



## *Early College High School Initiative*

# “It’s Kind of Different”

## *Student Experiences in Two Early College High Schools*

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**The Early College High School  
Initiative is sponsored by**  
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## About the Early College High School Initiative

Early college high schools are small schools designed so that students can earn both a high school diploma and an Associate's degree or up to two years of credit toward a Bachelor's degree. Early college high schools have the potential to improve graduation rates and better prepare students for entry into high-skill careers by engaging all students in a rigorous, college preparatory curriculum and compressing the number of years to a college degree.

Funding for the Early College High School Initiative comes from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, along with Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and a number of local foundations. By 2008, 12 partner organizations will create or redesign more than 170 pioneering small high schools. Jobs for the Future coordinates the Early College High School Initiative and provides support to the partners and to the effort as a whole.

[www.earlycolleges.org](http://www.earlycolleges.org)



Jobs for the Future seeks to accelerate the educational and economic advancement of youth and adults struggling in today's economy. JFF partners with leaders in education, business, government, and communities around the nation to: strengthen opportunities for youth to succeed in postsecondary learning and high-skill careers; increase opportunities for low-income individuals to move into family-supporting careers; and meet the growing economic demand for knowledgeable and skilled workers.

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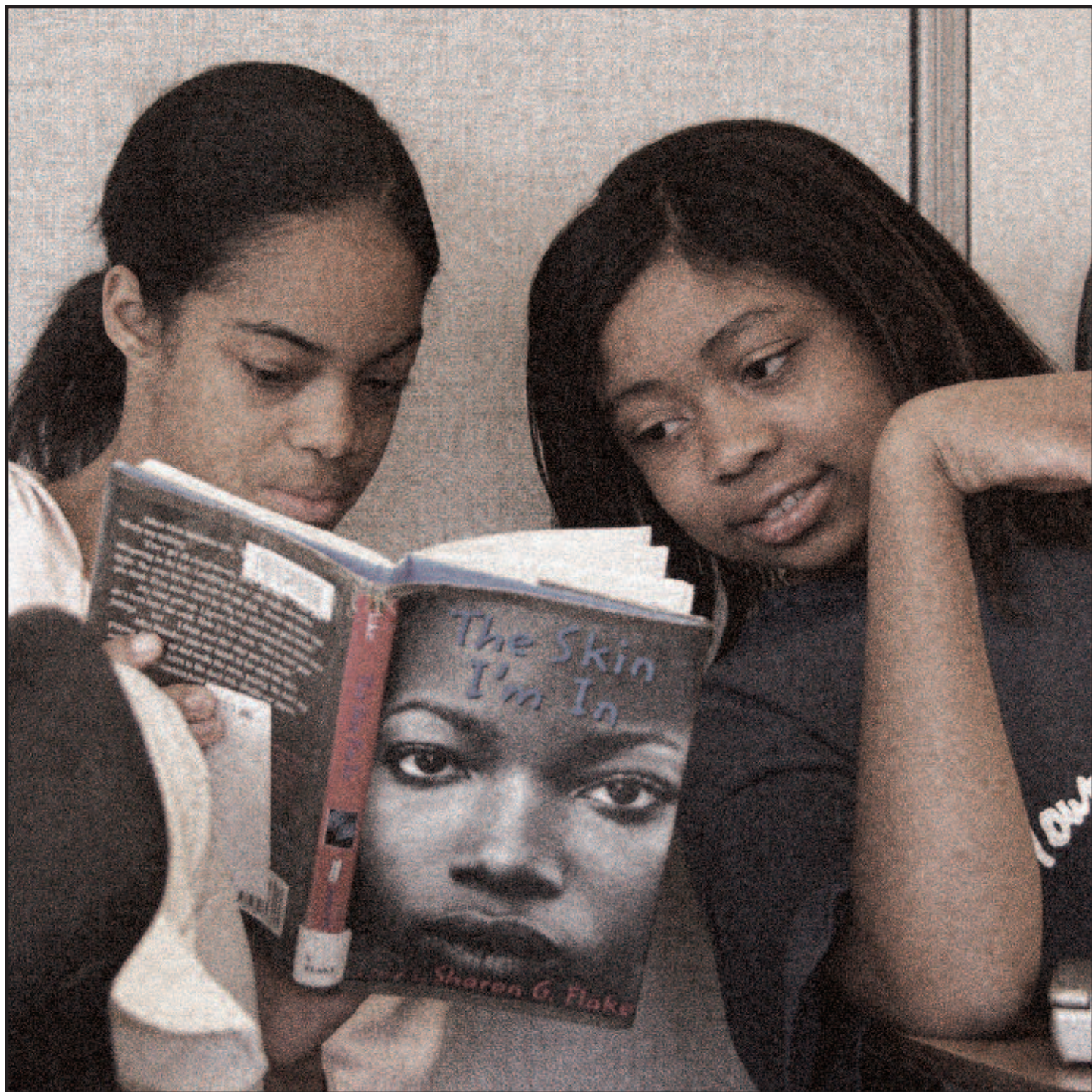
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## Table of Contents

