

Evidence-Based Practices to Support College and Career Readiness in High School

Early-College High School

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides increased flexibility for states and districts to develop strategies to support school improvement while, at the same time, emphasizes the importance of implementing evidence-based interventions to support low-performing schools. As states and districts implement comprehensive college and career readiness initiatives, one challenge is the identification and selection of evidence-based practices for high schools. This snapshot is part of a series by the College and Career Readiness and Success Center highlighting evidence-based practices that promote college and career readiness in high schools.

Within ESSA there are four levels of evidence (see Figure 1) that educators can use as a guide to select education strategies that are grounded in research and proven to be effective in supporting and/or enhancing college and career readiness (ESSA, 2016).

Early-College High School Overview

ESSA includes provisions that promote early-college high schools (ECHSs) as a college and career readiness pathway. ECHSs are partnerships between secondary and postsecondary institutions, and/or businesses where students can earn both a high school diploma and an associate's degree, or up to 2 years of credit toward a bachelor's degree, for little or no cost to the student, as early as ninth grade. The ECHS model is known for providing a small learning environment to enhance the student's education experience and is generally structured to provide students the academic and social preparation needed for college and beyond.

Figure 1. Levels of Evidence

To support the identification and selection of evidence-based interventions, the U.S. Department of Education developed four levels of evidence.



Strong Evidence

Interventions with **strong evidence** have at least one experimental study that shows a statistically significant and positive effect without being overridden by other statistically negative evidence. The study must have a large, multisite sample with overlap in both population and setting.



Moderate Evidence

Interventions with **moderate evidence** have at least one quasi-experimental study that shows a statistically significant and positive effect without being overridden by other statistically negative evidence. The study must have a large, multisite sample with overlap in either population or setting.



Promising Evidence

Interventions with **promising evidence** have at least one correlational study that shows a statistically significant and positive effect without being overridden by other statistically negative evidence.



Demonstrates a Rationale

Interventions that **demonstrate a rationale** are those with a well-specified logic model informed by research or evaluation where relevant research suggests the likelihood of positive effect and a study of the effects will occur as part of the intervention or is under way elsewhere.

ESSA evidence standards:

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceuseinvestment.pdf>

ECHS is an evidence-based practice (Table 1) that improves student outcomes in high school and postsecondary education, and has been found to improve outcomes for first-generation students, low-income students, English learners (ELs), and students of color.











	Early-college students are significantly more likely to graduate from high school than comparison students.
	Early-college students are more likely to reach proficiency on state assessments than comparison students.
	Early-college students have better attendance, fewer suspensions, and a higher level of engagement in school than comparison students.
	ECHS creates positive student-teacher relationships and engages students in rigorous academic coursework.
	ECHS provides a caring and supportive community.
	Early-college students are significantly more likely to enroll in college than comparison students.
	Early-college students are significantly more likely to earn a college degree than comparison students.
	Early-college participation results in increased higher education graduation rates.

Table 1. Evidence-Based Early-college High School Research

Article	Level of Evidence ¹	Summary of Findings
<i>Smoothing the Transition to Postsecondary Education: The Impact of the Early College Model (2015)</i>	 STRONG EVIDENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECHS students were on track for completing college preparatory coursework compared with non-ECHS students. ECHS students had a higher percentage of postsecondary degree completion than their comparison counterparts. ECHS students had higher high school graduation and end-of-course completion rates than the comparison group.
<i>Early College, Early Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study (2013)</i>	 STRONG EVIDENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECHS student college enrollment was higher than their non-ECHS counterparts. ECHS students had a lower level of developmental course placement compared with their non-ECHS counterparts. ECHS’ impact on underrepresented students’ degree completion was significant.

¹ Refer to the ESSA Levels of Evidence in Figure 1.

Policy Considerations

State Legislation Consideration

The evidence supporting the positive impact of ECHS strategies on student success has led to the growth of ECHS in many states. Ten states have enacted specific legislation to create and/or sustain ECHS (see Figure 2).

Colorado allows for the limited operation of Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH) in the state. The P-TECH program in Colorado is a collaboration between a local education agency, community college, and high-growth industry partner. Students in Grades 9–12 have the opportunity to graduate with their high school diploma and an industry-recognized associate’s degree.

Enrollment of students who represent a socioeconomic and racially diverse student body is encouraged. This includes first-generation students, ELs, and students with disabilities.

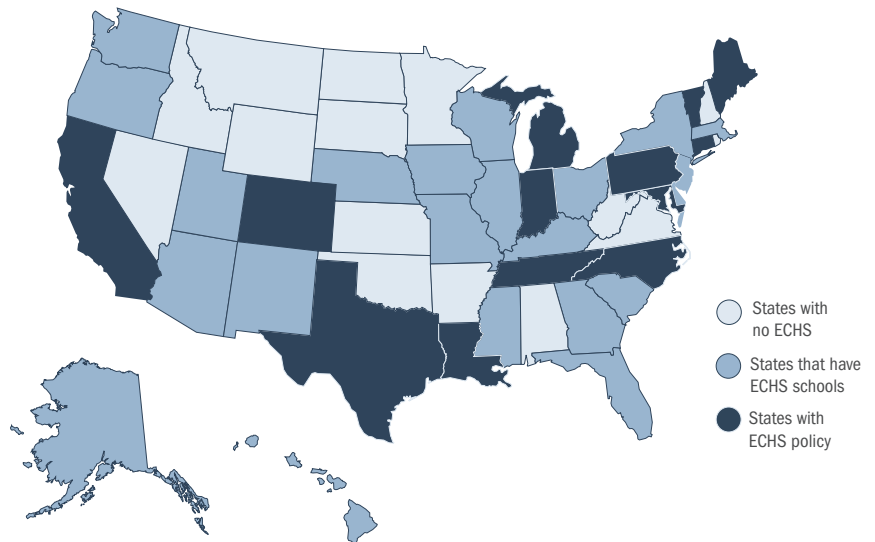
Texas ECHS policy emphasizes the development of skill sets that meet the demands of the workforce and highlights alternative graduation pathways for Texas high school students; notably, career and technical education ECHSs. Students will be able to earn stackable credentials and certificates, along with the possibility of obtaining a high school diploma and postsecondary degree credential simultaneously.

