

FOCUS ON

IMPROVING ACCESS TO
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
THROUGH EARLY COLLEGE
HIGH SCHOOLS



A TRENDS IN AMERICA SPECIAL REPORT



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FOCUS ON: IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION THROUGH EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS

Executive Summary

- ▶ More college graduates are needed in the U.S. to keep pace with developing countries and to meet the demands of an ever-changing work force. Some experts predict the U.S. will need more than 15 million more college graduates by 2025 to equal the degree attainment in top-performing countries.
- ▶ While the rates of degree attainment among minorities have increased, minorities and low-income young people continue to be less likely than their white and more affluent counterparts to enroll in college.
- ▶ One initiative that has gained momentum during the past decade is the early college high school movement. Some 200 early college high schools exist in 24 states. These high schools are aligned with postsecondary institutions and allow students from underserved populations to take tuition-free college courses while also taking high school courses. The college courses generally are transferrable to postsecondary institutions.
- ▶ Georgia, North Carolina and Texas have become leaders in the early college high school movement. These states use a combination of innovative public policy initiatives and public-private partnerships to create systems that encourage early college high schools and provide improved opportunities for students who otherwise might not attend college to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and college credits.

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The odds seemed to be stacked against Alyse Pennington attending college. Statistically, the Dayton, Ohio, native didn't match the profile of a traditional college-goer. She came from a low-income family and was even homeless for a time while attending elementary school. Her parents hadn't finished high school, much less attended college.

Although she maintained good grades through middle school, for Pennington higher education at times seemed out of reach. As an eighth-grader, she was concerned that a traditional high school would not prepare her for college and she would be lost in the crowd. So she enrolled in the Dayton Early College Academy, also known as DECA, a small college preparatory school that gives low-income and other students underrepresented in college an opportunity to earn tuition-free college credit while taking a regular high school curriculum. DECA students take courses at nearby Sinclair Community College in Dayton, where they earn credits that can be transferred to any public postsecondary institute in Ohio. (For a detailed examination of DECA, see page 10)

Pennington, now 19, made the most of the opportunity. One week after graduating from DECA in 2008, she received her associate degree from the community college. Within weeks of graduating from high school she entered Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, with enough college credits to earn status as a junior. She has received a full scholarship and is majoring in English education. Just two years after high school, Pennington will be eligible to earn her bachelor's degree.

"When I went to Miami I was very prepared. I didn't come in with the freshmen being scared," she said. "I knew how to plan my time well. I knew how to schedule my classes. I knew how to take perfect notes because I had learned all of that here."

Likewise, nobody would have guessed Paul Harsha would attend college when he was an eighth-grader growing up in Dayton. Harsha admits he was an unmotivated student and skipped school dozens of times, missing nearly one-fourth of his eighth-grade year. "I've always liked to learn. I just didn't like school," he recalled.

Nevertheless, he was accepted at DECA for ninth grade. An intelligent but academically unchallenged youngster, Harsha found that DECA ignited a spark

to learning that had been largely latent throughout his elementary and middle school years.

As a 14-year-old freshman, Harsha began taking college classes. In just three years he passed all six achievement levels—called gateways—required for graduation. Surprisingly to many, the eighth-grader who once skipped school an average of at least one day per week earned 32 hours of college credit while in high school and was accepted at Wittenberg University after his junior year. He is currently a political science major with a 3.73 grade-point average.

"The big thing that DECA taught me was the value of education and that knowledge is power," he said. "I feel I was more prepared for the college setting—for discussions and presentations, those things outside of taking a test."

Pennington and Harsha are two success stories from Ohio's oldest early college high school and one of the oldest such schools in the nation. There are many others. DECA is one of more than 200 early college schools located in 24 states, according to the Early College High School Initiative, a national advocacy group that is aligned with the Boston-based Jobs for the Future.

What are early college high schools?

Early college high schools are schools affiliated with two- or four-year postsecondary institutions that permit students to take college courses while simultaneously earning their high school diplomas. The credits can be transferred to other colleges after the students finish high school. The students accepted into early colleges are not always the most gifted students in the district. In fact, they seldom are. Most early college schools target populations that are underrepresented in higher education—those from low-income families, racial and ethnic minorities, and first-generation college students.

Other programs in public schools, such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses and dual enrollment programs, allow students to earn college credit while attending high school. But early college high schools are more likely to target underserved populations and to provide students with a more focused and

EDUCATION THROUGH EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS

rigorous curriculum, one structured to prepare them for success on the postsecondary level.

At many early college high schools, students can earn enough college credits to receive an associate degree while enrolled in high school. In most cases, students take courses on college campuses, helping them to become familiar with the college experience and thus minimizing the often difficult transition from high school to college.

