

The Early College High School

Early College High Schools make higher education more accessible, affordable and attractive to young Oregonians from a variety of backgrounds.

Americans strongly believe that all young people must be educated beyond the high school diploma. More than 85% of parents expect their children to complete college.¹ In a 2002 comprehensive study of high school sophomores, 72% expected to earn a bachelor's degree or higher with 58% of students with the lowest income sharing the same aspiration.² Yet attaining the dream of a college education is a reality for fewer than 3 of every 10 high school freshman.³

In Oregon, a state whose citizens hold high expectations for their schools, only 58% of students will enroll in college and only one-half will complete their degrees with even lower rates for ethnic minorities and students from low income families.⁴ Over a lifetime, a worker with a college degree earns \$1 million more than non-degree holding workers.⁵ A college education continues to be a good investment for young Oregonians, for the families they might support, for their communities, and for the state's economy.

■ **What are the barriers to accessing a college education?**

Lack of Funds Many motivated and capable students cannot afford the costs associated with a college degree. Given the rising cost of tuition and increasing competition for financial aid, paying for college will continue to be a formidable barrier. Even with financial assistance, students will need to work to finance their college educations. Early College High School students earn two years of tuition-free college credit.

Lack of Rigorous Preparation Minority, English language learners, and low income students continue to be under-represented in the most rigorous high school courses. Early College High Schools introduce prepared students in Grades 9 and 10 to intensive work that will prepare them to access college course work in Grades 11 and 12.

Lack of High Expectations Low expectations of young people send the message that college is unattainable. For those groups traditionally under-represented among college graduates, the message diminishes educational and career aspirations. In Early College High School, every student is engaged in conversations about attending college.

Early College High Schools offer students accelerated learning through rigorous, career-relevant programs in a personalized and supportive college environment.

■ ***What do Early College High Schools look like?***

Early College High Schools are small schools in which the transition from the high school to the college is smooth and anticipated by both students and faculty. The ECHS is a coherent, coordinated program in which students meet commonly agreed-upon high standards. Students are supported with intensive guidance from adults who incorporate individual student aspirations and interests into the educational program.

Students typically attend classes on the college campus. High school teachers and college faculty work together to ensure students have access to an aligned and well articulated curriculum that prepares students to access college level coursework and complete their certifications or associate degree. This requires ongoing collaboration that relies on a strong partnership between secondary schools and higher education partners.

Working as partners, high schools and colleges implement a comprehensive counseling program to support students as they pursue accelerated programs. Using agreements forged by the education partners, counselors advise students on dual enrollment courses, transfer credit to universities, and postsecondary education requirements for pursuing specific career options.

Counselors play another critical role in the success of ECHSs by connecting with middle school students. Traditional college transition programs recruit under-represented students in Grades 11 and 12. Even though these students often enter high school with limited educational opportunities and experiences, their immediate exposure to college curriculum and higher expectations than they have experienced in the past puts them at risk of not completing their studies.⁶ ECHS counselors conduct outreach to under-represented students in Grades 6-8 to begin conversations about career and education and to encourage enrollment in courses that will prepare them for Early College.

ECHS students in Grades 11-14 devote as much as 90-100% of their time to college courses. Students immersed in college studies are supported through frequent meetings with ECHS students and staff for peer-to-peer support and academic consultation.

Students in Grades 9 and 10 spend the majority of their day working in an intensive program of study that is well articulated with the courses they will select when they are ready to advance to college level work. The students' on-campus programs provides adequate preparation for college courses, affording students more time to enroll in college course work or career-related experiences such as service learning, internships, and apprenticeships rather than having to spend time on remedial non-credit college coursework.

Middle College High Schools are similar to Early College High Schools, but without the focus on students earning a two-year associates degree.

