

Scaling up Early Colleges: Implementation and Impacts across Settings

Early colleges are comprehensive efforts to redesign high schools such that the line between high school and college is blurred. Students in early colleges are given the opportunity to take college courses at a much younger age and at an intensity that can allow them to earn an associate's degree or two years of college credit by the time they graduate from high school. Early colleges differ from traditional dual enrollment programs in that they are accompanied by other changes within the school, such as creating a college-going culture, aligning high school coursetaking requirements with college expectations, modifying instruction to prepare students for college courses, providing academic and affective supports to students, and increasing school staff collaboration and professional learning. These schools also target students for whom the access to college has historically been problematic, such as students who are the first in their family to go to college or students who are low-income or members of minority groups underrepresented in college.

Initial development work focused primarily on creating early colleges that were small schools of choice, often located on a college campus. These schools were purposefully constructed from scratch to focus on college readiness for all students (Author, 2012). Two experimental studies—one a longitudinal experimental study of 19 schools in North Carolina and one a retrospective experimental of 10 schools nationally—have found that early colleges have positive impacts on a variety of student outcomes, including more students succeeding in the courses they needed for college (Authors, 2012); better attendance and fewer suspensions (Authors, 2013); higher graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates (Berger et al, 2013, Authors, 2014).

These positive outcomes were somewhat unusual in education research and have led to substantial interest in early colleges. Yet many in the education field have dismissed early colleges as a “boutique” model that would face challenges in scaling up because they are schools of choice and because they would reach capacity relative to the postsecondary institutions hosting them. As a result, organizations began exploring the possibility of scaling the early college model by transforming the comprehensive high school into a version of the early college (Le, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) program has awarded four grants totaling approximately \$60 million to support the implementation of early college strategies in multiple settings, mostly in comprehensive high schools.

This symposium explores the idea of scaling up the early college from its original small school incarnation through efforts to more broadly implement early college strategies in comprehensive high schools, including work being done district-wide. The first two presentations will focus on updated findings from a longitudinal experimental study on the impact of the small, stand-alone early college model. The third presentation will present an overview of how three different i3 projects are conceptualizing efforts to scale up the model. The final presentation will provide early results from a quasi-experimental study of one of these scale-up efforts.

Our discussant will comment on the papers from his experience with early colleges.

References:

Berger, A., Turk-Bicakci, L., Garet, M., Song, M., Knudson, J., Haxton, C., et al. (2013). *Early College, early success: Early College High School Initiative impact study*. Washington, DC: American Institutes of Research & SRI International.

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Le, C. (2012). *Launching Early College districtwide: Pharr San Juan Alamo's "College for All" strategy*. Boston, MA and Dallas, TX: Jobs for the Future and Educate Texas.