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Supportive Relationships

"There are people who know you here, and they know what your capabilities are, and they have these dreams for you."

— Early College High School student

Relationships are also central to students' learning in ECHSs.

Strong relationships can:

- Provide access to both academic and social support
- Offer students valuable academic or professional role models
- Be a driving force that motivates or empowers student success

Strong relationships also provide instructors with information that allows them to individualize instruction to better meet students' academic needs.

ECHSI Intermediaries and Number of ECHSs Open in 2005–06

ECHSI Intermediaries	Number of ECHSs Open in 2005–06
City University of New York	3
Center for Native Education	8
Foundation for California Community Colleges	7
Gateway to College at Portland Community College (GTC)	5
KnowledgeWorks Foundation	6
Middle College National Consortium	13
National Council of La Raza	6
North Carolina New Schools Project	12
SECME, Inc.	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)	3
University System of Georgia	1
The Utah Partnership for Education	5
Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation	7
Total	78

Additional Resources

This brief was adapted from the complete 2007 evaluation report *Evaluation of the Early College High School Initiative, Select Topics on Implementation*, which can be found at <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/UnitedStates/Education/ResearchAndEvaluation/Evaluation/ECHSEvaluation.htm>. This report is the third annual synthesis report on the national evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's ECHSI. The report focuses on the ECHSI implementation year of 2005–06 but also provides a longitudinal view of the initiative.

Early College High Schools: Core Principles

This 2003 brief published by Jobs for the Future defines Early College High Schools and explains the rationale for the ECHSI. It briefly outlines the principles that partner organizations and their intermediaries are using to plan for, implement, and assess 70 pioneering small high schools over 5 years. <http://www.earlycolleges.org/Downloads/CorePrinciples.pdf>

Add and Subtract: Dual Enrollment as a State Strategy to Increase Postsecondary Success for Underrepresented Students

This 2005 policy primer for states by Nancy Hoffman (published by Jobs for the Future) provides an overview of dual enrollment and a rationale for its expansion and guidelines (including funding models) for states wishing to implement dual enrollment for a wider range of students. www.jff.org

What Is the Cost of Planning and Implementing Early College High School?

On behalf of the Finance Working Group of ECHSI, Jobs for the Future's Michael Webb estimated the costs of planning and implementing these new institutions spanning high school to college in this 2004 report. www.earlycolleges.org

Return on Investment in Early College High Schools

This financial analysis model, developed by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc., was commissioned in 2006 by Jobs for the Future to calculate the return on investment for ECHSs. www.earlycolleges.org

Update to State Dual Enrollment Policies: Addressing Access and Quality

This updated (2005) document from Katherine L. Hughes, Melinda Mechur Karp, Baranda Fermin, and Thomas R. Bailey (in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education) provides new and additional explanatory information on the dual enrollment policies highlighted in the 2004 report *State Dual Enrollment Policies: Addressing Access and Quality*. <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=294>

Notes

1. These data are based on school-level averages and are not adjusted for students' academic achievement levels prior to entering the ECHS.
2. McKnight, Erica, and Vargas, Joel. (2006). *Smoothing the path: Changing state policies to support early college high school, case studies from Georgia, Ohio, Texas, and Utah*. Boston: Jobs for the Future.

Toward a Seamless Transition to College

An Evaluation of the Early College High School Initiative From 2003–06

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

ECHSI has come a long way toward developing a network comprising a new breed of instructional institutions: schools that cross the divide between high school and college education.

College-level coursework in high school traditionally has been available only to academically advanced students. ECHSI operates under the principle that improved high school curriculum and instruction tied to the incentive of earning college credits will motivate struggling students, thereby increasing their interest in and access to postsecondary education as well as their chances of completing college.

In 2005–06, ECHSI turned 4 years old, essentially the midpoint of the 7-year initiative. In another 3 years, a critical mass of ECHSs will have graduated one or two cohorts of students, and the earliest implementers will have graduated students who will ideally have completed undergraduate degrees. It is a time to reflect and take stock of the vision for the initiative and the evidence that the vision is being achieved to inform plans for strengthening ECHSs in the future.

How are Early College High Schools developed?

- As newly developed, stand-alone schools or as existing high schools that adapt the characteristics of an ECHS, located on or off college or university campuses
- As new ECHS 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)

Findings for the Early College High Schools

ECHSs have been supporting students by implementing the core principles of ECHSI, which include a college-going culture, a strong instructional environment, and access to college-level courses.

Establishing a College-Going Culture

In interviews, students across many ECHS sites conveyed a strong academic identity and shared specific goals for their postsecondary education and career plans.

Emphasizing the New Three Rs

As part of the ECHSI, ECHS classes should emphasize the new three Rs—rigorous instruction, relevant curriculum, and supportive relationships.