RATIONALE FOR EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS

The structure of Early College High Schools is based on academic and institutional rationales supported by well established principles of social psychology and learning theory:

- Intellectual development is a continuous process as is the learning process. There is no gap in intellectual development at age 18 to correspond with the gap between secondary and postsecondary education. The curriculum between high school and college should be coordinated and student transition should be seamless.
- Unlike our 19th and 20th century belief system, which assumed that only a small proportion of the population was capable of advanced study, we now know that a majority of students have the intellectual ability to take on the challenge of college level work.
- Challenge is a stronger motivator for achievement than remediation.
- Interaction with positive role models leads to productive, goal-oriented decisions.
- Flexible use of time maximizes opportunities for new learning.⁷

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES OF EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS

As is the case with other small high schools, an organizing theme provides cohesion and purpose to the Early College High School. The theme is college success focused on the common goal of graduating students with both a high school diploma and an associate degree or two years of transferable college credit. Other key components include:

Equitable Access to College

Targets students who are underrepresented in higher education and provides access to college, an important component for those students who may not have the financial means to pay for tuition.

Raised Aspirations

Inspires middle and high school students from all backgrounds to engage in serious study, to work hard, and to be challenged; increases the likelihood that they will graduate from high school and college.

Accelerated Study

Engages students in serious intellectual work that duplicates the rigor, depth, and intensity of college-level course work and permits students to supplant, not supplement, their high school course work with college classes.

Seamless Transition

Eliminates the need for seniors to select a post-secondary institution and allows students to focus their attention on their Grade 12 studies, not on the college application, selection, and financial aid process.

Connections to Career and Community

Incorporates career exploration and work experiences into the curriculum, enabling students to make informed decisions about career choices.

Flexibility

Embeds flexible programs and schedules that facilitate community-based learning experiences that allow students to carry out responsibilities such as holding a job, caring for family members, or studying English as a second language.

EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS ADDRESS THE 3 “R”s**Rigor**

Like other effective small schools, students share a common intellectual purpose. ECHS students are committed to earning college degrees. The common purpose guides the development of a focused curriculum specifically designed to teach students what they need to know to be successful college students. As early as age 14, students are part of a 5-6 year coherent and integrated program that provides the level of academic support and guidance they need to accomplish their higher education goals.

Relevance

The common intellectual focus does not restrict the number of within-ECHS educational pathways from which students may select. Student choice drives the community learning experiences and career focus of each individual student’s program. With one-third of sophomores reporting no career interest,² an Early College High School with its career focus, work experience, and strong guidance program makes sense.

Relationships

Many of the structures and strategies successfully employed by effective small schools are options for Early College High Schools. Strong relationships are fostered through multi-year connections with the same teachers and students. The smaller student body allows students, parents, and teachers to get to know one another. Additionally, ECHS staff and students may employ flexible and creative uses of instructional time, performance assessments that

enable students to exhibit their work to the community, and the development of individual educational plans.

■ **What design options are available for Early College High Schools?**

The designs of Early College High Schools are based on formal agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions. The agreements may be formed between magnet schools, charter schools, school districts, community colleges, private liberal arts colleges, and public universities. Other design option categories include:

Liberal Arts: traditional design with a focus on content knowledge or world view.

Student-Centered: individualized, flexible, and supportive environment typically designed for at-risk students

Thematic/Focused: applied and integrated learning around an area of interest such as international business or health services

➤ Promising Design Option for Oregon: Blending Academic Rigor and Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Joining high school and postsecondary career and technical studies in a seamless pathway is the goal of many successful Middle Colleges and Career and Technical Education Programs. It may be especially advantageous for Oregon in that it allows ECHS to rely heavily on state and federal programs and funds, an important point given Oregon's education funding crisis. Additionally, Oregon community colleges have strong CTE programs that may provide many options for students, including the option to work toward a four-year degree.

Programs with a CTE focus give students an education that adds value to their future places in the workforce.⁸ Blending the strengths of Middle Colleges and CTE programs into an Early College High School makes sense.

"The best CTE programs and school designs point the way for high school reform more generally: greater academic rigor, a clear focus or theme, pathways connecting secondary and postsecondary institutions, and increased time with adults." *Betsy Brand, American Youth Policy Forum*⁹

"...successful CTE programs combine real-world, applied learning experiences with the rigorous academic content that traditionally was reserved for the "college prep" track. It's not an "either/or" but a "both/and" proposition." *Ross Wiener, The Education Trust*¹⁰

RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS

Students Rise to the Challenge of College Work

Early College High Schools utilize the most effective components of middle colleges, dual enrollment, tech prep, and advanced placement programs to increase student achievement. Research indicates that these programs have a long track record of retaining students and lowering drop out rates; providing a head-start to attaining college credit while in high school; and providing options in which students can choose alternative pathways to traditional Grades 9-14 programs.