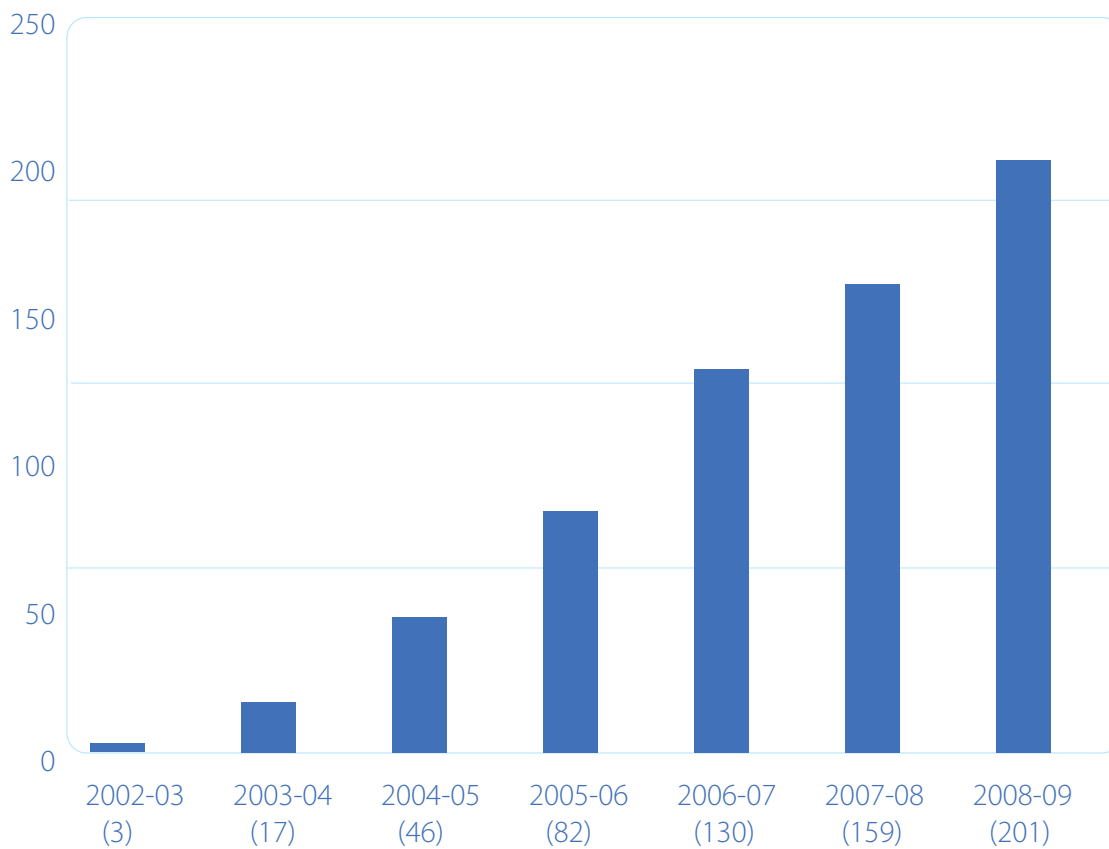
According to the Early College High School Initiative, during the 2006-07 school year:

- ▶ More than 40,000 students attended early college high schools;
- ▶ Two-thirds of the students enrolled in early college high schools were African-American or Latino;

- ▶ Eight early college high schools served Native Americans;
- ▶ Thirty-two schools served students who previously had dropped out of high school or were at risk of dropping out;
- ▶ The majority of students in early college high schools were the first in their families to enroll in college; and
- ▶ Nearly 60 percent of early college students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

The growth in these schools has been tremendous. Only three such schools existed in the 2002-03 school year, including DECA. That num-

Growth In Early College High Schools (Number of Schools Per Year*)



*Source: Early College High School Initiative, "Portrait in Numbers"

ber has grown steadily ever since. Despite the growth of these schools during the past decade and the opportunities for underserved populations to receive college credit, only half the states so far have at least one early college high school. Numerous policy barriers, particularly related to financing, stand in the way of increased growth of these schools and the sustainability of existing ones. Possible conflicts with teacher unions over collective bargaining agreements and the need for waivers to implement alternative models and procedures are other policy obstacles that must be overcome.

The case for improved higher education access

The need for increased numbers of college graduates is well-documented. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, one in five jobs in occupations that will experience the fastest growth in the next decade will require a four-year degree. Anthony Carnavale, an economist and director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, predicted by 2012, the U.S. will face a shortage of 850,000 associate degrees, 3.2 million bachelor's degrees and 2.9 million graduate degrees. Another study from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, estimates 55 percent of the population will need college degrees by 2025 in order to equal the degree attainment in the top-performing countries, or more than 15 million fewer degrees than the number that will be needed.

Unfortunately, the U.S. has been slipping in college participation compared to other industrialized nations. Although the number of people enrolled in college in the U.S. has increased between 1995 and 2005, the U.S. dropped from second to 15th among 30 industrial nations in university completion for young people, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. This decline is attributed to increased college enrollment rates in other countries.

The situation threatens to become even more critical. While the U.S. boasts the largest percentage of college-educated people in the 55 to 64 age group, these people are nearing retirement age. According to the Pathways to College Network, the young adult age group (25-34) ranks seventh in the world in the rate of college degrees.

Clearly, the lack of young Americans participating in higher education and obtaining college degrees has troubling implications. Particularly problematic is the fact that racial minorities are

less likely than their white counterparts to earn a bachelor's degree. According to a 2008 study by the U.S. Department of Education, 35.5 percent of whites, 19.5 percent of African-Americans and 11.6 percent of Hispanics aged 25 to 29 earned a bachelor's degree or higher between 1971 and 2007.

The news is not all bad. The rates of minority students earning degrees have increased faster than among whites between the 1990-91 and the 2005-06 school years. And more young people are completing at least some college. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the rate at which 25- to 29-year-olds completed some college education increased from 34 percent to 58 percent between 1971 and 2007. Despite those increases, the rate has leveled off since the late 1990s.

Degree gaps, however, persist along racial and socioeconomic lines. According to the National Educational Longitudinal Study, for every 100 low-income students, only 65 graduate from high school, 45 enroll in college and 11 obtain a college degree. While fewer than half the students from the bottom income quartile enter college, 85 percent from the highest income quartile do so, according to a published study by Thomas G. Mortenson, a senior scholar at The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education in Washington, D.C.

Multiple studies show first-generation college students are more likely than those whose parents attended postsecondary education to delay entering college, to begin at two-year colleges and to need remedial coursework. All these factors put them at greater risk of dropping out of college without earning a degree. A 2005 study by Xianglei Chen of MPR Associates, an education research and consulting firm, concludes "first-generation students consistently remained at a disadvantage after entering postsecondary education: They completed fewer credits, took fewer academic courses, earned lower grades, needed more remedial assistance, and were more likely to withdraw from or repeat courses they attempted. As a result, the likelihood of attaining a bachelor's degree was lower for first-generation students compared to their peers whose parents attended college."

An individual's educational attainment influences his or her earnings. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a person with a bachelor's degree will, on average, earn about \$25,000 more per year than a high school graduate and \$35,000 more per year than someone who failed to com-

plete high school. Providing improved access to postsecondary education is likely to increase per capita income, reduce dependence on government social programs and lower the number of people filling jails and prisons.

Thus, state policymakers have begun to search for programs and strategies that promise to increase college access, particularly for these underrepresented and at-risk populations. Early college high school is one such initiative that appears to be gaining favor and one that is showing evidence of success.

