

# Making the Grade

Texas Early College High Schools  
Prepare Students for College



March 2011

## Executive Summary

**E**arly college high schools are improving student outcomes in Texas. This performance is being achieved by youth who are underrepresented in college, including Hispanic youth, economically disadvantaged students, and first-generation college goers. In improving readiness for college and careers, early college schools have become an essential part of Texas' strategy to develop a young workforce that can compete in a global, knowledge-based economy. The benefits to taxpayers of having more students progress successfully toward college completion makes the state's support for starting up these sustainable schools a prudent move.

### IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

Early college schools serve 10,000 students in 44 early college high schools and 5 T-STEM (Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) schools throughout Texas. Their first graduations were held in spring 2010, with 900 graduates at 11 schools across the state. The students have:

- Taken rigorous academic courses, including college classes;
- Outperformed their peers in their districts as a whole on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in "commended performance" on math and reading;
- Accumulated an average of 24 college credits, which is more than a semester.

National outcomes for early college schools mirror the positive outcomes in Texas.

### SERVING STUDENTS WHO ARE UNDERREPRESENTED IN COLLEGE

About 66 percent of early college students in Texas are Hispanic, compared with a statewide average of 49 percent. About 63 percent of early college students are economically disadvantaged, and 74 percent are first-generation college goers.

### IMPROVING COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS: A HEAD START ON COLLEGE

Of the 900 students who graduated from early college schools in Texas in 2010, about 95 percent had already earned at least some college credits. More than one-third (308) had earned an Associate's degree, which can reduce by half their time to a Bachelor's degree. The graduates earned \$5.6 million in college scholarships (about \$6,220 per graduate).

According to several graduates now enrolled in college, their experiences as early college students helped them go straight to advanced courses in college and avoid remediation—a savings for their families and Texas taxpayers.

### EXCEPTIONAL COLLEGE-GOING RATES

At the two early college schools studied in depth for this report, 87 percent of Mission Early College High School graduates and 86 percent of Collegiate High School graduates enrolled immediately in college. In comparison, 57 percent of high school graduates statewide enrolled in college.

## HOW EARLY COLLEGE SCHOOLS SUCCEED

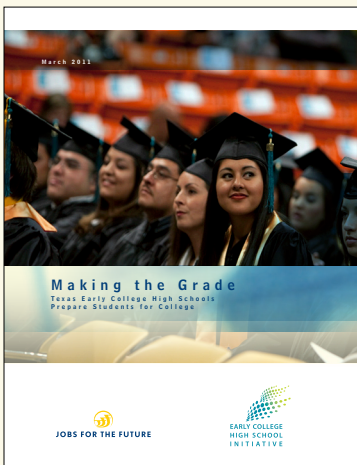
Early college schools are part of a national initiative to align high school and college through a rigorous, college-prep curriculum coupled with high expectations and comprehensive student supports. The schools provide all students with direct experience, preparation, and support in taking college classes. A proficiency-based curriculum moves students into college-level work as they are ready. Students in early college schools take accelerated and advanced classes that lead to and include college courses by their junior or senior years of high school—and some students qualify for college courses as early as their first year.

Interviews with graduates from early college schools at Mission and El Paso Community College—schools at opposite ends of the state—reveal more about what their schools did to prepare them for college, including providing: intensive summer preparation programs; a “college-first” culture and approach; a rigorous curriculum; and extensive student supports.

## THE EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Early college high school is a bold approach, based on the principle that academic rigor, combined with the opportunity to save time and money, is a powerful motivator for students to work hard and meet serious intellectual challenges. Early college high schools blend high school and college in a rigorous yet supportive program, compressing the time it takes to complete a high school diploma and the first two years of college.

Since 2002, the partner organizations of the Early College High School Initiative have started or redesigned more than 230 schools in 28 states and the District of Columbia. The schools are designed so that low-income youth, first-generation college goers, English language learners, students of color, and other young people underrepresented in higher education can simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an Associate’s degree or up to two years of credit toward a Bachelor’s degree—tuition free.



To download *Making the Grade*, please visit the JFF website.

For more information about how Texas early college high schools are preparing students for college, contact the Texas High School Project, [www.thsp.org](http://www.thsp.org). For information on the national Early College High School Initiative, contact Jobs for the Future, [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org).



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