As more of the nation's early colleges move into their third year of operation, specific information about student achievement is emerging. Dayton Early College Academy (DECA) opened in its doors in 2003 to a very diverse student population. In 2004, 70% of DECA students scored above the 50th percentile in reading as compared to only 37% of students in other Dayton schools.¹¹

In a 1990-2000 review of New York City's transition to college programs, researchers found that 97% stayed in school as compared to 70% in traditional high school programs, with 90% of seniors enrolling in college after graduation.¹² The high rate of college enrollment replicates the findings of Bard Early College (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY), one of the oldest models in the U.S. that 99% of their first graduating class enrolled in college.¹³

The older ECHS models have demonstrated that successful programs must look at student retention-in-program, including continued enrollment in college, as opposed to high school graduation rates. For many students, it is advantageous to be enrolled in their high school throughout Grade 13 because they need the continued support from their K-12 systems. Likewise, some ECHS models do not emphasize traditional student achievement data as a measure of success. Rather, Early College High Schools prefer to use students' successful completion of college course work as evidence of achievement.

In the Pacific Northwest, two programs initiated in 2003 and 2004 use student retention and accrual of college credit as indicators of a successful program. Although they are still in their first few years of operation, the programs are producing some very promising outcomes. The early/middle college charter school program in the North Clackamas School District reports that of spring 2005's Grade 12 students, 33% exited with a diploma and 66% returned for Grade 13. The total number of college credits earned by all 136 students in Grades 9-12 in 2004-05 was 1859, with the average number per student being 13.7 credits.¹⁴

Likewise, Antioch University's eight Early College High Schools located on tribal lands to serve the educational needs of Washington State's Native Americans,

are demonstrating dramatic success in retaining students in school. As compared to a 14.6% Native American annual drop out rate in Washington (2002-03), Antioch's schools in their first year of operation found that 100% of their students returned to the Early College High Schools.¹⁵

Students Connected to Their Future

“High school has a broader mission than college preparation or even academic preparation. As the last institution attended by all youths, high schools must prepare all young people for productive careers. If they fail, youths will have difficulty becoming self-sufficient adults, and in fact, many youths spend 2-10 years floundering among many dead end, high turnover jobs with many unemployment spells...”¹⁶ *Rosenbaum*

Early College High Schools provide students with a seamless pathway to their future places in the workforce through an accelerated program that provides the academic skills to enter college without remediation. Through fully-integrated, comprehensive counseling programs in early colleges, students have the opportunity to select a career interest, research education requirements, study the viability of employment in the field, develop a six- to eight-year plan for achieving their career goals, and direct a Grade 9-14 or 16 course of action that will lead to careers with family-sustaining salaries. With the guidance of high school and college instructors, students have the support they need to navigate the secondary and post-secondary institutions.

EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS MAKE SENSE FOR OREGON

Through Early College High Schools, secondary, postsecondary, and businesses forge partnerships to benefit Oregon communities. Students, using local and regional job forecasts, can select careers based on job availability and pay scales. Through the partnerships, the number of qualified workers increases, and at the same time, workers have the option to continue their education in degree or advanced degree programs further increasing their earning power, a win-win situation for any community.

Oregon's resources are maximized through collaboration that improves the college utilization rate and reduces the overall cost of students' postsecondary education.

- Broaden access to Oregon's higher education system.
- Capitalize on the Proficiency-Based Admission Standards System (PASS), a system created by the Oregon University System in collaboration with high school teachers, which enables students to advance to college coursework by demonstrating proficiency.

- Increase the number of transfer students to the higher education system.
- Ensure the flow of students to upper division college courses.
- Take advantage of content and pedagogical expertise of both high school and college faculties.
- Reduce the cost of remediation at the college level.