Core principles of early college high schools

Through early college high school, many of the academic, financial and social barriers preventing low-income students from enrolling in college are beginning to crumble. According to a study by Jobs for the Future, these schools are providing pathways to college for tens of thousands of young people who might not otherwise go to college. More than 90 percent of students in early college high schools graduate from high school and 88 percent graduate with some college credit, the study reports. Nearly half of students who enter early college high schools as ninth-graders earn a full year or more of college credit tuition-free.

“We know that students need to be academically prepared for postsecondary education, and we know that low-income students are not receiving the preparation that they need that is consistent with what postsecondary expects of them for college credit,” said Joel Vargas, program director for Jobs for the Future, the coordinating agency for the Early College High School Initiative. That organization has become the voice of the early college high school movement nationally. Furthermore, through funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private sources, the early college initiative has provided grants to cover start-up costs and to assist intermediary organizations working with schools.

As a leading national expert on the early college initiative, Vargas has worked closely with state policymakers, local school districts, colleges and intermediary organizations to establish more than 200 such schools in 24 states.

Jobs for the Future and a group of 13 intermediary organizations have established five core principles for all early college programs. They suggest all early college schools should:

Distribution Of Bachelor’s Degrees, By Race*

	1990-91	2005-06
Caucasian	93.5%	72.4%
African-American	6.1%	9.6%
Hispanic	3.4%	7.2%

*Source: U.S. Department of Education

Mean Earnings By Highest Degree Earned (2005)*

High school dropout	\$19,915
High school graduate	\$29,448
Some college, no degree	\$31,421
Associate degree	\$37,990
Bachelor’s degree	\$54,689
Master’s degree	\$67,898
Professional	\$119,009
Doctorate degree	\$92,863

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Photo by Tim Weldon

This junior social studies class looks very much like any public school. What the photo can't show is that the students in this class at the Dayton Early College Academy also are attending college courses. All 32 students in the school's first graduating class enrolled in college. DECA students have earned a cumulative 3,500 college credit hours while still enrolled in high school.

- ▶ Be committed to serving students underrepresented in higher education;
- ▶ Be created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution and the community, all of which are jointly accountable for student success;
- ▶ Develop a program that permits all students to earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion;
- ▶ Engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops both academic and social skills, as well as behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion; and
- ▶ Create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement

The first early college high schools were developed in 2002. The Early College High School Initiative reports astounding success with the initial graduating classes. In 2007, the organization said 115 students graduated from the first three high schools. Nine hundred students graduated at 18 early college schools one year later. Among the first two graduating classes:

- ▶ 85 percent earned at least one semester of transferable college credit;
- ▶ 10 percent earned two full years of college credit or an associate degree;
- ▶ More than 60 percent were accepted to four-year colleges, exceeding rates from traditional high schools; and
- ▶ More than 250 early college graduates earned merit-based college scholarships.

These impressive results are even more striking because most of the graduates came from populations that are underrepresented in college. Nationally, three-fourths of early college students are racial minorities, more than half are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and nearly a third of early college schools receive Title I funding based on the number of low-income students they serve.

“The bet is that if they are better prepared for college and actually have some college under their belts, then they will spend less time in re-

medial coursework and get through the courses more efficiently and successfully and potentially finish earlier,” Vargas said. “Several models for early college high schools exist. Some are physically located on a two- or four-year college campus. Others are located in their own buildings or within larger high school buildings. Additionally, some facilities are located on Native American reservations, designed specifically to serve young Native American students.”

Difference between early college and dual credit programs

Early college high schools are not the only model through which students can earn college credit while attending high school. For more than 50 years, Advanced Placement classes have provided opportunities for students to obtain credit in numerous subjects based on test scores at the end of the course. More than 1 million students take AP exams each year, according to the College Board, which operates the program.

Likewise, many states encourage students to take college courses through dual enrollment programs. These courses can be programs located on college or high school campuses or through a distance learning provider and can be taught either by college faculty or by high school teachers with special credentials to teach college-level classes. In a typical dual enrollment program, sometimes called concurrent enrollment, students enroll in a college course and earn college credit while still enrolled in high school.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly three-fourths of public high schools offered courses for dual credit in the 2002-03 school year, the most recent information available. The U.S. Department of Education pointed out that college credits earned in dual enrollment programs prior to high school graduation reduce the length of time it takes to earn a college degree by almost half a year.

While dual enrollment programs offer many of the same benefits to students as early college high schools, important distinctions between the two models exist. Like a majority of states, Texas provides opportunities for students to enroll in dual enrollment courses. Only juniors and seniors who meet college-mandated prerequisites for the course they want to take may participate. These students are typically more academically gifted than those in early college programs.

In contrast, early college high schools in Texas focus on low-performing students, first-generation college students, potential dropouts and students who want to accelerate high school completion. Students in early college high schools also spend all four years in high school preparing for postsecondary education, unlike students who enroll in a limited number of dual enrollment classes.

Other important distinctions include:

- ▶ The academic mission of dual enrollment is to augment the high school curriculum with more challenging work for college-ready students. Early college high school programs prepare all students for college;
- ▶ In Texas, students are limited to two college courses per semester through dual enrollment. Early college high school students have no restrictions and can earn up to two years

of college credit toward a bachelor's degree along with their high school diploma;