Although most ECHS classes showed evidence of the three Rs, improvement is still needed to ensure that schools are offering rigorous instruction, particularly in mathematics.

Creating Supportive School Climates

Among the most evident successes of ECHSs found in this evaluation were the positive climates they have established and the high expectations and supports provided at both high school-based and college-based campuses. Overall, the evaluation team found strong evidence of safe, supportive, nurturing school climates at the ECHSs visited.

Some sites, however, were challenged to fully develop a college-going culture due to their physical distance from their partner's college campus.

How do Early College High 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 ECHS students on a college campus
- By attending college courses with both college students and a group of ECHS 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 High Schools?

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

The Goal: The Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) provides students who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary institutions with the opportunity to pursue a high school diploma and college credit simultaneously. Although many students entering the Early College High Schools (ECHSs) are performing below grade level, these schools put students on an accelerated path to college readiness and to college.

The Initiative: The number of ECHSs in operation had grown to about 130 by fall 2006. Plans call for more than 200 by 2011. These small schools are demonstrating ways to serve the intellectual and developmental needs of young people who now struggle in, or fail to complete, high school or drop out in the first years of college.

How: ECHSs 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

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Rigorous Instruction

"We cover the same material [as regular college students]. I give the same homework. [Students] take the same tests. They also need to produce the same results."

— College mathematics instructor

Rigorous instruction requires students to:

- Build on existing knowledge and skills to create or explore new ideas
- Demonstrate conceptual understanding of important content
- Organize, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize information
- Communicate clearly and well
- Revise work based on informative feedback

Relevant Curriculum

"We're always going for the most real-life application[s] possible."

— Early College High School leader

Relevant instruction requires students to:

- Address questions or problems with real-world applications
- Make choices about what they will study and how they will study it
- Take on plausible writing roles and submit their work to real audiences

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To date, it has typically been the high schools rather than the colleges that have taken the lead in supporting students academically and socially, even for college-based classes. It may benefit students if future program innovations focus on providing access to—and advancing student comfort level regarding—more college-based supports.

Integrating the High School and College Experience

ECHSs have proven to be flexible in meeting the goal of compressing the time it takes to graduate from high school and attain a college degree. Some sites have implemented grades 6 through 12 or 9 through 13 models to help make a successful journey through school a reality for more students.

ECHSs have developed various strategies for integrating the college-level component. These approaches include placing an emphasis on helping students simultaneously earn college and high school credits, with individual student goals and abilities dictating exactly how many college credits will be earned, if any.

All the sampled ECHSs were working to ensure that their academic plan allowed all students the opportunity to take at least some college-level courses, regardless of how unprepared they might be when first entering the program. Some ECHSs included the use of "stretch" classes wherein a college course typically offered over the course of one semester is offered to high school students over the course of an academic year. Many ECHSs provided students with a sheltered college experience by offering college courses primarily or entirely on the high school campus.

Factors That Facilitate High School/College Partnerships

An effective blended high school/college experience must address the quality of both high school and college instruction, as well as the ways in which participating high school and college staff interact together to meet the needs of ECHS students. This integration of high school and college makes effective partnerships between high school and college entities critical to the ECHSs' success.

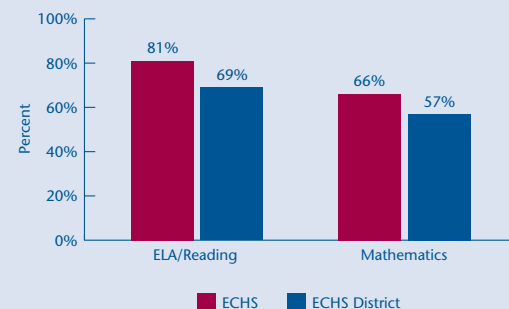
Findings reveal that the ECHSs sometimes struggle with bringing together high school and college faculty to develop an inclusive professional learning community.

Bridging the divide between high schools and postsecondary institutions can be challenging and the path made less smooth when high school and college team members are not well integrated in their work to

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ECHSs Perform Better Than Other High Schools in Their Districts

Percentage of ECHS and Comparison District High School Students Scoring Proficient or Above on Their State's 2005–06 ELA/Reading and Mathematics Assessments*

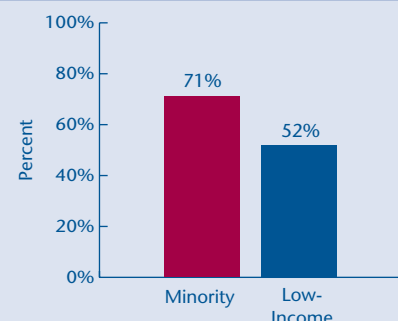


* These data are based on school-level averages and are not adjusted for students' academic achievement levels prior to entering the ECHS.