<b>Fulfilling a Promise</b> .....	1
<b>Results from Year One</b> .....	7
<i>An Educational Identity</i> .....	7
<i>Continuous Support</i> .....	8
<i>Caring Relationships</i> .....	8
<i>Support for Staff</i> .....	8
<i>Challenging Environment</i> .....	9
<i>Importance of Learning Spaces</i> .....	10
<i>Constructing Knowledge</i> .....	10
<i>Personalized Learning</i> .....	11
<i>Widespread and Intense Commitment</i> .....	11
<b>Year Two and Onward</b> .....	13



# Fulfilling a Promise

In South Central Los Angeles, in a neighborhood long victimized by poverty and gang violence, a stunning, new, state-of-art high school admitted its first freshman class in September 2003. Wallis Annenberg High School stands not only as a beacon of hope to the surrounding urban community but as a symbol of educational innovation with real promise for the future.

At the same time, some 2,000 miles away in Dayton, Ohio, a similar pioneering high school opened in makeshift quarters on the campus of the University of Dayton. The Dayton Early College Academy and the university have entered into a symbiotic partnership that promises to provide a model for institutions of higher education across the nation.

These two schools are a new breed of institution that combines high school and college into a coherent educational program and helps to bridge the gap between graduating from high school and entering and succeeding in college. Inspired by the success of dual enrollment programs that allow high school students to take college courses, these “early college high schools” are small—usually fewer than 400 students—and located on or near a college campus. Unlike the traditional high school where the senior year is virtually wasted time for too many students, these new schools are designed so that all students can earn up to two years of college credit or an Associate’s degree in addition to their high school diploma. More often than not, early college high schools have an explicit mission to serve poor and minority students.

Because it is somewhat counterintuitive to take adolescents who are already at an educational disadvantage and push them further and faster, and because the idea is largely untested, a long-term research project was launched to track the progress of early college high schools and their impact on students. Conducted by researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the study has completed its first year with encouraging findings that are summarized below.

## The Obsolescent High School

The Los Angeles and Dayton early college high schools are participants in a pioneering initiative that is expected to create as many as 2,000 innovative high schools of various models over the coming decade. They are part of a concerted and growing response to what has been called “the greatest tragedy” in American education: “The rise and fall of the American high school.”



A new breed of institution bridges the gap between graduating from high school and entering and succeeding in college. These early college high schools have an explicit mission to serve young people who might not otherwise go to college.

## By the Numbers

170 Early College High Schools by 2008

67 Early College High Schools as of September 2005

62,000 Students in Early College High Schools by 2012

Over 12,000 Students in Early College High Schools as of September 2005

24 States with Early College High Schools as of September 2005

## Opening Year

3 Schools Opened in 2002–03 School Year

18 Schools Opened in 2003–04 School Year

25 Schools Opened in 2004–05 School Year

21 Schools Opened in 2005–06 School Year

Alarms over the decline of the American high school have been sounded periodically over the past half-century, but only in recent years has the issue risen to the top of the school-reform priority list. In 2005, the nation's governors devoted their fourth national education summit to a discussion of the high school's problems. In the opening session, Microsoft founder Bill Gates described the high school as "obsolete."

"Everyone who understands the importance of education," Gates said, "everyone who believes in equal opportunity; everyone who has been elected to uphold the obligations of public office should be ashamed that we are breaking our promise of a free education for millions of students."

