

Texas Study of the

MIDDLE COLLEGE EARLY COLLEGE

Expansion Grant Program

Final Report

May 2007

Prepared for the

Texas Education Agency



Resources for Learning, LLC

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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.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Background

High school education has been characterized as “obsolete” (Toch, 2003), especially in the context of the skills and knowledge required to develop a productive workforce for 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). Since the 1960s, school reform efforts evolved from remedial pullout programs for at-risk students (Borman, Wong, Hedges, & D’Agostino, 2001) to systemic approaches to school change (Smith & O’Day, 1991). While systemic reform has been deemed essential, it may be a matter of concern that well-targeted academic interventions, including pullout programs for the most at-risk students, are being reduced, especially as standards become more rigorous (Gewertz, 2006).

Building on the systemic school reform movement, innovation and change in high school education has become a significant topic in education reform since the 1990s. Small size and distinctive programs have been identified as key characteristics of successfully transformed schools (Toch, 2003). Traditional high schools, often large and impersonal, have been seen as failing to provide access to challenging curriculum to ensure high school completion as well as college and career readiness of graduates (Plucker, Zapf, and Spradlin, 2004). Breaking large high schools into smaller academies or other types of “schools within a school” has been a promising approach

to making high schools more relevant and connected to their students (Quint, 2006). Preparation for college, not just high school graduation, should be the measure of high schools’ effectiveness (Roderick, 2006).

The United States Department of Education reported that 26% of students who enter four-year colleges and 45% of students who enter two-year colleges do not return after the first year (Mortensen, 1999). Mortensen stated that approximately 57% of entering college freshmen need at least one remedial course when they arrive on campus. Taking remedial courses prolongs the time it takes for a student to earn a degree and makes it less likely that the student will do so. Mortensen also contended that there is a disconnect between what high school teachers and students think is needed for a diploma and what college professors and employers say is actually required for success in college and the workplace.

These statistics are perhaps why one stakeholder has stated that “the transition from high school to college today is as chancy and vexing as crossing a bridge over a river where builders on one bank have ignored what those on the other are doing. Only the fortunate will be able to make it across” (Finn, 2006, p. B40). Two remedies to ease the transition from high school to college are first, to make the high school curriculum academically stronger, and second, to improve “communication and outreach between postsecondary institutions and high schools” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Many articles and papers refer to the need to “smooth the bridge” and “ease the transition” between secondary and postsecondary education (Kirst, 2004; Finn, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Middle College/Early College (MC/EC) programs offer promising methods for 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 International, 2005, p. 3). Middle colleges are high schools located on college campuses. Early college high schools are not necessarily located on a college campus, but partner with higher education institutions in order to allow students to earn both a high school diploma and college credits. The goal of the 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, p. 2).

According to Lieberman (2004), the middle college concept first began in 1972, and the following are descriptors of the middle college program:

- Total enrollment is limited to 450 students.
- The program is located on a college campus.
- The program operates on a college schedule, with no bells, hall monitors or metal detectors.
- High school faculty have the same privileges as college faculty, such as better facilities, private offices, personal telephones, professional respect, and the opportunity to teach at the college level.
- The program provides intense peer and group counseling with a high ratio of counselors and paraprofessionals to students.
- Internships are encouraged.
- The academic calendar is based on the college schedule.

Building on the successes and challenges of middle college programs, the early college concept emerged in 2000. Lieberman (2004) described the qualities of an early college program, which are informed by the experience of middle college programs. These characteristics include the following:

- Students who are underserved by regular schools are targeted for admission.
- A cooperative relationship between the district high school administration and the college president is established.
- The program offers a different sequence of courses beginning in the 10th grade and an accelerated

program from the ninth grade to the associate’s degree, which can be achieved in five years or less (instead of six years).

- The resources of a high school on a college campus are combined with the college facilities (gym, library, cafeteria), which are all available to the early college high school student.
- Active college campus collaboration is required from the college administrative structure, including college faculty interchange as well as support from the college divisions of finance, admissions, scheduling and counseling under a college-appointed administrator.
- The role of high school staff is enhanced.
- High school and college studies are integrated in an articulated program.

A major factor in how well these programs work is the nature of the relationship between the institution of higher education, the school district, and other partners such as private educational or philanthropic organizations that may be involved. Ideally, all parties should sign some type of agreement that delineates the responsibilities of each organization (American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2004). These authors stated that another critical factor is the capacity the partners have, or are willing to develop, for supporting early and middle college high schools in all areas of program implementation. They also pointed to the need for more outreach to middle schools to prepare students at earlier ages for taking college courses once they get to high school.

Jobs for the Future commissioned the development of a financial analysis model for calculating the return on investment for early college high schools (Palaich, Augenblick, Foster, Anderson, & Rose, 2006). This model showed that youth would reap significant rewards in terms of savings on college tuition and increased lifetime earning from attending early college high schools where students graduate with a high school diploma and also an associate’s degree or up to two years of college credit toward a bachelor’s degree. States would also benefit. Their financial investment in these schools would pay off in terms of higher educational attainment for young people, increased earnings, and a longer working life for graduates, leading to increased future tax revenues. While the model shows potential advantages, data to test it are not yet available in

large enough quantities to substantiate the claim, as the program has not been in existence long enough for that to occur. However, preliminary data look promising (Hoffman & Bayerl, 2006). These authors stated that accelerated learning options, such as MC/EC, are more motivating than remedial programs. Their reasoning was that remedial programs imply repeating something previously failed, while accelerated learning means moving ahead.

State Context

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 begun 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 assumption of this model is that education for most students ends with high school graduation. The new reality is that an increasing proportion of jobs require at least some postsecondary education. By raising expectations and improving the academic achievement of students, THSP intends that students will graduate from high school highly skilled and ready to meet the increasing demands of the workforce or postsecondary education.

The four key strategies of the THSP are rigorous curriculum, effective teachers, building leadership, and multiple pathways. The Office of Education Initiatives at the Texas Education Agency supports a number of Texas initiatives that provide funding for schools implementing a rigorous curriculum for students. Additional initiatives fund programs supporting highly-qualified teachers who have full certification, a bachelor's degree, and who have demonstrated competence in subject knowledge and teaching. Further initiatives supported by THSP focus on building leadership capacity for principals and other school administrators enabling them to better lead and sustain effective change. The fourth key strategy of THSP stimulates creation of multiple pathways for learning and postsecondary success. Through the THSP, Texas high schools are creating innovative ways to ensure that all students are served, including variations in institutional arrangements, personalized learning environments and additional academic and social support (Texas Education Agency, 2006).

TEA has implemented the MC/EC Grant program as a part of the THSP. MC/EC programs provide a rigorous

curriculum for students through an alternative path whereby students can take advanced courses and accumulate college credits at the same time that they are completing their high school degree requirements. TEA provided expansion grants for middle college and early college programs already in existence as a means of gathering data on best practices for these schools. The grant period was from January 1, 2005, to December 31, 2006, and grant awards ranged from \$149,389 to \$350,000.

Eligibility for expansion grant funding required that the campuses meet the following criteria:

Middle College High Schools

1. The Middle College High School is an autonomous high school located on a college or university campus.
2. The district in which the high school is located and the postsecondary institution on which the school is situated have entered into an agreement or have adopted procedures that address the budget of the school, the sources of revenues, and the responsibilities of each partner for specific costs related to the Middle College High School.
3. Formalized and ongoing procedures and structures for joint decision-making are in place, enabling the high school and the higher education partner to plan and implement a coherent program across institutions. The budget for the high school reflects resources for supporting the ongoing collaboration between the high school and the higher education institution.
4. The high school and the higher education partner provide students with academic and support services, such as advisory structures, tutoring, personalized learning communities, and guidance counseling, to ensure student success in both high school and college-level coursework. Students have access to the college's facilities, resources and services, such as sports facilities, writing centers, and extracurricular activities as appropriate.
5. The Middle College High School targets students for admission who are at risk of not graduating from high school within four years from entering ninth grade, members of student groups who have been historically underrepresented in higher education, students who are economically disadvantaged, and/or students with limited English proficiency.
6. Students in the Middle College High School take

college courses during their 11th- and 12th-grade years and accumulate college credit by the time they graduate from high school.

Early College High Schools

1. The Early College High School is an autonomous high school located on a college or university campus, within a larger high school, or on an independent campus.
2. The district in which the high school is located and a postsecondary institution have entered into an agreement or have adopted procedures that address the budget of the school, the sources of revenues, and the responsibilities of each partner for specific costs related to the Early College High School.
3. Formalized and ongoing procedures and structures are in place for joint decision-making, enabling the high school and the higher education partner to plan and implement a coherent program across institutions. The budget for the high school reflects resources for supporting the ongoing collaboration between the high school and the higher education institution.
4. The high school and the higher education partner provide students with academic and support services, such as advisory structures, tutoring, personalized learning communities, or guidance counseling, to ensure student success in both high school and college-level coursework. Students have access to the college's facilities, resources and services, such as sports facilities, writing centers, and extracurricular activities as appropriate.
5. The Early College High School targets students for admission who are at risk of not graduating from high school within four years of entering ninth grade, members of student groups who have been historically underrepresented in higher education, students who are economically disadvantaged, and/or students with limited English proficiency.
6. Students in the Early College High School take a rigorous academic program of study that enables them to complete high school within five years of entering ninth grade and at the same time obtain an associate's degree or 60 semester credit hours toward a Baccalaureate degree. An academic plan is in place in the high school which shows how students will progress toward this goal. The plan lists high school, college, and dual credit courses by semester

and year for each year and when students will satisfy district and state examination requirements.

7. If the Early College High School is not located on a college or university campus, the school has strategies and activities in place that foster a collegiate culture, including campus visits or weekend, Saturday, or summer programs on the college campus.

Texas had a total of 14 early college high schools listed as members in the Early College High School Network as of fall 2006 (Jobs for the Future, 2006); this evaluation includes four of the schools on the list. Two Texas sites are listed as members of the Middle College National Consortium (Middle College National Consortium, 2006) and one of them is included in this evaluation. That school is listed both as an early college and a middle college.

Theoretical Framework

In the wake of the federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation, the Texas High School Project and other reform initiatives, educators have begun many innovative programs to increase students' motivation and reasons to stay in school and to graduate prepared for college. Federal and state governments as well as private organizations and foundations joined in these reform efforts. Early college/middle college high school programs are ways to bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary education. Rigorous methods for evaluating such programs, however, remain scarce (Cavaluzzo, Jordan, & Corallo, 2002).

A weakness of past evaluation methodologies of middle and early college high schools is the problem of comparing performance of students in these programs to students in an equivalent high school program. The issue is that students who enter middle college or early college high school programs are often pre-screened and are not randomly selected. This raises questions about the validity of comparing their student achievement and dropout rates to a control group of students in traditional high schools. Recruiters for middle and early college programs may have chosen students who seemed likely to succeed in an early or middle college environment (Cavalluzzo, Jordan, & Corallo, 2002).

There is, in fact, a formal selection process for most of these programs. Early college and middle college high schools typically have a set of explicit criteria in place for

applicants. These criteria vary, but behavioral, academic, and motivational factors are common. Criteria that are often cited include the requirement that the student is drug-free and has had no serious disciplinary problems. Many programs specify that students should be from a low socio-economic situation and/or from an ethnic minority group. Some programs specify minimums regarding grades and test scores. Some programs have committees that review applications and determine the fit of each student based on varying criteria (American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2005).

The current evaluation involved 10 sites that serve a diverse population of students. The great majority of students at these Texas early or middle college high schools are at risk of dropping out, although there are some students who want to be in the program to accelerate their education. A student is identified as “at risk” of dropping out of school if that student meets certain state-defined criteria. Examples of such criteria include not being advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years; being of limited English proficiency; being placed in an alternative education program during the preceding or current school year; or being placed on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release.

Research suggests that there are several factors contributing to successful alternative-education programs (Raywid, 1995; Kemple & Snipes, as cited in Cavalluzzo, Jordan, & Corallo, 2002). These factors, which are applicable to the current evaluation and were considered during the process of designing surveys as well as interview and focus group protocols, include:

- a highly engaged director who is involved in day-to-day program operations and maintains strong relationships with the college and the district;
- an emphasis on open communications and a team approach to meeting the needs of each student;
- a small school size and higher teacher-student ratios than those found in comprehensive high schools, which together foster a nurturing setting and sustained relationships between high school staff and students;
- highly motivated high school teachers, counselors, and staff who treat students with care and respect as individuals; and
- strong program support from and clear benefits to host college and district, coupled with generous initial

state funding that contributed to successful startup and continued program success (Cavalluzzo, Jordan, & Corallo, 2002).

Another issue that the current evaluation addresses is cost. Early college and middle college high school programs are more expensive than traditional comprehensive high schools (American Youth Policy Forum, 2004). It is arguable that the increased cost is justified, as these programs are designed to reach students who are at risk of dropping out of school. A student who drops out is likely to cost society in the form of public assistance, increased health care expenses, involvement in the criminal justice system, and/or incarceration (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006b). This evaluation considered the use of grant funds attempting to determine the extent to which at risk students are being reached. The evaluation structured its questions to gauge the achievement and engagement of students in the program.

This evaluation gathered both qualitative and quantitative data to determine student achievement levels and also student pursuit of postsecondary education. Evaluators used interviews and focus groups as well as analysis of quantitative data such as survey results and scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), to determine student engagement, attachment with the program, and student achievement.

Ideally, evaluation of an MC/EC program would focus on the percentages of students earning an associate’s degree within five years of entering ninth grade or at least the number of college credits earned by the time of high school graduation. The current evaluation occurs too early in the implementation of programs for these outcomes to be addressed. Therefore, evaluators chose advanced course offerings and completions, and high student-attachment scale scores as preliminary evidence of promising programs in the face of limited theoretical background for evaluation of early and middle college programs. Advanced courses are defined as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), concurrent enrollment and dual credit courses. Dual credit enables a student to earn both college and high school credit at the same time. Concurrent enrollment allows a high school student to enroll in a college course for college credit only. Large numbers of advanced courses offered and taken mean that students have the chance to accelerate their learning.

School attachment refers to the degree to which students report feeling safe and happy at school, feeling they are a part of things at school, feeling as though they are treated fairly, and feeling that they get along with teachers and other students. High scores on school attachment scales, in conjunction with availability and completion of many advanced courses, show that students have some level of comfort in the early college or middle college environment, even though they are being challenged with difficult coursework. Since the purpose of early college and middle college high schools is to ease the transition from high school to college, these indicators show that students are engaged with school as well as challenged by it. This information indicates an increased likelihood that they will continue in higher education after graduation from high school.

Evaluation Objectives

The goals of the MC/EC High School Expansion Grant were to:

- increase student achievement, as evidenced through improved TAKS scores and increased credit accrual;
- increase the number of students who are ready for college when they graduate from high school, as demonstrated through credit accrual, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, dual credit, concurrent enrollment participation, and enrollment in rigorous coursework in a college preparatory curriculum; and
- increase the college success of students, as demonstrated through college credit accrual, dual credit, and concurrent enrollment participation.

Ten schools were awarded expansion grants for this two-year project. Seven of the campuses were eligible for up to \$150,000 in funding, and three other campuses received an additional \$200,000 each to redesign their campuses as part of supporting the Early College High School model.

The objectives of the evaluation included: (1) investigating how the grant funds were being utilized by the schools; (2) creating a profile of each school; (3) determining the types of students who attend such schools and the benefits and challenges they face; (4) assessing the success of implementation; (5) determining the campus efforts being made to disseminate

information to other entities; (6) determining if the programs are making progress toward the goals of the Expansion Grant; and (7) providing information about promising practices and their effectiveness.

Evaluation questions were derived from the literature on MC/EC program successes and challenges. The following questions guided this evaluation:

- 1. What type of student attends schools implementing these grant programs, as measured by:**
 - a. demographic characteristics;
 - b. academic characteristics;
 - c. school attachment;
 - d. increased propensity of students to have post-secondary education plans;
 - e. future orientation;
 - f. motivation for program participation; and
 - g. perceived benefits of program participation?
- 2. How have grant funds affected the campuses participating in the program, as measured by:**
 - a. school climate;
 - b. use of grant funds;
 - c. increased propensity of students to have post-secondary education plans;
 - d. implementation of program, including individual growth plans (IGPs); and
 - e. barriers and facilitators to implementation?
- 3. Are students participating in the MC/EC High School Expansion Grant performing better than students not participating in the grant, as measured by:**
 - a. student achievement as evidenced through TAKS scores and credit accrual;
 - b. the number of students who graduate from high school college-ready, as demonstrated through credit accrual, dual credit, and concurrent enrollment participation, and enrollment in rigorous coursework in a college preparatory curriculum; and
 - c. increased potential for college success of students, as demonstrated through college credit accrual and dual credit and concurrent enrollment participation?
- 4. What promising practices do schools implementing these grants exhibit? Schools will be selected based on:**
 - a. student performance; and
 - b. school attributes.

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 was demographic, course taking, and TAKS achievement data provided by TEA. TEA data were collected for school years 2003–04, the year prior to the Expansion Grant, through 2005–06.

Staff Surveys

The School Climate Inventory (SCI) (Butler & Alberg, 1989), which measures school climate, was administered online to all high school teachers at all grantee sites. (See Appendix A for protocol.) The SCI consists of seven dimensions, or scales, logically and empirically linked with successful school reform efforts. The seven dimensions of the instrument are Order, Leadership, Environment, Involvement, Instruction, Expectations, and Collaboration. Order refers to the extent to which the environment is ordered and appropriate student behaviors are present. Order is measured with items regarding the way student discipline is administered and rules enforced. Leadership refers to the extent to which the administration provides instructional leadership. The scale consists of items measuring the way the administration sets and communicates goals, provides instructional guidance, and maintains a visible presence in the school. Environment refers to the extent to which positive learning environments exist, measured by items regarding the extent to which the physical space is neat and comfortable, and the degree of respect and trust shown between students and school employees. Involvement refers to the extent to which parents and the community are involved in the school. The involvement scale is constructed through teacher perceptions of parent and community involvement, such as whether parents actively support school activities, are invited to serve on school advisory committees, and are invited to visit classrooms. Instruction refers to the extent to which the instructional program is well developed

and implemented, and is measured through questions regarding teaching strategies, methods, and materials. Expectations refers to the extent to which students are expected to learn and be responsible, and the scale consists of items measuring teacher expectations of student achievement and related factors, such as students participating in classroom activities, mastering basic skills at each grade level, and being held accountable for their actions. Collaboration refers to the degree of cooperation among school staff members in meeting program goals and resolving program-related issues, and the degree of cooperation between students.

