, early college high schools unify and reconceptualize academic work from ninth through fourteenth grades, and thus challenge the structure of the current secondary/postsecondary system.



Early college high schools are small schools from which students leave with not only a high school diploma but also an Associate's degree or two years of college credit toward a Bachelor's degree. By changing the structure of the high school years and compressing the number of years to a college degree, early college high schools have the potential to improve graduation rates and better prepare students for entry into high-skill careers. This approach helps young people to progress toward the education and experience they need to succeed in life and a family-supporting career.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, along with Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, is funding the Early College High School Initiative. By 2008, the partner organizations will create or redesign more than 150 pioneering small high schools. Jobs for the Future coordinates the Early College High School Initiative and provides support to the partners and to the effort as a whole.

www.antiochsea.edu

Antioch University Seattle

www.earlycollege.cuny.edu

City University of New York

www.foundationccc.org

Foundation for California Community Colleges

www.georgiaearlycolleges.org

Georgia Department of Education and the University System of Georgia

www.jff.org

Jobs for the Future

www.kwfdn.org

KnowledgeWorks Foundation

www.laguardia.edu/mcnc

Middle College National Consortium

www.ndlr.org

National Council of La Raza

www.gatewaytocollege.org

Portland Community College: Gateway to College

www.secme.org

SECME

www.utahpartnership.utah.org

Utah Partnership

www.woodrow.org

Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation

In addition, state-based early college high school efforts in North Carolina and Texas are affiliated with the initiative.

For more information, see
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