Other speakers in the summit's various panel discussions documented Gates' charge with dismal and depressing statistics:

- Almost a third of the students who start the ninth grade fail to graduate and two-thirds are not prepared for college; only half of African-American, Latino, and Native-American youth earn a high school diploma.
- A solid majority of high school seniors are not proficient in reading, math, or science, and their scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress tend to decline from the fourth to the twelfth grade. In international comparisons, U.S. students usually rank in the bottom half along with underdeveloped nations.
- Although about 75 percent of high school graduates enroll in college, more than a third need remedial courses, a third never make it to the sophomore year, and more than half do not complete the work necessary to earn a degree.
- Only 18 percent of African Americans and 10 percent of Latinos complete a four-year college degree by the time they are 29, compared to 34 percent of whites. A miniscule 4 percent of Native Americans who start college go on to complete a Bachelor's degree. Upper-income students are seven times more likely than low-income students to earn a Bachelor's degree by age 24.
- The percentage of U.S. students who earn a college degree is essentially the same as it was 30 years ago.

The story these statistics tell is not a new one. By the early 1970s, concern about the failure of the comprehensive high school led to studies by three blue-ribbon national commissions. All three found the traditional high school to be seriously flawed. One declared that the high school has effectively "decoupled the generations" by isolating adolescents from adults.

In response to the high school crisis, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched a program in 2000 to build small, innovative high schools across the nation and transform larger high schools into clusters of smaller, semiautonomous schools. Foundation officials searched the country for schools that were succeeding, especially with poor and minority students, and then partnered with their founders to replicate the “model schools.” They also encouraged and funded the development of new kinds of schools—among which is early college high school.

So far, the foundation has invested nearly \$1.2 billion in efforts to improve secondary education, including support to create more than 2,000 high-quality schools in 41 states and the District of Columbia. The Early College High School Initiative, a major part of that effort, is being funded with \$114 million in grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates, Ford, and W. K. Kellogg foundations, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and a number of local foundations. Twelve organizations are partnering with them to create 170 schools by 2008.

Already up and running are 67 early college high schools—including some that include the middle school years. These schools are in 24 states and have a combined enrollment of more than 12,000 students. And seven states—California, Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Utah, and Washington—have statewide early college high school initiatives. Jobs for the Future, an action/research/policy organization, is coordinating the effort.

The early college high school movement promises to make higher education more accessible and more affordable for underrepresented students. It will also ease the transition for students from high school to college and provide young people with a smoother pathway into adulthood and work.

## Origins

Like the other new, innovative small schools, early college high schools differ somewhat from one another in important ways. About 30 percent are charter schools; more than 60 percent are district schools. Two-thirds are theme-based schools—for example, a number of them focus on math, science, or technology. More than half are located on college campuses and in college facilities, but a third are located off campus, sending their students to nearby colleges for some courses or offering college courses in their own classrooms.

The new schools receive start-up support from foundations and may continue to seek gifts and grants. However, once they are up and running, they generally receive the same public funding as traditional public schools and colleges.

Early college high schools have generated considerable publicity and caught the imagination of the public. Still, not everyone is convinced they are a good idea. Some educators are concerned about accelerating the education of high school students.

## By the Numbers

### Locations

49% of Early College High Schools on Postsecondary Campuses

31% of Early College High Schools in Separate Facilities

20% of Early College High Schools Within a Comprehensive High Schools

6% of Early College High Schools on Native-American Reservations

### Partners

57% of Early College High Schools Partner with Two-Year Colleges

30% of Early College High Schools Partner with Four-Year Colleges

13% of Early College High Schools Partner with Two-Year and Four-Year Colleges

For more information, see [www.earlycolleges.org](http://www.earlycolleges.org)

The dean of the School of Education at Indiana University at Bloomington, Gerardo M. Gonzalez, expressed concern to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* over the “unanticipated consequences of depriving students of the traditional four-year campus experience.” High schools, he argued, should prepare kids for college without trying to replace college.

“College is more than just mastering a set of academic courses,” Dean Gonzalez told the *Chronicle*. “[It’s] also a time to develop as a person and come in contact with new ideas and people.”

Others contend that there is too little research on early college high schools to justify replicating them in significant numbers at this point.