Each of the seven SCI scales contains seven statements, with 49 statements comprising the SCI. Participants respond to each statement using a 5-point Likert-type scale which ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Each of the seven SCI scales yields a mean ranging from one to five with higher scores being more positive¹. Missing data on the individual SCI items were very few (only one to two cases for any question). Responses which contained missing data were therefore dropped when scales were calculated. Scale descriptions and current internal reliability coefficients can be accessed at <http://crep.memphis.edu/web/instruments/sci.php>.

Scales were calculated for the ten schools overall and for each school. In addition to the seven scale scores, an average overall SCI score was calculated for each school with five or more responses. School-level results are compared to national norms for secondary schools (Ross, McDonald & Bol, 2005). The program descriptions in Chapter 2 include each site's SCI scores, and the interpretation of the scores is discussed in the findings chapter of this report. (See Appendix B for scale descriptions.) Additional questions were added to the survey to solicit demographic data as well as program-specific information.

Teacher and principal surveys were approved by TEA and then programmed for online administration. Evaluators worked with a local survey contact at each site to administer the surveys to each high school teacher. After an introductory e-mail regarding the survey and the purpose of the evaluation, local survey administrators contacted each teacher on campus to briefly explain the survey and provide the URL for accessing and completing the survey online.

¹ Responses to each question in each scale are reported in Tables C-1 through C-7 in Appendix C.

An e-mail address was provided for respondents to use for technical assistance as needed during survey completion. Surveys were made available online as of April 5, 2006, and were monitored on a weekly basis; reminders were sent until the survey window was closed on May 5, 2006.

Student Surveys

The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS 88) was adapted to assess school attachment and future orientation for students at participating schools. Additional questions were added to assess student motivation and benefits of program participation. (See Appendix A for protocol.)

The school attachment scale was created from seven questions. Five questions asked students to agree or disagree, on a 4-point scale, with statements regarding feelings about their school. Two questions asked students to report, on a 5-point scale, the number of times they have had trouble getting along with high school teachers or other students. For more information on the school attachment scales, see Dornbusch, et al. (2001).

The survey also contained questions about students' future plans for college and beyond college. They were asked about sources of support and how their time was spent outside of school. Finally, students were asked questions regarding the impact of the MC/EC program on several areas of their lives, such as relationships with teachers and peers, and plans for the future.

Evaluators worked with local survey contacts to obtain the number of students attending the schools, and after approval by TEA, the appropriate number of surveys was mailed to each site with instructions for administration and return to Resources for Learning (RFL). By utilizing the same shipping label, school personnel were able to return surveys at no cost to the school. Surveys were mailed May 2, 2006, and were returned by July 5, 2006.

Hard copies of surveys were sent based on the number of students provided by each school. A total of 1,095 surveys were completed and returned; however, 11 of these documents had schools named that are not part of the program. These surveys were probably given to dual enrollment students from other high schools, so these responses were deleted. After deletion, the response rate for the student surveys was 90%. One hundred of the surveys that were not returned had been sent to School 10. The response rate for schools other than School 10 was 98%.

Individual item response frequencies were calculated based on the number of responses. School attachment scale values were calculated for the MC/EC grantees overall and for each individual grantee. Student survey responses were somewhat different from teacher survey responses, in that larger numbers of students skipped one or more questions when completing the survey. Because of the larger number of missing responses to individual questions, to create summary statistics for the survey scale, missing responses were assigned the school mean on individual questions. Imputations were used to create a complete data set for the construction of the scale. This approach meant that the seven questions across the scale had the same number of usable responses. Single imputations were a reasonable choice in this case because the rate of missing information was below 20% (Schenker et al., 2004). Additionally the number of respondents at the school level was judged too low to use multiple imputation (Rubin & Schenker, 1986) based on predicting missing responses from prior responses.

Student Achievement

Student-level data were requested from TEA for all districts which contained campuses that were included in the current evaluation. Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) demographic and course completion data were collected in addition to TAKS student assessment data. Assessment, course completion and demographic data were requested for the school years 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06. Student demographic data were compared to the demographics of their school overall as well as students across the state. Assessment and course completion data for program students were compared to the average for the participating schools.

In order to match demographic, course completion, and assessment data to program students, student identifier numbers were collected from schools by the TEA. Schools reported a total of 1,199 students enrolled in the program; however, identification numbers were not provided for 99 of those students. It was possible to match 1100 program students with TEA-provided data.

Site Visits

After all survey and assessment data were obtained and analyzed, three sites were chosen for site visits to

determine promising practices. The sites were chosen after consideration of student achievement, number of advanced courses taken by program students, student demographics, and program type. Site visit preparation included creating protocols for interviews with the principal, grant coordinator, a teacher, counselor and college coordinator/college faculty member, and for a focus group of parents/guardians. (See Appendix A for protocols.) Following TEA approval of all protocols, two researchers conducted each site visit, and notes were submitted to evaluators and summarized.

CHAPTER 2

SITE DESCRIPTIONS

School 1, District 1

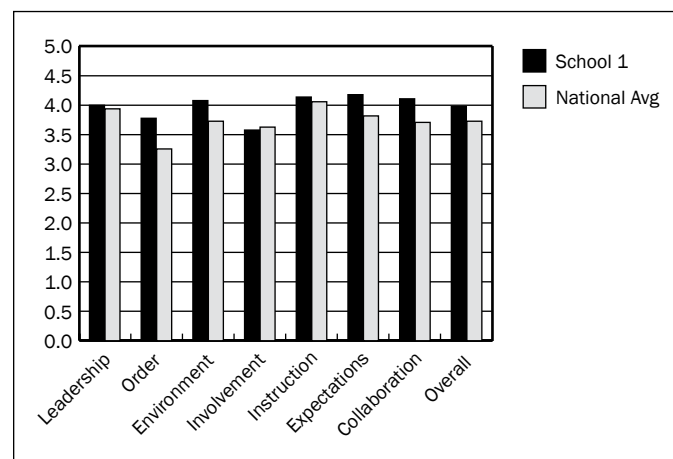
The Middle College/Early College program in District 1 has been in existence since 1989. Texas Education Agency (TEA) Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data list 118 students in 2005 and 132 students in 2006. Per district policy, students begin college classes in the 11th grade. The school's higher education partner is a local community college. The local college provides classroom and office space, for which the high school pays \$36,000 annually. This expense does not come from grant funds. The school has 16 high school staff and one campus. One of the goals that school officials set for students is accumulation of 30 college credits by high school graduation. The program is publicized through notices in community newspapers, radio and television public service announcements in both English and Spanish, presentations to middle school counselors and/or administrators, and informational programs in both public and private middle schools.

Over three quarters (78%) of the 132 students at School 1 responded to the student survey. Responding students were in Grades 9–12 and were mostly Hispanic (42%) or White (58%). Students had an average attachment level of 3.90, compared to the overall average for students surveyed across all ten campuses of 3.96. This score on the school attachment scale indicates that students feel highly attached to their school experience, including feeling safe and happy at school, and getting along with teachers or other students.

Seven high school teachers (44%) responded to the online surveys. Results indicate School 1 teachers feel most positively about expectations: that is, teacher expectations of student achievement, classroom participation, and mastery of basic skills. The score on this scale was 4.2,

somewhat higher than the average of the 10 campuses of 3.9. Of the seven SCI constructs, teachers rated the parent and community involvement lowest, although the score of 3.6 still indicates positive feelings. The average score for the 10 campuses on Involvement was 3.6. SCI scale scores for School 1 are summarized in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1. SCI Scale Scores for School 1 (N = 7)



Source. Staff Surveys. See Appendix A for teacher survey protocols.

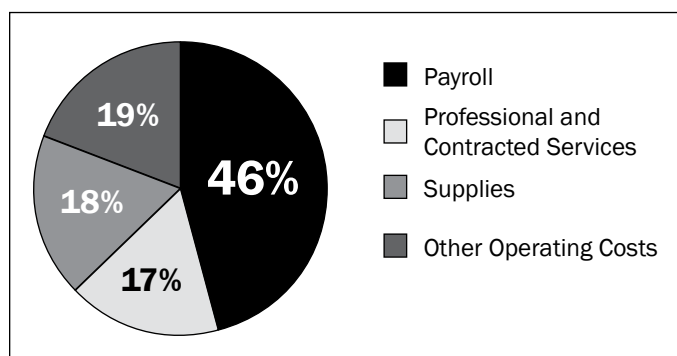
Please see the findings chapter for further discussion of student and staff survey results.

Data collected from the district indicate that students accrue college credits through dual credit classes, which allow students to earn college and high school credit at the same time. Identifying information was submitted only for 34 ninth-grade students who had not yet taken advanced courses.

School 1 received \$150,000 in grant funds. Administrators allocated 46%, or \$68,600, of the grant budget to payroll costs, comprised of \$5,400 for

substitute high school teachers, \$59,200 for extra duty, and \$4,000 for benefits. School 1 allocated \$3,500 for administrative costs, all of which covered research and evaluation services with the school district. They allocated 17% of their MC/EC budget, or \$22,500, for professional and contracted services, comprised of \$12,500 for consultants and \$10,000 for a parent liaison. School 1 also allocated 18%, or \$26,500, for supplies and materials, including \$7,000 for textbooks, \$3,000 for assessment instruments, \$12,000 for general supplies, and \$4,500 for computers. They allocated 19% of their budget, or \$28,900, for operating costs, which includes \$4,000 for conferences other than early and middle college conferences; \$13,500 for travel to the Early College Conference and the Middle College Student Conference; \$5,400 for registration fees; \$1,000 for transportation; \$3,000 for incentives; and \$2,000 for brochures. When reviewing budget data, it is important to remember that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 1 are summarized in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2. School 1 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Schools 2 and 3, District 2

Two high schools in District 2 received grant funds. The programs and agreements with the local college are the same, although the budgets and actual expenditures are different. Because of some confusion in listing the school name on surveys, student and teacher survey data were analyzed for the two schools as a whole. All other data are reported separately for the two schools.

School 2 has a school-within-a-school program that has been operating since 1990. PEIMS data show

2,100 students overall at School 2 in 2005 and 2,083 students in 2006. The school reported 45 program students in 2006. The program funds a full-time project director and additional student tuition scholarships. School 2 reported offering Advanced Placement (AP) and concurrent enrollment courses. Students are limited to two college classes per semester with the classes being taught at either the college or the high school. If a college class is taught at the high school, only advanced students may enroll. Students may receive only up to 30 hours of college credit for courses taken on the School 2 campus, but many students accumulate more by taking courses at the local college. The program is publicized through the high school's Collegiate Academy, and speakers from nearby universities and colleges are invited to speak to all students about the program. In addition, the Gear-Up program and Upward Bound program provide funding for students to experience a weekend on various college campuses.

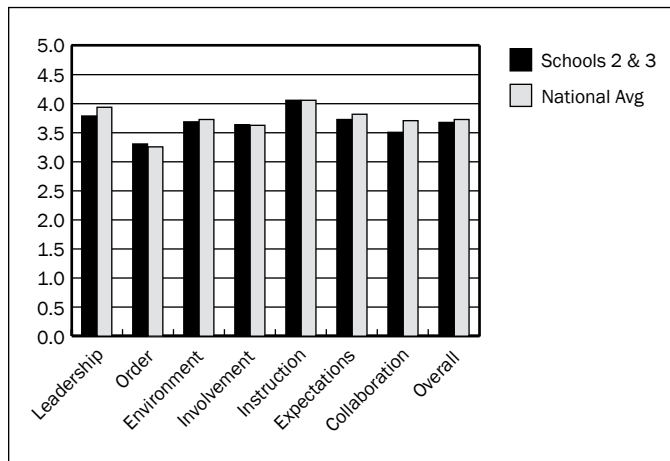
School 3 also has a school-within-a-school program that has been operating since 1990. The program funds a full-time project director and student tuition scholarships. The high school's partner is a local college. School 3 officials report offering AP and concurrent enrollment courses. PEIMS data show 2,032 students at the school in 2005 and 2,010 in 2006. The school reported 62 program students in 2006. The students are limited to two college classes per semester with the classes being taught at either the college campus or the high school campus. If a college class is taught at the high school, only advanced students may enroll. Students may receive only up to 30 hours of college credit for courses taken on School 3's campus, but many students accumulate more than this by taking courses at the college. The program is publicized through the high school's Collegiate Academy, and speakers from nearby universities and colleges are invited to speak to all students about the program. In addition, the Gear-Up program and Upward Bound program provide funding for students to experience a weekend on various college campuses.

Two hundred seventy students in the two District 2 high schools responded to the student survey, and their school attachment score was 4.00, slightly higher than the average of 3.96 for all students surveyed.

Seventeen high school teachers responded to the online teacher surveys, and for both District 2 schools teachers were most positive about the Instruction

construct, which measures teaching strategies, evaluation strategies and materials. The scale value for Instruction was 4.10 on a 5–point scale, compared to the average of 4.00 for the 10 schools. Teachers were least positive when responding to questions related to the Order construct, which measures administration of discipline and rule enforcement. The scale value for this construct was 3.30, compared to an average of 3.40. SCI scale scores for Schools 2 and 3 are summarized in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3. SCI Scale Scores for Schools 2 and 3 (N = 17)



Source. Staff Surveys. See Appendix A for teacher survey protocols.

Please see the findings chapter for further discussion of student and staff survey results.

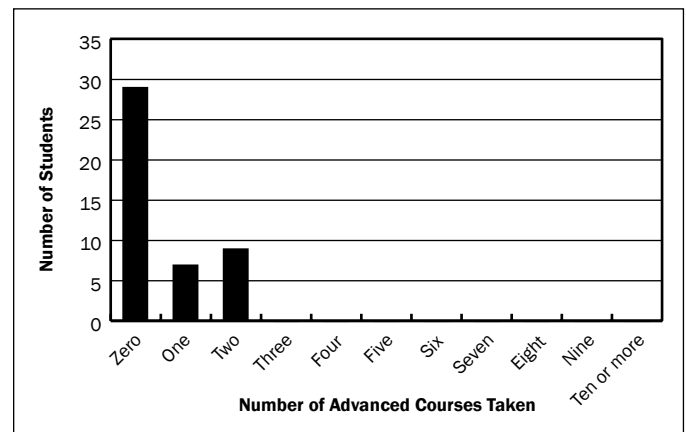
Through the 2005–06 school year, 16 of the 45 program students at School 2 had taken an average of three semesters of advanced courses, including AP and concurrent enrollment. The number of advanced courses taken by School 2 students is summarized in Figure 2.4.

Through the 2005–06 school year, 62 of the 63 students in School 3’s program had taken an average of four semesters of advanced courses, including AP and concurrent enrollment. This data includes only students whose identification numbers could be matched with the PEIMS data set. The school reported 62 of the 63 Middle College/Early College students had taken a total of 145 AP courses. The number of advanced courses taken by School 3 students is summarized in Figure 2.5.

School 2 received \$150,000 in grant funds. They allocated 72% of their budget, or \$108,200, for payroll costs. This consisted of \$90,000 for the director; \$7,400 for a clerk; and \$10,800 for the director’s benefits. School

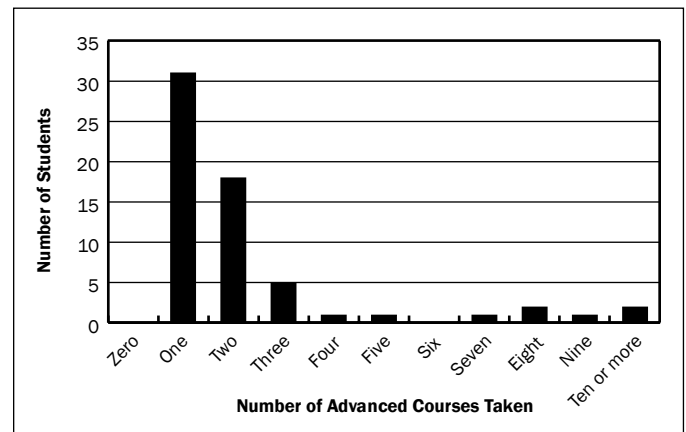
2 allocated 28% of their project budget, or \$41,800, for professional and contracted services, all of which covered student tuition. When reviewing budget data, it is important to remember that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 2 are summarized in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.4. Number of Advanced Courses Taken by School 2 Students



Source. Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

Figure 2.5. Number of Advanced Courses Taken by School 3 Students

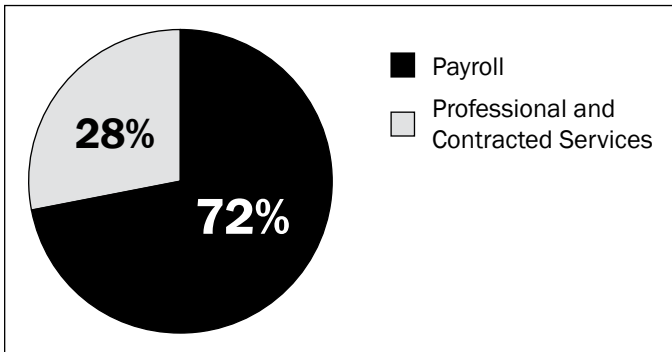


Source. Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

School 3 received \$150,000 in grant funds. They allocated 72% of their MC/EC budget, or \$108,200, to payroll costs. This consisted of \$90,000 for the director, \$7,400 for the clerk, and \$10,800 for the director’s benefits. They also allocated 28%, or \$41,800, for professional and contracted services, all of which covered student tuition. When reviewing budget data, it is important

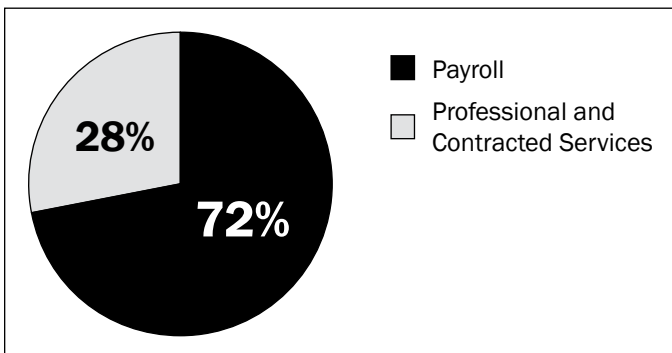
to remember that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 3 are summarized in Figure 2.7.

