

TEXAS EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN FIRST DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS, APRIL 2017

Throughout the spring and summer of 2017, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is leading a redesign of the Early College High School (ECHS) blueprint and designation process. The current ECHS Blueprint has not changed substantively in over 10 years, despite considerable expansion of early college schools, the adoption of new types of ECHS models, and policy changes affecting dual credit opportunities in Texas. This redesign effort is intended to:

- Better reflect the current and diverse state of the ECHS field, including general education, CTE, and innovation models. !
- Reduce the burden of some onerous blueprint requirements,
- Acknowledge the differences in regional and local needs,
- Identify and address needs for technical assistance where they are needed most and support continuous improvement,
- Provide greater flexibility in implementation, and
- Structure ECHS status and recognition based on evidence-based metrics and outcomes, not just on inputs or compliance. !

TEA engaged the Pathways to Prosperity Network—led by national nonprofit Jobs for the Future (JFF) and the Harvard Graduate School of Education—to gather stakeholder input and provide strategic advising on a revised ECHS Blueprint and designation process. With over 30 years of experience, JFF is a recognized national leader in education policy and high-impact strategies that ensure all young people graduate high school on a clear path to college completion and career success. JFF launched the national early college movement fifteen years ago, coordinating and supporting partners nationwide to enable more students, particularly low-income and minority students, to experience rigorous high school and college coursework that leads to improved outcomes. JFF’s Pathways to Prosperity Network builds systems of STEM college and career pathways that create new opportunities for young people, provide employers with a talent pipeline of young professionals, and strengthen state and regional economies.

JFF crafted the following redesign recommendations based on our research of existing policies and practices in Texas, interviews with stakeholders, TEA ECHS survey results, and best practices in early college. This document provides a high-level outline of our suggested revisions, with the intent of generating feedback from the field. We will use stakeholder input to inform our more detailed second draft of recommendations, which will include a more detailed

set of recommended changes to the design elements of the ECHS blueprint as well as more details on the categories and outcomes-based measures described below.

The final revision of the Early College Blueprint and designation process will be put in place for the 2018-19 school year. ECHSs designated for the 2017-18 school year will follow the requirements in the existing Blueprint.

REDESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS !

Recommendation 1: Require one year of planning for new ECHS candidates prior to submitting a designation application

CURRENT METHOD: All new ECHS candidates submit materials as required by the Early College Blueprint and immediately begin implementation once designation has been granted. This results in schools conducting the requisite school planning—such as building public will for ECHS, conducting student/family outreach, and student recruitment/enrollment—*prior* to the school receiving official ECHS designation.

PROPOSED METHOD: All new ECHS candidates should work with a technical assistance provider for one year of planning prior to submitting an application for ECHS designation, at which point they will be able to begin implementing at the Provisional¹ level. TEA will provide guidelines on the specific benchmarks and activities that must be met during the planning year.

Recommendation 2: Define metrics for ECHS designation and recognition

CURRENT METHOD: The ECHS blueprint defines/assesses design requirements and inputs during the designation process, but does not include data on ECHS outputs and outcomes.

PROPOSED METHOD: TEA should define observable metrics in four broad categories, which include design elements as well as metrics that measure access, achievement, and attainment.

Metric Category	Definition
Design	Programmatic design elements, similar to those included in the current ECHS blueprint.
Access	Student enrollment in ECHS is to be proportionate to, or over-representive of, targeted subgroups in the entire district—including ELLs, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, at-risk students, as well as Hispanic/Latino, African American, and Native American students.
Achievement	Student performance on various measures of college readiness and achievement while enrolled in ECHS, such as TSI passed or exempted.
Attainment	Student completion of ECHS programming, such as high school graduation rate, number of postsecondary credentials earned by high school graduation, number of college courses completed, number of guaranteed transfer courses completed, and/or completion of community college “Success Points” milestones.

¹ Provisional, as well as the other proposed ECHS designation categories, are outlined on page 4

Recommendation 3: Differentiate designation categories

CURRENT METHOD: Once designated as an ECHS by TEA, all ECHSs have the same level of designation and same annual requirements to submit an abbreviated application based on design inputs.

PROPOSED METHOD: TEA should use four differentiated ECHS designation categories, based on number of years and outcomes-based measures met.

Designation Category	Criteria
Provisional Early College	ECHS demonstrates all design elements and remains in this designation category until it meets other access, achievement, and attainment benchmarks for a specified amount of time.
Early College	ECHS demonstrates all design elements and meets access, achievement, and attainment benchmarks.
Distinguished Early College	ECHS must be operating for at least five years and meet all specified benchmarks. ECHSs in this category will serve as learning lab sites for other early colleges.
Needs Improvement	At any time, if an ECHS is performing below specified benchmarks, it may be categorized as Needs Improvement. It will receive targeted technical assistance and have two years to meet benchmarks or lose designation.

Recommendation 4: Require ECHS to meet outcomes-based measures

CURRENT METHOD: Once designated, ECHSs are not required to monitor and/or report on any outcomes-based measures.

PROPOSED METHOD: TEA should review outcomes-based measures from all ECHSs annually, and designate ECHS status according to performance on observable metrics.

Below is a table that reflects the proposed designation categories (as described in Recommendation 3) aligned with potential expectations for outcomes by year and type of measure (i.e., design, access, achievement, and attainment measures; as described in Recommendation 2).

Proposed Designation Categories Aligned with Outcomes-Based Measures !

Designation Category	Provisional Early College				Early College				Distinguished Early College				Needs Improvement			
	Design	Access	Achievement	Attainment	Design	Access	Achievement	Attainment	Design	Access	Achievement	Attainment	Design	Access	Achievement	Attainment
First Year																
Second Year																
Third Year																
Fourth Year																
Fifth Year or Above					*				*							

More than two outcomes-based measures categories are not met.

Legend: !



All metrics are met !



Most metrics are met !



Metrics are not reviewed or not applicable !

* !

ECHS receives a “continuous learning” visit from TEA or designees to identify best-in-class practices, areas for improvement, alignment with Early College Blueprint, and provision of technical assistance

NEXT STEPS

Over the next two months, JFF will conduct focus groups and structured interviews with key stakeholders to discuss these recommendations and other aspects of the ECHS redesign process. If you would like to contribute to the process, TEA seeks your input and comments on these recommendations through the ECHS website at www.tea.texas.gov/echs.

JFF will develop a second, more detailed draft of these recommendations, which will be released in mid-May for additional public comment. We anticipate that these recommendations will also include provisions for different types of ECHS models—such as a focus on college ***and*** career-readiness in the Innovative Academies—with corresponding metrics and outcomes that reflect these differences.