Advocates of the new schools respond that high school students have been taking college courses successfully for many years. Nearly all states have some form of dual enrollment program, where high school students take courses for credit at nearby colleges. Twenty-one states provide incentives to increase student and institutional participation in such programs. For example, Running Start in Washington had more than 15,000 students—about 10 percent of all juniors and seniors in the state—taking free courses in 2003-04 at the state’s 34 community and technical colleges, as well as at some universities.

The City University of New York, the largest urban postsecondary system in the country, and the New York Department of Education, the largest urban school district in the country, have established a high school/postsecondary partnership that rivals in size those of entire states. At the center of College Now, one segment of this partnership, are free, credit-bearing college courses. In 2003-04, 14,170 students took college-credit courses through College Now.

Early data suggest that dual enrollment students earn higher grades in college than those who have not previously taken college courses. Not only that, these students are more likely to stay in school and graduate.

More evidence comes from “middle colleges,” which preceded early college schools. Like many early college high schools, they are located on college campuses and blend high school and college-level work into a single academic program, although without the goal of having each student earn two full years of college credit. Of the 4,500 students enrolled in middle colleges in 1999, 41 percent took college classes and earned a passing grade in 97 percent of those classes.

Advocates of early college high school agree that more research is necessary, but they argue that the existing comprehensive high school is performing so dismally that innovation is necessary and appropriate. Experimentation should not be put on hold while stud-



Early college high school advocates believe that the existing comprehensive high school is performing so dismally that innovation is necessary and appropriate.



ies are conducted and more young people suffer the consequences of inappropriate and inadequate schooling.

### Documenting Progress and Challenges

Those funding and implementing early college high schools obviously are committed to moving forward, even as they do so with their eyes open. Jobs for the Future is creating a Student Information System to collect data from school systems on such facts as student demographics, scores on standardized tests, attendance, and high school and college courses taken and grades received. With tight safeguards to ensure individual privacy, the data-collection effort will also follow students into and through college.

At the same time, JFF commissioned the study by scholars at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. The researchers seek to capture students' perspectives on early college high school. They are focusing on the Dayton Early College Academy in Ohio and Wallis Annenberg High School (formerly The Accelerated School or TAS) in Los Angeles, two quite different types of early college high school.

DECA also benefited from a particularly strong relationship with a key University of Dayton administrator, Thomas J. Lasley, II, Dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions. With Superintendent Percy Mack of Dayton Public Schools and the Dayton Board of Education, he helped establish the early college high school from the outset and was instrumental in recruiting the school's principal and other key leadership personnel. DECA opened its doors in fall 2003 with 95 students, most of whom are African Americans, and had 169 students in fall 2004. In addition to taking high school classes, a small number of DECA ninth graders attended University of Dayton courses that year, and about one-third attended courses at Sinclair Community College. DECA also benefited from a particularly strong relationship with a key University of Dayton administrator, Thomas J. Lasley, II, dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions, who helped establish the early college high school from the outset and was instrumental in recruiting the school's principal and other key leadership personnel.

DECA started in a very different place from the Wallis Annenberg High School, a difference facilitated by its location on a college campus. WAHS, a K-12 charter school in Los Angeles, has its own facility situated in the heart of an urban community and partners with nearby California State University Los Angeles. University faculty worked with WAHS in its first year to develop curricula in a number of subject areas and to prepare for future university coursework. The high school students did not take college courses in the first year, but 20 students enrolled in college chemistry and philosophy in the summer of 2005.



Researchers are capturing the perspectives of students at the Dayton Early College Academy and the Wallis Annenberg High School, as well as those of teachers, administrators, and parents.



# Results from Year One

In 2005, after following the first class of ninth graders at WAHS and DECA, the Harvard study, led by senior researchers Karen Foster and Michael J. Nakkula, issued an interim report. Researchers interviewed students, teachers, administrators, and parents from the two schools, along with faculty and other staff of the university partners. In addition, they surveyed all of the DECA and WAHS students, using two standardized measures. With the Across Time Orientation Measure (ATOM) they assessed students' past experiences, present interests, and future hopes and worries. They used the Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness to assess the relative degree of connection adolescents feel to different domains in their lives, including school, family, friends, future prospects, and risk-taking behavior.

With only its first phase completed, the research project's findings are preliminary and much remains to be learned. Still, the findings to date are compatible with previous research on effective schools, and Drs. Foster and Nakkula feel the new schools "are off to a good start, despite the research surfacing the inevitable challenges that new schools experience in starting up."