Figure 2.6. School 2 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.
 Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Figure 2.7. School 3 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.
 Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

School 4, District 3

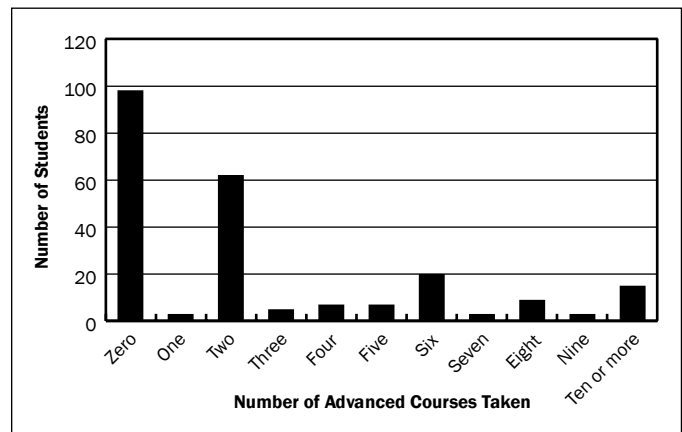
School 4, in District 3, is located on one of the campuses of the local community college. PEIMS data show 210 students enrolled in 2005 and 313 in 2006. A steering committee made up of staff from the high school and college, community liaisons, and education-related service providers oversees the program. Students have the option of attending the school for a fifth year if they choose. Students potentially can graduate with 61 college credits if they complete the fifth year in the program. The fifth year is offered as an option to allow students to gain maturity and accrue more college credits prior to graduation. The program is publicized by the School 4 Collaborative, which says it serves as the vehicle for a diversity of voices and feedback. This campus also receives

funding from a Technical Assistance Provider and the TEA Innovative Charter Start-Up Grant.

One hundred eighty-nine of 313 students (60%) responded to the student survey. The scale value for school attachment was 4.1, compared to the overall average for all schools of 3.96. This indicates a very high level of student attachment to school. School attachment was measured by student responses to items regarding feeling close to people at school, being treated fairly, feeling safe, and having trouble getting along with teachers and other students. Only one of 20 high school teachers responded to the online survey, so results are not reported.

The school did not submit a 2006 grant progress report, but in 2005 reported that students could earn college credit through AP, dual credit, and concurrent enrollment courses. Course completion data from TEA showed 134 students who had taken an average of six semesters of advanced courses. District-reported data show 168 students had passed AP courses; without identification numbers provided by the district for all students, this information could not be verified. Course completion data are summarized in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8. Number of Advanced Courses Taken by School 4 Students



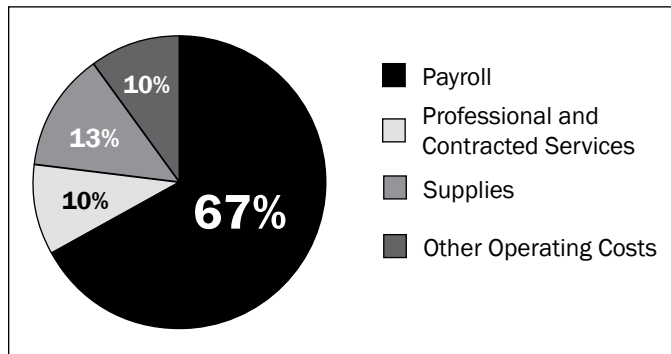
Source. Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

School 4 received \$150,000 in grant funds. They allocated 67% of their budget, or \$101,000, for payroll costs. The payroll budget was comprised of \$84,000 for two years of support of a mathematics teacher/college liaison and \$17,000 for a study skills teacher. In addition, School 4 allocated 10% of their project budget, or \$15,000, for professional and contracted services, all

of which is designated for a prevention control advocate. They allocated \$19,500 for supplies and materials, all of which covered textbooks and reading materials. School 4 allocated \$14,500 for other operating costs, which included \$8,000 for conference travel, \$4,000 for conference fees, and \$2,500 for ACT testing fees.

When reviewing budget data, it is important to remember that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 4 are summarized in Figure 2.9

Figure 2.9. School 4 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.
 Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

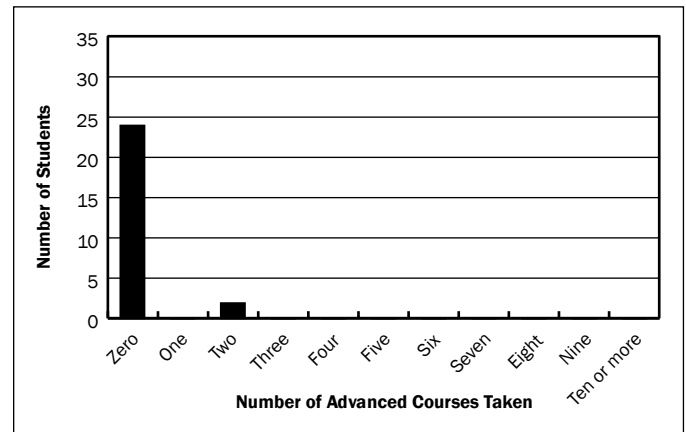
School 5, District 4

School 5 is an ongoing program in District 4. School 5's program opened in 2004 for students in a coastal county which includes District 4. Some grant funds are used for marketing to increase enrollment in the program and to support services to help ensure student success. The program aims to produce graduates interested in petrochemical careers that will support local industry. The program partner is a local college. The school enrolled 1142 students in 2005 and 1120 students in 2006, according to PEIMS data. The school reported 26 program students in 2006. Students take courses at the college unless there is something offered only at their high school. The college provides two mathematics classes for only high school students. The school is introducing two new petrochemical-related courses to increase interest in the field and encourage the accumulation of college credits. No specific number of possible college credits to be earned was stated. The program is being publicized through a new direct marketing and outreach campaign focused on the diverse careers in the petrochemical industry available

to college graduates. A part-time marketing and outreach coordinator also distributes flyers and brochures about the program to eighth-grade students. There is more effort being invested in publicity and recruiting as program enrollment has been lower than expected. This program also receives funding from the United States Department of Education Tech Prep Demonstration Program, which is intended to fund the school for a five-year period, 2004-09.

Eight of 26 program students (31%) completed the student survey with a school attachment score of 4.30 compared to the overall average of 3.96. This score indicates students reported a very high level of feeling safe and happy at school, and getting along well with teachers and other students. Two of seven high school teachers (29%) completed the online survey, so no teacher results are reported.

Figure 2.10. Number of Advanced Courses Taken by School 5 Students



Source. Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

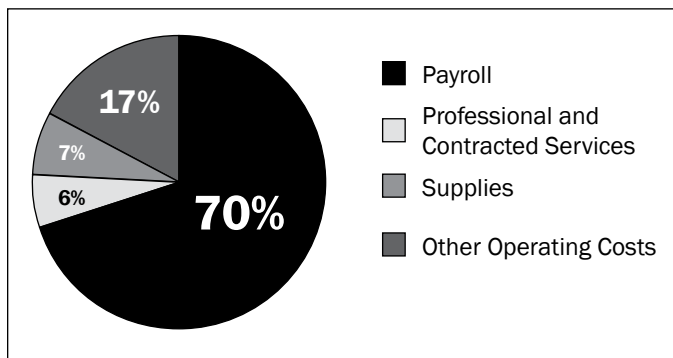
District-reported data lists dual credit and concurrent enrollment classes available to students, and the district reports that two students in the program have completed two AP courses each, for a total of four. TEA course-taking data show that two students have taken an average of five semesters of advanced courses.

School 5 received \$149,389 in grant funds. They allocated 70% of their budget, or \$104,574, for payroll costs. This consisted of \$7,116 for a grant accountant/bookkeeper, \$30,000 for a counselor, \$31,100 for a community liaison/parent coordinator, \$16,550 for an instructional designer, and \$19,808 for a benefits package. School 5 allocated 6% of their budget, or \$9,000, for professional and contracted services,

comprised of \$2,000 for a graphic designer, \$2,000 for printing materials, and \$5,000 for subject matter experts. They allocated 7% of their budget, or \$10,200, for supplies and materials. This amount was comprised of \$6,600 for office supplies and \$3,600 for computers and printers. School 5 also allocated 17% of their budget, or \$25,615 for other operating costs. School 5's other operating costs were designated for student transportation, high school staff, and the outreach coordinator.

When reviewing budget data, it is important to remember that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 5 are summarized in Figure 2.11.

Figure 2.11. School 5 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

School 6, District 5

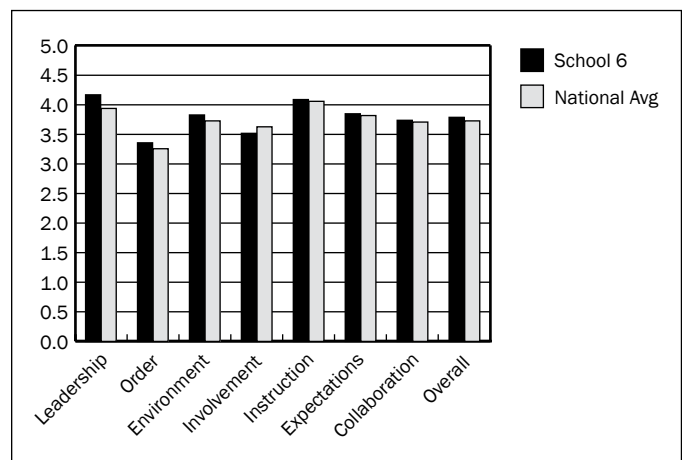
School 6 is located within District 5 and partners with a local university. School 6 had an overall enrollment of 1,241 in 2005 and 1,313 in 2006, according to TEA PEIMS data. The school reported 196 students in the program in 2006. Students apply in the eighth grade for this four-year plan which focuses on improving reading, thinking, and organizational skills in the early years of high school. The program includes small learning communities within the high school. The high school provides local funds for instruction, administration, professional development, and maintenance of facility costs beyond startup costs. The university provides administrative, instructional and support services, and tuition expenses beyond the expenditure of start-up funds. There are summer college-credit courses on the university campus. Students must take eight classes on campus. The goal of the program is for students to acquire 60

college credits by the time they graduate. The program is publicized through parent meetings at the middle school. Informational material is distributed, and eighth-grade students who are interested in the program complete applications for admission.

One hundred seventeen of 196 program students (60%) completed the student survey, and a school attachment score of 3.9 was calculated, compared to an overall average for study schools of 3.96. Though slightly lower than the overall average, the level of attachment to school and getting along with teachers and students is still fairly high at School 6. Thirty-five high school teachers responded to the online survey, and SCI scale values were calculated for each of the constructs. Leadership is strong at this school as evidenced by responses to the items which measure the way the administration sets and communicates goals, provides instructional guidance, and is a visible presence in the school. This construct had a scale value of 4.2 on a 5-point scale compared to an average for the 10 schools of 3.9. Teachers were least positive about items on the Order scale, which measures how student discipline is administered and rules enforced. Order had a scale value at 3.4 which is the average value for the 10 schools. SCI scale scores are summarized in Figure 2.12.

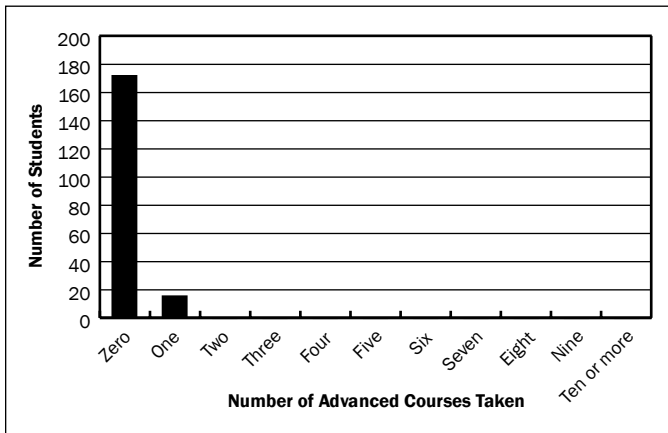
The district reported AP, dual credit, and concurrent enrollment courses available for students in 2006. Their progress report also listed 16 students as having passed an AP course. Advanced course data from TEA confirms 16 students passed two semesters of advanced courses through the 2005–06 school year.

Figure 2.12. SCI Scale Scores for School 6 (N = 35)



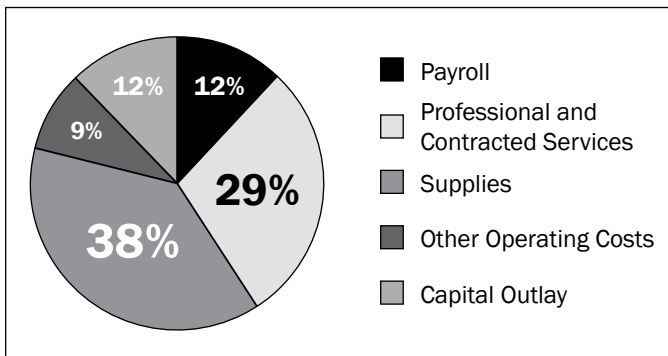
Source. Staff Surveys. See Appendix A for teacher survey protocols.

Figure 2.13. Number of Advanced Courses Taken by School 6 Students



Source. Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

Figure 2.14. School 6 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

School 6 received \$350,000 in grant funds. School officials allocated 12% of their budget, or \$41,600, for payroll costs, comprised of \$17,600 for substitutes for high school teachers for professional development, and \$24,000 for supplemental pay for high school teachers for professional development and small learning community teacher leaders. They allocated 29%, or \$102,890, for professional and contracted services, all of which was designated for professional development modules in various areas. School 6 allocated 38% of their budget, or \$133,650, for supplies and materials, comprised of \$11,250 for student reference materials, \$33,400 for Seven Habits books, and \$89,000 for hardware and equipment. They allocated 9% of their budget, or \$30,760, for other operating costs, comprised of \$25,760 for conferences and \$5,000 for student transportation to

the university. School 6 allocated 12% of their budget, or \$41,100, for capital outlay, all of which went for fixed assets (computers, projectors, and monitors).

When reviewing budget data, it is important to remember that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 6 are summarized in Figure 2.14.

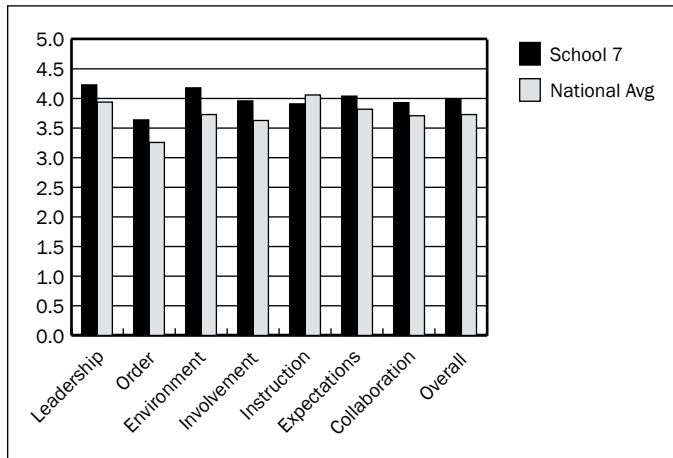
School 7, District 6

School 7 is located in District 6 and partners with a local university. The program began in the fall of 2004 with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. PEIMS data show that the school enrolled 2,616 students in 2005 and 2,665 students in 2006. The school reported 202 program students in 2006. The program's stated purpose, in part, is to focus on the "least served students in the middle" through Advancement by Individual Determination (AVID) and "associated equipment." The AVID program's stated purpose is to provide in-school academic support to prepare students for college eligibility and success. The high school uses local funds for instruction, administration, professional development, and maintenance of facility costs beyond startup funds. The university provides administrative, instructional and support services, and tuition money beyond expenditure of startup funds. Summer college-credit courses are offered on the university campus. In some cases, a university professor teaches at the high school in Grades 11 and 12. Students must take eight classes on the college campus. The program is publicized by a web page, media outlets such as district, regional, state, and national newsletters; and local radio, television, and newspapers. The program does not specify a target number of college credits to be accumulated.

One hundred seventy-four of 202 program students (86%) completed the student survey. The school attachment scale value was 3.9, compared to an overall average for all schools of 3.96. Though slightly lower than the overall average, the level of attachment to school and getting along with teachers and students is still fairly high at School 7, indicating that program students feel safe and happy at school. Eight high school teachers completed the online survey. Teachers were most positive about the Leadership and Environment constructs. Questions about their perceptions of instructional leadership and positive learning environment both received 4.2 on a 5-point scale. This value is higher than the overall averages of 3.9 and 3.8

respectively. The Order construct, measuring enforcement of rules and administration of student discipline, was seen the least positively by teachers with a scale value of 3.6. SCI scale scores are summarized in Figure 2.15.

Figure 2.15. SCI Scale Scores for School 7 (N = 8)



Source. Staff Surveys. See Appendix A for teacher survey protocols.

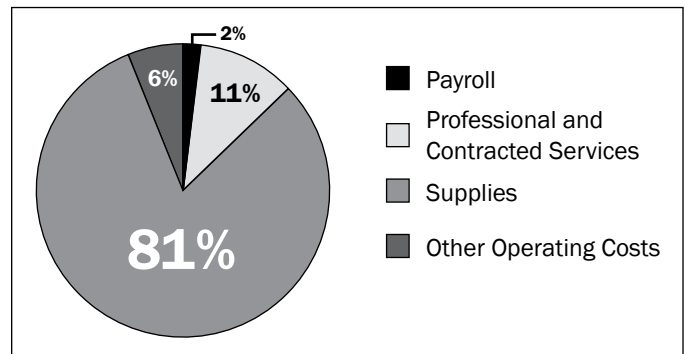
Progress reports submitted in 2005 and 2006 indicate that one AP course is provided for students. TEA data show four students each taking two semesters of advanced courses. This is not unusual since the majority of the students in the program are ninth- and 10th-grade students.