States also have utilized existing dual enrollment policies to support ECHS implementation (Hoffman & Vargas, 2010; Ward & Vargas, 2012). Dual enrollment is a program that allows high school students to take college classes and earn college credit, typically during their junior and senior years of high school. Maine, for example, expanded ECHS using the funding for dual enrollment. By considering dual enrollment and ECHS similar in program structure, Maine was able to use policy for dual enrollment to increase the ECHS presence in the state.

Whether it is initiating or expanding policy to create ECHS, the use of policy establishes enabling conditions for ECHS to flourish (Williams, 2015). States considering the development of an ECHS policy should include the following policy components:

- ✓ A definition of ECHS that at a minimum includes one semester of transferable college credit
- ✓ Identification of the population served
- ✓ Partnerships and collaborations among key leaders that are accountable for student success
- ✓ Roles and responsibilities of partners
- ✓ Curriculum articulation agreements

Figure 2. States with ECHS Policies and Schools



Source: Education Commission of the States (ECS) Database

- ✔ Program expectations (e.g., rigorous academic courses equivalent to college courses with high-quality instructors)
- ✔ Student outcomes (e.g., certificate, credential)
- ✔ Student support services (e.g., counseling, tutoring)



[California](#) is an example of an ECHS policy that encompasses the key policy pieces (see Figure 2).

California Education Code § 11302. The California Legislature finds and declares that ECHSs are innovative partnerships between charter or noncharter public secondary schools and a local community college, the California State University, or the University of California that allow pupils to earn a high school diploma and up to 2 years of college credit in 4 years or less. ECHSs are small, autonomous schools that blend high school and college into a coherent education program. In ECHSs, pupils begin taking college courses as soon as they demonstrate readiness, and the college credit earned may be applied toward completing an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, transferring to a 4-year university, or obtaining a skills certificate.

State Financial Support

Financial support is a critical component of how states can support ECHS implementation. Although states have secured monies from nonprofit and private institutions in the past, federal funding streams remain the most popular. Some states have taken the initiative to use federal funds to implement ECHS as a turnaround model to transform their low-performing schools



[Massachusetts](#) utilized a portion of its Race to the Top funds to support the implementation of five science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) ECHSs at the district level. Dearborn Middle School, one of the five STEM ECHS initiative sites and a designated turnaround school, was awarded a \$1.2 million School Improvement Grant to “implement a comprehensive redesign plan.”



[New York](#) leveraged its resources to create three ECHS models. For example, the state received close to \$7 million through the Youth CareerConnect grant administered by the U.S. Department of Labor to create a curriculum focused on technology, apprenticeship, and counseling support. Students have the opportunity to also earn an industry-recognized credential.

Funding will always be a challenge; however, states can prepare themselves to be a step ahead of financial support for ECHS to ensure that students continue to receive support and access to college and career readiness opportunities. When states think about their financial strategies, the following approaches should be kept in mind:

- ✔ Sustainability
- ✔ Braiding of federal funding streams with alternative resources (e.g., federal and private funding or federal and nonprofit funding)
- ✔ Partnership collaborations (e.g., businesses)

Technical Assistance Support

States capitalize on technical assistance support to build their ECHS implementation capacity. We found that TA support centered on ECHS is administered in two ways

- ✓ Peer community of practice (CoP)
- ✓ Organizational technical assistance support

Peer CoP is a process by which states learn from their colleagues that have implemented ECHS. States learn from their peers by attending national conferences, site visits, and webinars hosted by their peers. The Texas ECHS model is an example of a peer CoP. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) awarded grants to 13 ECHSs to become demonstration sites. As a demonstration site, schools provide “provide mentoring, technical assistance, webinars and open house opportunities to new and prospective ECHS school leaders” (TEA, n.d.).

At the organizational technical assistance support level, support is provided by experts in college and career readiness pathways, college access, and college success who have an extensive track record supporting states with ECHS policy implementation.

Organizations such as Jobs for the Future and The KnowledgeWorks Foundation work in partnership with one another and individually with states, supporting states with the conceptualization and application of the ECHS model relative to the state’s context. Through their efforts, states have redesigned schools into ECHS models, developed ECHS models that serve traditionally underrepresented students, and replicated ECHS to scale. Key resources include

- Early College Designs²
- Creating an Early College Feeder Pattern³

Figure 3. ECHS Peer Knowledge



² <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/early-college-designs/research>

³ <http://www.knowledgeworks.org/schools/early-college/feeder-pattern>

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