



The

Early College High School Initiative

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Prepared for Jobs for the Future
By Janet E. Lieberman

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- 88 Broad Street | Boston | MA 02110
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By Janet E. Lieberman

Over three decades ago, Janet E. Lieberman conceived of the idea of Middle College, which places high schools on college campuses. Recently, this concept led directly into the idea of Early College High School, which goes a step further, blending high school education and the first years of college. In the intervening years, Dr. Lieberman has written extensively on school-college collaboration and educational reform. She is also the designer of "Exploring Transfer," a very successful community-college-to-senior-college program that celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. Jobs for the Future asked Lieberman to prepare this essay on the connections between high school and college and how they can inform efforts to scale up early college high schools across the nation. She can be reached at janetl@lagcc.cuny.edu.

Continued failure of the nation's school system to meet the needs of underserved students has prompted the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to launch the Early College High School Initiative, which expands the Middle College concept first articulated in 1972. Although the two innovations are not the same, the design of early college high school is based strongly and directly on the 30-year experience with Middle College, and that experience points to the requisites for success in the new initiative.

Middle College is what Ernest Boyer, former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, U.S. Commissioner of Education, and Chancellor of the State University of New York, called a "hybrid": it is a high school on a college campus. It covers the academic years of grades 9-12; it employs secondary school teachers; it functions primarily on a board of education budget; and it fulfills the high school curriculum requirements.

The Middle College structure has innovative features that contribute significantly to its success with students who have records of academic failure and multiple social problems. The original structural innovations, which still define the model and are vital to success, are:

- Total enrollment is limited to 450 students, currently designated as a "small school."
- The location on a college campus provides motivation and mitigates the usual teenage behavior. Being on a college campus encourages high school students to develop a "future orientation." Sharing the college facilities—gym, library, cafeteria—enhances the resources of the high school, provides better institutional utilization, and shares costs.
- Shared space, including the presence of teenagers on the college campus, reduces the traditional fears of college faculty toward teaching younger students and helps encourage collaboration between high school and college faculty.
- Having the high school function on a college schedule demands alterations in the traditional high school modules, promotes longer classes, enables project learning and portfolio assessment, and encourages personal freedom. High school students are treated as adults: there are no bells, no hall monitors, and no metal detectors. There are personal responsibility, trust, and encouragement.
- High school faculty have an enhanced role. They gain privileges of college faculty, better facilities, private offices, personal telephones, professional respect, and the opportunity to teach at the college level.
- Middle College enables and encourages intensive guidance, with a ratio of 3 counselors to 450 students. Students receive daily peer and group counseling, with a high ratio of paraprofessionals to students.

- A program of internship is encouraged: work in the community for all students offers one-third to one-quarter of the school population a program of learning off campus, thereby reducing the in-school population on specific days.
- The calendar is based on the college schedule.

Results

In New York City, where Middle College began, it is important to record that these innovations occurred under the Board of Education's category of "alternative schools." The results, based on data from New York City covering 1990-2000, have been impressive:

- 97 percent of the students stayed in school, compared to an approximately 70 percent rate of retention in the city as a whole.
- 87 percent graduated.
- 90 percent of the graduates went on to college.
- 11 major foundations contributed to the school, and the program won 28 awards for excellence.

It is also important to note that, largely through the Middle College National Consortium, the model has been replicated in more than 30 other sites across the country with similar results. The data from those settings in different states proves that the structural changes succeed in a variety of locations and under different legislative parameters.

From Middle College to Early College High School

As Middle College students succeeded and the institution matured, the original designer (Janet Lieberman) and the Middle College principal in New York City (Cecilia Cunningham) recognized that some of the eleventh- and twelfth-grade students had completed their secondary school requirements in less than the ordinary four-year framework and were ready, academically and emotionally, to "go across the street" and take college courses. The record showed that in the 1999-2000 school year, of 4,581 Middle College students nationwide, 41 percent enrolled in more than 3,984 college classes, with a 97 percent pass rate, higher than that of the regular college freshman cohort.