School 7 received \$349,033 in grant funds. School officials allocated 2% of their budget, or \$7,560, for payroll costs. This was comprised of \$420 for substitute high school teachers and \$7,140 for high school staff training. They allocated 11%, or \$39,840, for professional and contracted services, including \$14,286 for an evaluator; \$1,800 for a Dana Center consultation; \$804 for administrative costs; and \$22,950 for ESC curriculum and high school staff development. School 7 allocated 81% of their MC/EC budget, or \$280,640, for supplies and materials, which included \$32,288 for textbooks; \$45,822 for software; \$5,040 for hardware; and \$197,490 for equipment. They allocated 6%, or \$20,993, for other operating costs, comprised of \$6,153 for travel for training; \$9,240 for registration fees; \$2,800 for transportation and parent involvement; \$1,500 for food for parents participating in parental involvement activities; and \$1,300 for recognition awards.

When reviewing budget data, it is important to

remember that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 7 are summarized in Figure 2.16.

Figure 2.16. School 7 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

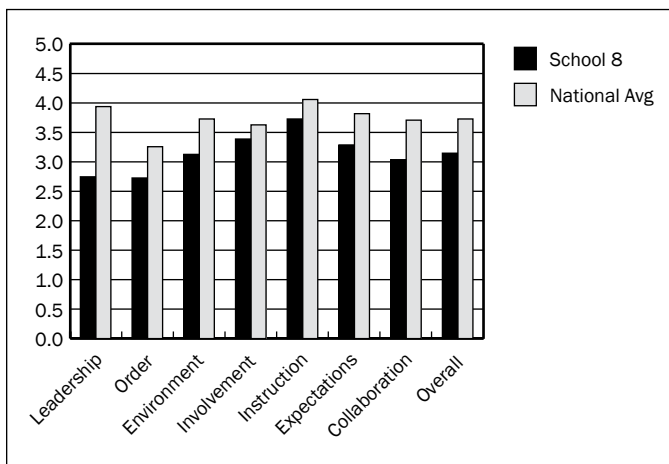
School 8, District 7

School 8 is located in District 7. This program, like the schools in District 5 and District 6, is a school-within-a-school. This program stresses training in Thinking Maps and Critical Friends. The school enrolled 2,234 students in 2005 and 2,260 students in 2006, according to TEA PEIMS data. In 2006 the school reports 169 students enrolled in the MC/EC program. Eighth-grade students in the 30th to 90th percentile ranking of their class can apply for the program. The higher education partner is a local university. The high school provides local funds for instruction, administration, professional development, and maintenance of facility costs beyond startup funds. The university provides administrative, instruction and support services, and tuition money beyond expenditure of startup funds. There are summer college-credit courses on campus. In some cases a university professor teaches at the high school in Grades 11 and 12. Students must take eight classes on campus. The program does not specify a target number of college credits to be accumulated. The program is publicized through a website and print documents.

One hundred sixty-five of 169 program students (98%) completed the student survey. The school attachment scale value was calculated at 3.8, compared to the overall average for all schools of 3.96. Although lower than the overall average, this value is still high, especially for a large student population. Eight high school teachers

completed the online survey. Teachers viewed the items of the Instruction scale, which measure teaching strategies, methods, and materials most positively. This scale value was 3.7 on the 5-point Instruction scale, compared to an average for the 10 schools of 4.0. Teachers were least positive about the Order construct, measured by items referring to the way student discipline is administered and rules enforced. The scale value on the Order scale was 2.7, compared to an average of 3.4. On each of the seven SCI scales, the value was lower for School 8 than any of the other schools for which data were available. SCI scale scores are summarized in Figure 2.17.

Figure 2.17. SCI Scale Scores for School 8 (N = 8)



Source. Staff Surveys. See Appendix A for teacher survey protocols.

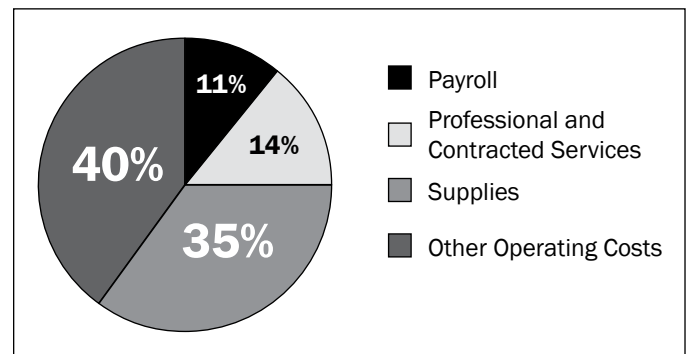
School 8 progress reports show AP, dual credit, and concurrent enrollment courses available to students in 2006. TEA data show one student completing two semesters of advanced courses. The district progress reports list no students who have completed AP courses.

School 8 received \$350,000 in grant funds. School officials allocated 11% of their grant funds, or \$38,500, for payroll costs, comprised of \$31,400 for substitutes and \$7,100 for Critical Friends extra-duty pay. They allocated 14%, or \$49,200, for professional and contracted services, comprised of \$24,000 for Seven Habits books; \$16,500 for Capturing Kids' Hearts; \$3,500 for Ruby Payne; and \$5,200 for van rental and NSSE surveys. School 8 allocated 35% of their budget, or \$124,000, for supplies and materials, comprised of \$20,000 for books and materials; \$32,600 for software; \$31,000 for mobile laptop carts; and \$40,400 for a camera, camcorder, microscope, and calculators. They

allocated 40% of their MC/EC funds, or \$138,300, for other operating costs, comprised of \$138,100 for travel, training, and conferences, and \$200 for miscellaneous operating costs.

When reviewing budget data, it is important to remember that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 8 are summarized in Figure 2.18.

Figure 2.18. School 8 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

School 9, District 8

This program started in 2002 and is located in District 8. The district applied for grant funds because it has had to limit the amount of college tuition that can be paid for program students, and career counseling is inadequate due to an increased number of students. PEIMS data show 166 students enrolled at the school in 2005 and 180 students in 2006. In 2006 the school reported 47 students in the MC/EC program.

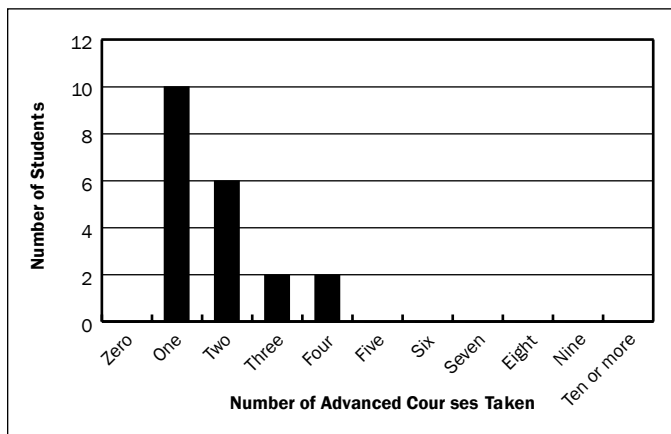
In order to be eligible for the program, students must be passing all of their high school courses, be on track to graduate under the Recommended High School Program (RHSP), and, if they are juniors or seniors, have passed all TAKS tests. Students taking college classes their sophomore year must have an ACT or SAT test score that meets college entrance requirements. The program partners are a local branch of a major university and a local college. The high school is located on the campus of the university. The program does not specify a target number of college credits to be accumulated, although students who complete the program should graduate with an associate's degree. The program is publicized via a website and an informational brochure.

Forty-one of 47 program students (87%) completed

the student survey. School attachment was calculated at 4.2, compared to an average of 3.96 for all study schools. This value represents a very high percentage of responding students feeling safe and happy at school, and very rarely encountering problems with teachers or other students. Only one teacher completed the online survey, so teacher results are not reported.

The school's officials report offering AP, dual credit, and concurrent enrollment courses for students. They report 20 students completing AP courses. TEA data show 20 students completed an average of four semesters of advanced courses.

Figure 2.19. Number of Advanced Courses Taken by School 9 Students



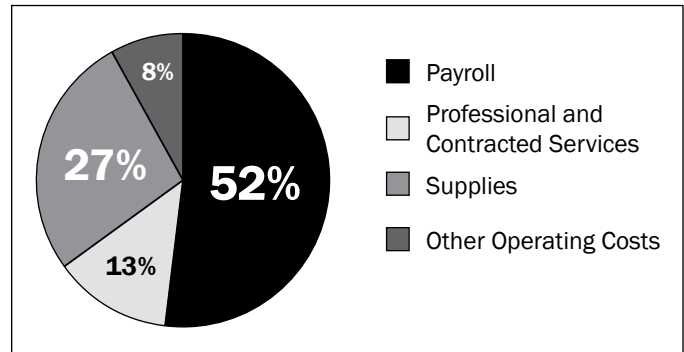
Source. Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

School 9 received \$150,000 in grant funds. Officials allocated 52% of their MC/EC budget, or \$78,098, for payroll costs, which included \$60,000 for a career counselor; \$8,400 for a university liaison; \$3,000 for release time for professional development; and \$6,698 for employee benefits. They allocated 13%, or \$20,001, for professional and contracted services, all of which went for student tuition for college courses. School 9 allocated 27% of their budget, or \$40,301, for supplies and materials, comprised of \$14,301 for texts and research materials; \$13,000 for Accuplacer and A Plus certification tests; and \$13,000 for office and classroom supplies and technology. They allocated 8%, or \$11,600, for other operating costs, which included \$3,000 for travel to view other programs; \$3,600 for transportation for students to classes; and \$5,000 for newspaper ads about the expanded program.

When reviewing budget data, it is important to remem-

ber that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 9 are summarized in Figure 2.20.

Figure 2.20. School 9 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

School 10

This program is located in School 10, a charter school. Students are screened for selection into the school. Some students petition for admission into the program. The program partner is one of the local community college's campuses. The school enrolled 531 students in 2005 and 527 students in 2006, according to TEA PEIMS data. An objective of the program is for students to accumulate 61 college credits and an Associate of Arts degree by the time they graduate. The program is publicized by dissemination of materials through its website.

Student surveys were not returned to evaluators. Twenty high school teachers completed the online survey. Teachers were most positive about the items on the Expectations scale, which measure the extent to which students are expected to learn and be responsive. The SCI scale value for this construct was 4.2 on a 5-point scale, compared to an average of 3.9 for all schools. Teachers were least positive about the items on the Order scale which measure the way student discipline is administered and rules enforced. The scale value for the Order construct was 3.6, compared to an average of 3.4. SCI scale scores are summarized in Figure 2.21.

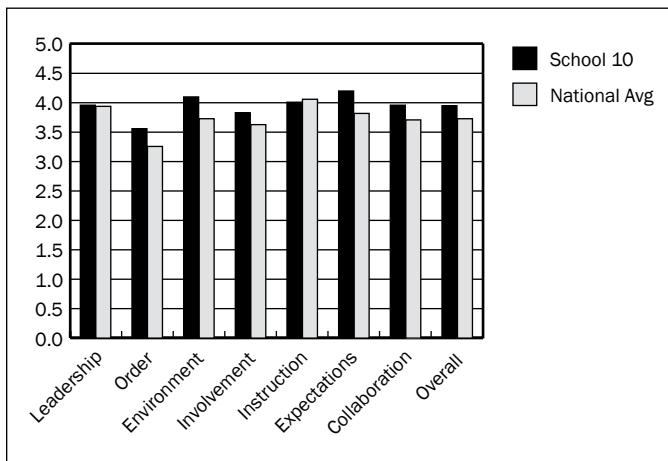
The school's officials list dual credit and concurrent enrollment available to students.

School 10 received \$149,744 in grant funds. Officials allocated 85% of their budget, or \$125,744, for payroll costs. This consisted of \$20,000 for a project director; \$6,000 for

a clerk; \$64,000 for a counselor; \$18,400 for extended pay (tutoring); and \$17,344 for benefits. They allocated 5%, or \$8,000, for professional and contracted services, all of which was designated for testing fees. School 10 allocated 5% of their MC/EC budget, or \$8,000, for supplies and materials, all of which was designated for academic materials. They allocated 5%, or \$8,000, for other operating costs, \$4,000 of which went for travel to conferences, \$2,000 of which went for conference fees and workshops, and \$2,000 of which went for transportation for students.

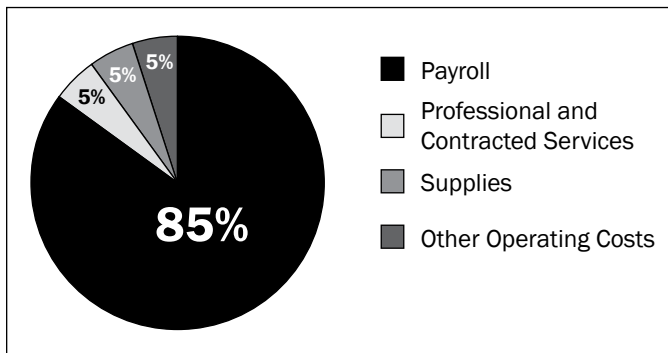
When reviewing budget data, it is important to remember that MC/EC grant funds are only a small portion of the overall school budget. Budgeted amounts for School 10 are summarized in Figure 2.22.

Figure 2.21. SCI Scale Scores for School 10 (N = 20)



Source. Staff Surveys. See Appendix A for teacher survey protocols.

Figure 2.22. School 10 MC/EC Budget



Source. School Notice of Grant Award.

Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS

Introduction

The evaluation of expansion grant programs was guided by the following objectives:

- Define the types of students who attend Middle College/Early College (MC/EC) schools, including their demographics, how they spend their time, and sources of information about the program.
- Describe implementation of the expansion grant programs, including facilitators and barriers to implementation.
- Measure the school climate as defined by leadership, order, environment, involvement, instruction, expectations, and collaboration.
- Assess the college readiness of student participants, including plans to attend college, college admissions tests taken, and actual college applications to college.
- Assess the potential for college success of student participants, including perceptions of college skills, plans for the future, and advanced courses taken.
- Measure student outcomes in regard to attachment to school and achievement.

Sources of data used for the evaluation included surveys of teachers and students, periodic school progress reports submitted to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and student-level data submitted electronically by schools to TEA.

Teacher surveys assessed the climate of the schools using the School Climate Inventory (SCI) which measures seven constructs; Leadership, Order, Environment, Involvement, Instruction, Expectations, and Collaboration. Scale values were calculated using the seven questions comprising each 5–point scale. Responses to each question in each scale are reported in Tables C.1-C.7

in Appendix C. An average overall score was calculated for each school with five or more responses. Across schools, the overall average score on the SCI was 3.75, which is virtually the same as the national secondary norm of 3.73.

Student surveys were administered through a contact at each of the schools. Students completed an adapted version of the NELS 88 survey which measured school attachment. Students responded to questions measuring school attachment and future orientation. A school attachment score was calculated for each of the schools submitting student answer documents. In addition to demographic information, data were also collected about influences on students' decision to attend the program and their completion of college entrance examinations.

Another source of data used in the evaluation was progress and expenditure reports submitted by schools to TEA. The information presented from these reports is limited due to a lack of submissions. The number of reports filed for the ten schools ranged from five to nine schools each reporting period.

TEA provided demographic and assessment data for all students in each of the districts with schools involved in this expansion grant program. Student-level data for program students was matched using identification numbers provided by schools. The number of advanced courses taken by program students was compared to the average number of advanced courses taken by students at the ten schools overall. Percent of students meeting the Texas Higher Education Readiness Standard was also compared to the average for the schools overall. Incomplete data due to missing student identification numbers limits the interpretation of results at the student level.

Description of Students Served

An important part of the evaluation was to describe the type of students who attend the MC/EC programs. Demographic data were available for 1,033 students by matching district-provided identification numbers with TEA student demographic data. More than half (58%) of students were female. The grade distribution of participating students is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Grade Level of MC/EC Students in 2005-06 School Year (N=1033)

Grade	9	10	11	12
Number of Students	428	342	172	91

Source: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

One of the elements for eligibility for grant funds was listed as follows:

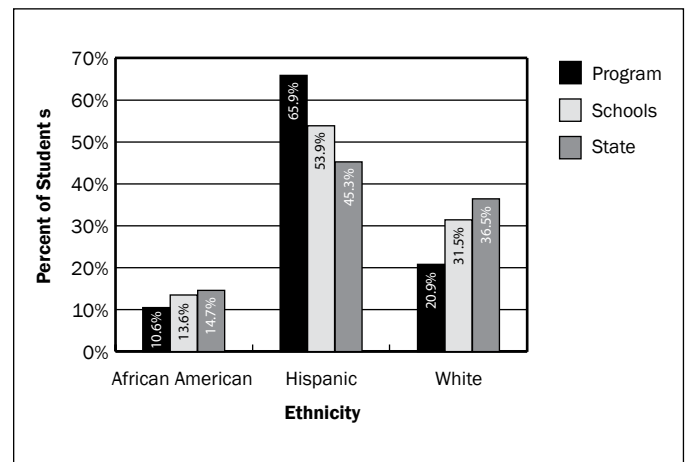
The school targets for admission students who are at risk of not graduating from high school within four years of entering ninth grade, members of student groups who have been historically underrepresented in higher education, students who are economically disadvantaged, and/or students with limited English proficiency.

As can be seen from Figure 3.1, the students enrolled in the program were more likely to be Hispanic and less likely to be white or African-American than students in their schools overall, or students statewide. A large majority (65.9%) of program students were listed as Hispanic in the TEA Public Education Information System Management (PEIMS) dataset. The programs are doing a good job of enrolling students from ethnic minority groups.

Program students are more likely to be economically disadvantaged than other students. For purposes of this evaluation, students were considered to be economically disadvantaged if they were registered for free or reduced-price meals, or defined as other economic disadvantage by the TEA PEIMS data. Statewide, 55.6% of students are reported as economically disadvantaged. In participating schools overall 46.5% of students are listed as economically disadvantaged, while in the MC/EC program group

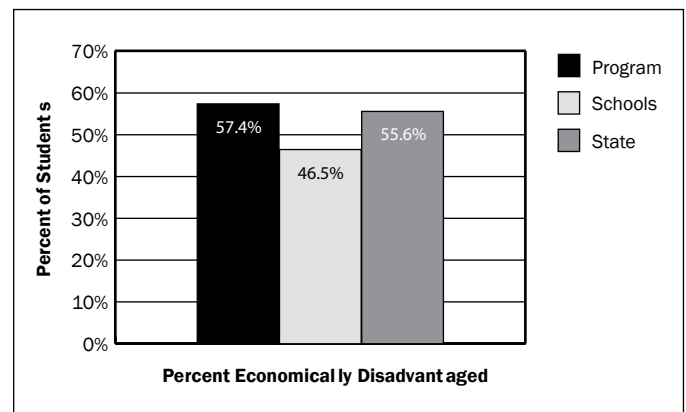
57.4% are reported as economically disadvantaged. More MC/EC program students are economically disadvantaged than the students overall in their schools, or in the state as a whole. Figure 3.2 displays these proportions. Programs are also doing a good job of enrolling economically disadvantaged students.