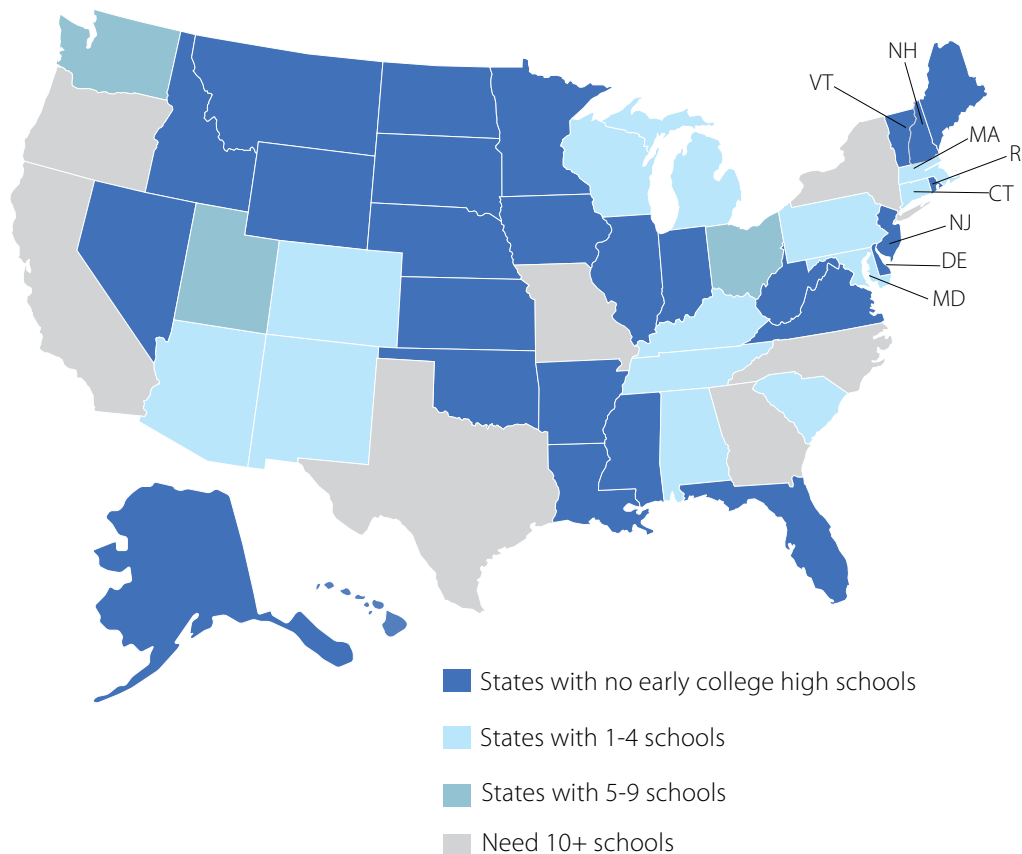
- ▶ Most high schools provide limited support to students taking dual enrollment college classes. Early college high schools provide intensive support and extra strategies coursework to prepare students for college level work and to ensure success in college classes.

The cost of early college high schools

Early colleges face additional funding requirements and limitations that traditional high schools do not. Policymakers may have to consider the cost of college tuition, textbooks, transportation, and staff for student support and in liaison roles between the high schools and colleges.

Michael Webb, associate vice-president for Jobs for the Future, conducted a study of the cost of

Distribution Of Early College High Schools



*Source: Early College High School Initiative, "Portrait in Numbers"

planning and implementing early college high schools in 2004, using five early college high school designs:

- ▶ College in the high school;
- ▶ Middle college national consortium, which implements a five-year course of study;
- ▶ Early college high school located on two-year college campus;
- ▶ Early college high school located on public university campus; and
- ▶ Charter school early college high school.

His study concluded that early college high school costs appeared to be close to the range of other public schools. Upon full implementation, per student costs ranged from \$4,903 for the colleges located in the high school buildings to \$12,250 to fund the university-based early college high school. The average cost for the examples in 2004 was \$7,824. To put that cost in perspective, his research cites data from the National Education Association that pointed out the average expenditure per pupil in K-12 was \$7,875 in the 2002-03 school year.

Clearly, start-up and operating costs are the greatest barrier to establishing and maintaining early college high schools. Early college programs in Ohio have been championed by former House Speaker Jon Husted, currently a member of the Ohio Senate. "It's like getting a jump-start on life, and frankly I think that's how our entire education system should work," he said. "This is not something we should look at and say, 'Wow, this is a neat experiment.' This is something that we should say, 'This works,' and we should build our entire education system around the concept of helping students get college credits if they're ready to do it."

Judy Hennessey, principal of the Dayton Early College Academy, said her school spends approximately \$10,700 per student per year, or \$2,000 more than it costs to educate students at other schools in the Dayton area. During the early years of Ohio's early college movement, the intermediary organization Knowledge Works successfully lobbied the state legislature for supplemental appropriations to support early college high schools. That funding has allowed students at Ohio's nine early college high schools to enroll in college classes tuition-free, but the future of that state's supplemental funding was in doubt as of

May 2009 because of the current economic situation.

"You can't start these initiatives and say on one hand you want to get 200,000 more underrepresented kids to college, and then cut out," Hennessey said. She acknowledges that schools such as DECA are more expensive than traditional high schools in the short term, but believes increasing the number of underserved students with college degrees will make it a bargain in the long run.

Early college programs typically have been funded by public-private partnerships. For example, the Texas Education Agency joined forces with several private organizations, most notably The Texas High School Project, to fund its early college high schools, according to Jobs for the Future. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation gave \$400,000 to each of 14 early college high schools, and the Texas Education Agency awarded 19 grants averaging \$425,000 each.

Similarly, Utah created a system of early college high schools focusing on math, science and technology that are co-funded by private sources, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, businesses and the state.

Legislators in some states resisted the idea of providing full funding to high schools based on average daily attendance, commonly referred to as ADA, while simultaneously paying college tuition and other costs associated with early college high schools. A core principle of the early college movement, according to Jobs for the Future, involves combining funding streams from high school per-pupil allocations, postsecondary per-credit allocations and state financial aid or incentive dollars. To overcome funding barriers, Jobs for the Future recommends the following policy measures:

- ▶ Allowing schools to claim K-12 per pupil ADA until age 21;
- ▶ Permitting a portion of per pupil ADA to follow students to pay for college credits;
- ▶ Giving high school students access to financial aid if 50 percent or more of their coursework is college-level in early college high school courses; and
- ▶ Allowing four-year public colleges to claim FTE reimbursement for dual enrollees.

An alternative approach, according to Jobs for the Future, would be for states to create a K-16 Innovation Fund of combined secondary and post-secondary per pupil revenue.