## An Educational Identity

Early college high school teachers help their students to develop an "educational identity." Students' ultimate success in high school may depend largely on how they perceive their future with regard to higher education. Because early college high school students tend to have had negative and disappointing educational experiences, and as such generally lack the skills and commitment needed to succeed in college, they are unlikely to realistically see themselves as future college students. Early college high school teachers and advisors keep a focus on the future and, without overwhelming their students, project high expectations for them. According to Dr. Foster, teachers and advisors play an important role in "holding" this prospective educational identity for their students until the students gradually come to see the possibility of higher education: "It is as if the teacher periodically lends the student a 'telescope' through which to see a future self succeeding in higher education at a time when the student may be struggling with considerable academic challenges in the present."

The key findings from surveys of and interviews with members of the early college high school community focus on eight areas:

- An educational identity;
- Continuous support;
- Caring relationships;
- Support for staff;
- Challenging environment;
- Importance of learning spaces;
- Constructing knowledge; and
- Widespread and intense commitment.

## I Know I Can Go to College

"I didn't think I was cut out for college...because I was having problems with reading and math and everything. And it's only because I don't learn in big groups. And so I was like failing math class and not reading real well, but...I'm reading a lot better than I was and I'm doing really well in math....I know I can go to college and pass....It's because I'm learning more and I have more confidence in myself."

—DECA Student



Early college high school teachers continuously help their students meet the demands of a challenging academic curriculum.

### They Help You in Everything

“In here, you fall behind and they pick you, they help you, they help pick you up. Like help you to go to your goal. Get to your goal. They help you in everything, anything they can....So that’s different. Like in the other high school they really don’t.”

— WAHS student

One WAHS student explains how a teacher sometimes writes “nothing on the board. And we’ll have to write our own notes like in college. Because the professor isn’t going to stand up there and write everything on the board. So he’s telling us, ‘Look, I’m going to do this. I’m preparing you.’”

### Continuous Support

WAHS and DECA teachers nourish the development of this educational identity by continuously helping the students meet the demands of a challenging academic curriculum. They also gradually join with students in experiencing educational aspirations that the young people have often not even considered. They strive to convince their students that it is never too late. That counters a message that underperforming students all too often get from adults: that they have squandered their chance ever to go to college.

### Caring Relationships

At both schools, the development of each student’s educational identity is firmly rooted in caring relationships, new and challenging learning pursuits, and powerful experiences of learning spaces. As research has shown, caring relationships between teachers and students enhance student learning and motivation. Drawing on the strength of these relationships, early college high school students describe learning as “fun” because it is “interactive, cooperative, relevant, and culturally responsive to their lives.”

DECA and WAHS students describe their schools as “like family,” and, write Foster and Nakkula:

*[There is] little doubt that some students experience teachers and advisors as more committed and caring than family. . . . Based on their relationships with key teachers, students refer to their schools as “havens” of care, safety, and support. It is this culture of care that is [fundamental in] helping students cope with learning challenges that in many respects far exceed anything they have experienced previously.*

### Support for Staff

One interesting finding from the research is that students become particularly attached to their school principal; they note approvingly that the principal is a familiar figure in halls, classrooms, and activities. That the principal cares enough about their education to be involved in the day-to-day operations of the school appears to give students a sense that they are valued and respected. The same is true of students’ connections to inspiring and inspired teachers. However, developing and sustaining students’ educational identity

and the building of caring relationships require exceptional effort. Becoming genuinely involved in students' lives and really understanding what it takes to help them succeed is a highly gratifying experience, but it can also be emotionally draining. As a result, some early college high schools, like other small innovative schools, have experienced higher-than-average turnover among teachers and principals.

When teachers and principals leave, students often experience a deep sense of loss. They wonder why their teachers chose to leave them. Parents, too, are disturbed when teachers leave. The likelihood of sustained success for ECHS may be jeopardized if students consistently build strong relationships with their teachers and principals only to see them disappear.

The founding principals of WAHS and DECA, both of whom have since moved on, spoke with Foster and Nakkula extensively about the challenges of adequately supporting their teachers. Each is aware of how critical teacher training and support are to the success of the initiative. In fact, it might be argued that the expectations for and demands on teachers are at least as challenging as those experienced by the students. The DECA principal, who has a lengthy career as an educator and educational leader, speaks as much about the importance of strong teacher support models as he does about student achievement models. Without the appropriate level of teacher training support, he reasons, ambitious student goals are bound to go unmet. He is concerned that DECA and the larger early college high school initiative find the resources necessary to provide what teachers need to help the initiative succeed.

