

Emerging Patterns and Relationships

A Summary of the Early College High School Initiative Evaluation Report (AIR & SRI, May 2008)

The Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) — launched in 2002 — aims to serve students who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary institutions. Through this initiative, Early College Schools (ECSs) offer students a chance to earn an Associate's degree or up to 2 years of college credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school.

College-level coursework in high school traditionally has been available only to academically advanced students. Within the ECHSI, earning college credits motivates struggling students, thereby increasing their interest in and access to postsecondary education as well as their chances of completing college.

Although many students entering ECSs are performing below grade level, these schools offer students an opportunity to be on an accelerated path to college readiness and to college.

ECSs seek to improve high school graduation rates and better prepare students for college and careers by:

- Coupling rigorous and relevant instruction with intensive support
- Compressing the number of years to a college degree
- Removing financial and other barriers to college

In 2006–07, the ECHSI turned 5 years old. With a critical mass of ECSs enrolling all planned grades, the evaluation focused on exploring early student outcomes.

The Initiative: The ECHSI is sponsored primarily by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The number of ECSs in operation had grown to 130 by fall 2006. Plans call for more than 200 by 2011.

Funding: As of 2006, the foundation invested more than \$110 million in the initiative. Additional and long-term funding for schools comes from a variety of public and private sources.

Participants: The ECHSI is operated by 13 grantee organizations, or intermediaries. The intermediaries play a key role in the ECHSI. Intermediaries must identify promising local partnerships among institutions of higher education, school districts, community organizations, and other entities;

ECS Student Outcomes

Several sources of data (including state and district Web sites, an ECS survey, and a student survey) provided information on intermediate student outcomes of interest to many observers. Some findings include:

- Average daily attendance in ECSs was 94 percent.
- ECS students must take state assessments, and they do well — 82 percent achieved proficiency in English language arts (ELA) and 68 percent did so in mathematics. On average, ECS students are doing better than students in other high schools in their districts on state tests. (See figure on page 2.)
- On average, 85 percent of ECS students remain at the school and progress to the next grade. And, for eight of the most mature ECSs, the estimated on-time graduation rate was 70 percent, on average.

Participation in college courses is a key part of the ECS student experience. On a survey, students reported on outcomes related to their academic programs:

- In spring 2007, 52 percent of ECS students were enrolled in at least one college course.

“It created an ideal. ... Because there was so much interest in increasing postsecondary attainment, ECS represents a powerful engine.”

—JFF representative

assist in fostering and solidifying those partnerships; distribute and monitor the use of ECHSI funding for startup and early implementation of the schools; and support networking activities for the schools. Local partnerships work together to open ECSs. Jobs for the Future (JFF) coordinates the initiative. JFF also coordinates the Student Information System (SIS), a secure, confidential collection of data about students attending ECSs throughout the United States.

Location: In 2006–07, the ECHSI was active in 23 states. Its geographic focus includes California; New York, NY; North Carolina; Ohio; Texas; and Washington.

How are Early College Schools developed?

- As newly developed, stand-alone schools or as existing high schools that adapt the characteristics of an ECS, located on or off college or university campuses
- As new high schools or programs within larger comprehensive high schools

Who teaches the college courses?

- College instructors who may or may not be certified to teach in high schools
- High school instructors who are qualified to teach college courses (usually as adjunct faculty with the partner colleges or universities)
- High school instructors teaching college-level high school courses, such as Advanced Placement (AP)

How do Early College School students participate in college courses?

- By attending college-level or college-credit courses taught on the high school campus
- By attending college courses that only enroll other ECS students on a college campus
- By attending college courses with both college students and a group of ECS students on the college campus
- By attending college courses as an individually enrolled student on a college campus with other college students

Who operates Early College Schools?

- ECS staff
- College and/or university partners
- District or charter management organization staff
- Community-based organizations and other community partners

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Who Do ECSs Serve?

ECSs are committed to enrolling students who meet one or more of the following characteristics:

- Are racial and ethnic minorities
- Lack financial resources for college
- Lack access to rigorous academics
- Are English language learners
- Would be the first in their family to attend college

School-level data show that in 2006–07, most ECSs enrolled more minority students and more low-income students than their geographic comparison districts — a pattern also noted in previous years of the evaluation.

Student survey data in 2006–07 suggest that 25 percent of ECS students come from homes where English is not the primary spoken language. This compares with 21 percent of high school students nationally.

In 2006–07, ECS students also reported, on average, that 33 percent of their mothers and 29 percent of their fathers were college graduates. These statistics may be higher than the national average and will be monitored over time to determine any emerging pattern.