■ ***What are the challenges for Early College High Schools in Oregon?***

We will find challenges in the beliefs and perceptions of students, parents, high school teachers, college faculty, and community members about under-represented students attending college. Misperceptions are expressed in statements such as: “college enrollment is a privilege for a few”; “these kids aren’t college material”; “I need to work, college doesn’t mean I’ll get a job”; “businesses aren’t interested in working with us”; and “career-focused programs are for those who do not have the potential to earn a bachelor’s degree”.

For some Oregon community colleges, increasing the number of students on campus is not a priority, particularly for those colleges that lack on-campus facility space. In addition, community college staff members express concern that younger students require a higher level of service resulting in higher costs associated with ECHSs.

Many Oregon K-12 school districts partner with colleges and universities to provide dual enrollment and dual credit options for high school students. Issues related to high school student eligibility for college courses, transfer credit to meet degree requirements, and teacher certification have not been major barriers for students in dual enrollment programs. This suggests that ECHS models are viable options for Oregon students. For those students who are enrolled in high school but have not earned a diploma, districts can claim per-student ADA through the age of 21, another policy that benefits ECHS students.

Our greatest challenge is funding Oregon Early College High Schools. In the last decade, Oregon decreased per pupil funding to school districts while dramatically raising tuition rates at higher education institutions. Using a nation-wide sample of new early colleges, Jobs for the Future analyzed projected costs per student for each Early College High School model in November 2004 as shown in the following table.

Projected Costs by ECHS Model, Based on First Year of Full Implementation 2002-2003¹⁷		
Model*		Projected Cost Per Student
ECHS in the High School		\$4,903
ECHS on Two-Year Campus		\$7,124
ECHS on University Campus		\$12,250
Charter School ECHS		\$6,795
Middle College ECHS on Two-Year Campus		\$8,604
* Based on School Size of 300-400 Students		

Considering that Oregon's average 2002-03 expenditures were \$7,044 per students, it is apparent that funding models other than early colleges on high school campuses and community colleges would be difficult in Oregon. This funding gap will need to be addressed prior to planning new early college models in Oregon.

Recent legislation in Oregon (SB 300, July 2005) modeled on Washington State's Running Start Program, addresses access to college courses by high school students. The legislation is not expected to affect established dual enrollment or middle college programs but will impact those districts with no program in place. The statute's wording suggests that community colleges will have a larger role in developing "approved programs" that high school students may access with the support of funding from their K-12 districts.

NATIONAL NETWORK OF EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS

Joining other new Early Colleges in a national network strategically places Oregon and E3 as front runners in the development of the model. The network allows us to build upon the learnings of 46 new Early College High Schools across the nation.

- Jobs for the Future, in partnership with the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation launched the Early College High School Initiative that will start 150 ECHSs by 2011 serving 60,000 students.
- Double the Numbers is a Jobs for the Future initiative that is designed to deepen support for state and federal policies that can increase the number of low-income young people who complete postsecondary education.
- 19 states have Early College High Schools in operation.
- 7 states instituted state-wide Early College High School initiatives with North Carolina implementing 10 ECHSs and Texas establishing 15 ECHSs.

■ **How do Early College High Schools fit into the work of E3 and the Oregon Small Schools Initiative?**

“Restricting our efforts to reforming existing schools forces us to deal only with incremental changes in those schools.”¹⁸ Joe Graba, Hamline University, 2004

With Early College High Schools, E3 has the opportunity to create new small schools that will make a difference for young Oregonians. Our goal is to successfully develop small schools in which all students experience a personalized and rigorous education that prepare them for college. The next step is to develop strategies for connecting students to higher education systems that will lead to family-sustaining wages, particularly for those students who face many barriers to accessing college. Early College High Schools can level the playing field. Creating new small schools that provide seamless educational programs for under-represented students in Grades 9 to 14 brings us closer to achieving our goal of equity in education.

Our next steps must be to:

- Increase the investment in planning and start-up of Early College High Schools;
- Develop financial and academic plans that clearly distinguish early college design elements; and
- Ensure formal structures and operating procedures to build and sustain secondary/postsecondary collaboration.¹⁹

Endnotes

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