Figure 3.1. Ethnicity of Program Students Compared to School Populations and State Population



Source: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

Figure 3.2. Economic Status of Program Students Compared to School Populations and State Population



Source: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

47% of the students in the program were classified at risk by TEA. In the PEIMS dataset, the at-risk indicator code indicates whether a student is identified as at risk of dropping out of school using state-defined criteria. These criteria include having failed to pass the TAKS test, failing courses, and limited English proficiency. The formal definition for the student at-risk indicator code

Table 3.2. Time Allocation by Survey Respondents

	Less/worse than peers	Same as peers	More/better than peers	N
Grades	6%	55%	39%	1075
Amount of time spent on homework	25%	54%	21%	1076
Amount of time spent in academic-related activities	25%	51%	23%	1071
Amount of time spent in non-academic activities	13%	44%	43%	1071
Amount of time spent on paid work	53%	25%	22%	1047

*Note. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.
Source: Student surveys*

can be found online at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/peims/standards/wedsold/index.html>.

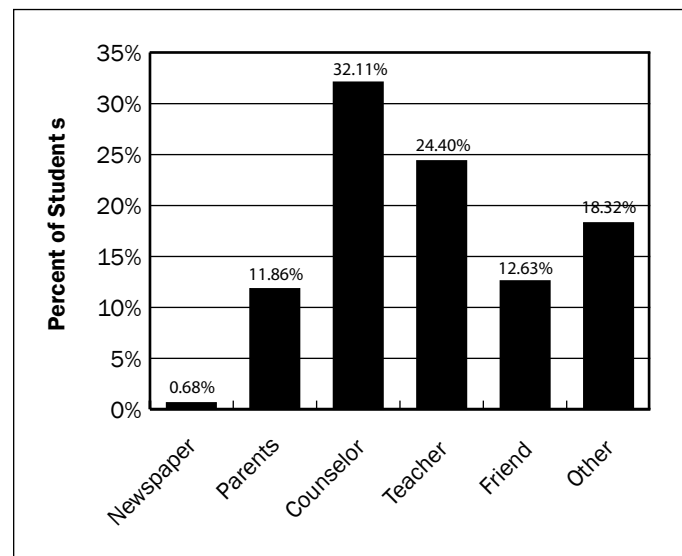
When surveyed, students were asked if they viewed themselves as similar to their peers. About half of the students view themselves as very similar to their peers in the amount of time spent on homework or spent in academic-related activities. About one-quarter responded that they spent less time in these activities, and about one-quarter responded that they spent more time. Only 13% of students reported spending less time than peers on non-academic activities, while the remaining 87% were split between spending the same or more time than peers on such activities. Over half of students reported that they spent less time than peers on paid work. Overall, program students are spending about the same amount of time as peers on academic-related activities, including homework, and more time on nonacademic activities but less time on paid work. It should be noted that the survey did not define the term “peer” for respondents. For some respondents, the term may have been interpreted as neighbors and friends from other schools, whereas for other respondents the term may have meant fellow students in the MC/EC program. This could have affected responses and limits the interpretability of the results. See Table 3.2 for more information on time allocation.

Students were also asked how they heard about the MC/EC program. As can be seen in Figure 3.3, most students heard about the MC/EC program from a counselor (32%) or teacher (24%). Although schools report dissemination efforts, including presentations to the community, enrollment still appears to be driven by school staff who are acquainted with the students.

While counselors and high school teachers were

important in disseminating the information about the MC/EC program, they were not a very important influence on the students’ decision to attend. When asked to rank influences on their decision, about half of the students ranked parents as the primary influence, and about half ranked self as the primary influence. The counselor and the teacher were usually ranked third, fourth or fifth in influence. More information about the top-ranked influences on student decision to attend an MC/EC program can be found in Table E.4 in Appendix E.

Figure 3.3. Source of Information about the MC/EC Program



Source: Student surveys

Students were surveyed about their perspective on the opinions of a variety of people in their lives (Table 3.3). They were asked “What do the following people think is the

Table 3.3. Students' Perspective on Impact of Others' Opinions on Future Plans

	Does not apply	Go to college	Get a full-time job	Trade school or apprenticeship program	Enter military service	Get married	They think I should do what I want	They don't care	I don't know	N
Your father	8%	72%	2%	1%	1%	0%	6%	2%	7%	1047
Your mother	2%	88%	1%	1%	0%	0%	5%	1%	2%	1049
Your friends	6%	53%	2%	1%	1%	0%	19%	5%	12%	1049
A close relative	2%	77%	2%	1%	1%	1%	8%	1%	7%	1046
School counselor	7%	70%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	17%	1048
Your favorite teacher	5%	78%	0%	1%	1%	0%	4%	1%	10%	1051
Coach	27%	49%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	3%	16%	1055
Yourself	1%	83%	2%	1%	3%	1%	5%	1%	4%	1034

Note. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.
Source: Student surveys

most important thing for you to do right after high school?” For each person, most students responded “Go to college.” Seventy-two percent of the students’ fathers said this, as did 88% of their mothers, 77% of their closest relatives, and 78% of their favorite teachers. A slim majority of the students’ friends said this also. The person reported to have the least influence in most areas was Coach as 27% reported that that category did not apply.

Program Implementation

TEA required campuses to submit four progress reports describing the status of the program between January 1, 2005, and December 31, 2006. Progress reports included the number of students with Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs) and the number and type of advanced courses available to students.

One of the requirements of the grant is that campuses have IGPs in place for all MC/EC program students. In the first year, between five and seven of the nine campuses filing progress reports had 100% of students with IGPs. By the time of the fourth report, filed in spring 2007, six of seven reporting campuses had 100% of students with

IGPs in place. In some cases, the failure to reach 100% was attributed to non-program students. One administrator explained “It has not been difficult for all Early College students to have an IGP. However, it has been very difficult to assure that every student in our large, comprehensive high school has an IGP simply due to sheer numbers.”

Another grant requirement is an agreement between the campus and a postsecondary institution. MC/EC grantees were asked if they experienced obstacles in following the articulation agreement with the postsecondary institution. In the first year, two campuses indicated problems in getting their articulation agreement signed. In the second year, three campuses reported problems that had to do with scheduling and students receiving credit for classes, all of which were later resolved. Overall, the obstacles do not appear to be long-term problems.

School Climate

Online surveys were made available to high school teachers on all campuses through a local survey contact. Survey questions gathered demographic data about high school teachers as well as answers to

individual questions that were combined to create the School Climate Inventory scales.

SCI scale values were calculated using the seven questions comprising each 5-point scale. Responses to each question in each scale are reported in Tables C.1-C.7 in Appendix C. An average overall score was calculated for each school with five or more responses. Across schools, the overall average score on the SCI was 3.75, which is virtually the same as the national secondary norm of 3.73.

SCI scale scores were examined by school. The highest SCI scores came from School 1 in District 1, School 7 in District 6, and School 10, all of which had overall mean scores of 4.0. These schools, according to high school teachers, have a very favorable school climate. School 8 in District 7 had the lowest score with an overall mean of 3.1. By and large high school teachers said that school climate in these programs was favorable.

Table 3.4. Average SCI by School

School	SCI Average
School 1	4.0
Schools 2 & 3	3.7
School 4	n/a
School 5	n/a
School 6	3.8
School 7	4.0
School 8	3.1
School 9	n/a
School 10	4.0

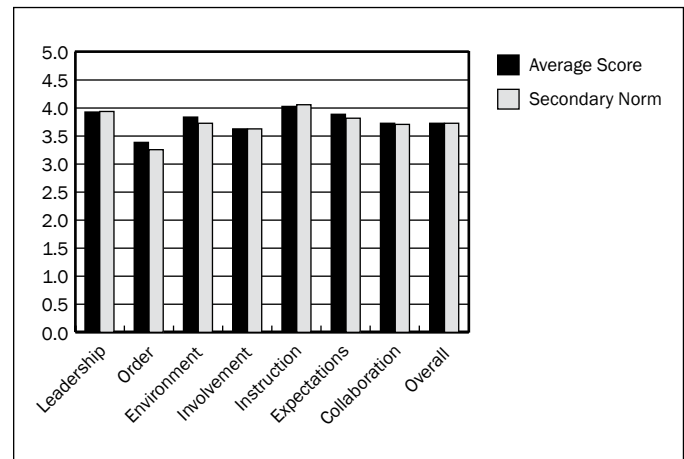
Source: Teacher surveys

Scores were then examined by each of the seven dimensions. Average SCI scores on each dimension across all schools are reported in Figure 3.4. SCI scores on each scale are presented for each school in Table C.8 in Appendix C. Consistent with the national norm values, the schools in this study reported the highest average score (4.0) on the Instruction scale, and the lowest average score (3.4) on the Order scale. As the lowest mean scores were positive, high school teachers indicated on the surveys that overall the MC/EC programs are sound.

Instruction in these programs is viewed very favorably. High school teachers strongly agree that they and their colleagues use a variety of teaching strategies, including

designing learning to support both curriculum and student needs; using appropriate assessment methods to measure student achievement; and using curriculum guides to ensure consistency of subject matter in each grade. On instructional quality, the MC/EC programs earned high marks from high school teachers. The one question with which only a slim majority agreed was that pull-out programs do not interfere with basic skills instruction, indicating that many teachers find these programs to be disruptive.

Figure 3.4. Scale Values for the SCI



*Note. See Ross, et. al., 2005, for norming information.
Source: Teacher surveys

Scores on the Leadership scale had a mean of 3.9. Leadership in these programs seems sound and well received by teachers. High school teachers generally have a favorable view of the leadership in these programs. They endorsed the view that the administration communicates the belief that all students can learn and encourages high school teachers to be creative and to try new methods of instruction. High school teachers also indicated that the principal was usually highly visible throughout the school. Only a slight majority of high school teachers said the administration is effective in protecting instructional time, so there is room for improvement as far as making sure that students do not unnecessarily lose class time.

The Expectations mean was 3.9, and most teachers agreed that although expectations of students in the program were high, all students were given ample opportunities to succeed. Overwhelmingly, high school teachers said that low-achieving students were given opportunities for success at their schools. They also

believed that high school teachers had high expectations for all students and that students participated in classroom activities without regard to sex, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or academic ability. They responded that students at their schools were expected to master basic skills at each grade level. Agreement was less strong that students were held responsible for their actions, as only 55 percent said this was true. Less than 40 percent agreed that students shared the responsibility for keeping the school environment attractive and clean. In combination with some of the low scores on the Order scale, discussed below, these are areas that would benefit from attention.

The Environment scale's overall mean score of 3.8 indicates that this is an area in which high school teachers are fairly satisfied. A large majority of high school teachers agreed that varied learning environments are provided to accommodate diverse teaching and learning styles, high school teachers are proud of their school and its students, and college faculty and high school staff think that they make important contributions to the school. A majority, though a slim one, agreed that an atmosphere of trust existed among the administration, college faculty, high school staff, students, and parents at their school. One of the main factors in the success of these programs is the way all of the partners work together. This is not only true of the institutional partners such as the college, high school, and educational or philanthropic organizations that run the program, but also of the relationships between the administration, teachers, students, and parents.

Collaboration among college faculty and high school staff is frequent and largely satisfactory. Survey respondents largely agreed that the college faculty and high school staff share a sense of commitment to the school goals and that high school teachers were encouraged to communicate questions, concerns, and constructive ideas. Three-fourths of high school teachers agreed that college faculty and high school staff cooperated a great deal in working toward school goals.

Only a slim majority agreed that high school teachers were active participants in the decision making at their schools, and just over a third agreed that students participated in solving school-related problems. Evaluators recommend looking at this as an opportunity to tap resources that may be underutilized at present.

In matters of Involvement, a large majority of high school teachers said that parents were treated courteously when

they visited the school, and three-quarters of high school teachers said that information about school activities was communicated to parents on a consistent basis. Slightly less than three-quarters of respondents said that parents were invited to serve on school advisory committees. A sizable majority said that parent volunteers were included whenever possible. The survey did not elaborate on the meaning of "whenever possible." However, less than half of respondents agreed that parents actively supported school activities. It is significant that only 38% agreed that parents were often invited to visit classrooms, and possibly responses to survey questions about parents often being invited to visit classrooms and parents actively supporting school activities are related. Parent involvement might be increased by inviting parents more often to visit classrooms. Another opportunity for these programs lies in the area of involving business leaders in the local community. High school teachers say that, by and large, community businesses are not very active in the MC/EC programs.

Responses to questions about Order garnered some of the lowest scores on the entire inventory, as they do on a national level. Most high school teachers said that their schools were safe places to work and that student behavior was generally positive. However, less than a quarter of respondents agreed that tardiness or absenteeism were not major issues. There also seems to be an issue with student behavior. High school teachers indicated that student misbehavior interfered with the teaching process; however, they indicated strongly that generally student behavior was positive.

Teachers and students were asked directly about school safety. Eighty-five percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "This school is a safe place in which to work." and 86% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel safe in my school." Responses to individual questions comprising the student attachment scale are displayed in Appendix D. Responses to individual teacher survey questions can be found in Tables C.1-C.7 in Appendix C. Scale values for the School Climate Inventory for individual schools are presented in Table C.8 in Appendix C.

College Readiness

Two aspects of college readiness were evaluated. The first aspect was student perceptions of program impact on their readiness for college enrollment,

including their plans to go to college and the time spent applying for financial aid. The second aspect was actual outcomes of the MC/EC program on student pursuit of college enrollment, including completion of college admission tests and applying to and being accepted to one or more colleges.

Students were surveyed about the perceived impact of the MC/EC program on their readiness for college (Table 3.5). Eighty-one percent of students said that the MC/EC program had positively impacted their plans to go to college. Seventy-five percent said that their college readiness had been positively impacted. Results show that the likelihood of these students attending college has probably increased as a result of participating in the MC/EC program. Although self-reported data must always be interpreted with caution, these results are promising. It is a strong possibility that exposure to college courses, college students, and/or a college campus increases a student's overall interest in attending college and his/her confidence in achieving success as a college student.

Least impacted were applying for financial aid and time that counselors spent with students. Responses to all statements on this survey item can be found in Table E.1 in Appendix E.

Students across all grade levels have taken a variety of tests in preparation for the post-high school plans. As shown in Table 3.6, the pre-SAT (PSAT/NMSQT) is the most commonly completed (64%), followed by the SAT (33%). These results are not surprising, considering that Table 3.1 shows

that over half (62%) of survey respondents were in Grades 9 or 10. Of 11th- and 12th-grade students, approximately 70% had taken the PSAT, while 28% of 11th-grade students and 65% of 12th-grade students had taken the SAT. Lower percentages of students had taken the ACT, 10% of 11th-grade students and 37% of 12th-grade students.

Table 3.5. Perceived Impact of MC/EC Program

	Yes, positively impacted	No, not positively impacted	N
Plans to go to college	81%	19%	1069
College readiness	75%	25%	1067
Time counselors spent with you	39%	61%	1062
Applying for financial aid	31%	68%	1054

*Note. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.
Source: Student surveys*

Students were asked about their plans for the future. Overall, 99% of the students who answered the survey are planning to attend college. They were then asked if they have applied to college and if they have been accepted to any college. Responses for students in Grades 11 and 12, who were more likely to have applied for college and to have been accepted, are displayed in Table 3.7. High percentages of students had responses

Table 3.6. Tests Taken in Preparation for Post-High School Plans

	I haven't thought about it	No, don't plan to take	Yes, this year	Yes, already took	N
Pre-SAT test	16%	7%	14%	64%	1042
College Board Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)	30%	8%	29%	33%	1021
American College Testing (ACT) test	46%	19%	21%	14%	989
Advanced Placement (AP) test	46%	24%	13%	17%	987
Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)	58%	35%	4%	3%	989
Preliminary American College Testing (PACT) test	63%	28%	5%	3%	989

*Note. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.
Source: Student surveys*

that were consistent with planning to attend college. Eighty-three percent of 12th-grade students had applied to college, and 80% had been accepted. Predictably, the number of students responding that they had applied as well as the number responding that they had been accepted was higher for Grade 12 students than Grade 11 students.

Table 3.7. Percent of Survey Respondents Who Have Applied to and Been Accepted to College

	Applied to College		Accepted to College	
	Grade 11 (N=257)	Grade 12 (N=133)	Grade 11 (N=255)	Grade 12 (N=131)
Yes	9%	83%	11%	80%
No	91%	17%	89%	20%

Source: Student surveys

Postsecondary Education Plans and Likelihood of College Success

Although it was not possible at this stage to follow students and measure their actual success after high school, there were indicators of whether students were in fact likely to be successful in college. Information such as their perception of their college level skills, the importance of college in their future plans, and actual number of advanced courses completed were used as likely indicators of future college success.

Students were surveyed about the perceived impact of the MC/EC program on their actual college skills. Seventy-three percent of students responded that the program had a positive impact on their college-level skills. They were then asked about their plans for the future, and 99% of students responded that pursuing an education was very important or somewhat important. Responses to all statements on these survey items can be found in Table E.1 and E.2 in Appendix E.

Students were also surveyed about their post-secondary plans. 36% of program students plan to graduate from college with a four- or five-year degree, 23% plan to obtain a master's degree or advanced professional degree (25%). This indicates that students in the program have ambitious post-high school plans. The most common responses are shown below in Table 3.8. Responses to all statements on this survey item can be found in Table E.3 in Appendix E.

Table 3.8. Student Plans for Post-Secondary Education

	Finish college (four or five year degree)	Master's degree or equivalent	Ph.D., M.D., or other professional degree
Percent	36.2%	23.4%	24.8%
Number	365	236	250

Source: Student surveys

The purpose of the grant is to help students obtain college credit during the time that they are also completing their high school requirements. Campuses were asked about availability of courses to students for earning college credit, including Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual credit (DC), and concurrent enrollment (CE).