A tension exists between two ECHSI goals: targeting a student population who may not be academically prepared for the rigor of the curriculum and allowing those students to earn college credits while in high school. Some schools have been able to achieve a balance between the two goals without sacrificing either one. Others have made changes to either their college credit accumulation goals or to their admissions policies.

- Students reported an average GPA of 3.0 in their college courses.
- More than three-fourths of ECS students (79 percent) expected to graduate with at least 1 year of college credits, and 46 percent expected to earn 2 years of credits.

ECSs' Structural Characteristics and Student Outcomes

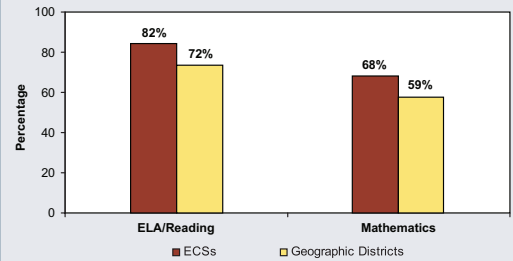
By fall 2006, the ECHSI had 130 affiliated ECSs. Through their partnership with intermediaries, ECSs have emerged with many different structural characteristics. Following is a brief discussion of variation in key characteristics, including their relationships to several student outcomes.

- **ECS location.** For evaluation purposes, the ECSs are considered to be “located” where they offer the majority of their high school courses. More than half of ECSs (56 percent) were located on a 2-year or 4-year college campus. The remainder were in their own school building (37 percent) or in a building with another school or other occupants (7 percent). ECSs located on college campuses had more positive outcomes than other ECSs on attendance and assessment proficiency rates, and students reported more academic engagement and self-confidence, less disruptive behaviors among their peers, and higher post-ECS educational aspirations. These findings support the idea that the location of the early college relates to student outcomes (often referred to as the “power of the site”).
- **Institution of higher education partnerships.** Although 9 percent of ECSs have both 2-year and 4-year institution of higher education (IHE) partners, ECSs are primarily partnered with 2-year IHEs (64 percent). The remaining ECSs have 4-year IHE partners (24 percent with public institutions and 3 percent with private institutions). ECSs with 4-year IHE partners had higher attendance and assessment proficiency rates, and students reported more academic interest and higher postsecondary aspirations, yet also reported more disruptive behaviors among their peers.
- **Origin.** Most ECSs (66 percent) are startup schools — new schools originated as part of this initiative. The remaining evolved out of existing schools where either the entire school became an ECS or part of the school became an ECS or an ECS program. Startup ECSs had higher attendance and assessment proficiency rates, and students reported fewer disruptive behaviors among their peers and higher college GPAs.

When considering these findings, it is important to remember that these are merely relationships. The causes for the documented differences in outcomes between types of ECSs have not been determined.

Students in ECSs, on average, score proficient on their state assessments at higher rates than students at other high schools in the surrounding districts

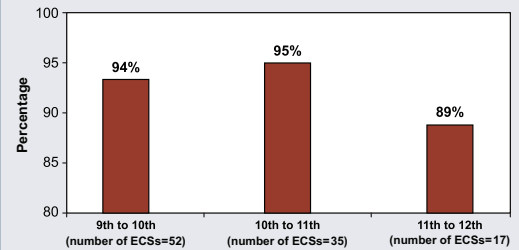
ECSs' and Districts' Average Assessment Proficiency Rates, 2006–07



* Note: Assessment proficiency rates do not control for student demographic characteristics or student achievement prior to enrolling in the ECSs.

On average, 85 percent or more of students progress to the next grade rather than dropping out or being retained

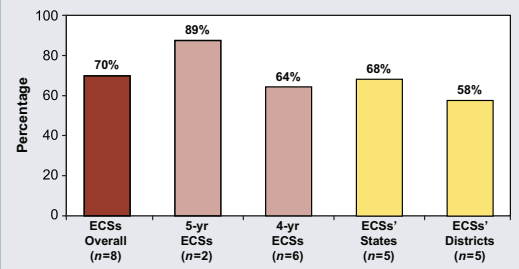
Grade-to-Grade Progression Rates, 2005–06 to 2006–07*



* Progression rates exclude transfer students.

On average, ECSs had on-time graduation rates higher than their geographic districts and states; the two 5-year ECSs had higher on-time graduation rates than the six 4-year ECSs

Average On-Time Graduation Rates for 8 ECSs (2006–07) and Their States and Districts (2003–04)



Being here prepares you more for college than a traditional high school, because this is an actual college campus.