In the year 2000, Middle College leaders requested and received a Ford Foundation grant to pilot a new design: "Early College," which would embody all of the distinguishing features of the original Middle College and add new structural interventions based on pragmatic student experience. The new model of high school-college collaboration, i.e., early college high school, incorporates some of the features of the previous design but emphasizes different goals: more intensive collaboration between secondary and higher education and an articulated, accelerated academic trajectory.

Fundamentally, the early college high school model:

- Reaches out for students who are undeserved by the regular schools;
- Demands a cooperative relationship between the district high school administration and the college president;
- Offers a different sequence of courses from the tenth grade and an accelerated program from the ninth grade to the Associate's degree, which can be achieved in five years or less, instead of six;
- Combines the resources of a high school on the college campus with the college facilities (gym, library, cafeteria), making them all available to the early college high school student;

- Requires active college campus collaboration from the college administrative structure: faculty interchange, support from the college divisions of finance, admissions, scheduling, and counseling under a college-appointed administrator;
- Enhances the role of high school faculty; and
- Integrates high school and college study in an articulated program.

The structural features are “non-negotiable”; all are necessary for the success of the model. The requisites outlined emerge from careful application of developmental psychology, educational principles, and pragmatic procedures. The theoretical and the practical pieces resemble a jigsaw puzzle: one cannot omit any part and still have either the whole picture or the desired impact.

To be scrupulously accurate, some early college high schools have been established separately from colleges, in neighboring but not integrated spaces. These models often reflect college space limitations, but the early college high school design sees non-integrated space as a temporary accommodation, with the eventual hope of situating the high school on the college campus. Separating the facilities is a trade-off; it may be worthwhile to initiate the model, but the ultimate aim is integration.

Rationale

The important academic and institutional rationales that underlie the structure of early college high school are based on well-established theories of developmental psychology, embedded into a practical model of educational reform. They are:

- Intellectual maturation is a continuous process: there is little or no difference between a student at the conclusion of the twelfth grade and the beginning of college enrollment. Therefore, learning should be a continuous process; the transitions should be smooth; and the curriculum between high school and college should be coordinated.
- Challenge, both academic and personal, is a strong motivator for achievement.
- Positive role models improve behavior.
- Flexible use of time advances opportunities for mastery.
- Teachers involved in reform have increased motivation for success; caring teachers improve students’ success.

Requirements for Success: The Lessons of Middle College for Early College High School

The success of early college high school depends on destroying the hierarchy between secondary and higher education and building an equal partnership. The role of the college administration needs to be universally understood and accepted for smooth functioning.

To be effective, the model requires active collaboration from the college administration. The college president must approve the program, promote it to the faculty, explain it to the community, and champion the secondary-postsecondary coalition in higher education forums. It is important to designate a college faculty member or an administrator as a college liaison: someone who has access to the president and the respect of the faculty, who can promote the concept, command resources, and facilitate support and collaboration. The concept requires the support of the financial aid office and the admissions staff to facilitate high school students’ registration for college courses. The college’s academic dean oversees scheduling and promotes interchange of faculty.

A major obstacle to the establishment of the early college high school model is the financing of the college credits. Different sites use varying strategies, but the lack of a coordinated funding stream that can cross the separation of high school and college funding needs attention from state and local authorities.

Similarly, in most states, the unions representing high school teachers and the college faculty are separate; in many cases, the representatives never meet together. Early college high school sponsors need to bring together representatives from each group to clarify overlap of faculty schedules, pay scales, and shared practices. Part of the problem in joining high schools and colleges resides in the differences between working conditions at secondary and postsecondary institutions. Experience has shown that these differences are easily negotiated, but the union leadership and approval are critical.