## Challenging Environment

Interviews with students reveal that many of them are thriving in the complex learning environment of early college high schools and college coursework, often in the same college classes as college students. This, too, is essential to developing an educational identity that leads a young person to college. Still, many are feeling anxiety, and many are both thriving and anxious.

Foster and Nakkula report:

*As with meaningful relationships, highly challenging learning opportunities constitute powerful medicine. The exhilaration from the experience of success in accomplishing a challenging task can be transformational for students. Repeated successes of this type come to define high achievement. At the same time, high challenge without high support can feel overwhelming. If learning challenges prove too difficult to accomplish, or if anxiety over the tasks prevents students from using their*



Students' ultimate success in high school may depend largely on how they perceive their future with regard to higher education.

## Just Start at the Top

"Every once in a while I feel overwhelmed with work...trying to space out my time so I can get everything done. Sometimes you just want to throw all the books on the ground and quit. But the method I learned, I just sit down, just write everything I need to do down, and just start at the top and just start like that. Check off. I get like an organizer and just do that.

"Ever since I've been doing that I don't feel overwhelmed. I just calm down. You always have your advisor to help you with anything you need help with."

—DECA student

A cast of extraordinarily committed teachers, principals, and partners in the Early College High School Initiative supports each school by working collaboratively to achieve exceptionally ambitious goals.



### You're Around Adult People

"Okay, it's, actually, it's amazing for real. Because it's different than going to regular public or private school. Especially on a college campus. Because first of all, you're around adult people, and a whole bunch of 'em. And then you're around a whole bunch of older kids. Like [college] seniors and everybody else there. Kind of keep you out of trouble.

"For me, taking my first college class, that's going pretty good. Because at first I thought I couldn't do it and it was going to be too hard. And plus I'm the only 15-year-old in the class. So. [lowers voice]. Nobody really knows that. [laughs]. I wish they kind of would because they treat me kind of older. But that's good too, but still."

—DECA student

*full potential, then the experience of repeated failure can be as deflating as success is exhilarating. Students from [WAHS] and DECA are clearly assessing the challenges presented in the moment, as well as those that await them—and they are assessing the extent to which they are up to these challenges.*

Because DECA has dual enrollment (and WAHS began it in 2005), people assume that its students are high achievers. Quite the opposite. As Dr. Foster, points out, the fact is often lost that many students enter early college high school performing several grades below normal. Thus, remediation and other supports that enable students to succeed in a challenging environment are part of what make early college high schools special. Nevertheless, there is the risk that cost and other pressures could lead early college high schools to select students who are high achievers rather than those who the initiative targets.

### Importance of Learning Spaces

As research on effective schools clearly shows, the physical surroundings—the learning spaces—are a critical factor. In this respect, the smallness of early college high schools provides students with what they see as safe havens. Just as important, the ambience of a college campus has a powerful appeal for students, including its symbolic meaning as a sign of capability and adult trust. Mingling with undergraduates narrows the gap that 15- and 16-year-olds might see between themselves and college students. It would be impossible to overestimate how much students value their campus experience.

Given the importance to students of being on a college campus and part of the academic experience, the location of early college high schools on or adjacent to a college may prove to be as instrumental as other critical factors. The extent to which early college high schools can become an integral part of the communities of their higher education partners may be central to their ultimate success.

### Constructing Knowledge

Teachers and students in early college high schools “construct” knowledge instead of passively receiving it. There is a process-oriented emphasis on “figuring things out together” so that students gain deep understanding of new learning through guided experience rather than lecture. This emphasis is tied to tangible benchmark outcomes—for example, passing the state standardized tests, mastering the school’s own standards for advancement, and completing the college-level coursework needed to reach the ultimate goal: an Associate’s degree along with a high school diploma. Each of these outcomes is challenging in its own right, and the combination of them is ambitious by any measure. Both

DECA and WAHS clearly communicate that they are wedded to a challenging outcomes-based approach for their students, but only under learning conditions that promote genuine process-oriented inquiry.