—ECS student

College Course-Taking

In spring 2007, 52 percent of ECS students were enrolled in at least one college class. During the 2006–07 academic year, all ECSs did not yet have fully implemented academic plans, either because they did not yet enroll all grades or because not all grades were part of the conversion to the ECS. Therefore, although eventually close to 100 percent of students should be taking college courses by 12th grade, in 2006–07, only 66 percent of 12th-grade students reported taking a college course. However, all 9th-grade students should have been experiencing the full ECS academic plan, and 36 percent of those students were already enrolled in college courses. Of the students taking college classes, 9th-grade students were more likely to be enrolled in an elective college course versus an academic course (50 percent) than 12th-grade students (about 30 percent). However, 46 percent of 12th-grade students were enrolled in academic college courses, compared with only 18 percent of the 9th-grade students.

Instruction in ECSs

In 2006–07, the evaluation team observed 74 high school and college classes, looking specifically at two dimensions of instruction: whether the instructor provided an *opportunity* for students to engage in rigorous instructional activities and whether he or she provided sufficient *support* for students to take advantage of the opportunity. Observed classes were categorized as either high or low on each of these two dimensions. High opportunity classes required students to think analytically, built student understanding of foundational concepts, and helped students understand how discipline knowledge is generated. High support classes provided students with the purpose and rationale for lesson activities and standards for achievement, and the instructor modeled or encouraged the use of discipline-specific tools, frameworks, and language. Findings from these classroom observations include:

- Of the 74 observed classes, about one-third offered students rigorous instructional activities (high opportunity) and supported students to engage in the opportunity (high support). About one-third of the classes were low on both opportunities for rigorous instructional activities and support.
- High school classes were more likely than college-level classes to demonstrate high levels of opportunity and supports for rigor. The same was true for mathematics classes, which were more likely than ELA classes to demonstrate high levels on both dimensions.

Student Supports

Not only are ECS students expected to perform well in their high school and college classes, but also they must exhibit a greater sense of maturity than their peers at other high schools when they take college courses on college campuses. These

“We’re going to expect a lot, but you can also expect a lot from us.”

—ECS principal (what he tells prospective students)

expectations, coupled with the fact that many ECSs enroll students who start high school academically behind, necessitate regular and targeted supports to ensure the success of ECS students.

Of the visited ECSs, 100 percent offered some combination of supports designed to help students succeed academically, socially, and in the transition to postsecondary education or work. Supports included formal and informal tutoring, seminar courses, peer mentoring, college tours, college preparation courses, and internships or other career awareness opportunities. Thirty-five percent of the visited ECSs offered a comprehensive set of academic and social-emotional supports. In those ECSs, students had a variety of options for receiving support from a number of adults and other students. Other findings include:

- Eighty-five percent of visited ECSs instituted early identification and interventions for students who were falling off track academically.
- Only 25 percent of visited ECSs had formal systems for IHE and high school faculty to communicate about students in need of additional support in college courses.

Additional Resources

This brief was adapted from the complete 2008 evaluation report, *2003–2007 Early College High School Initiative Evaluation: Emerging Patterns and Relationships*, which can be found at <http://www.gatesfoundation.org>. This is the fourth

Students’ Post-ECS Aspirations

Students interviewed during focus groups had unequivocal visions of themselves as college bound, and many had well articulated career plans that included college.

Based on these interviews, it appears that ECSs both attract students who are already interested in attending college and pique the interest in attending in others.

Almost all ECS students who participated in the student survey planned to graduate from the ECS. Students’ educational aspirations included the following:

- 86 percent of ECS students aspired to attain at least a 2-year degree.
- 75 percent aspired to attain at least a 4-year degree.
- 36 percent aspired to continue their education after a 4-year degree.

“I wasn’t planning on going to college, and when I came here, I thought, ‘Now I can go to college.’”

—ECS student

Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment, the provision of high school credits for completion of college courses, is the cornerstone of ECS curricula. Dual enrollment policies can range from states funding both school districts and IHEs when a student takes a course for dual credit to requiring students to cover the cost of college tuition and associated college fees.

State policies encourage the participation of both high schools and colleges, by providing per-pupil funding to both, covering the cost of student tuition, or setting aside funding expressly for ECSs. In states that do not provide sufficient resources, some ECSs are starting as charter schools, allowing them to qualify for federal charter funds as well as state charter funds in certain states (such as California).

Sustainability of the ECSs

Most ECSs in the ECHSI begin their work supported by a combination of public funding (based on enrollment) and “soft” money from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Over time, the public funds increase as enrollment grows, and the original grant funding decreases (and eventually ceases) as a proportion of total funding needs.