- Five of the nine reporting campuses indicated that they provided AP courses in 2005 and in 2006.
 - A range of 1 to 28 courses were available in 2005, reportedly serving 1 to 651 students per school.
 - A range of 4 to 116 courses were available in 2006, reportedly serving between 22 and 970 students per school.
 - Five campuses did not provide AP courses in 2005 or 2006.
- None of the nine responding campuses reported IB courses in 2005 or 2006.
- Seven of nine campuses in 2005 and six of nine campuses in 2006 reported providing dual credit courses.
 - A range of 1 to 24 dual credit courses were available in 2005, serving between 23 and 65 students per school.
 - A range of 3 to 33 courses were available in 2006, serving 13 to 51 students per school.
- Five of nine campuses reported concurrent enrollment courses in 2005; six of nine reported concurrent enrollment courses in 2006.
 - A range of 1 to 50 concurrent enrollment courses were available in 2005, serving 2 to 703 students per school.
 - A range of 2 to 33 courses were available in 2006, serving between 11 and 499 students per school.
- In 2005, three campuses listed distance learning, pre-AP, and summer school courses as having been provided to students, with 2 to 16 courses serving between 3 and 198 students per school.

The program students were then compared to school averages in regard to the accrued credits for advanced courses taken as reported to TEA in the PEIMS dataset. Advanced courses were defined as AP, IB, or dual credit courses. The PEIMS data does not differentiate concurrent enrollment courses. Course-taking data were available for 2004, 2005, and 2006. The program students were compared to the school average by 2006 enrolled grade level, because of the tendency for advanced courses to be taken later in students' high school careers.

Two aspects of advanced course completion were considered important for the purposes of this evaluation. The first aspect was percentage of students completing advanced courses, and the second aspect was the average number of courses taken by those students participating in advanced courses. As can be seen in Table 3.9, a larger percentage (25%) of MC/EC program students took at least one advanced course than the average for their schools (10%). This is a positive finding as it illustrates that the MC/EC program is having the desired impact. Program students are indeed taking more advanced courses, some of which earn them college credit, than other students enrolled at their schools.

Table 3.9. Number and Percentage of Students Taking Advanced Courses

Group	N	Percent of Total
Program	259	25%
School Average	1972	10%

Source: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

The average number of courses taken by students was examined by grade level. In ninth grade, for students at each campus but not involved in the MC/EC program, 10 students took 22 advanced credits, for an average of 2.2 credits per participating student, compared to one MC/EC student taking one credit. By the time they reached 12th grade, MC/EC students taking advanced courses had taken an average of 7.2 credits, compared to 6.0 credits for students not in the program. Table 3.10 presents the number of credits taken by students in Grades 9–12.

In Grades 9 and 10, the average number of credits in advanced courses taken by MC/EC program students was lower than school averages. However, in Grades 11 and 12, MC/EC program students taking advanced courses had taken more courses than the school average. For all

students in the school, a higher percentage of MC/EC students took advanced courses than the school average.

Table 3.10. Average Number of Credits for Students Taking Advanced Courses

	Average Number of Credits Taken			
	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Program Average	1	1.8	3.5	7.2
School Average	2.2	1.9	3.3	6.0

Source: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

Student Perceptions and Performance

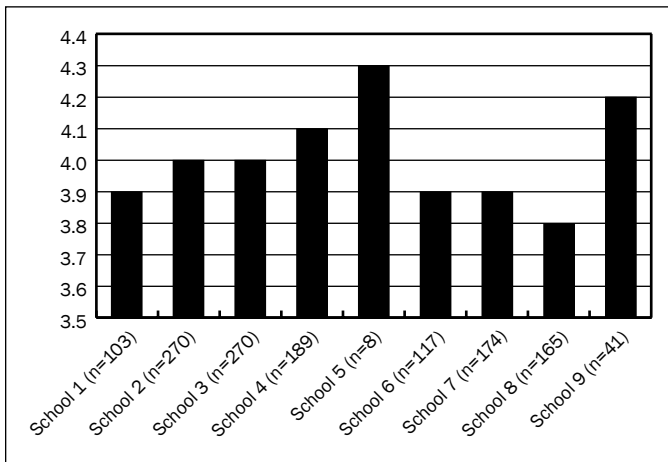
Students participating in the MC/EC program perceive the program to have had a positive impact on their academic performance. Specifically, students reported that the MC/EC program had a positive impact on their academic skills (77%), interest in school (70%), relationships with teachers (64%), and teachers' attitudes towards them (62%).

This finding is supported by the school attachment scores that were calculated for each school based on the survey responses of the attending students. The school attachment scale is constructed of items asking about the frequency of student problems, getting along with teachers and other students, and whether students feel safe, happy, fairly treated, and close to other people at school. Overall, students seem glad to be in their schools. Well over 80% of respondents said they feel safe at school, and over 80% agreed that they feel close to other people at their school. Eighty percent also said they are happy at school, over three-fourths feel like a part of things at the school, and three-fourths reported that students are treated fairly. For the most part, students said they do not have trouble with their teachers. Over 80% said that they had never had trouble with teachers or had been in trouble just a few times. Just under three-fourths of students never, or infrequently, experienced trouble with other students. Responses to individual questions comprising the scale are displayed in Appendix D.

Overall, the average school attachment score was 3.96. School 5 received the highest school attachment score (4.3), while students in School 8 in District 7 had the lowest scale scores (3.8). Figure 3.5 lists the average score by school. It is not unusual to find lower averages in schools with larger numbers of students completing the survey. It could be that

in schools with very low numbers of students completing the survey, only the students who were most attached to the school chose to complete the survey. Still, with the scores on a 5-point scale spread from 3.8 to 4.3, the level of attachment to MC/EC schools in general is quite high, so the program's appeal to students seems assured.

Figure 3.5. School Average Scores on School Attachment Scale



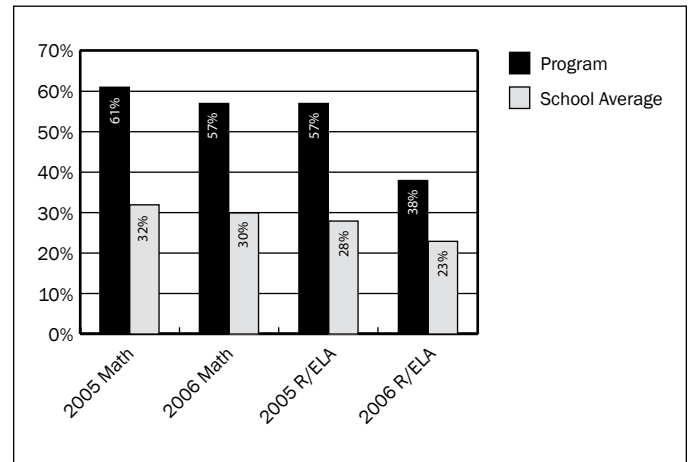
Source: Student Surveys

Note: School 10 surveys were not returned.

Earlier, self-reported data from students indicated that their academic skills, college readiness, and college-level skills had been positively impacted by participation in the MC/EC program. These results were corroborated when the groups were compared on the percentage of students whose 11th-grade Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores were considered to have met higher education readiness. For English Language Arts (ELA) exit level TAKS results, the THECB Higher Education Readiness Standard is a scale score of at least 2,200 plus an essay score of at least 3. For mathematics exit-level TAKS results, the standard is a scale score of at least 2,200 (Texas Education Agency, 2004). On the 2005 reading/ELA TAKS, 57% of the students in the MC/EC program met the THECB standard compared to 28% of students in the same schools overall (Figure 3.6). In 2006 reading/ELA, 38% of the students in the program group met the THECB standard compared to a school average of 23%. In mathematics, 61% of MC/EC program students and 32% of students overall had scores that met the THECB standard in 2005. In 2006 mathematics, 57% of program students met the

standard compared to a school average of 30%. This shows that the highest performing students at each campus are participating in the program.

Figure 3.6. Percentage of Students Meeting THECB Standard in 2005 and 2006 for Program Students and Schools Overall



Source: Texas Education Agency, PEIMS.

Summary

Analysis of the type of students attending MC/EC programs showed that the schools are recruiting from the target population. Seventy-seven percent of students are from ethnic minority groups, 57% are economically disadvantaged, and 47% are at risk of dropping out of school. These students report that they have been positively impacted by the program in a number of ways. Ninety-nine percent plan to attend college; 80% of 12th-grade students had already been accepted by at least one college. Students perceive the program to have had a positive impact on their academic success, as well as relationships with teachers and other students. Students also indicate a strong level of attachment to school and strong support from friends and family to attend college. Higher percentages of program students than comparison students met the Higher Education Readiness Standard in 2005 and 2006 for both mathematics and reading/ELA. In addition, higher percentages of program students took advanced courses than students in the schools overall. These results indicate that students want to attend college, have the benefit of having been exposed to the college environment, and have the necessary level of academic skill to be successful.

CHAPTER 4

PROMISING PRACTICES

Three schools were chosen for site visits to determine best practices. The following sites chosen were: School 4 in District 3; School 6 in District 5; and School 9 in District 8. The sites were chosen based on a variety of factors, including student achievement, program type, and location. School 4 had high student survey scores on school attachment and a large number of advanced courses taken by students. School 4 is located on the campus of a community college. School 6 is a program currently serving Grades 9–11 as a learning community within a large urban school. School 6 also received \$200,000 for restructuring the rest of the high school to support the MC/EC program after a decision was made that the program was “raising the bar” for participating students, and all students should have an opportunity to participate in a school-within-a-school academy. These funds were used to set up two more schools-within-a-school in addition to the Early College High School. School 9 is located on the campus of a large state university, and also had high school attachment scores. The school serves students from two school districts as well as transfer students from other area school districts. All three schools had high percentages (75% to 100%) of students with Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs).

Two-day site visits were conducted by two researchers during early November 2006. At each school, interviews were scheduled with the principal, a teacher, the school counselor, grant coordinator, college coordinator or college faculty. A focus group was conducted with parents of program students.

School 4

Introduction

School 4 is housed in its own building on the campus of a local community college. The school currently has students in Grade 9 through the fifth year of enrollment². School 4’s goal is to provide an accelerated, college-preparatory learning program, allowing students to combine high school and tuition-free college-level classes. As opposed to traditional high schools that focus on graduation, School 4 focuses on the MC/EC goal of preparing students for college and giving them a strong foundation for college success.

General Information

School 4 opened in 2003–04 with funding from a local foundation and charter school startup funds. The Technical Assistance Provider’s website reports that School 4 was one of the first early college/middle college high schools in Texas. District 3 required School 4 to have 85 students to open; the school began with 91 students, enrolling both freshmen and sophomores, in order to meet the required enrollment of 85. With additional funding from a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant, a grade was added every year until the school had students enrolled in Grade 9 through the fifth year. School 4 graduated its first three students in 2005 as these students had accumulated enough credits to graduate. The first graduating class of 13 students completed the program in 2006. Currently, 387 students are enrolled in School 4, and enrollment will be capped at 400 students.

² Students may opt for a five-year Early College High School program to accrue more hours or obtain an associate’s degree.

A teacher, a parent, and a principal wrote the original Gates Foundation grant. The principal had been hired in the spring of 2003 to do research and planning for the school. The plan was to locate the school on the college campus in the northwestern region of the city. The project was relocated to another District 3 region and community college campus due to lack of facilities at the first proposed site. The final approval for the new site was given on July 13, 2003. School staff, high school students, and temporary buildings had to be found quickly.

The School 4 staff had four weeks' notice that the school would be opening. An area was soon marked off for temporary buildings on the community college campus. School 4 staff held high school classes in the temporary buildings the first year. Build out of the new facility was scheduled to be completed in the summer of 2004 but work had not begun. In the fall of 2004, School 4 enrollment was over 200 students and increased staff, but the school continued to operate in the temporary buildings. It took several months to bring in additional buildings.

The new space was built during 2004 and was due to be finished in June of 2005, but there was difficulty with the contractor in getting the space completed, according to School 4 representatives. The 2005 school year began with over 300 students in the temporary buildings. Finally, within weeks, School 4 moved into the new space where they continue to be housed today.

The school is connected by a hallway to the community college. The School 4 building is partially "built out" with area to expand when needed. More students attend each year, and the number of staff has also increased. More courses are being offered each year. School 4 contributed funds toward building a library on the community college campus, which is shared by both groups of students as is the computer lab.

The staff at both the high school and the college have worked together to make the program successful. The high school principal and the college advisor meet weekly to discuss the program. Over time, the college administration has become more flexible in allowing students to take college classes earlier in their high school careers. There is a limit to the number of hours a student can take based on his/her grade point average (GPA), but if a student's GPA is high enough, he/she can request permission from the community college dean to take more college classes.

Interviews indicated that a lack of funding is keeping

the program from growing more than it has. In 2004–05, the school administration thought it was necessary to seek additional funds because they had encountered unanticipated needs for items such as additional chairs and lockers. The school also needed a lunch room since students had to eat outside and did not have shelter from the sun or rain. So administrators applied for the MC/EC grant from TEA and were able to obtain needed textbooks, equipment, and facilities, including a multipurpose room with dividers. They also hired a staff member who oversees advisory classes, takes care of purchasing, enters payroll information, and manages the front desk. She also serves as the school nurse as the school does not have a full-time or part-time nurse on staff. In short, the school applied for the MC/EC grant because it needed the financial resources to provide more complete services to its students.

High School Program Description

The school's original founders oversaw the management of the school in its initial years. Though positions have been added, staff members still perform many activities beyond their stated job responsibilities. For example, the grant's financial clerk helps monitor the lunchroom and patrols with the school police officer as needed. The clerk also checks teachers' requests for purchases to determine whether the item(s) can be purchased through the grant.

Students are recruited into School 4 by counselors who visit middle schools and conduct presentations on the program. They also send out flyers. Students complete an application for admission. During the application process, current students are shadowed by prospective students, giving them a realistic understanding of how the school works. A school representative reports that all students who enter as freshmen to School 4 take the online COMPASS test that is published by ACT. It is a comprehensive computerized placement system that helps School 4 staff decide if students need acceleration or double blocking in English, math, or science. Students can retake any subtest if they need to improve their scores.

Students who attend School 4 come from a wide variety of backgrounds; however, they have in common the choice they have made to better themselves. Most students come from environments where parents care about their children but are not college graduates themselves, so students

may not receive the educational support they need to stay focused on the goal of post-secondary education. In some cases, school staff members provide emotional as well as academic support to the students. Students in some ways are typical students, but some have more challenges to overcome in order to do college-level work. Many are from low-income families and take two or three city buses every day to get to School 4. Most of them are or will be the first in their families to go to college, and they attend School 4 because they value the college credits they will get. They like the small environment and the absence of discipline problems that can interfere with learning in larger schools. Students also like the fact that they can see a counselor quickly when needed and do not have to wait a week or more as they might in a larger high school.

The Business Computer Information Systems (BCIS) class was often mentioned as a good class. Students can do a great variety of work on the school computers, and most agree that computer instruction is excellent. There is a separate lab to learn applications such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access. A teacher said that the final examination on computer use was challenging enough to be just below what is required for Microsoft certification. The school has purchased software to help the students, specifically a dictionary/thesaurus to help with students' writing and keyboarding skills. The school occasionally buys educational books and movies.

Parents said the science labs are very well-equipped. They see the projects that the students work on and note that teachers give out their telephone numbers and e-mail addresses so that students can receive help if they need it.

The school uses a block schedule, which resembles a college schedule. The students have four classes per day and no college classes on Fridays. Friday is used for clubs, field trips, and other activities. Though extracurricular activities such as football and cheerleading are not available, more extracurricular activities have become available over time, such as a yearbook and internship opportunities in Washington, D.C. Rather than competitive sports, the physical education program emphasizes fitness. Many of the clubs are career-oriented, such as one focused on medical careers and another targeted for careers in radio. Students are given leadership opportunities, such as becoming a "facilitator," a position in which a student helps other students. The school also

sponsors tours of university campuses.

According to staff, many students seem to blossom at School 4. The nurturing relationships at School 4 are a source of motivation and help students to improve socially as well as academically. Each year the school selects a book to read in the summer and this book is provided to students. Students seem to be excited about learning. One parent said, "I can't say I know what goes on in the classroom, but my daughter has the utmost respect for all her teachers. She has become an avid reader and has pretty mature thought processes for a 16-year-old." Students say that they feel a part of the school community and that their input and opinions are considered and respected though they sometimes complain when new rules are introduced. School 4 staff members say that students are proud that they can voice their opinions; they can go into the principal's office at any time and say what they think about an issue. This sense of belonging helps motivate learning. Teachers say that there is a great deal of student participation in class and that students are highly involved in what is happening there.

The school does not have its own assessment system. It uses the yearly Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) as required by the state accountability system. The school has achieved a rating of Recognized in the Texas Education Agency's accountability system. There is no testing online either in high school or college classes. Both high school and college grades are given. Parents can find out about their child's academic progress from high school teachers, but because of the federal Family Education Right to Privacy Act (FERPA), parents cannot talk directly with professors about their students' progress and must go through a high school liaison to obtain this information.

Teachers say they have everything they need to teach their classes. They have adequate supplies and students who want to learn. They also differentiate instruction for students of varying abilities. They understand what they are taking on when they come to School 4—rigor, relevance, and relationships. As a result, project-based learning is a prominent feature.

Teachers say the school's technology capacity has improved. Each teacher has a computer station and a shared office area where teachers can collaborate. There is wireless Internet access throughout the campus, and there are Smart Boards in every classroom.

The high school offers tutorials, and teachers are

available after every school day. The National Honor Society provides tutoring after school, and teachers can get paid for an hour of tutoring per day, but they often stay longer than one hour. Students taking community college courses come back to the School 4 teachers for support in their college work. When students attend Saturday detention, their teachers send the class work to the supervisor so the students can work on it during detention. Students can also engage a community college tutor if they are struggling with a college class.

Facilitators

The size of the program is one of its strengths. If it were smaller, it could not offer the diversity of classes; if it were larger, it could not give the same level of individualized attention to the students. The students appear excited and eager to learn, and the teachers are well prepared to teach them. Teachers say that there are rarely complaints from students about fairness or about a teacher's personality. One teacher said, "We do not keep the students at arm's length—we are expected to develop relationships with our students."

Over time, high school students demonstrate increased maturity as a result of being in the adult environment. The high school students also challenge the community college students to achieve more. Many of the high school students are ready to take college classes and do well in them. They get a great deal of academic support. Students are being inspired to go on to college and see that they can do well academically. The program has been an avenue for innovation out of necessity. "We have been flying this plane as we are building it," one parent said. One member of the staff said, "It is very touching when you see students who are struggling and then become successful."