### Personalized Learning

DECA students emphasize in-depth learning and process. Each student has a personalized learning plan. And each student progresses at his or her own pace through various “gateways,” rather than moving from ninth to tenth grade in all subject areas at the same time.

Key to the success of a personalized learning approach is personalized support. Advisors work closely with students as they carry out their learning plans. The assessment system substitutes the terms “instructional,” “practice,” “proficient,” and “mastery” in place of letter grades. According to Dr. Foster:

*For many students the notion of learning as ongoing practice is new. Initially many seem to think that a letter grade connotes “the end” of an assignment and, implicitly, the learning process. The communication to students at DECA is that “sooner or later” you will need to master learning this assignment, rather than “it goes away” once it is graded. Learning is presented as an iterative process of ongoing practice, feedback, and revision.*

Students write in journals daily to document their own progress, and they are encouraged to reflect in these entries about their past, present, and future academic performance and achievement.

### Widespread and Intense Commitment

At both schools, it is evident that a host of invested educators works tirelessly to support the ECHS goals, not only in classrooms but beyond. The magnitude of their efforts might be viewed both as a signal of health and as a yellow light of caution.

On the positive side, a cast of extraordinarily committed teachers, principals, and partners in the Early College High School Initiative supports each school by working collaboratively to achieve exceptionally ambitious goals. On the other hand, the amount of energy invested by key leaders and faculty raises concerns about sustainability. The success of special schools like WAHS and DECA relies on the adults’ complex knowledge, political acumen, and voluminous amounts of energy and commitment, as well as on the commitment and buy-in of students and their families. The long-term success of such schools, it seems, will depend upon building and sustaining strong leadership teams as much as on teacher training and student accomplishments.

### You Have to Really Understand

“I like knowing that I got a A on a paper or a B on a paper. And like here we have instructional, practicing, proficient, and mastery. I don’t know. It took me a while to get used to that because it’s not pass or fail...because every time I saw a B, A or B, on a paper I was proud of myself. But now I see instructional and practicing, I’m not sure where I’m at....”

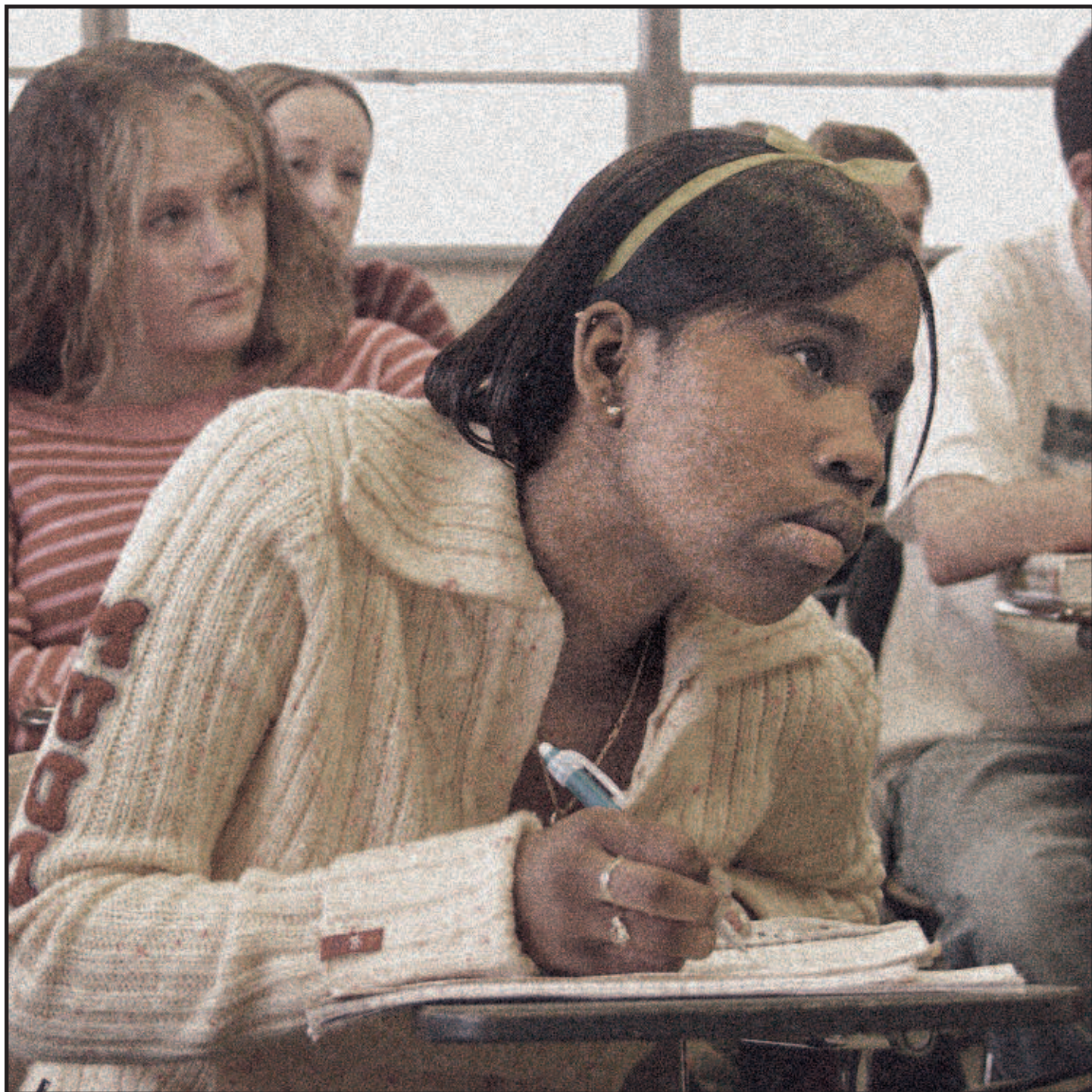
“So it’s kind of different. You feel like you did your best and they scored it low, you really have to figure out what you really did wrong and what you could do the next time better. Unlike if you get like a B on a paper and they tell you and you just go back and fix it. Here you have to really understand what you did wrong so you won’t ever make that again. So it’s kind of different.”