Jobs for the Future lists other funding sources available to cover tuition costs. These include tuition waivers by postsecondary institutions, Tech Prep funding and 529 Plans, which are prepaid college tuition programs. Some states allow early college high schools to use their core funding to cover tuition and other costs. In other places, school districts and higher education institutions contract for services and districts use a percentage of the per-pupil funding they receive from the state or local school district.

Meanwhile, legislation has been introduced in both chambers of Congress to provide additional funding to expand early college high school programs. U.S. Rep. Dale Kildee of Michigan and Sen. Herb Kohl of Wisconsin in March filed the Fast Track to College Act of 2009. Both bills (H.R. 6926 and S.3508) would authorize the U.S. secretary of education to spend \$50 million for six-year grants to school districts for new or existing early college high schools and an additional \$50 million to help fund dual enrollment programs.

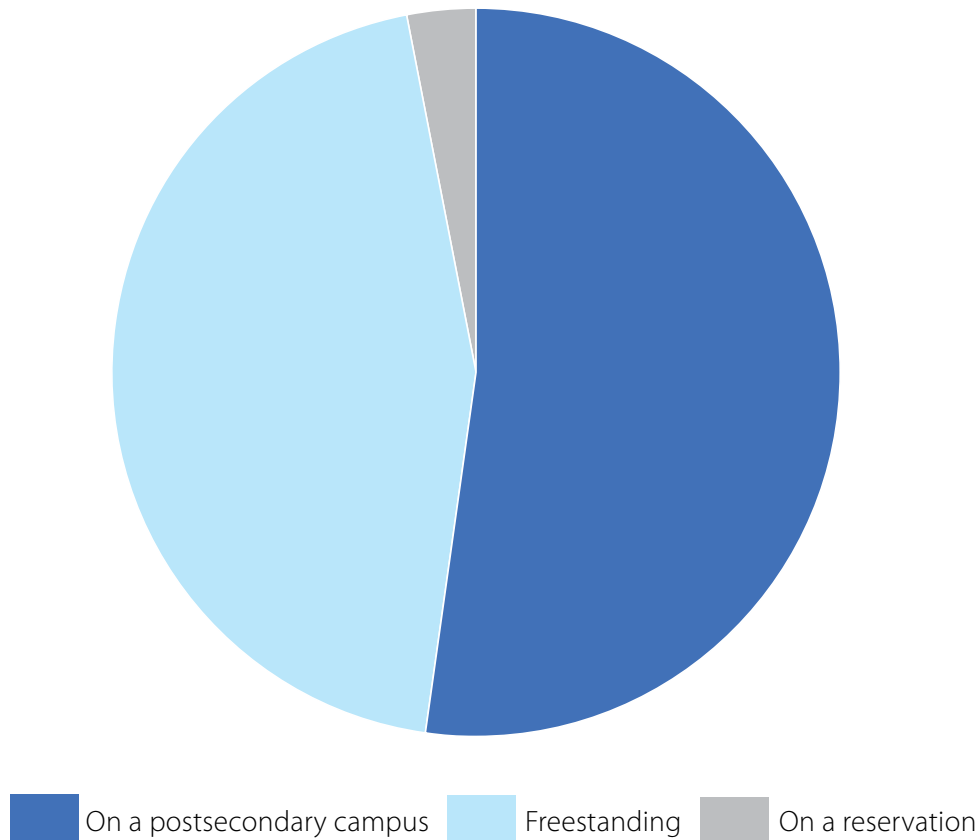
Other policy barriers

Other barriers policymakers might have to consider include collective bargaining issues, such as salary equity among college and high school faculty and extra pay to provide support to students outside regular school hours. DECA became a charter school in 2007. It is the only one of Ohio's early college high schools that is a charter school. Becoming a charter school provided additional revenue sources and removed the collective bargaining restrictions that created problems for the school when it was part of the Dayton Public School system.

In an annual report on early college high schools to the Kellogg Foundation, Jobs for the Future lists other typical policy barriers for each principle associated with the early college movement as well as recommendations for overcoming those barriers.

One of the key principles involves transferability of college credits earned while in high school to

Location Of Early College High Schools*



*Source: Early College High School Initiative, "Portrait in Numbers"

meet requirements for associate and bachelor's degrees at other public colleges and universities. The report lists other barriers, including the absence of a systematic means to equate courses across a state's higher education institutions; unique prerequisites set by academic departments that can only be fulfilled within the same institution; and uncertainty from four-year colleges regarding the admission status of students with dual credit courses.

Jobs for the Future suggests policymakers consider the following alternative approaches:

- ▶ Mandating formal articulation agreements within and across state higher education systems. These agreements provide seamless transitions from secondary to postsecondary institutions;
- ▶ Making prerequisites transparent for transfer into general education and major requirements for degree programs;
- ▶ Making transfer agreements widely accessible to schools and individuals; and
- ▶ Requiring public higher education institutions to accept dual credit courses as equivalent to courses transferable under articulation agreements.

Finally, early college high schools typically have autonomy to make decisions that enable accelerated advancement and integration of secondary and postsecondary education. These schools, however, frequently lack autonomy from state and local district controls. To overcome this barrier, Jobs for the Future encourages agreements at the district or state level that grant autonomy in exchange for accountability, fund early college high schools at the same rate as other public schools in the districts in which they are located, and hold schools accountable only for students they serve and allow some districts to operate charter-like schools. Many states provide waivers for early college schools to integrate innovative practices that do not conform to state standards.

Case Study: Ohio school pioneers early college

In 2002, the Dayton Early College Academy opened its doors to 100 low-income, mostly minority, youth from Dayton Public Schools. It was, in many respects,

an incubator for early college high schools not only in Ohio, also but nationwide. Nearly seven years later, Principal Judy Hennessey proclaims the program an overall success.

"We are on to something. Early colleges are not only starting to get kids into college, but they're sending with them the culture of achievement," she said.

The walls outside the elevators of the third floor school on the University of Dayton campus are covered with college acceptance letters of DECA's students. That's no small achievement in a state that ranks 37th in the number of adults with bachelor's degrees, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Knowledge Works, a private organization that has championed early college schools in Ohio, points to a study by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University that concludes Ohio has the nation's second worst high school graduation rate among African-Americans (39.6 percent).