Barriers

Sustainability is the number one need identified by the faculty, and the lack of dependable funding is a major constraint on the program's growth. Faculty expressed appreciation for the \$275 per student, appropriated by the Legislature and available through TEA, for students enrolled in dual-credit courses. However, many School 4 students need remedial courses before they are ready to do college-level work. There is a gap between the skill level needed to pass the mathematics TAKS and the skill level required for college mathematics, which may increase the need for remedial mathematics courses. Some students take

the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) to assess their readiness for college-level work, but it is offered only six times a year and it takes time to get the scores back. Some parents wish the school would offer and fund an SAT preparation class. It was offered for a year, but funds are no longer available for this class.

Physical space to house School 4 students is an issue, though more classrooms are planned in the near future. The building has space that can be finished out to provide more classrooms. A food court, or an eating facility, is needed on one of the community college campuses so that high school students will be able to go to the college for lunch. Currently, lunch is brought in from a nearby middle school and the food quality is reported to be marginal.

Transportation of students is another issue. One teacher mentioned, "It would be great if we had a bus to pick the students up and bring them to school." Transportation is not provided and some students are on public buses four to five hours per day. Last year the school was able to provide public bus passes to students who needed them, but this year there were not sufficient funds to provide this service. Additional transportation issues were identified since School 4 students who wish to take certain foreign language classes must travel to other college campuses where these classes are offered.

Though there have been occasional complaints from college faculty about high school students sleeping in class, showing public displays of affection, or being unwilling to do the work, communication about such issues is rapid, and problems are addressed almost immediately.

The lack of flexibility to move grant funds is an obstacle as approval takes time, and submitting the paperwork to TEA is a lengthy process. The clerk suggested that such delays could be ameliorated by using e-mail or fax.

College Program Description

School 4 and the community college have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that forms the basis of their relationship. However, the terms of the MOU do not constrict the opportunities available to School 4 students. School 4 will pay for a class even if it is not covered by the MOU, and students have the option of taking a course on another college campus. Additionally, community college administrators gave a freshman permission to take a college class, and they appear to be getting more flexible every year.

The ninth- and 10th-grade students are not allowed on the community college's campus. The 11th- and 12th-grade students monitor the situation to ensure the younger students do not go to the college campus. Ninth graders do not mix with the college students at all because of concerns about their lack of maturity. Students have to earn the privilege to be on the college campus. 10th-grade students and entering college students take a class in study skills and library usage where they learn about various issues related to college, such as how to register for college classes and interpret a syllabus. A few exceptions have been made for School 4 freshmen to take the study skills class.

Only five School 4 students are allowed in any given college class, and once there, they have to meet the same expectations as college students. Most college students are not even aware that there are high school students in their classes. Staff reported that initially some School 4 students thought it was funny to be partnered with an older student for projects, but the seriousness of the older students helped the high school students become more focused. The School 4 students are embedded among the college students and are listed on the same grading sheets and class rosters. These lists of students used to be separated, but that is no longer true as of fall 2006.

Every student has an IGP, and all students work with a guidance counselor to be sure that it is followed. Students and counselors follow both the high school transcript and the college plan to see where students are with their IGPs and to ensure that students stay on track for high school graduation, college credit hours, and possibly an Associate's degree. To this end, students need to stay in touch with both a high school counselor and a college counselor.

College coordinators and contacts can communicate through an Early Alert program, so that a student's academic difficulties can be addressed early. Though only effective if used, the Early Alert system is in place for all college students, not just School 4 students. The Early Alert system should result in a referral of the student to a counselor. School 4 counselors will be notified if School 4 students receive an Early Alert. Professors are being encouraged to use the Early Alert system more consistently so there are no surprises for students at the end of the semester when grades are issued.

School 4 students take part in the community college's events such as the Halloween festival and the spring

festival. School 4 students can also participate on the campus soccer team. The college chooses a book to be read by all college staff and faculty, and the author of the book comes on campus to speak. School 4 students and high school staff are invited to attend this event.

The School 4 students' grades are at least as good as, and sometimes better than, those of the college students. Many students take advantage of courses offered in a mini-semester (which is the time between semesters) and during summer school to help obtain the college credits needed for their Associate's degrees.

Students expect to accrue college credits simultaneously with high school credits. They enroll in School 4 because they want to get a head start on their college education. The counselors assist students with preparing for college and setting academic and career goals. University representatives visit the campus and tell the students about higher education opportunities available to them after graduation.

School 4 students have essentially the same rights and responsibilities as college students. School 4 students can remain in the program for four years and then apply to college, or they can stay a fifth year and accumulate additional college credits. If they choose the additional year, they must be sure they do not accumulate enough high school credits by the end of the fourth year that they are automatically graduated. Most students who plan to stay end the senior year two credits short of the minimum required for graduation.

Students pay \$10-15 for their textbooks, and grant funds pay for the rest of the price of the books. The grant also funds an advisory leader as well as the grant financial clerk who fulfills multiple roles. The grant has also funded a small library of materials to help students do searches on colleges, grants and scholarships.

Facilitators

School 4 students can take tests to see if they are ready for college work: THEA, ACT, SAT, COMPASS and ASSET. Knowing whether or not they are prepared lessens the chance of failure. There is an early warning system for all students who are having trouble with college courses, including School 4 High School students. If School 4 students are not meeting requirements, they are referred to a counselor, and their high school teachers are notified. It has not been necessary to modify the college curriculum

in any way or create a different assessment for School 4 students; thus, integration of School 4 students into the college is smooth.

The community college benefits from the program in terms of seat count. Enrolling more students means more revenue from the state for the college. It also makes college professors more willing to teach dual-credit classes. Initially, some college faculty members were resistant to teaching high school students, but they now have more positive attitudes. A college staff member stated, "This is the only early college program I have worked with, but truly the staff this school started with has made it easy for us. There is a desire on everyone's part for it to work. Even our most skeptical faculty members have accepted it."

Initially the college faculty was uncomfortable with the high school students and referred to them as "those students." Now the faculty members usually say "our students" so the discomfort seems to have abated, as has initial concern about possible vandalism from high school students on campus. As of fall 2006, college faculty members are not informed as to which of their students are in high school and which are in college.

Parents report that, "It opens doors for the students, showing them the possibilities. It gives them exposure to different kinds of people and educators. When they go off to school, they have already had the college experience...It is overall a maturing experience."

Barriers

Because of FERPA and other issues, college faculty does not talk to parents so professors' concerns about student needs or behavior are relayed through a contact at the high school. This is frustrating to some parents.

Communication and Collaboration

A liaison at the high school interacts with the college faculty. The dean of students at the community college campus is described as very proactive, even knowing which professors have School 4 students in their classes. He lets the high school faculty know when students do well on tests in the college courses. High school and college teachers collaborate frequently. Some adjunct professors now teach in the high school. The college faculty uses some School 4 classrooms for evening classes. At first there was concern about sharing this space, but now School 4 staff members put their supplies away when they leave for the day so the

space is clear for college professors to use. Every semester high school staff members from each subject area have a meeting with all college faculty members to discuss issues related to dual credit.

There is ongoing communication between the high school staff and the college coordinator regarding administrative matters. The college coordinator communicates with the college faculty regarding any changes being made at the high school that will affect the faculty. In turn, a contact at the college sends out notification to the high school of any changes in the dual-credit program.

There has been little communication between parents/guardians and the college faculty because of FERPA regulations. Communication between parents and high school staff is much more regular and frequent. A liaison between the high school and college keeps parents informed of what is going on at the college. Parents rely on the high school liaison to get information from the professors. Many parents are working two jobs, and they live in different areas of the city, which makes it difficult for some to participate in school activities.

Facilitators

The dean of students at the community college campus is described as very proactive and supportive. He lets the high school faculty know when students do well on tests in the college courses. High school teachers and college faculty collaborate frequently. High school staff and the college coordinator communicate often about administrative matters.

One teacher said, "Yes, there is a lot of collaboration. (The program) would not work without that."

Barriers

This year the professors often do not know who the School 4 students are, which makes it harder to track how they are doing. Often students do not want to identify themselves as high school students because "they want to be treated the same as the college students."

Professional Development and Support

Teachers are selected based on their desire to be a part of students' lives, including (but not limited to) teaching them. Teachers are expected to be available to students. Many teachers work beyond the class day and do tutoring after school. They are also available to help

during lunch. As the classes are smaller than typical high school classes and teachers have classes only four days a week, this extra instruction is possible. When teachers are interviewed for the program, the interview panel includes students as well as teachers.

There is no professional development specific to the early college program for college faculty and limited professional development for high school faculty. Some members of the high school staff visited early college programs in New York and said they learned a great deal about the recruiting process from this experience. High school teachers are taking classes in “Laying the Foundation” and all are pushing the concept of AP courses. Teachers have been offered a \$1000 budget each year to attend the conference of their choice. Sometimes a group is taken to a specific conference dealing with early college, rigor, service learning, or curriculum. For example, three teachers attended the Model Schools Conference in Orlando, Florida. During the school year, there is professional development in Friday morning staff meetings (7:30 a.m.-9:00 a.m.) in which teachers discuss school issues and individual students. They often break into smaller Critical Friends Groups. Teachers find this collaboration with others to be a source of support.

Smaller classes are a big advantage. Another advantage is the alliance with the students. Teachers want to teach, and students want to learn. One disadvantage is the expectation of fulfilling multiple roles because of the school’s small size.

Teachers expect to build relationships with students. There is a strong emphasis on helping students who are not passing their courses to get them prepared for college. Teachers expect to help students become independent and have the skills necessary to succeed academically. They focus not so much on graduation, but on what students will do after graduation. Teachers say that there is a need for more staff because of additional students entering the program. They point to a more diverse curriculum that has been established over time with the addition of courses in drama, foreign languages, creative writing, and photojournalism.

Facilitators

The smaller classes and four-day schedules each week make it possible for teachers to be available to students for tutoring and discussions after school. The weekly meetings for teachers are a source of support to them. Teachers

and students are allied more closely than is the case in some public high schools, in that teachers want to teach and students are ready to learn. The staff is beginning to explore the various aspects of the early college concept more deeply. One School 4 high school teacher said, “Some of us visited Early Colleges in New York. We learned a lot about the recruiting aspect.”

Barriers

There is no professional development for college faculty members and little professional development specific to the early college program for high school staff. High school staff members have to fulfill multiple roles because the program is small; they may not receive enough professional development to fulfill all those roles to the optimum degree. “We get a lot of professional development in staff meetings through the conversations and topics we discuss,” one teacher commented.

Parent Support

Parents generally are positive about the school. School 4 faculty members say that the parent group is very supportive. Parents state that School 4 is a welcoming and healthy environment in which their children flourish due in part to the high expectation of the teachers. Parents sometimes need coaching by the social worker to allow their child time that is free of chores and child care to complete homework, but most parents provide that once they understand it is needed. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is very active and parents’ voices are heard there. The information board outside the school posts current PTO events. Many parents attend PTO meetings, and many e-mail and telephone the high school teachers when they have concerns. The high school teachers seem comfortable with receiving e-mails and telephone calls from parents.

Parents receive report cards through the mail and follow-up telephone calls to ensure that report cards have been received. Each student’s advisory teacher telephones the parents to see if there is anything about the report card that needs to be discussed. Progress reports are provided for the high school classes, but not for the college classes. Students and their parents are advised about drop dates so that potential failing grades do not affect their GPA. This notification is important because if a student fails a class, the grade will count double if it is a dual-credit class.

Parents of new students go through an orientation process in which they meet all of the staff and learn about all the courses being offered. All parents receive at least one e-mail a week telling them what is going on at the school. There is a Yahoo group listserv for students, parents, staff, and faculty so that students can explore topics outside of the high school environment. The principal also hosts brown-bag lunches to which parents are invited. Open houses and other school activities also involve parents.

Parents expect their children to attend and succeed in college. They have considerable input into how School 4 operates. They want to keep a close eye on the school because it is new, and they monitor the program closely. They want to save the expense of two years of college as well as give the students more time to mature before they enter a university. Parents learn about the program in several ways: flyers from the district, friends of their children, friends who teach in the MC/EC program at the high school, and counselors.

School 4 seems to have met parents' expectations. One parent thought the program had changed her son for the better, and he has become not only more academically focused, but more sociable and confident. Parents say that there are many students like him who probably would perform adequately in a traditional high school, but have blossomed in this program. Other students possibly would have dropped out if they had not been in the program. Some parents said that their students were already college-bound and that the program helped them lead and get ahead. Other parents said that their children might have gotten into trouble, but the program helped them refocus their priorities. Parents say that most of the teachers in the program are very dedicated and want to help the students succeed. They say that the principal is very approachable.

Some parents said that they have always communicated high expectations to their children, and told them that the goal was for them to go to college. Parents chose the program because they said it was the "right way to go" for their children. They like the fact that prospective students shadow a current student during the application process, so that they understand how the school works before they enroll. Parents want their children to get out of college without a lot of debt and to find a college or university that is well suited to their son or daughter. They say that the program helps students become aware of higher education options. A counselor helps the individual student make the

decision to stay for either four or five years, depending on how much college credit the student wishes to accrue.

Parents said that the program opens doors for students. It gives students exposure to different kinds of people. When students complete high school and enroll in college, they will have had some college experience already. The program builds confidence because it focuses on early success and is seen as an overall maturing experience for the student.

Some parents would like to see college courses offered earlier in the high school years, and they say that the coordination between high school and college courses could be better. They like the high school's block scheduling as they say it reduces stress and teaches students how to plan.

Facilitators

Parents state that School 4 is a welcoming and healthy environment in which their students have flourished. They prefer the small community offered by the school as opposed to a large high school setting in which their child could be "lost." This probably provides an incentive for parental participation. Parents receive report cards and follow-up telephone calls to ensure that report cards have been received, so there is a concerted effort to keep parents informed about students' academic progress. There is a special orientation process for parents of new students to introduce them to all aspects of the program. Parents receive at least one e-mail a week telling them about events at the school. There is a Yahoo group listserv in which parents participate, and they have brown bag lunches with the principal. One parent said, "Once a student gets 20 hours of (college) credit, they start to think of themselves as college students and believe they can do it."

Barriers

Some parents want college courses offered earlier in the high school years. They also wish they could talk directly with college professors about their son or daughter's academic progress, but FERPA requirements mean that professors can not communicate directly with parents.

"It is like sending your student off to college – you don't get progress reports or communicate with college faculty," one parent reported.

Counselor Support

School 4's counseling staff consists of a full-time and half-time guidance counselor and a contracted social

worker/licensed therapist. The school started with one guidance counselor when the former principal realized the need for a social worker. The number of students enrolled was small, and the staff got to know the students well, which also meant knowing about personal circumstances that could sometimes affect their school performance. After having other staff spend a great deal of time on these issues, the former principal employed a licensed social worker to address students' emotional, social and family matters. This year she is on-site two days a week instead of the four she had previously worked because the funding for her position has decreased. Her services are essential, as having someone to take care of students' needs outside of the classroom means that high school teachers and college professors can concentrate on academics.

There is great demand for the social worker's counseling services. She sees students all day on an as-needed basis and says she has to leave campus for lunch or she would never get a break. Sometimes a female student will bring in a boyfriend if the boyfriend is having problems at home. The social worker meets with students and sometimes includes parents to resolve familial issues. She coaches parents to allow time and space for the student to complete homework, free of demands to do chores, and take care of younger siblings at home. Both parents and teachers are aware of the need for confidentiality in the social worker's discussions with students and how that differs from the role of a teacher. She works with students on friendship problems, which can potentially take energy away from academics. She also meets with students whose grades are falling to explore reasons for the decline. She makes referrals as needed to outside nonprofit organizations, especially with cases of suicidal ideation, which must be reported to District 3. Once she deals with students' social and emotional needs, she works with them on goal setting and addressing academic and future career goals. She collaborates with the guidance counselors frequently and regularly. She also attends "Fish Camp," a week-long orientation for new students, to meet them and explain her role to them.

There is a guidance counselor and another half-time counselor who work with IGPs and registration for the college. The guidance counselors help struggling students to get tutors and encourage these students to consult with their teachers. A retired staff member from a private university who worked in the Admissions office was paid as

a consultant last year. This year, however, there are no funds to pay him so he is volunteering. He is very knowledgeable about all the colleges and universities in the country.

Students appreciate the availability of counselors. They say that in bigger schools, "you fill out a form to see the counselor, and you might get a call a few weeks later."

Facilitators

Having the social worker on-site allows the principal and teachers to concentrate on curriculum and instruction. Students have an avenue for meeting family, emotional and social needs that may otherwise interfere with academics. Because these services are being provided to students, the social worker said, "I see choices and family patterns changing."

Barriers

Some staff members indicated the need for the social worker to be on campus more than two days per week as students have needs in other areas besides academics, but that would require more funding. "I have had to cut back to two days a week until the school can straighten out budget issues," the social worker said.

Summary

The School 4 Early College High School is an optimum size to balance a wide variety of courses and ability to give individualized attention to the students. While it needs more funding for classroom space, counseling services, and SAT preparation classes, School 4 staff is able to prepare the students thoroughly for college classes and take rapid action if students are failing any subject. Students mature by doing college-level work and being with college students. School 4 has an excellent technology program. Collaboration between high school staff and college faculty is frequent. Parents are very much involved with the program through the PTO, e-mails from the school, and brown bag lunches. School 4 students receive academic counseling as part of their participation in the program and timely personal counseling upon request.

School 6

Introduction

Through a partnership between the Communities Foundation of Texas, the university, District 7, District 5, and District 6, an early college high school program was created that served these three school districts. This particular case study describes these efforts as they pertain specifically to District 5.

The foundation of School 6 was laid in 2004. Since then, three cohorts of students have been enrolled. Currently, there are approximately 300 students in the program with about 100 students in each cohort. The program has the goal of creating a more personalized high school environment in which students' individual needs are addressed within a rigorous and challenging academic program. The program targets: (1) students who lack the academic foundation needed to meet high school standards; (2) students who are ranked outside the top 10% of their class; (3) students from families for whom the cost of college is a hardship; (4) students who are from demographic groups that are traditionally underserved and under represented in higher education; and/or (5) students who must balance school, work, and family obligations.

