

Symposium Title: Improving High School Students' Success in Transitioning to College

Paper 1

Title: SOURCE: impacts from a program to increase college enrollment among Los Angeles high school students

This paper presents impact findings, based on two surveys and data from the Los Angeles Unified School District and the National Student Clearinghouse, of an evaluation of an intervention designed to improve the college outcomes of high school students in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). The program operated by Los Angeles nonprofit organization, matched high school students to paid college mentors who themselves were students in Los Angeles area undergraduate and graduate programs.

The intervention was designed to offer an alternative to the limited opportunities available to LAUSD high school students to obtain college advice from high school counselors in their schools (who have caseloads of as many as 1000 students). The study focused on high school students whose grade point average in their junior year was sufficiently high to where they would be eligible for enrollment in California State University. The study recruited 2500 of these students throughout Los Angeles. After random assignment, 1000 of these students were offered a mentor who would help them navigate the college application process for a year. The mentors were not supposed to provide academic services but were tasked with providing the high school students with advice, support, reminders, and the kind of continuous attention that low-income students often lack during their academic careers in high school.

The program began during the spring semester of the students' junior year in high school and concluded a year later when high school students were about to graduate and would have been in the process of selecting a college from among the ones that admitted them.

Data collection included a baseline survey, a senior year follow-up survey for control group members (to ascertain the extent to which they had access to similar services as those offered to the treatment group), extensive implementation data collection, a follow-up survey conducted during students' freshman year in college, and administrative data from LAUSD and the NSC.

Our research found a relatively modest treatment contrast between the treatment and control group but also found that students in the treatment group generally received consistent services throughout the program year. Despite this modest treatment contrast, we found statistically significant impacts on key indicators of program success such as enrollment in four-year colleges, enrollment in University of California or CSU, and greater usage of scholarships and grants by treatment group students once admitted to college.

The paper presents the program model underlying the intervention, details about program implementation and challenges, and first-year impacts of the program on key student outcomes.

Paper 2

Title: Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do

Neal Finkelstein (WestEd) will briefly review the findings on the recently published IES Practice Guide “Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do”. He will refer to the studies that were examined by the panel as meeting moderate standards of evidence to suggest strategies for developing a line of research to examine high school to college transitions. In particular, this section of the symposium will suggest strategies for studying isolated program strategies that are typically blended into packages of program interventions with multiple, highly correlated, outcomes. For example, he will discuss research on high school transcript analysis as one way of measuring the outcomes of possible program interventions around college readiness.

Paper 3

Overview of the Early College High School Initiative Evaluation Andrea R. Berger and Susan Cole, AIR

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), which began its development in 2002, conceptualized Early College Schools (ECSs) as institutions that would serve students who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education, offering them the opportunity to simultaneously pursue a high school diploma and earn a substantial number of college credits. ECSs partner with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to offer enrolled students an opportunity to earn an Associate’s degree or up to 2 years of college credits toward the baccalaureate while in high school. In fall 2009, there are over 200 ECSs nationwide.

The ECHSI targets underrepresented groups, broadly defined to include students who are the first in their families to attend college, including students from minority backgrounds, English language learners, and low-income students of any background. The hypothesis underlying the ECHSI is that even reluctant or discouraged high school students, who may not be engaged in traditional school settings, can be motivated at a relatively early age to view themselves as successful participants in the college experience. Moving students who are at an academic disadvantage into college early cannot be done in isolation: ECSs provide a comprehensive experience, focusing on providing small learning environments with an emphasis on strong student supports.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International (SRI) have conducted an evaluation of the ECSHI since 2002. Our SREE presentation will summarize key findings from 5 years of annual evaluation reports produced for the Bill & Melinda Gates

Foundation. Thus far, the evaluation has been descriptive, focusing on documenting the ECHSI, its ECSs and student outcomes. The remaining three years of the evaluation will be used to conduct an impact study focusing on lottery based admissions in a sample of ECSs. Following is an overview of the major findings in student outcomes to date:

- In 2006–07, the most recent year for which data were reported, the average daily attendance rate at ECSs was 94 percent. This rate has been somewhat stable across the evaluation years and very similar to national figures (94 percent in 2003–04).
- In 2007-08, ELA proficiency rates were approximately 80 percent and mathematics rates were approximately 70 percent. In every year the evaluation tracked proficiency rates, ECSs, on average, outperformed district averages on statewide assessments.
- At the time of our analyses, few schools had seen a cohort of students graduate. Therefore, one major focus of our analysis was grade-to-grade progression rates. These progression rates ranged from 85 percent on average for the 9th-to-10th-grade progression rate to 87 percent for the 12th-to-graduation or grade 13 progression rate. These grade-to-grade progression rates can be combined to provide an estimate of the percentage of 9th-grade students who will graduate on time. This estimate, called the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI), is useful because many school districts' CPIs are publicly available. For the 12 ECSs with data to provide this estimate, the average CPI was 66 percent, higher than their districts' CPI by an average of 14 percent.
- Students' progress in college courses is at the center of the ECHSI. Yet, data on high school students' college attendance can be hard to come by given the incompatibility between secondary and postsecondary data systems. Therefore, we present the results from two different data sources. In 2006–07, 56 ECSs reported that students earned, on average, 23 college credits (about seven or eight college classes) by the time they graduated from high school. We also examined students' college transcripts for the 21 ECSs with these data available. By averaging the number of college classes that students took in each grade level, we estimated that students will graduate with 10 college classes by the end of 12th grade (about 1 year's worth of college credit).

Given that ECSs strive to serve students who are disengaged or marginally successful in traditional schools and who also are members of groups that are underrepresented in the postsecondary population, we examined differences in outcomes for different groups of students. One finding was that students who reported that they would be the first in their family to go to college reported lower high school and college GPAs, had lower educational aspirations, and felt less positively about ECSs than other students. This challenge with first-generation students is certainly not novel to ECSs; however, it is discouraging, as these are the students who need academic success to help them prepare for and succeed in college. The experience of minority and low-income students was more mixed; although both groups reported lower high school GPAs, no differences were

evident on other outcomes. On the other hand, students who come from non-English-speaking homes appeared to be having very positive ECS experiences. For example, they reported higher high school GPAs. ECSs appear to be having success with their targeted students; yet those in the initiative will have to continue to work to eliminate the academic gaps among students.

We also examined several key structural characteristics of ECSs for their relationships to student outcomes. These characteristics include enrollment size, the age of the ECS, whether the ECS was a start-up site (i.e., a new school), whether or not the ECS had a 4-year IHE partner, and whether or not the ECS was located on a college campus. One characteristic frequently had a relationship to positive student outcomes—location. ECSs located on a college campus had higher proficiency rates on state assessments relative to their districts, higher attendance rates, and higher 9th-to-10th-grade progression rates than ECSs not located on a college campus. This finding lends support to the existing belief of many stakeholders within the ECHSI of the “power of place”—that is, having high-school-aged students attend school daily on a college campus engenders in them an idea of themselves as individuals who can negotiate an adult environment and succeed intellectually.

We will also provide an update on the status of our on-going evaluation work, particularly on the plans for the impact study, which will be getting underway in 2010.