

Texas Study of the

MIDDLE COLLEGE EARLY COLLEGE

Expansion Grant Program

Final Report

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Texas Education Agency



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

High school education has been criticized, especially in the context of the skills and knowledge required for a productive workforce in this century. Because of the strong perceived need for change, the topic of school reform has attracted considerable attention and funding from a range of stakeholders including the federal government, state governments, philanthropists, local schools, and the general public (Quint, 2006). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, among others, is involved in identifying and funding programs to improve secondary school education (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006a).

The Texas High School Project (THSP) is a \$261 million public-private initiative dedicated to increasing high school graduation and college enrollment rates all over Texas. The THSP was founded out of recognition that the traditional American high school is based on a model that is fast becoming obsolete in the context of a knowledge economy. The four key strategies of the THSP are rigorous curriculum, effective teachers, building leadership, and multiple pathways, all of which are included in the middle college/early college (MC/EC) concept funded through the THSP. MC/EC programs offer promising methods of improving secondary education and smoothing the bridge between high school and college. These programs offer college credit for coursework completed while students are still in high school. Their goal is to provide “an accelerated, rather than remedial, learning environment” (American Institutes for Research & SRI, 2005, p. 3). Middle college high schools are high schools located on college campuses. Early college high schools combine high school and college, giving students a way to earn a high school diploma as well as college credits. The goal of early college and middle college high

school programs is to “minimize the barriers between high school and college, to ease the transition from secondary to postsecondary school, to prepare the students for and attract them to higher education, and to increase the high school graduation rates” (Glick, 2006).

The evaluation of the Middle College/Early College (MC/EC) Expansion Grant Program was guided by the following objectives:

- Investigate how the grant funds were being used by the schools;
- Create a profile of each school;
- Determine the types of students who attend such schools and the benefits and challenges they face;
- Assess the success of implementation;
- Determine the campus efforts being made to disseminate information to other entities;
- Determine if the programs are making progress toward the goals of the Expansion Grant provided by the Texas Education Agency (TEA); and
- Provide information about promising practices and their effectiveness.

Methods

Grant applications, progress reports, and expenditure reports were provided by TEA for each of the grantee sites. Evaluators collected two other types of data. The first was survey administration to high school teachers, principals, and students in participating schools. Student surveys were administered in the spring of 2006, and high school teachers and principals were surveyed in the spring of 2006. The second type of data was demographic, course completion, and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) achievement data provided by TEA. TEA data were

collected for school years 2003–04, the year before grant funding, through 2005–06.

Findings

Student-level data were combined with data from surveys and campus progress reports submitted to TEA and were compared across the 10 schools. TEA was interested in whether the programs were targeting educationally underserved, at risk, economically disadvantaged students, as they were intended. Program implementation and school climate provided important additional information for the agency. Although it was not possible to measure student success in post-secondary education, college readiness, likelihood of college success, and student performance were summarized as early indicators of student success. Three schools were then selected for visits intended to extract further information on promising practices that could be helpful to a variety of future MC/EC programs.

Description of Students Served

MC/EC programs are successfully targeting the intended students. The majority of students who participate in the 10 programs included in the evaluation are economically disadvantaged and from an ethnic minority group, while slightly less than half are considered at risk of dropping out of school.

- Seventy-seven percent of program students come from minority ethnic groups.
- Fifty-seven percent of program students are economically disadvantaged.
- Forty-seven percent of program students are at risk of dropping out of school.
- Overall, students view themselves as very similar to peers except in the area of time spent working for pay. Sixty percent of MC/EC students reported that they do not work for pay.
- While the primary source of information for students on MC/EC programs is high school teachers and counselors, the decision to attend is most heavily dependent on family and self.
- Students have strong support from family and friends to attend college.

Program Implementation

Schools are making strong attempts to provide Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs) for all students, even

non-program students attending large, comprehensive high schools with an MC/EC program. Some schools report minor problems in the execution of their articulation agreement with a postsecondary institution.

School Climate

Teachers report a positive school climate in their schools. Instruction is viewed very favorably, and leadership is sound and well received. Teachers reported that students are given opportunities to succeed, and that the learning environment accommodates diverse teaching and learning styles.

- Teachers in MC/EC programs find their school climate to be positive.
- Eighty-five percent of responding teachers and 86% of students describe their school as safe.
- The construct related to climate that is most positively regarded is instruction.

College Readiness

Students are being positively impacted by MC/EC programs, and are following through on pursuing a college education after high school.

- Ninety-nine percent of responding program students plan to attend college.
- Seventy-five percent of 11th- and 12th-grade students have taken the PSAT.
- Sixty-five percent of Grade 12 students have taken the SAT, and thirty-seven percent have taken the ACT.
- Eighty-three percent of Grade 12 students have applied to college.
- Eighty percent of Grade 12 students have been accepted by at least one college.

Postsecondary Education Plans and Likelihood of College Success

Although it was not possible to report on actual post-secondary results because many of these students are still in high school, findings indicate that they have plans to pursue further education and are earning college credits.

- Thirty-six percent of responding program students plan to finish a four or five year degree.
- Twenty-three percent plan to finish a master's degree.
- Twenty-five percent report they will earn a professional degree beyond a master's degree.
- Students take advanced courses at a higher rate

than students in their schools overall.

- Students earn more credits for advanced courses than students in their schools overall.

Student Perceptions and Performance

Early analysis of student performance shows that:

- Students perceive the program to have a positive impact on their academic performance and relationships with teachers and other students.
- Students indicate a strong level of school attachment.
- Higher percentages of program students met the Higher Education Readiness Standard in 2005 and 2006 for both mathematics and reading / English Language Arts than students in their schools overall.

Link to complete report:

http://www.tea.state.tx.us/opge/progeval/HighSchoolCollege/MCEC_final_report.pdf