The challenge for ECSs is maintaining adequate funding to cover costs that are unique to the model: college tuition or fees; college textbooks; college instructors; transportation; and extra supports to help students succeed in a rigorous academic program. Findings include:

- In 2006–07, 85 percent of visited ECSs reported that they had developed sustainability plans.
- Of these, 55 percent reported confidence in their plans to cover all their costs long term.

State, local, and IHE partner policies with respect to tuition and other college costs are the most critical variables for sustaining fidelity to the ECS model. The schools tend to thrive in policy environments where both school districts and IHEs benefit from participation.

“As long as we have students, we are sustainable.”

—ECS leader

Sustainability of the ECHSI

Individual ECSs benefit from being part of something larger: the Early College High School Initiative, which includes the intermediary partners listed in the table on this page. Jobs for the Future coordinates the ECHSI, and the foundation provides ongoing support. Together, these entities are committed to specifying and ensuring school-level fidelity to the five recently revised Core Principles (available at <http://www.earlycolleges.org>).

The ECHSI serves as a professional learning community, an accountability mechanism for the work of the partner groups, and a voice for ideas that can improve success for students who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary institutions.

ECHSI Intermediaries and Number of ECSs Open in 2006–07

| ECHSI Intermediary | Number of ECSs Open in 2006–07 |
|---|--------------------------------|
| City University of New York (http://www.earlycollege.cuny.edu) | 6 |
| Center for Native Education (http://www.centerfornativeed.org) | 8 |
| Foundation for California Community Colleges (http://www.foundationccc.org) | 11 |
| Gateway to College at Portland Community College (GtC) (http://www.gatewaytocollege.org) | 9 |
| KnowledgeWorks Foundation (http://www.kwfdn.org) | 6 |
| Middle College National Consortium (http://www.mcnc.us) | 14 |
| National Council of La Raza (http://www.nclr.org/section/ecp) | 11 |
| North Carolina New Schools Project (http://www.ncllearnandearn.gov) | 33 |
| SECME, Inc. (http://www.secme.org/home/initiatives.html) | 2 |
| Texas High School Project (working with Texas A&M University System, Texas Community College Education Initiative, University of North Texas, and University of Texas System) (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/ed_init/sec/thsp/index.html) | 11 |
| University System of Georgia (http://www.gaeearlycollege.org) | 5 |
| The Utah Partnership for Education (http://www.utpartnership.org) | 6 |
| Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (http://www.woodrow.org/practice/readiness/schools/index.php) | 10 |
| Total | 130* |

* Two ECSs are affiliated with two different intermediaries; thus the total is 130 rather than 132.

annual report of an evaluation of the overall ECHSI. It focuses on the status of the ECHSI in 2006–07 but also provides a longitudinal view of the initiative.

Many intermediaries have accumulated and published model-specific materials. These materials may be found at the intermediaries’ Web sites (listed in the table above).

Leveraging Postsecondary Partners to Build a College-Going Culture: Tools for High School–Postsecondary Partnerships

This document is a toolkit for schools that wish to create, broaden, and deepen their postsecondary partnerships for maximum impact on college-going. The toolkit draws on the lessons of important efforts (including the ECHSI) to create clear, tightly designed pathways from high school to college on behalf of students traditionally underrepresented in higher education. This document can be found at <http://www.jff.org>.

On Ramp to College: A State Policymaker’s Guide to Dual Enrollment

This May 2008 report shows how dual enrollment can serve as an “on ramp” to postsecondary education for students who are otherwise unlikely to attend college. The report also highlights examples of successful statewide dual-enrollment efforts and provides a step-by-step plan for policymakers to create successful programs and policies and to assess their current approaches. *On Ramp to College* also

guides state officials in how to provide a wide range of students with equal access to dual enrollment and make it part of a continuous system for grades 9–16. This document can be found at <http://www.jff.org>.

Empowering Students: How Georgia College Early College Changes Student Aspirations

Housed in the Georgia College and State University School of Education, Georgia College Early College (GCEC) offers hope of a brighter future to its students and their families in its rural community. This 2008 case study examines how GCEC achieves its mission of college success for all. The college-going culture, small class sizes, and the adults and college students who work with the school’s students enable these young people to believe in themselves as learners, achieve academically and socially, and raise their aspirations. This document can be found at <http://www.jff.org>.

Accelerated Learning Options: Moving the Needle on Access and Success

This 2006 report, produced by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), summarizes the policies and practices around four accelerated learning options, one of which is dual enrollment. It also provides recommendations for improving the consistency and availability of these programs. This document can be found at <http://www.wiche.edu>.

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