



Early College High School Initiative

Integrating Grades 9 Through 14

State Policies to Support and Sustain Early College High Schools

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the country, increasing numbers of high school students are getting a head start on college by completing some college-level work in high school. Opportunities such as Advanced Placement courses and dual enrollment not only boost college-going rates but also save money for families and, potentially, for taxpayers and states. In particular, approximately 180 early college high schools being implemented over the next four years are designed to enable underrepresented students to graduate in four to five years with a high school diploma and up to an Associate's degree or sufficient credit to enter a Bachelor's degree program as a junior. In essence, these schools blend secondary and postsecondary education.

The prospect of moving students more efficiently through the pipeline raises new and complex policy and finance issues for states: in order to integrate secondary and postsecondary education within a single, small school, states and districts must be able to facilitate funding, staffing, and the crediting of courses across educational sectors. Drawing on lessons learned over the first two years of the Early College High School Initiative, this brief recommends state policies that would support these new schools.

Because early college high schools *blend secondary and postsecondary* education, the public policies most relevant to these schools are legislation and regulations that define the jurisdictions of the secondary and postsecondary sectors and those that attempt to better align the two.

Six types of policy can support early college high school:

- *Dual Enrollment/Dual Credit:* College courses can supplant high school courses.
- *Eligibility for College Courses:* Eligibility requirements for college courses are based on student readiness in the subject area.
- *Transfer:* Credits for early college high school courses are transferable to two- and four-year institutions.
- *Teacher Certification:* Teacher certification is flexible: college faculty can teach in high schools.
- *Funding:* Secondary and postsecondary funding streams can be merged.
- *Autonomy:* Schools have key autonomies (e.g., hiring, curriculum, budget).

No state has in place all the policies needed to support early college high schools. However, some states have policies that can be reshaped to meet ECHS goals.

This brief also points to broader policy changes that would benefit early college high schools *and* advance the agenda of creating a seamless K-16 system that promotes smooth transitions from one education level to the next, a system in which students can advance fluidly based on what they learn rather than in lockstep based on what time they spend in school. The broader agenda to increase postsecondary success rates would be enhanced by continued efforts to align standards for secondary and postsecondary exit, entrance, and placement. States should create formal decision-making vehicles—such as joint legislative committees—to govern across secondary and postsecondary education.



Integrating Grades 9 Through 14
is a publication of Jobs for the Future.

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Principle	Typical Policy Barriers	Recommendations
<i>Dual Enrollment/Dual Credit:</i> ECHS college courses can count simultaneously for high school graduation, college credit, and high school day/minute requirements.	<p>Restrictions on the use of college courses to fulfill requirements for high school seat time or Carnegie Units</p> <p>Choice of either high school or college credit but not both</p> <p>Caps on number of college courses high school students may take</p>	<p>Give discretion to secondary and postsecondary schools to grant dual credit toward program and graduation requirements.</p> <p>Permit college course work to count toward seat-time requirements for high school.</p> <p>Authorize high schools to determine how many college courses a student may take in a given period.</p>
<i>Eligibility for College Courses:</i> Eligibility requirements for college courses assess academic readiness but do not exclude students based on "all-or-nothing" criteria.	<p>Restrictions on access to any dual enrollment course based on combined assessment scores or GPA</p> <p>Restrictions based on age or grade level</p>	<p>Base eligibility on performance criteria, not age or grade-level.</p> <p>Regulate access on a subject-specific basis corresponding to subject-specific performance.</p> <p>Alternative Approach Allow open access but grant college course credit only after students pass an external exam or assessment.</p>
<i>Transfer:</i> ECHS-generated college course credits can be transferred to meet general education and academic major requirements for Associate's and Bachelor's degrees.	<p>No systematic means of equating courses across states' higher education institutions</p> <p>Unique prerequisites set by academic departments that can only be fulfilled within the same institution</p> <p>Uncertainty from four-year colleges regarding admission status of students with dual credit courses</p>	<p>Mandate formal articulation agreements within and across state higher ed systems.</p> <p>Make prerequisites transparent for transfer into general education and major requirements for degree programs.</p> <p>Make transfer agreements widely accessible to schools and individuals.</p> <p>Require public higher education institutions to accept dual credit courses as equivalent to courses transferable under articulation agreements.</p>
<i>Teacher Certification:</i> High school teachers are permitted to teach college-level, credit-bearing courses, and college professors are permitted to teach high school students within an early college high school.	<p>State and union regulations that prohibit college instructors from teaching high school students</p> <p>High school teachers who cannot meet hiring criteria to become adjunct professors at selective postsecondary institutions</p>	<p>Designate college instructors as "highly qualified" under NCLB and state rules if they have taught for three years in their discipline.</p> <p>Provide incentives, such as adjunct professor status, to teachers in return for allowing college instructors to teach in high schools.</p> <p>Reward postsecondary institutions that encourage faculty to work in local high schools.</p>
<i>Funding:</i> Early college high schools can combine funding streams: high school per-pupil allocations, postsecondary per-credit allocations, and state financial aid or incentive dollars.	<p>Lack of FTE reimbursement for dual enrollees at four-year public colleges</p> <p>Ineligibility of high school students for federal and state financial aid</p> <p>High school loses dollars when students leave, discouraging high school participation in dual enrollment</p> <p>Inflexibility of funding rules to pay for per-credit costs of cohorts of students</p>	<p>Allow schools to claim K-12 per-pupil ADA until age 21.</p> <p>Permit a portion of per-pupil ADA to follow students to pay for college credits.</p> <p>Give high school students access to financial aid if 50% or more of their coursework is college-level in ECHS courses.</p> <p>Allow four-year public colleges to claim FTE reimbursement for dual enrollees.</p> <p>Alternative Approach Create a K-16 Innovation Fund of combined secondary-postsecondary per-pupil revenues.</p>
<i>Autonomy:</i> Schools have autonomy to make decisions that enable accelerated advancement and integration of secondary and postsecondary education.	<p>Insufficient autonomy at the school-level from state and district controls</p> <p>Policies that do not comparably fund charter schools or do not hold them accountable distinctively from district schools</p>	<p>Encourage agreements at the district or state level that grant autonomy in exchange for accountability.</p> <p>Fund such schools at the same rate as other public schools in the districts in which they are located.</p> <p>Hold schools accountable only for students they serve, and allow some districts to operate charter-like schools.</p>

* Specific recommendations may vary based in part upon differences in secondary and postsecondary institutions and policies.