In 2007, 32 students graduated from DECA's inaugural class. All of them went to college. They received more than \$2 million in scholarships and grants. Three-fourths of them returned to the same college the following year. In 2008, all 48 graduates from DECA were accepted by colleges.

Today, approximately 200 students are enrolled in grades 9-12. What makes DECA's success noteworthy is that with very few exceptions, these students come from low-income families. Historical data suggests these students typically are unlikely to participate in postsecondary education. Hennessey says the poverty rate among students at her school is nearly 98 percent. More than 80 percent of the students are African-American. Most are the first generation in their family to attend college. Many will be the first in their family to graduate from high school.

Students, such as senior Charles Wilkes, shuttle back and forth each day between the high school and Sinclair Community College in Dayton, where DECA students take college classes alongside students old enough to be their parents. Some students at DECA, although not most, will take enough courses at the community college to earn an associate degree at the same time they finish high school. All students are required to pass a minimum of three college classes. Most take many more.

The college credits students earn at Sinclair Community College can be transferred to any public four-year postsecondary institution in Ohio. Hennessey quickly points out, however, that the goal of DECA is not to provide all students with associate

degrees while they're still in high school. It is simply to introduce them to college, teach them the skills needed to be successful in higher education and give them the opportunity to earn college credits. Program officials also hope the students' experience at DECA will persuade them to pursue a college education after graduation. If the school's first graduating class is any indication, DECA is meeting its goals.

But success took some creativity. "If you're going to permit incubation of innovation, you're going to have to step outside what is the status quo," Hennessey said. One of the key policies that has allowed DECA to succeed has been a waiver from the Ohio Department of Education to use unconventional performance-based assessment models.

Instead of receiving traditional alpha-grades, each student at DECA must complete a series of six gateways. Each gateway includes criteria the student must meet to move to the next level. The early gateways emphasize organizational and time-management skills. Later ones become more rigorous. By the final gateway, each student must take the ACT at least twice, visit at least two college campuses, complete

scholarship applications and write a college entrance essay, among other requirements.

The principal calls her school a "microcosm of a college experience." She insists she knows what rigor looks like. "We're not there yet. We can see it. We can smell it. But we are not there, but we are ratcheting it up."

From a policy perspective, DECA has overcome several hurdles. Hennessey says states with strict collective bargaining systems may face challenges creating the type of school environment DECA has. Here, faculty members also serve as advisers and are expected to work with students after hours, if needed, to help them succeed and take on roles that go far beyond the traditional teacher's duties. But Hennessey said being a charter school also presents other challenges the school didn't face before. As a charter school, DECA is required to have an open enrollment policy and to accept students by lottery if there are more applications than open positions. Open enrollment means the school is not able to turn away students who might not be capable of meeting the rigorous workload expected of students or those with substance abuse problems.



Photo by Tim Weldon

"The opportunities we have at DECA are far better than at any other high school. ... DECA has such an impact on you that you just want to go to college."

Krista Ponder, DECA junior

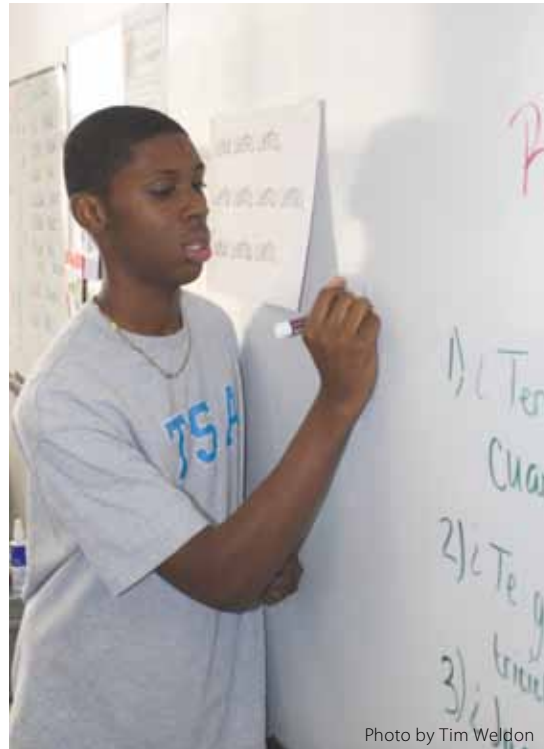


Photo by Tim Weldon

"If I had gone to a traditional high school I probably would have been skipping classes. ... I probably wouldn't have had that passion for college."

Dionte Allen, DECA junior



Photo courtesy of Dayton Early College Academy

Former Ohio Gov. Bob Taft meets with a group of students from the Dayton Early College Academy. As governor, Taft was one of the leaders of the early college movement in Ohio, and continues to have close ties with DECA. Taft, who has been lauded as a leader in education reform, now works at the University of Dayton and sometimes meets with classes at DECA, according to Principal Judy Hennessey.



Photo courtesy of Sen. Husted's office

"It's like getting a jump-start on life, and frankly I think that's how our entire education system should work."

Sen. Jon Husted, Ohio

School supporters see evidence of success. They find it in college acceptance rates and a lack of discipline problems. Hennessey said the school averages only one fight per year. Supporters point to the school's 97 percent attendance rate, and most importantly to more than 3,000 hours of tuition-free college credit earned by students while attending high school as proof that DECA is making a difference with its underrepresented students.

STATE POLICY EXAMPLES

According to Education Commission of the States, six states—Colorado, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Texas—have explicit policies to administer early college high schools. Four states—California, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Texas—have policies to administer middle college high schools, another model of early college high school that typically involves adding a fifth year to the high school. According to the commission, some of these policies include:

- ▶ Colorado: Fast College Fast Jobs Education Program is a pilot program established by the

legislature in 2007. To participate, districts must have contracted with a community college to implement a dual degree program within two years of the 2007 legislation or had a graduation rate below 75 percent;

- ▶ Michigan: Legislation enacted in 2006 provides start-up funds for early and middle college schools focusing on health sciences. Also, Senate Bill 1107, signed into law in 2008, provides \$15 million for the creation of smaller, more personalized high schools, including early college high schools, providing real-world learning to at-risk students.
- ▶ Tennessee: House Bill 99 in 2007 authorized the creation of cooperative innovative high school programs, including early college high schools. The legislation also created an alliance for cooperative innovative education, a joint effort of the state board, department of education, higher education commission, board of trustees of the University of Tennessee and board of regents “to oversee cooperative innovative high school programs, to oversee articulation, alignment and curriculum development for such programs and to evaluate the success of students in the programs.”
- ▶ Pennsylvania: State policy creates a structured sequence of secondary and postsecondary credits offered over a five- or six-year period, allowing a student to earn both a high school diploma and postsecondary credits.

