

INNOVATIONS IN COLLEGE READINESS

HOW EARLY COLLEGE SCHOOLS ARE PREPARING STUDENTS UNDERREPRESENTED IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Immediately upon taking office, President Barack Obama articulated in speeches and policy what Americans already knew: achieving some form of education or training beyond high school—whether it’s a one-year training certificate, a two-year Associate’s degree, or a four-year Bachelor’s degree—is critical to our country’s future.

Despite the need to increase the educational levels of all Americans, educational inequities persist. National assessments continue to show persistent gaps in K-12 school achievement by race, ethnicity, and income. About 65 percent of low-income students complete high school, compared with 91 percent of middle- and upper-income students. Young people from the middle and upper ends of the socioeconomic scale are almost five times more likely to earn a two-year or four-year college degree than those from low-income families.

Innovations in College Readiness describes a young national effort—the Early College High School Initiative—that in seven years has made headway in contesting those trends. The initiative has done so by focusing on the same challenge President Obama enunciated: getting more students prepared for and successfully completing postsecondary education. Through the creation of 201 early college high schools in 24 states, the initiative reaches students who typically fall through the cracks between America’s system of K-12 schools and its system of postsecondary education: low-income youth,

first-generation college goers, English language learners, students of color, and other young people underrepresented in higher education. In a bold approach, early college schools, as they are also called, engage these students in a rigorous and supportive educational program that enables them to succeed in college classes *before they graduate from high school*.

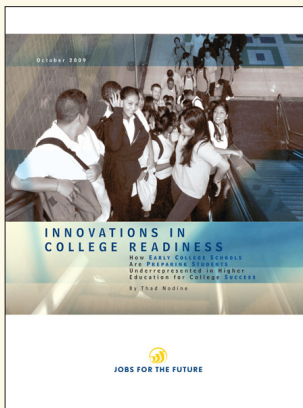
The philosophy behind this approach is grounded in the expectation that most students have the intellectual ability to succeed in college. What many students do not have—particularly students whose parents did not go to college—is college expectations, meaningful college exposure, sufficient academic rigor in their K-12 classes, and the habits of mind required for college success. Early college schools provide these missing ingredients through dual enrollment opportunities and comprehensive student supports. This philosophy is built into the design of the schools, which supports broad populations of students in earning high school diplomas and up to two years of college credit (including an Associate’s degree) while in high school. The school design includes the following key elements:

- Providing high school students with deep, diverse, and sustained experiences on college campuses that help to demystify the process of applying to and attending college;
- Immersing the students in rigorous coursework building to and including college courses while in high school;

- Providing comprehensive student supports to improve success;
- Changing the incentive structure for high school students by offering free college credits; and
- Building local partnerships to create seamless transitions between high school and college.

Early outcomes suggest that broad populations of students are succeeding in a comprehensive, rigorous high school program that builds to and includes college coursework. Based on the results of the most recent graduating class, it appears that early college students are beating the odds: they are more likely to graduate from high school and are more likely to enroll in college right after graduation than the average high school student. And those who enroll in postsecondary institutions are more likely to attend four-year colleges—which in turn increases their likelihood of college completion.

As the reach of early college schools has expanded to 24 states, the initiative has garnered the attention of policymakers and education leaders nationwide. Early promising outcomes along with research that shows that early college high schools are a cost-effective strategy have prompted great interest. Several states have supported statewide early college programs, including Georgia, Ohio, North Carolina, Texas, and Michigan. Many more states, influenced by the early college high school design, are encouraging and investing in a wide range of strategies to increase high school graduation rates, improve college readiness of high school students, and help more students into and through postsecondary programs.



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