—DECA student

### They Don’t Just Give You a Grade

“They don’t just give you a grade, hand it out, and just say ‘You got a F on this’ or something like that. Here, when you got a ‘mastery’ or a ‘proficient,’ ‘instructional,’ or ‘practicing,’ they tell you right there, circle around what you need to work on...and then in your next essay or speech, or something like that, you can try to work on that. And they’ll give you another rubric to tell you what you improved...and you can compare. You can actually see what you need to work on, and compare and stuff like that.”

—DECA Student



# Year Two and Onward

Findings in the Harvard research project echo previous research on effective schools. Early college high schools differ from conventional schools and from one another, but they share many of the characteristics of successful schools: a clear sense of mission, high standards for all, close teacher-student relationships, personalized education, an integrated curriculum, flexibility in the use of time, an emphasis on student work, a real world context for learning, and the continuous involvement of parents and the community.

Even so, the Harvard research project, which will continue interviewing young people as they move on through their lives, cannot be expected to show with certainty how successful early college high schools will be. That can be known only after years of experience and as graduates make their way into adulthood in a demanding and changing world. Those answers will come with the help of data like that to be gathered in the long-term Student Information System. Only by following the path of innovation long enough, and adjusting course as they go, can any new schools demonstrate their ability to meet the formidable demands of the future.

Early college high schools—and others in the Small Schools Initiative supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—are obviously calculated risks. But they are no riskier than continuing to do what we have always done in public education. The reform strategies of the past two decades have had minimal success in improving public high schools. It is neither necessary nor prudent to bet the future of our children and ultimately the society on a single strategy—on the conviction that America can only get the schools it needs by improving the schools it has.

Early college high schools, along with hundreds of other small innovative schools being created around the country, represent a new strategy, a parallel effort to improve education by creating new learning opportunities that differ from the ones now available to young people. The students coming to the schoolhouse door are more diverse than they have ever been. They come from many different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds, speak different languages, learn in different ways and at different rates. They have different needs, different talents, and different interests. They require and deserve an educational system that offers learning opportunities as varied as they are.



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# About the Author

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## I Know I Can Go to College

“I didn’t think I was cut out for college...because I was having problems with reading and math and everything. And it’s only because I don’t learn in big groups. And so I was like failing math class and not reading real well, but...I’m reading a lot better than I was and I’m doing really well in math....I know I can go to college and pass....It’s because I’m learning more and I have more confidence in myself.”

—Early College High School Student



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