Three states—Texas, North Carolina and Georgia—are widely viewed as being leaders in the early college movement.

Texas

Texas, which opened its first early college high school in 2006, now operates 29 early college high schools with nearly 7,000 students and is widely viewed as a leader in the early college movement. Three more early college schools are on track to open in fall 2009. Still, in a state with 1,704 high schools and 1.2 million high school students, the early college movement is clearly still in its infancy.

Eighty-five percent of the students enrolled in Texas’ early college high schools are either African-American or Hispanic. Nearly three-fourths are economically disadvantaged. Alma Garcia, the

program officer for the early college high school initiative at the Texas High School Project/Communities Foundation of Texas, said traditional high schools in Texas are challenged to provide the kind of education that these underrepresented students need to be successful in higher education.

“In an early college high school we leave nothing to chance. We design the school to be successful by building it around research and best practices,” Garcia said.

Initially, early college high schools in Texas were created by a private intermediary organization, the Texas High School Project/Communities Foundation of Texas and the Texas Education Agency. It received financial support from several sources, most notably the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, along with the state of Texas, to start up and provide technical assistance and other services to 14 early college high schools in the state.

The education agency, a public entity, separately created and operates 15 early college high schools. The Texas legislature in 2007 enacted House Bill 2237, which provided grants for a variety of dropout prevention programs, high school success and college readiness programs. It included \$8 million to fund the early college high schools operated by the agency.

Several public policies fostered the proliferation of early college schools in Texas. House Bill 1, enacted in 2006, provided landmark education reform that, among other things, developed initiatives to prepare all Texas students for college. The law requires school districts to develop a plan that provides the opportunity for every high school student to earn at least 12 college credits. It also provided funding to cover the costs.

In most cases, schools meet this requirement by providing students the opportunity to take dual enrollment or Advanced Placement courses. It has also encouraged the development of early college high schools.

State policy in Texas also provides several funding sources for dual enrollment and early college programs. Unlike some states, Texas provides high schools with per pupil, or average daily attendance funding for all students in early college high schools. It also provides colleges with per-pupil or contact hour funding for all dually enrolled students. Finally, Texas awards high schools an allotment of \$275 per student to support the costs associated with college readiness.

Until 2003, Texas law prevented local school districts and colleges from both claiming per pupil funding for dual enrollees. The legislature revoked that restriction and opened the door to the current funding model.

The Texas Education Agency developed a designation process for all early college high schools in the state under the authority of the Texas Education Code and Texas Administrative Code. Schools benefit from the early college designation in several ways:

- ▶ Recognition as an approved early college high school;
- ▶ Eligibility for exemptions from dual credit restrictions;
- ▶ Eligibility for state programs designated by the Texas legislature, Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board;
- ▶ Membership in the Early College High School Network; and
- ▶ Access to professional development and technical assistance.

Garcia points out that it is easier for early college schools funded by Communities Foundation of Texas to target underrepresented groups, particularly English language learners along the Rio Grande valley. She points to one school in Hidalgo where students are 98 percent Hispanic, 75 percent low-income, and 32 percent English language learners. Schools created by the Texas Education Agency may reach target populations by awarding extra points in a request for proposal to schools applying to be designated an early college high school.

Garcia said several policy barriers remain in Texas. For one thing, policymakers have not specifically appropriated money to purchase college textbooks for students. In most cases, each school district has the burden of purchasing books for students. Another barrier is lack of funds to transport students from their homes or high schools to college campuses to take classes.

Although Texas has not had its initial graduating class from early college high school, Garcia said she is beginning to see signs of success. In May

2009, Mission Early College High School in El Paso had 23 high school juniors earn associate degrees from El Paso Community College. During their senior year of high school, these students will be taking junior-level courses at the University of Texas at El Paso, while finishing up their fourth year of high school English and science. They will graduate from Mission Early College High School in May 2010. "These are kids who may not even have seen college as a possibility," Garcia said. "And in a lot of these cases they're going to be the first in their family to have set foot on a college campus."

Links:

- ▶ Texas High School Project: Early College High Schools: http://www.thsp.org/initiatives/early_college/
- ▶ Texas Education Agency: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/>
- ▶ Lessons from the Lone Star State: Designing a Sustainable Model to Expand Early College High School in Texas (Jobs for the Future): <http://www.earlycolleges.org/Downloads/ECHStexasmodel.pdf>
- ▶ Texas House Bill 1146: <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/79R/billtext/pdf/SB01146F.pdf>

North Carolina

Perhaps no state has taken on the task of building a system of early college high schools with as much vigor as North Carolina. Since 2005, the state has established 60 schools, or nearly one-third of the total number nationwide. Twelve more early college high schools are scheduled to open in North Carolina in the next 24 months, according to Tony Habit, president of the North Carolina New Schools Project.

Under the leadership of then-Gov. Mike Easley and leaders of the North Carolina General Assembly, legislators in 2003 enacted the Innovative Education Initiatives Act (Senate Bill 656), which created a mechanism for boards of education to establish with one or more boards of trustees cooperative innovative programs in high schools and postsecondary institutions to serve high school students who were at risk of dropping out of high school and those who would benefit from an accelerated curriculum.

At roughly the same time, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the North Carolina New Schools Project was established to serve as an intermediary organization to work with state education leaders to support innovative programs that would benefit underserved populations and allow them to earn college credit.

