The Evaluation of Career and College Promise

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Background: One way educators are addressing concerns about workforce readiness is by expanding the amount of college credit courses offered to high school students through approaches such as dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, and early college (Iatarola, Conger, & Long, 2011; Speroni, 2011). The new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has dual enrollment and early college integrated throughout, with provisions that require states to report on participation of high school students in college courses and to integrate access to college courses into district Title I plans, and that explicitly allow the use of ESSA-authorized funds for college courses (Perry & Lowe, n.d.). North Carolina has long been a national leader in implementing efforts to expand dual enrollment and early college. Career and College Promise, the state's most recent policy efforts are the subject of this project.

Purpose: This project has two purposes. The first is to examine the implementation, impact, and cost of all components of Career and College Promise. The second is to build the capacity of the participating state agencies to support a cross-sector research agenda. Specific research questions that will be addressed include:

Impact Questions:

1. What is the impact of students' participation in the College Transfer and Career Technical Education pathways on their performance in high school, enrollment and

performance in postsecondary education, earning a postsecondary credential, and their employment and earnings?

2. How do impacts differ based on the type of pathway in which a student participated (College Transfer only, CTE only, both CTE and College Transfer, STEM-oriented CTE, such as engineering or computer science)?
3. How do impacts differ for specific student populations and by specific school characteristics?
4. What is the impact of the early college model (the CIHS pathway) on students' long-term outcomes, including earning a postsecondary credential, their employment and earnings, and their participation in the criminal justice system?

Implementation questions: The project will look at a variety of implementation questions, including the number and characteristics of students participating in different pathways, the extent of and reasons for differing levels of participation, reasons students give for participating, and extent to which postsecondary participation aligns with pathway efforts.

Setting: This will be a state-wide study in North Carolina.

Sample: The study will utilize different samples depending on the research question; the largest sample will include all NC high school students who (will) have participated in CCP between the 2012-13 and 2022-23 school years and a matched set of comparison students.

Intervention: North Carolina's Career and College Promise legislation was passed in 2011; it consolidated pre-existing legislation relative to dual enrollment. In this process it created three distinct pathways to ensure that students focused their course-taking and codified eligibility criteria for students to participate in the pathways. Courses in the first two pathways are available at community colleges while the third pathway is associated with both two- and four-year

institutions. The three pathways include:

1. *College Transfer Pathway*. Offered to any North Carolina high school student, this pathway is designed for students who would like to continue their academic career at a four-year institution. The pathway includes college credit transfer courses in English, mathematics and a college transfer success course. After the student completes the college transfer pathway courses, they may enroll in a course of study leading to an associate degree.
2. *Career Technical Education (CTE) Pathway.* This pathway is for students who would like to earn a certificate or diploma aligned with a high school Career Cluster.
3. *Cooperative Innovative High School Pathway (CIHS).* Cooperative Innovative High Schools are small schools of choice, frequently located on college campuses, that provide students with the opportunity to complete an associate degree program or earn up to two years of college credit within five years. These schools include early colleges and theme-based schools that operate similarly to early colleges.

For all three pathways, the college courses are provided tuition-free; costs of textbooks, fees, and transportation must be borne by either the student or the school/district, depending on decisions made at the local level.

Research Design and Methods: The evaluation will conduct multiple impact analyses that examine the impact of different CCP components. Each question will be addressed using a separate research design that supports causal inference. To examine the impact of the three different CCP pathways on students, we will utilize a cross-sectional quasi-experimental design that matches participating students to non-participating students on a rich set of baseline covariates. Within the CIHS pathway, we will also extend an existing experimental study on the impact of early colleges. The impact studies will be supplemented by descriptive analyses,

surveys and site visits to explore various aspects of implementation. The cost and cost-effectiveness of CCP will also be examined using the ingredients method, supplemented by analyses of administrative data.

Data Collection and Analyses: Outcomes include: 1) core high school outcomes, such as college credits accrued in high school and high school graduation that will come from data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction; 2) core postsecondary outcomes such as enrollment, courses taken, and degree attainment that will come from the data from the North Carolina Community College System, the University of North Carolina System, and the National Student Clearinghouse; 3) workforce outcomes such as wages and earnings that will come from the North Carolina Department of Commerce. The matching processes will use rich sets of baseline covariates that reflect thorough examination of the selection issues.

Comparison groups will be constructed using state of the art matching techniques. Impact analyses will account for nested data structures via hierarchical linear modeling. All analysis procedures will be consistent with What Works Clearinghouse standards.

References:

Iatarola, P., Conger, D., & Long, M. C. (2011). Determinants of high schools' advanced course offerings. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 33*(3), 340-359.

Perry, A., & Lowe, A. (n.d.). *The Every Student Succeeds Act: Provisions concerning dual and concurrent enrollment*. Retrieved from Washington, DC: http://nacep.org/docs/research-and-policy/ESSA%20Provisions%20Encouraging%20College%20in%20High%20School.pdf

Speroni, C. (2011). *Determinants of students' success: the role of Advanced Placement and dual enrollment programs*. Retrieved from New York: https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/role-advanced-placement-dual-enrollment.html