

# Early College High Schools

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Early college and dual- and concurrent-enrollment programs, while similar, are uniquely different initiatives. Students in dual- and concurrent-enrollment programs enroll through a separate academic institution<sup>1</sup> and take individual courses that allow them to earn college and high school credit simultaneously.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, early college programs operate as “schools within a school,” offering a wide-ranging curriculum of college and high school course work woven into a single program.<sup>3</sup> While both approaches offer students the opportunity to acquire college credits, early college students typically are not required to meet academic eligibility criteria, unlike their dual- and concurrent-enrollment counterparts.<sup>4</sup>

## Bard High School Early Colleges

Bard High School Early Colleges (BHSECs) are prominent examples of an early college model offered by Bard College. BHSECs consist of a network of early college high schools that allow students to take up to two years of credit-bearing college courses in the liberal arts and sciences during the four years of high school. BHSEC students take college-preparatory courses in ninth and tenth grades and college courses in eleventh and twelfth grades within the school.<sup>5</sup> Courses are taught by faculty who hold advanced degrees in their fields and have college-level teaching experience. Upon successful completion of course requirements, students earn a high school diploma and up to a Bard College associate of arts (AA) degree<sup>6</sup> worth sixty transferable credits.<sup>7</sup> This can translate into cost savings for students as they persist through their postsecondary education. Bard Early Colleges estimates that students can save a total of \$27,000 to \$72,000 toward the completion of a bachelor's degree (depending on whether the institution is public or private).<sup>8</sup>

While BHSECs tailor programming to meet local needs, including targeting enrollment to first-generation college students,<sup>9</sup> there are several fundamental components each BHSEC includes. On the human capital side, the flagship Bard College in New York retains considerable discretion in the hiring of faculty, thus ensuring that instructors are capable of teaching courses across all four grade levels (ninth- and tenth-grade college-preparatory classes and eleventh- and twelfth-grade college courses).<sup>10</sup> The flagship Bard College also retains considerable sway in hiring school leaders, who serve as provosts as well as local BHSEC school principals.<sup>11</sup> BHSECs are tuition-free; however, there are

costs above and beyond that of a traditional high school. These costs include professors' salaries, student support services, college textbooks, and program coordination. Bard College covers these additional costs; however, the amount Bard College covers varies by location depending on the per-student funding from the local education agency.

## Impact on Student Outcomes

With regard to student outcomes, evidence suggests BHSEC is a promising model for increasing college readiness. A recent quasi-experimental design analysis of the New York City campuses finds that BHSEC students are more likely to complete high school and earn a four-year college degree than comparison groups.<sup>12</sup> Using propensity score matching,<sup>13</sup> researchers paired students in three class cohorts (Classes of 2010, 2011, and 2012) and found that on-time graduation rates for BHSEC students were between 2 and 4 percentage points higher than those for both the selective/specialized<sup>14</sup> high school and the traditional high school comparison groups.<sup>15</sup> The same study also finds BHSEC students are more likely to complete a four-year college degree than their comparison group counterparts.

In the Class of 2010, 34 percent of the BHSEC students completed a four-year college degree in three years or less, compared to the 6 percent of students in the specialized/selective high school comparison group and 7 percent of students in the traditional high school comparison group. Moreover, a significant percentage of the BHSEC students who completed college early were African American or from low-income families—two groups typically with lower-than-average rates of college completion. Among African American students, 55 percent of the BHSEC students earned a four-year college degree in three years or less, compared to 15 percent of students in the specialized/selective high school comparison group and 17 percent of students in the traditional high school comparison group.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, among students from low-income families, 46 percent of BHSEC students completed their college degree early, compared to 0 percent in the specialized/selective high school group and 7 percent in the traditional high school comparison group.<sup>17</sup>

For all their success, BHSECs do meet some criticism. For instance, some suggest that the liberal arts-heavy curriculum is out of step with today's rapidly changing, technology-driven economy.<sup>18</sup> This challenge aside, BHSECs are examples of a potentially transformative early college model for addressing college-readiness gaps.

## Guiding Questions

- What financial resources are available locally or at the state level to support an early college high school program in the school district, over the long term?
- Is the school district willing to cede certain local decision-making power, such as teacher selection, to a postsecondary institution to implement an early college high school program?
- Strong early college models represent a potential challenge to community colleges, since they offer the opportunity for students to secure an associate's degree while still in high school. How do school and district leaders plan to manage potential tensions that arise between the K–12 school system and local community colleges?



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Although students enroll in a separate institution for college course work, in many instances those courses can be taken online or at the high school campus.
- <sup>2</sup> J. Zinth, *Early College High Schools: Model Policy Components* (Washington, DC: Education Commission of the States, 2016), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED569132>.
- <sup>3</sup> A. Berger et al., *Early College, Continued Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study* (Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research, 2014), [http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/AIR\\_ECHSI\\_Impact\\_Study\\_Report-NSC\\_Update\\_01-14-14.pdf](http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/AIR_ECHSI_Impact_Study_Report-NSC_Update_01-14-14.pdf).
- <sup>4</sup> Zinth, *Early College High Schools*.
- <sup>5</sup> Bard Early Colleges, "Bard High School Early College Curriculum: High School Program," <http://www.bard.edu/earlycollege/policyreform/reports/> (accessed July 13, 2017).
- <sup>6</sup> Students must earn sixty college credits with a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.0 during the two years in the college program and complete all New York State Regents Diploma requirements to receive the Bard College associate of arts degree. Bard High School Early College Baltimore, "Overview," <http://bhsec.bard.edu/baltimore/academics/> (accessed July 13, 2017).
- <sup>7</sup> F. Gamber, "The Bard Early College Model: Implementation Challenges and Benefits" (Alternative Models in Urban Education: Curriculum, Choice, and Early College, Johns Hopkins University, School of Education, January 27, 2016), <http://edpolicy.education.jhu.edu/?p=172>.
- <sup>8</sup> Bard Early Colleges, "Results," <http://www.bard.edu/earlycollege/impact/results/> (accessed July 5, 2017).
- <sup>9</sup> E. L. Green, "In Bard, Baltimore School Officials Hope to Pave a Free Path to College," *The Baltimore Sun*, August 31, 2015, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-bard-early-college-20150830-story.html>.
- <sup>10</sup> Gamber, "The Bard Early College Model: Implementation Challenges and Benefits."
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Metis Associates, "Equity & Excellence" (New York, NY: Bard Early Colleges, 2015), <http://www.bard.edu/earlycollege/impact/results/>.
- <sup>13</sup> Propensity scoring is a quasi-experimental design method used to create control groups from observational data. This method often is used in studies where researchers have limited resources but large samples sizes. See J. Osborne "Matching Methods for Causal Inference," in *Best Practices in Quasi-Experimental Designs* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), <http://methods.sagepub.com/book/best-practices-in-quantitative-methods/d14.xml>.
- <sup>14</sup> The selective/specialized high school group consists of students attending public high schools with academic selection criteria.
- <sup>15</sup> In the Class of 2012, 96.4 percent of BHSEC students graduated on time, compared to 94.1 percent of students in the specialized/selective group and 92.7 percent of students in the traditional comparison group.
- <sup>16</sup> E. DeRuy, "Where Students Get Two Years of College in High School for Free," *The Atlantic*, December 7, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/12/early-college-isnt-a-new-idea/509759/>.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> K. Kiley, "Liberal Arts Colleges Rethink Their Messaging in the Face of Criticism," *Inside Higher Ed*, November 9, 2012, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/11/19/liberal-arts-colleges-rethink-their-messaging-face-criticism>.

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