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CHANGE BEGINS WITH IDEAS®
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Editor's Note: Ohio lawmakers grappling with how to fund education reforms in a time of dwindling revenues made what to many observers was a surprising choice in the 2010-11 budget. Despite clear evidence of success and wide support for a network of nine early college high schools that allow students to get up to two years of college credit while still in high school, funding for the schools was cut in the final stages of budget negotiations. Now the schools and supporters are seeking alternative ways to restore funding that will allow them to continue helping students become the first in their families to attend college. As Ohio revisits how to support this and other programs that give high school students college credit, we take a look at one area's experience with how they contribute to creating a culture that encourages more students to attend college.

The role of early college high schools and dual credit in changing the college-going culture in Ohio

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In May 2009, when 32 early college high school students marched with 700 of their adult peers into the Canton Civic Center to receive their associate degrees, the crowd of more than 2,000 gave them a standing ovation.

Canton's Repository wrote, "The students' accomplishments represent a milestone that's bigger than their individual achievement. It's a milestone for not just the Canton City School District, but also the community."

Innovation has made Ohio one of the largest economies in the world and our manufacturing sector is the third largest in the nation. However, Ohio's 39th ranking among the states in bachelor's degrees neither serves the state in the current

economic situation, nor prepares it for long-term competition in the global marketplace. Innovation must now drive our efforts to increase education attainment.

When the state's 10-year *Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2008-2017* was released by Board of Regents Chancellor Eric Fingerhut in March 2008, one of the key accountability measures for the new University System of Ohio spoke directly to the audacious goal established by Gov. Ted Strickland to increase college enrollment by 32%. The plan set a new target enrollment of 702,694 for Ohio's public colleges and universities by 2017. The following fall, the system registered 478,376 students – a number that had increased only by 12,520 students, or 2.7% over the previous year.

While efforts are underway to educate our current workforce, a key indicator for future workforce development is the percentage of high

school graduates who stay in the state and go directly to college. Consider that in 2001, 45% of all Ohio high school graduates entered our colleges and universities the following fall. Six years later we remain at 45%.

The Ohio Board of Regents estimates that 15% of high school graduates go to college out of state. Even with this addition, taking us to 60%, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems ranks Ohio a low 33rd among all states in the college-going rate of high school graduates. The leader? Mississippi with 76.1 %.

College-going rates and poverty

High graduation rates and high college-going rates are the norm in high-wealth school districts. Take suburban Jackson Local in Stark County, where 70% of all high school graduates will enroll in Ohio colleges the next fall. With another estimated 15% going out of state, the district college-going

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rate is essentially maxed out at 85%. Educational attainment is generally higher than the state average in these high wealth districts and the parents of these students expect that the students will obtain some form of postsecondary education.

School districts classified by the Ohio Department of Education as high-poverty urban, small and medium high-poverty urban, and high-poverty rural enroll 810,000 of 1.8 million Ohio students. The good news is that many of these districts have made great strides in increasing their high school graduation rates. However, these school districts have not reached a maximum for high school to college going and are usually at a

rate that is well below the state average. Frequently their persistence rates to the second year of college are much below the state average of 81%. Low educational attainment is the general rule in these communities and the expectation for high school to college going is usually not present and must be created in the school environment.

Changing the culture

The replacement of the Ohio Graduation Test with the ACT will help boost college going. For instance in 2002 after Illinois introduced the test, a 6% increase occurred in college enrollments by students from families earning less than \$30,000. The institution of the Ohio Core curriculum will also assist, particularly with lowering remediation rates.

However, these new strategies will not move us far enough or fast enough, particularly since they first become effective with the class of 2014, more than halfway through the state's 10-year strategic plan.

We need to think differently about what we can do today. A case in point is the state's existing opportunities for students to gain college credit while in high school, including Postsecondary Enrollment Option (PSEO), Tech Prep, Advanced Placement (AP) courses, International Baccalaureate, and recently, a new credit flexibility plan and Seniors to Sophomores (S2S). With the exception of S2S, we have thought of these options primarily as high school enhancement, not college access strategies.