Habit said North Carolina took an aggressive approach toward early college high schools out of economic necessity. The state's economy, built on farming, manufacturing and textiles, was crumbling. "There is an accelerated pace of change taking place in North Carolina to prepare for the new economy," he said. "So, there's a great deal of intensity here about being innovative and taking calculated risks."

The Gates Foundation invested \$1.2 million in early college programs in North Carolina, according to Habit. Legislators also provided \$25 million from the state's general fund. Those funds are used for one year of planning and the first five years of implementation for each school.

Easley named the state's early college program "Learn and Earn." Its objective is for at least 95 percent of students enrolled in early college high schools to be academically at-risk, first-generation college attendees or economically disadvantaged.

Most early colleges are located on college campuses, a model that Habit contends is essential for creating what he terms the "power of place." He asserts, "The culture of conventional high schools is frequently anti-intellectual, and those schools are often organized around things that are remotely related to academic achievement. This can be especially true for poor and minority children whose peers may essentially harass students who become serious about academic achievement. So the power of place is an essential component of creating within students a firm belief that they can and will graduate high school and they can and will earn two years of college credit."

Nevertheless, one of the biggest barriers Habit has encountered is getting postsecondary institutions to accept an early college high school on their campuses. "Typically (the colleges) don't have space. Every single college and university we work with has the same story. They have no space. So being creative in the development of these models is essential."

Another barrier has been winning the support of college faculty, who often are reluctant to teach

high school students. "For example, typically, a professor at a college or university, if they had an interest in teaching adolescents they would have taught in high school. So it's not uncommon for the faculty senate to have very legitimate reservations about an early college on their campus," Habit said. One way to overcome this barrier has been to take hundreds of college faculty members to early college high schools in other states so they can see the successes for themselves.

As early colleges institute innovative and non-traditional practices, Habit points out that it is important to have a flexible system that permits waivers by state education agencies. "The work with these students is challenging enough. And having these artificial barriers becomes too burdensome for these schools to move forward quickly," he said.

Another barrier in North Carolina, particularly in rural counties without college campuses where students can conveniently take college courses and earn an associate degree, has been the reliance on so-called virtual colleges where students take courses by distance learning. Habit says this model of early college high school can be effective with students who are academically advanced, but not for at-risk students, who need the "power of place" to engage them and help them succeed in a college environment.

Links:

- ▶ North Carolina New Schools Project: <http://newschoolsproject.org/page.php>
- ▶ Senate Bill 656: <http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2003/Bills/Senate/PDF/S656v5.pdf>
- ▶ Public Schools of North Carolina: Learn and Earn: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/performance/initiatives/learnandearn/>

Georgia

As in most states, early college high schools in Georgia involve a collaborative arrangement between various state agencies as well as private funders. Early colleges are created and operated by the Office of Educator Preparation, Innovation and Research.

The first early college high school in Georgia, Carver Early College in Atlanta, opened in 2005. All 79 seniors in the first class graduated on time

this year, according to Dawn Cooper, who heads the state's early college initiative. All have earned college credit, and all have been accepted into a two- or four-year college. Today, approximately 1,600 students are enrolled in 12 early college high schools in Georgia. Among those students:

- ▶ 83 percent are low-income;
- ▶ 86 percent are racial minorities; and
- ▶ 77 percent are first-generation college students

Cooper said in the 2008 fiscal year, all early college schools in Georgia have on average outscored other schools in their districts on state assessments and have higher attendance rates.

One policy measure that separates Georgia from other states is the funding source for college tuition. Accel is a program funded by proceeds from the Georgia state lottery that pays tuition costs for all Georgia students enrolled in early college and dual enrollment classes. In addition to tuition, Accel provides a stipend of \$150 per semester to pay for textbooks.

Cooper points out many students enrolled in early college high schools would not be eligible to take dual enrollment classes in traditional high schools. The University System of Georgia policy requires a minimum grade point average and SAT score. That requirement, however, is waived by the University System for students in early college high schools.

Georgia once had a surplus of lottery funds to pay tuition costs for students in early college programs. Tuition increases and the increased number of students taking dual enrollment courses, however, have caused a reduction in that surplus, according to Cooper.

Unlike some other state early college programs, students enrolled in early colleges in Georgia are generally not able to earn an associate degree while enrolled in high school, according to Cooper. The Accel program will not pay college tuition for any high school student prior to their junior year. It also will not pay tuition for any courses taken during summers. Consequently, Cooper said students in Georgia's early college high schools typically will graduate with 30-40 hours of college credit—the equivalent of one year of college credit. Many of the schools are hoping to acquire private funding to enable some 10th graders to take college classes.

Aside from start-up funding from the Georgia Board of Regents, Georgia's early colleges receive no additional state financial support beyond their public school funding. The Board of Regents has obtained federal and state dollars to provide additional support for the schools. Georgia College Early College in Milledgeville is an example of one of the state's early colleges that operates on a college campus. The school was part of the original cohort of Georgia Early College sites that received \$450,000 over three years, supported professional development during the planning year and provided most administrative costs. This was provided by the Georgia Board of Regents through two grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Robert Woodruff Foundation. Georgia College & State University is the postsecondary partner for Georgia College Early College and provides in-kind contributions, such as classroom space.

Georgia uses several early college models. One school includes grades 6-12; five schools include grades 7-12; and the remaining six schools are 9-12. Only four schools are physically located on college campuses. The others are either in self-contained buildings off-campus or are programs located within larger high school buildings.

The sixth through 10th grades in an early college high school are typically marked by an accelerated curriculum that tries to squeeze in as many middle and high school credits as possible and to prepare students for college classes. College courses currently are all taught on college campuses by college faculty.

"We are targeting a population of struggling learners," Cooper said. "So in order to be able to handle the rigor of college coursework, the earlier you can begin working with them, the better."

Links:

- ▶ Georgia Early College: <http://www.gaeearlycollege.org/>
- ▶ Empowering Students: How Georgia College Early College Changes Student Aspirations: <http://www.jff.org/Documents/empoweringstudents.pdf>

Resources:

- ▶ *In addition to the links listed above, more information about early college high schools can be obtained through the Early College High School Initiative Web site (www.earlycolleges.org).*



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