ECHSs Enroll More Minority Students Than Other Schools in Their Districts

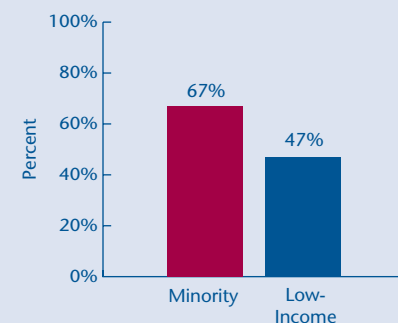
ECHSs are recruiting and enrolling higher percentages of minority students and similar percentages of lower income students, relative to their geographic district.

2005–06 Average Percentage Enrollment of Minority and Low-Income Students in ECHS*



* ECHSs with publicly available data; Minority n = 58, Low-income n = 57

Percentage of ECHSs with a Percentage Enrollment of Minority and Low-Income Students Equal to or Higher Than the Geographic District*



* ECHSs with publicly available data; Minority n = 58, Low-income n = 57

Findings for Early College High School Students

An evaluation of ECHSI and 77 of its schools in 2005–06 by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International (SRI) reveals evidence of student outcomes that are very promising.

Strong Test Scores

ECHS students are doing as well or better than other area high school students on standardized assessments:

- ECHSs had a higher average percentage of students scoring proficient on their states' assessments in English language arts (ELA)/reading and mathematics than did other high schools in the districts in which they are located.¹

accelerate student learning. ECHSs and their postsecondary partners can help ensure success by putting in place the following:

- A common understanding of the goals and purposes
- Flexibility among partners, particularly in terms of policies and procedures
- Active and engaged liaisons from colleges and/or universities

Typically, ECHSs with more supports from colleges and/or universities, districts, or other organizations had more resources to rely on, including professional development for teachers and supports for students and families. Memoranda of understanding between the partners went a long way in providing mutual trust, particularly around planning for future sustainability.

Overall implementation of ECHSI is proceeding smoothly, with good progress in developing local partnerships, opening a critical mass of ECHSs, and growing multiple levels of professional learning communities that will help sustain the initiative into the future.

Looking Forward

Future sustainability of ECHSs is gradually becoming more of a concern, although many intermediaries have made sure that participating ECHSs have concrete plans to continue funding after their grants end.

Funding

ECHSs are at least partially supported by district and/or state per-pupil funding, but experience has

High Attendance Rates

ECHS students attend school at high rates:

- Overall, the mean average daily attendance rate reported by ECHSs was 94 percent, up from 91 percent in 2003–04.

Access for Underserved Students

ECHSs have remained committed to serving a student population underrepresented in postsecondary institutions:

- ECHSs had higher percentages of minority and similar percentages of low-income students compared to the enrollments of other area schools. On average, ECHSs had enrolled 71 percent minority students and 52 percent low-income students.

shown that this governmental funding is not necessarily sufficient to meet all the financial demands, such as the cost of college textbooks. As their grants end, many ECHSs are attempting to supplement per-pupil funding by securing additional funding through grants or business support. Many ECHSs are finding that strong partnerships with their college or university partners can help stretch their budgets.

Policy

Sustainability will also be viable to the extent that ECHSI participants, at both the site level and the intermediary level, have a positive policy environment. When states, for example, do not have a coordinated and aligned P–16 policy approach but instead have misalignment between secondary and postsecondary education, ECHSs will have a more difficult time flourishing. When states have the following in place, then ECHSs will stand a better chance of long-term success:²

- Policies that allow college courses to count for both high school and college credit
- No limit on the number of college courses a high school student can take
- No college course restrictions based on minimum cumulative grade point averages or combined SAT scores
- Easy transfer of credits to 4-year postsecondary institutions, involving a statewide systematic means of equating courses for transferring credit
- Funding arrangements that promote integrated schools, such as allowing high school students taking college courses to access college financial aid
- Policies that ensure districts do not lose funding when high school students enroll in college courses

As ECHSs continue to succeed in raising student outcomes, they can serve as critical evidence for making more supportive policy changes a reality.

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Funding: ECHSI is sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. As of 2006, more than \$110 million has been invested in the initiative. Additional and long-term funding for schools comes from a variety of public and private sources.

Participants: ECHSI is operated by 17 grantee organizations, or intermediaries, which receive funding to work with local partners. Local partners, such as school districts, community organizations, high schools, and 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities, work together to open ECHSs. Jobs for the Future (JFF) coordinates the initiative. JFF also analyzes trends and outcomes of ECHS students through the Student Information System (SIS), a secure, confidential collection of data about students attending ECHSs throughout the United States. SIS provides information to guide the development and improvement of ECHSs.

Location: ECHSI is currently active in 23 states. Its geographic focus includes California; New York, NY; North Carolina; Ohio; Texas; and Washington.

Evaluated by: American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International (SRI)