The policy argument surrounding participation in such opportunities, here and across the nation, has often been that high-performing students need to be selected because, "We can't set kids up for failure."

In Ohio's early college high schools, the focus is college access for all students. The norm is, "What will set all students up for success?" Whether it's team teaching in Canton, or achievement gateways in Dayton, the idea is that with the proper support, inner-city students regardless of their previous

performance levels, can be brought up to speed and can succeed by earning dual credit.

Early college high school dual credit attainment serves as proof and example because the students become exemplars testifying to the entire community that all urban kids have the potential to attain college credit and degrees.

The Stark County experience

Because of early college high school, I no longer say “What if?” I say, “What’s next?” Terrance Truitt, 2009 graduate of Canton Early College High School with an A.A. from Stark State College of Technology, pursuing a B.A. in Criminal Justice and Finance at the University of Cincinnati

For Stark State College of Technology and the Canton City Schools, early college high school was a risk. Many adults sincerely wondered if the students could meet the college standards of academic rigor because they were not selected on the basis of previous high academic performance. Instead, they were first in their families to go to college, reflective of the minority population in Canton City Schools and classified as high-poverty students. A unique team-teaching arrangement between high school teachers and college professors was created to serve students in the first two years of a four-year program. If extra support was needed by individual students, it was provided by college tutors. This collaboration rapidly brought students up to the level they needed to succeed in college coursework.

After the first class in the summer of 2005 had a 95% success rate in passing the first six hours of dual credit coursework, adults became believers and now thought that the school’s goal of both a high school diploma and associate degree could be met. And they were right. The first graduating class saw 32 graduates with an AA degree and 28 more who had attained 15 to 58 credit hours. Most of those 60 students enrolled in selective four-year colleges and universities or remained at Stark State

College of Technology to finish their AA degrees. These numbers are a remarkable contrast to the 19 students who had gone to college from Timken High School in 2004 – the year before early college high school began.

Prior to early college high school, the community saw dual credit as a few high-performing students taking a course on a college campus. After the first summer of early college high school, the community began to ask, “Why can’t we do this for other students?” During the summer of 2006, the Stark Education Partnership drew upon the lessons from early college high school and launched a pilot for other districts. Sixty-five students repeated the success of early college. This led to local changes.

A cadre of high school teachers, meeting the content qualifications to become college adjuncts, was formed. These teachers taught dual credit courses for non-early college high school students. Such teachers were best positioned to provide additional support to help students master the

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material. Students remained in their high schools as exemplars. The year early college high school was being planned in Canton, only 29 students participated in dual credit through PSEO. In 2008-09, 156 students in Canton were taking dual credit courses at their high schools in addition to 287 students at early college high school.

When Ohio created other dual-credit opportunities, the rest of Stark County was ready.

Five institutions of higher education partnered with the Stark County Educational Service Center in implementing high school-based dual credit across 14 districts. Three encompassed urban area and two were among the poorest rural districts in the state. During the 2008-09 academic year 1,294 students took courses for both college and high school credit,

earning nearly 4,000 hours of college credit at a grade of C or above. The enrollment was three times greater than what had ever been achieved with PSEO.

Rather than being supplanted by dual credit, advanced placement and tech prep also significantly increased.

All Students

“I was told by my fifth-grade teacher at the Maryland School for the Deaf that I would never read beyond a third-grade level.” Paul Hovan, A.A., Rochester Institute of Technology, pursuing BA in 3D animation & digital art.

About the Author

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For impoverished families, poverty begins to end when the first child goes on to college.

Ohio’s early college high schools and dual credit policies are creative innovations housed in some of the state’s poorest districts and have demonstrated that all students can successfully earn college credit while in high school.

Ohio must work to grow and sustain early college high schools and maximize dual credit. Studies show that for impoverished families, poverty begins to end when the first child goes on to college. Across the state, we can no longer afford to ask “What if?” It is time to ask, “What’s next if Ohio is to truly build its future workforce?”



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