



Early College Means Early Success for Students

Results From the Early College High School Initiative Impact Study



- students who were unlikely to go to college had the opportunity to enroll in college courses while they were still in high school?
- they were given extra academic and social support from instructors and the chance to experience a college culture before graduation?

Would more of these students end up graduating from high school, enrolling in college, and ultimately obtaining a college degree?

According to a 2014 study by American Institutes for Research (AIR), the answer is yes.

The study explored the impact of the Early College High School Initiative, launched by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2002. The initiative provided funds for the development of Early College High Schools, called Early Colleges, to give students who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education the opportunity to enroll in college courses and receive credit while pursuing a high school diploma. The goal is to better prepare these students for college and career success.

“ This was probably the best decision of my life. It has helped me get some college education that I might not have been able to afford otherwise. —Early College Alum ”

AIR and its partner, SRI International, have studied the Early College High School Initiative for more than a decade, charting its growth and looking at student educational outcomes in Early Colleges. This study is the capstone project, allowing researchers to directly measure the initiative's impact.

The Early College High School Initiative Impact Study compared educational outcomes for students who applied for admission to an Early College, participated in a lottery, and were admitted (“Early College students”) to educational outcomes for students who applied for admission, participated in a lottery, but were not admitted (“comparison students”). This randomized controlled trial design allowed researchers to provide strong evidence to answer the study research questions. All differences between Early College and comparison students reported in this summary are statistically significant unless otherwise noted.

KEY FINDINGS

By the End of High School



High School Graduation and Achievement

Early College students were more likely to graduate from high school than comparison students. Early College students also had higher English language arts assessment scores than comparison students, although mathematics assessment scores and grade point averages were about the same in the two groups.

College Enrollment

Early College students were more likely to enroll in college than comparison students. Almost two thirds of Early College students enrolled in college while they were still in high school, whereas less than one fourth of comparison students enrolled in college during high school. By the time students were two years out of high school, the majority of both groups had enrolled in college, but Early College students still enrolled at a higher rate.

By the End of High School



By Two Years After High School



Two-Year College



Four-Year College



College Enrollment by Type of Institution

Early College students were more likely than comparison students to enroll in two-year colleges and were as likely to enroll in four-year colleges. As the researchers followed students for several years, some students attended both two-year and four-year colleges. More than half of Early College students enrolled in two-year colleges, and more than half of Early College students enrolled in four-year colleges.

College Degree Attainment

Early College students were more likely to earn a college degree than comparison students. By the end of high school, 21 percent of Early College students earned a college degree. Types of degrees earned included certificates, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees, but almost all were associate's degrees. About 1 percent of comparison students earned a degree during the same time period. Because Early Colleges start students working toward a college degree, we should expect these students to complete college degrees earlier than comparison students. However, by two years out of high school, comparison students had not yet caught up with Early College students in degree attainment.

By the End of High School



By Two Years After High School



“ My time at [the Early College] has prepared me for schoolwork at a higher level because I was basically performing the same level of work throughout high school. The environment pushed me to take every opportunity offered to me.... I am a better student for having attended [Early College].
—Early College Alum

“ [The Early College] allowed me to receive my associate's degree nearly for free. Without [the Early College], I would not have my competitive edge that I have now at [college]; and I wouldn't have the same confidence, college smarts, or goals.
—Early College Alum

Impacts for Underrepresented Students

Early Colleges benefit all types of students. The Early College impacts on high school graduation and college enrollment were similar regardless of students' gender, race/ethnicity, family income, achievement before high school, and whether they were the first in their family to attend college. Early Colleges were particularly effective at helping minority and lower income students earn college degrees.

High School Experiences

Early College students had more positive high school experiences than comparison students. Early College students gave higher ratings than the comparison students to the following:

- The rigor of their high school experiences
- Their high school's college-going culture
- The level of instructor support
- The quality of support for completing college and financial aid applications



ABOUT the STUDY

The Early College High School Initiative Impact Study addressed two questions:

1. Do Early College students have better outcomes than they would have had at other high schools?
2. Do the impacts of Early Colleges vary with student background characteristics (e.g., gender and family income)?

The impacts of Early Colleges on high school and college outcomes were assessed for a sample of 10 Early Colleges. These 10 Early Colleges used lotteries as part of the admission processes in at least one of the study cohorts (students who entered ninth grade in 2005–06, 2006–07, or 2007–08). Data sources included schools, districts, states, the National Student Clearinghouse, and a student survey. Data covered 2004 to 2013 and included college enrollment and degree attainment up to two years after high school for all students and up to four years after high school for some students. The overall study sample included 2,458 students. The student survey sample included 8 of the 10 Early Colleges and 1,294 students.

The study students attended one of the 10 Early Colleges or other high schools, which were located in five states. Overall, approximately half the students were female, approximately half were minority, approximately half were low-income, and approximately one third were the first in their family to go to college.

I felt that being able to start taking college courses at [Early College] while still in high school made it much easier to adapt from high school to full-time college student after graduation. —Early College Alum

Early College High School Initiative Core Principles

Early Colleges are united by their commitment to the Early College High School Initiative's core principles:

- Early college schools are committed to serving students underrepresented in higher education.
- Early college schools are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success.
- Early college schools and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program so that all students earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion.
- Early college schools engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion.
- Early college schools and their higher education and community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement.

For more information, see Jobs for the Future's *Early College High School Initiative Core Principles* at <http://www.earlycolleges.org/Downloads/ECHSICorePrin.pdf>.

This summary was adapted from two reports, *Early College, Early Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study (2013)*, and *Early College, Continued Success (2014)*, available at www.air.org/earlycollegeimpact. Inquiries about the evaluation may be sent to Andrea Berger at aberger@air.org.

For more information about the Early College High School Initiative, visit www.earlycolleges.org.



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