As in any successful educational enterprise, the faculty qualifications and willingness to participate in a shared academic program are also critical. All faculty need to be flexible, open-minded, highly skilled, and innovative. The academic program of early college high school emphasizes high expectations and standards; the faculty must see learning not as text-bound and test-oriented but as a continuous process, emphasizing concept development and integrated learning. Obviously, early college high school faculty need to be experts in their disciplines and able to cooperate, confer, and even team-teach with college instructors.

Collaboration across the board is the key component to success. Not only faculty, unions, and administrators need to meet and share, but the public sectors must also merge and cooperate to make the design work. Local educational districts, citywide officials, and sometimes state representatives must agree on common academic goals to override the existing separation of educational institutions.

Success in establishing an early college high school requires a commitment to the principles outlined. It is an integrated concept; replicators cannot separate a factor and have it work; i.e., it is not only a small school, it is not a laboratory school dominated by a school of education, it is not an “alternative school,” nor a magnet, nor a “specialized school” for high scoring students.

Tech Prep and Early College High School

The traditional tech-prep program, where high school courses are articulated with college courses and faculties work together to guarantee student mastery, exemplifies some of the best features of the early college high school model. The long and successful history of the tech-prep program makes it a natural site for the new concept. It is probably the easiest program to convert into a unified structure. Faculties from the high school and the college are accustomed to joint curriculum planning. The problem of financing the college courses has been solved. Transition from the high school to the college is smooth and anticipated by both students and faculty. Credits have been established, and there is an expectation of a coordinated program for both students and faculty.

To capitalize on this vocational affiliation, high schools and colleges involved in tech-prep programs need to consider placing the high school program on a college campus. This would encourage more faculty cooperation and working together to merge learning and credits, making the training a five-year program.

Why Do It?

Realistically, the overriding consideration and incentives for early college high school are the tangible financial savings in both real and social capital. A five-year program with appropriate instruction can substantially reduce the college cost of remediation. It also eliminates the cost of one year's instruction from the high school or a year's worth of the college administrative cost. Students move through the academic sequence faster, they enter the work world sooner, and they become wage earners earlier, contributing to the GNP.

Besides saving time and money, having a student move through the academic sequence faster enhances motivation, and it promises to reduce college drop-out rates and increase the graduation rate. Simultaneously,

collaboration improves the college utilization rate and reduces the overall cost of an individual students' educational passage.

Yet serious problems remain in designating funds for high school students to attend college classes and acquire college credits. That problem is closely related to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's goals of scaling up the early college high school model. The experience of the Middle College Consortium shows that early college high school can be successfully replicated: we can duplicate the original concept and have it succeed. But the goals of replication and scaling up are different. If the early college high school model proves effective in a number of different settings, we may discern some generic components, and then the experiences in these settings may provide answers to a number of key and provocative questions in education reform:

- How do we take lessons from something new and build the capacity to make the model work nationally?
- How do we use acceleration to deconstruct the rigidity of the two-tier system of education?
- How can we engineer systemic change through partnerships?
- Can we increase the graduation rates of underserved high school students and attract more of these students to college?

About Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future seeks to accelerate the educational and economic advancement of youth and adults struggling in today's economy. JFF partners with leaders in education, business, government, and communities around the nation to: strengthen opportunities for youth to succeed in postsecondary learning and high-skill careers; increase opportunities for low-income individuals to move into family-supporting careers; and meet the growing economic demand for knowledgeable and skilled workers.

About the Early College High School Initiative

Early college high schools are small schools from which students leave with not only a high school diploma but also an Associate's degree or two years of college credit. By changing the structure of the high school years and compressing the number of years to college degrees, early college high schools have the potential to improve graduation rates and better prepare students for entry into high-skill careers. This approach helps people acquire the education and experience they need to succeed in life and a family-supporting career. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, along with Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, are funding the Early College High School Initiative. Over five years, the initiative will create or redesign 150 early college high schools for underserved and low-income young people and neighborhoods. JFF coordinates the initiative.