

Testimony Before the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor

Hearing: "High School/College Dual Enrollment
Programs"
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Dear Chairman Dale E. Kildee and members of the Committee:

I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify today before the Committee on
Education and Labor on the issue of "High School/College Dual Enrollment Programs."

My testimony today will build upon the experience of the Early College High School Initiative, a
national effort to significantly increase the number of underrepresented students who attain a
college degree.

I am associate vice president at Jobs for the Future. Through research, action, and advocacy,
JFF develops promising education and labor market models that enable American families and
companies to compete in a global economy.

Higher Education Attainment is Lagging

As Education Secretary Arne Duncan noted recently, "Only 38 percent of young workers have a
college degree, a lower percentage than nine other countries, and no higher than a generation
ago." It is a sad reality today that one-third of high school students don't graduate, and more
than half leave high school unprepared for college-level academics. Yet, as the United States
pulls itself out of the most severe financial crisis since the Great Depression, it is the level of
preparation of our workforce that will ultimately determine our economic strength and ability to
compete in a global economy.

Gaps in educational attainment are caused by failures at critical points. For every ten students
who start high school, approximately two-thirds will get a diploma, and five will enroll in a
postsecondary institution. Fewer than three will complete a Bachelor's degree within ten years.
The statistics for students of color are far worse, with just over half of African-Americans and
Latinos completing a high school credential.

However, completing high school is not enough to compete in today's economy. A high school
diploma will no longer enable a young person to gain a decent paying career. A four-year

college graduate earns two-thirds more than a high school graduate does. An Associate's degree translates into earnings significantly higher than those earned by an individual with a high school diploma alone.

Preparation, Support, and Success in Higher Education

Early college schools are small schools designed so that students can earn both a high school diploma and up to two years of college credit or an Associate's degree. The Early College High School Initiative began with a captivating, though radical, concept: challenge, not remediation will make a difference for those young people who are least likely to attend college and for whom society often has low aspirations for academic achievement.

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—are college expectations, meaningful college exposure, sufficient academic rigor in their K-12 classes, and the habits of mind required for college success.

To make the early college proposition succeed, secondary and postsecondary partners have had to rethink traditional curriculum sequences, find creative ways to align and connect high school and college experiences, and provide the academic and social supports students need to succeed in an intensive early college program. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has provided significant start-up and implementation funding for the initiative. Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, and the W.K Kellogg Foundation also provided early funding.

The first year of college is a critical time. For many students, the lack of adequate preparation in high school means the need for remedial, non-credit courses. Ultimately, this means wasted money and time and results in low college completion rates. Early college schools help to compress the time to a college degree and provide support to help students transition to and through the first year or two of college without the need for remediation.

Strengthening the Pipeline to and Through College

Today, the number of early college schools has grown from 3 during the 2002-03 school year to more than 200 early college schools in 24 states. The schools enroll 42,000 students. Half the students are the first in their family to attend college. Nearly 60 percent qualify for the free- or reduced-lunch program. Three-fourths are students of color. A number of schools include the middle grades in order to begin rigorous academic preparation at an earlier age.

Though the initiative is young, we are seeing significant successes. In 2008, early college schools open 4 or more years graduated nearly 2,300 students, with a graduation rate of 92 percent. Ninety percent of the graduates earned college credit, with 40% earning more than a year of college credits. More than one student out of 10 earned an Associate's degree or two years of college credit.

Based on emerging data, early college graduates are likely to immediately enroll in college at rates higher than other high school graduates. In the first study of enrollment patterns, 89 percent of early college graduates enrolled in college right after graduation, compared to 67 percent of a nationally representative sample of graduates taken from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS).

Early college students tend to be low-income and students of color, characteristics that correlate with low college-going rates. Yet, this same study showed that early college graduates were nearly 65% more likely to enroll in college immediately after graduation than students in the lowest economic quartile in the NELS sample.

Early college graduates also enrolled in four-year colleges at rates higher than low-income graduates in the NELS study. Enrollment in four-year colleges is a predictor of greater success in attaining a Bachelor's degree.

The Power of Place

More than half of early college schools are located on a college campus. Two-thirds are located on a two-year college campus. Schools not located on a college campus include in their design activities to create and reinforce the college experience for their students.

Talk with any students attending an early college school on a college campus and it will soon be clear that there is a positive effect brought about by the location. Expectations for student behavior, recognition, and a sense of belonging all contribute to the development of students' college-going identity. This is particularly important for students who lack the tradition of college going in their family and community.

In Lean Times, A Growing Investment

Despite the severe retrenchment in state budgets, a number of states have continued significant investments in early college and even appropriated new investments. North Carolina leads the nation with 69 early college schools. New York State recently established a program to create 22 early college schools. Michigan has made a substantial investment in early colleges to develop its workforce in the fields of allied health. Texas is also planning to open additional early college schools, adding to the 29 that are already in existence.

The evidence supporting the growth of early college schools continues to build. Jobs for the Future has established a Student Information System to provide data on the progress and outcomes of early college students and their schools. With three graduating classes of significant numbers, JFF is also tracking postsecondary enrollment of graduates as they progress through higher education.

The early evidence indicates that early colleges are fulfilling their mission. By changing the structure of high school, compressing the number of years to a college degree, and removing financial and other barriers to college, early college schools will increase the number of underrepresented youth who attain a postsecondary degree.