General Information

The city mayor had created an initiative, a planned urban and economic development effort designed to enhance the city's south side in anticipation of a large manufacturing plant planned for that area. The district's program was created to support that initiative. With the anticipation that this area would be growing, the school wanted to create opportunities for the students to be successful in college.

In collaboration with a university, District 5 applied for a Woodrow Wilson grant prior to 2004 to conduct a feasibility study of MC/EC programs. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also contacted the university's president, who then contacted the university's provost and K-16 Initiatives Office. District 5 officials spent almost two years planning for the MC/EC High School Expansion Grant with their counterparts from District 6 and District 7, as well as officials from the university. Prior to the TEA grant, the

university offered a dual credit/concurrent enrollment³ program. Although some students from an area high school attended the university and received college credit, the university did not have an arrangement with District 5 at that time.

All of these efforts led to School 6's MC/EC grant proposal to TEA. The grant period began when School 6 had a cohort of ninth- and 10th-grade students. Because this particular effort involved three school districts working with the university, program implementation required some coordinated effort. For instance, School 6 staff tried to align its student selection process with the processes used at the other two high schools. Also, the partnership between the three districts was a factor in how the program was designed. The basic Gates Foundation model removes students from their regular high school and places them in what is essentially a magnet program near the university. According to the university coordinator, the three high schools did not want to structure the program in that manner.

Furthermore, many governance structures that include representatives from all partner organizations have been built into the program in order to ensure that solutions work for all parties. The Policy Council – which consists of the superintendents, curriculum directors, principals, counselors, parent representatives, MC/EC program liaison, and university representatives - meets monthly to deal with ongoing issues in the partnership. According to the grant, a Collaborative Council and an Advisory Council also exist.

The university received \$400,000 to support an MC/EC program for the three high schools, but staff stated in interviews that most universities that were awarded a similar funding amount were required to support only one high school. The university spends most of the \$400,000 in grant funds on student transportation to the university campus to take college classes.

Subsequently, School 6 received \$200,000 in additional grant funds from TEA that came from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through the Texas High School Project. The additional \$200,000 was used to set up two additional small "schools" (academies) at School 6 in order to offer other students the opportunity to participate in small learning communities.

³ Dual credit means the student receives both high school and college credit; concurrent enrollment means a high school student is enrolled in a college course for college credit only.

High School Program Description

The program is housed on the School 6 campus. Because it does not have a separate structure, program students take their high school classes in the building with other School 6 students.

Recruiting for the program begins in March of each year at the middle schools in the three districts. Program representatives and the university liaison make presentations to the middle school students and then meet with parents. These sessions are well attended by parents; a Spanish language translator is always present, and the presenters discuss how college works and how to apply to the program and to the university. An application packet is given to interested students and parents. Eighth-grade students may then apply for the program. They complete an application, which includes an essay and two teacher recommendations. The top 10% of the class is not eligible to apply, and there is a cap of 100 students in each cohort, in accordance with Gates Foundation requirements.

A wide variety of students attend School 6's MC/EC program. Some students and parents at the high school think that it is a type of gifted program. "They (other students) think we have the best students," a teacher reported. "We don't have discipline problems, but our students are not any different than the others. That is probably due to smaller class sizes and the high expectations."

Initially, School 6's program was relatively unknown. However, as other School 6 students learned about the program's benefits, school officials began to discuss how to expand the concept of smaller learning communities throughout the school. This year School 6 has used the Gates Foundation funds to establish two other smaller learning communities, Science, Technology, and Business Management (STBM) and Leadership, Public Service, and Communication (LPSC). Starting in spring 2006, incoming eighth-grade students now take a career inventory, and the two additional learning communities are constituted by the inventory results. All current students at School 6 except the seniors are part of one of these learning communities or the MC/EC program.

Some students are admitted to the program and then decide that they want to leave because the program is too challenging. Because school officials anticipated that this situation might occur, the decision was made to accept 115 students this year. Due to the enrollment cap established by

the Gates Foundation, the program has smaller class sizes than the school's two learning communities. The program counselor encourages students to finish the year and always seeks parental input into the final decision about whether these students will transfer to another learning community. Interviewees indicated that the instructional rigor has been enhanced in the school's two learning communities so if a student transfers from the program to another community, they will not have easier course work. Program policy does not allow a student to drop out of the program once he/she is a junior.

The teachers do a great deal of project-based learning and hands-on activities. A teacher said that a visitor to classrooms, "...would feel the higher expectations. Students will be in the classroom, not in the hall. The classrooms are not quiet. We are learning, working in pairs, (and) asking questions. There are lots of small projects."

According to a teacher, students originally didn't see the application of AP classes to their future, only to their high school tenure. District administrators said that the focus of the program is on pre-AP and AP courses. This past summer was the first year that program students could take dual credit courses. In order to take dual credit courses, program students must also apply and be accepted to the university, make certain scores and maintain a high-enough GPA to be admitted. The university liaison created a matrix of classes that included high school graduation requirements and the 42 courses for the core in higher education. This effort resulted in a core curriculum matrix to determine where dual credit and concurrent enrollment could work together.

Presently, a U.S. History dual credit course is taught at the high school and the teacher uses the same textbook, calendar, and grading period as university faculty. Program students can take an online mathematics class or Business Computer Information Systems (BCIS) class, both of which are offered on the School 6 campus.

What dual credit courses the students take is still a difficult issue for program staff. School administrators noted that because three high schools are involved in this program, coordinating the time to offer a course is very difficult.

Strong support structures are built into the program. For instance, a teacher noted that mentoring students is an important part of the program since the core teachers share the same students for all their classes. Program advisory periods involve 25 students across the four core

teachers, and the teachers also collaborate about student progress. A teacher interviewed commented that the other campus learning communities are now starting to emulate this program. "We give constant recognition to our students. They are very personal awards. Now we see the other communities receiving staff development and the teachers are getting better at compromising."

Program students experience high expectations for appropriate behavior. An administrator offered this explanation about the high expectations. "Students really like the challenge, but they don't like missing out on some of the activities, such as pep rallies. They don't get excused absences from the college courses to attend an athletic tournament. They feel they are different because they are in {the MC/EC program}, but they really aren't different. They make mistakes like the other students, but we do get fewer behavior referrals from this group."

Students get more attention than they previously received, and the smaller class sizes are advantageous to the students. "The students like it that the teachers know them and their families and background. They are disadvantageous to the teachers in the learning communities who have larger class sizes as a result," a teacher said. "Smaller classes offer support as the program is required to limit the total number of students to 100, compared to 150-180 or so in other learning communities on campus."

Formal tutoring is offered two days during the school week and on Saturdays. There are four college tutors assigned to School 6, and they tutor ten hours a week, including in the BCIS class. Saturday tutoring, which provides university tutors for four hours of tutoring in each core subject area, is paid jointly from School 6 funds and university funds. All students can attend the Saturday tutoring. Tutoring is well attended, especially by juniors and seniors, and it is especially important for those students involved in distance learning.

The high school students go to a university campus for college classes two days a week, and they attend classes at School 6 during the other three days of the week. As a result, high school teachers often assist students with college classes as needed.

Facilitators

The creation of the program has raised the achievement bar for School 6 as a whole. The issue of equity was reviewed

after it began and teachers and administration realized that the school was not a "special place" for other students. This realization proved to be the impetus for creating the school's two other smaller learning communities. School staff reported, "As we began {the program} it was a very isolated group, but there was buzz among the other students so we began to expand the concept."

The ability to build relationships is also a strength of the program due to the smaller learning communities. The students believe that the teachers are like surrogate parents. The students come back to the teachers for help even after advancing to a higher grade level. They get more individual attention as a result of the program. The students also build strong relationships with other program students in School 6 and in the other two high schools.

Goal-setting with the students is ongoing in the program and is seen as very valuable. Attendance has improved over the last year, and SAT scores are reported to have increased. The program benefited when School 6 established the two other small learning communities. These two academies ensure that rigorous instruction is occurring throughout the school; therefore, students cannot opt out of the program in order to have less challenging coursework.

There is much more awareness of the program throughout School 6 this year. The staff is interested to see what the students do after graduation and how far they will progress in their college careers.

Getting free college credit also is a motivator for the program students. The university waives the students' fees and pays for their textbooks. The area community college does not offer a similar arrangement, so the high school currently picks up the costs for courses taken there.

Students in the program expect to be treated differently. They are, in fact, treated more like college students than high school students. Program staff says that student maturity significantly increases by the junior year, and that the first cohort has modeled the expected behavior for the next two cohorts.

Barriers

Some interviewees say that the program tries to do too much and should be more realistic about what it can achieve. Some interviewees say that they see more benefits to running the program as it was originally envisioned, as a small stand-alone high school located on a college campus.

There are still equity issues with the rest of the school.

The other two learning communities are considerably larger than this program; thus, their classes are larger as well. Even if a program staff member has an extra planning period, he or she cannot teach a class in one of the other academies due to the regulations of the grant.

Staff also expressed some uncertainty about the future of the program as nobody knows what the next steps are going to be, and program staff says that they are “always in a developmental phase.” There may be changes in the future in the structuring of the learning communities and the MC/EC program. Furthermore, the university would like to see more than 100 students per class enrolled in the program.

Program students find it difficult to coordinate their extracurricular activities with their coursework as these students tend to be involved in many extracurricular activities, such as band, football, and cheerleading. The program staff wants the students to be well rounded in extracurricular activities as well as in course work. Also, the difference in time frames for reporting high school and college grades is an issue for the state no-pass no-play requirement.

Scheduling did not go smoothly during the first year of the program as some students in the top 10% of the class were mistakenly admitted to the program. The program staff chose to keep those four or five students in the program. This issue has not arisen since then.

Additionally, when students struggle in a college class, it is a major problem for the high school since the students have to be taken out of the college class and placed in a regular high school class. Scheduling gets more complicated each year as the two academies, along with this program, expand into more grade levels. It becomes difficult to determine which students should go into which electives because of the way the schedule is structured. According to program administration, “We discussed what our teachers need to be teaching in each grade to prepare students for college courses – we have ninth and 10th grade to prepare them. What dual credit classes are they going to take? This is a very difficult issue to resolve.”

High school staff reported that, “We want to make the program as smooth as possible, not have chaos and be responding at the last minute to new information.”

College Program Description

The official partner is a local university and students are transported there for college classes. The university

president and provost are supportive of continuing to waive tuition and fees for the program students. There is a director of the program at the university. The director oversees the program on the university campus and serves as the liaison with the high schools.

Though an MOU with a local community college has not yet been officially approved, students can take courses at the college that will eventually transfer to the university.

The university has 100 slots for the program students. The students are taken to the university to attend classes two or three days each week. They are bussed to the university and they return to the high school after taking their college classes.

Most high school staff say that they do not want the high school students treated differently from the college students in any way with regard to instruction, class participation, and assessment. High school students are embedded in classes with college students. But one interviewee did express concern that some university faculty do not understand that the program students are “still children of sorts.”

Program students must also apply to the university in order to take coursework. Four types of admission into the university are available: (1) automatic; (2) by review (the university office is given the authority to admit the student even though a student did not quite meet all the criteria); (3) probationary (the student scored below the minimum necessary for admission in terms of the college admissions scores); and (4) provisional. If a student is admitted on probationary or provisional status, it means that the student has not yet met the Texas Success Initiative Standard, which uses the THEA, TAKS, ACT or SAT to indicate that the student is ready for college. If admitted on probationary or provisional status, a student has to meet additional requirements: (1) two letters of recommendation from teachers; (2) their parent(s) must meet with teachers at least twice per semester; (3) the student must maintain a 2.5 GPA; and (4) the student is allowed to take only six hours (probationary) or three hours (provisional) of college courses. These students are also enrolled in a THEA test preparation class.

The summer program is a critically important part of the School 6 program. Prior to ninth grade, entering program students attend a summer program at the university for two weeks. During this time they learn study skills and organizational skills. The director of the MC/

EC programs at the university incorporated the course Essential Study Skills for College. She tried to hire high school personnel first to build relationships between high school and college and to teach the study skills curriculum in the first week. In the second week of the second summer session, the program provided an introduction to courses the students will encounter in high school such as writing, using the scientific method, using graphing calculators, interpreting graphs and charts, and learning world geography. The students were divided into groups and assigned a teaching assistant (TA) who is with them from the time they arrive at the school until they get back on the bus. The director meets with all students each morning in an auditorium during the summer session to discuss the expectations of the program and rules and regulations and to review what they have learned.

The director gives the TAs a rubric to evaluate each student every day during the summer session. The students get a report card every week and a certification of completion at the end. They also received items such as lunch, tote bags, t-shirts, calculators, pens and pencils, and other supplies. The summer session has a required dress code of blue jeans with t-shirts – the program provided two t-shirts.

During the summer before the sophomore year, students attend another two-week program which is primarily focused on SAT preparation.

Prior to the junior year, students can take up to six college credit hours in a seven-week summer program. They have college IDs and access to the campus library. Last summer students took a freshman seminar and a Latino Cultural Awareness course with college students. The Latino Cultural Awareness course has a performance-based final during which students have to present what they learned to the class. They may choose to do posters, or perform, or do research. The students get six hours of college credit. The high school students reportedly enjoyed this experience and were very comfortable being on the college campus.

The program students in college courses are assessed in the same way as the college students, with a few minor exceptions. Students take online placement tests such as COMPASS and Accuplacer to assess college readiness. There is no other online testing either in the college or the high school classes. Students and parents receive report cards containing both high school and college grades.

Some issues have arisen in relationship to high school

students taking college courses, and the expectations of the university faculty for those courses. These issues have resulted in some policy changes in how credit is awarded. For instance, the BCIS course has five modules, all of which must be successfully completed to pass the course. There has been no averaging of the grades from each module, although this is changing. The failure rate for this course is very high both for university students and program students. The faculty member who teaches the BCIS course used to say that if the adult college students failed the course, they had to pay and take it again. The high school has now gained flexibility to average the module scores so students have a lessened chance of failing. School 6 students who fail the course will be withdrawn from the university and given another opportunity to pass at the high school. The BCIS course can also be taken online with a School 6 teacher monitoring the coursework.

Additionally, program students can take government, economics, and English classes at the high school and get dual credit for these courses through the community college, so there are some college courses for which students do not have to go to the university campus.

The program counselor encourages the students to think about their major and careers. Most students expect to go to college and continue their accrual of college credits. The program students will graduate from high school with a minimum of 24 college credits and a maximum of 60 college credits.

Facilitators

Many of the students seem to be on track for success as college students. They are receiving some college experience, and their maturity level appears to increase over time. They are aware of the choices that can affect their GPA, and they are thinking about their future. The program students are, for the most part, responsible students who ask for help when they are struggling. They do not want to fail and work hard to prevent failure. The program students seem to benefit from being on a college campus with the university students. Some students are already working toward vocational certificates so that when they graduate they will have not just a high school diploma but something that will help them with a career or vocation.

The consensus among those interviewed is that the program will improve over time. Next year there will be two

cohorts of students instead of one taking college courses. Academic achievement has been impressive even though all students are not where they need to be. Some of the college faculty members have said that there are program students whose work is at the standard of college sophomores. Ninety percent of the program students who went to the summer sessions are meeting the academic standards and passing the college courses, some with a 4.0 grade point average. While this grade average is for only one or two courses, these students are motivated by their early success.

The university has not had to alter or modify its curriculum for the high school students, aside from some minor adjustments related to test-taking. This facilitates the program as faculty members are more accepting of the high school students if they do not change or disrupt college instruction in any way. Every college course is conducted like a typical college class and has similar expectations for all students, including the high school students.

The summer sessions help to facilitate the program. Students enjoy and seem to benefit from being on the college campus full time as indicated by parents who spoke highly of the summer session before their child's junior year. The students took a humanities course called Latino Cultural Awareness as well as a freshman seminar. The students did presentations at the end of the seminar, and one professor taped a student's presentation because the professor wanted to use the presentation in a college class the following year. According to one parent, "The students were comfortable, almost too comfortable, on the college campus." Students say that being at the university during the summer is "very different from being there during the year, because they have more freedom as to how they spend their time. They learn that they can survive in college."

The university waives their fees and pays for textbooks, but the community college does not, so the high school currently picks up the costs for those courses. Officially the university is committed to four years of student cohorts, but unofficially they want to work with the high school in continuing to waive fees. In the future they want the program to apply across all schools/academies and not be limited to 100 students.

Barriers

There is some conflict between the rules as well as the culture of the university and the high school. For instance, program students sometimes have difficulty

in understanding a professor's approach to instruction, discipline, and academic freedom. For example, the professor might use profanity in class or post a note saying the class is cancelled and students should go to the library and work. Professors have been known to take students' cell phones away if they ring in class and leave them outside the classroom. This conflict also extends to differences between the postsecondary institution and the school district. For instance, high school officials do not want a student to be barred from taking classes at the university because he or she fails a course.

Transportation costs between college campuses (the university and the community college) and the distance from School 6 to the university downtown campus are barriers. According to staff, most students do not have their own transportation. The program provides transportation to the higher education institution as well as to home for students who attend after-school tutoring.

Lack of adequate funding was cited as a barrier by several interviewees. It is expensive to pay for all of the student lunches and to bus the students to both the university and the community college. Interviewees said that more money could fund additional student transportation, counselors and support staff for each of the smaller learning communities in order to provide additional individualized attention to the students.

Occasionally high school students have been disruptive in college classes. There have been a few incidents of high school students talking in college classes and distracting other students. When this happens, the professor communicates with the director of the program at the university. In her role as liaison between the university and the program, she then talks to the students about expectations of the college environment. The students have come a long way, but their maturity levels are occasionally an issue.

Communication and Collaboration

The director of the program meets regularly with the program teachers to discuss how the program works and what students will need to do to be prepared for the classes. Occasionally, university professors attend the meetings. The program is still working out what skills students need to be prepared for college courses. The program students do not match the maturity or academic level of college students, but the program teachers are

working hard to get the students ready. Some program staff say there needs to be more communication between high school teachers and college faculty so they have a better understanding of both programs. College faculty may not fully understand the objectives of the program.

The main communication issue between the high school and the university that was mentioned by interviewees is that situations seem to come up at the last minute, when they would be easier to solve if they could be anticipated and discussed in advance. For example, with regard to the admission of the students to the university, School 6 staff report that a registration deadline during the sophomore year was missed so a waiver was issued to let the students enroll for the summer session. In the fall when students needed to be fully enrolled, some needed additional testing. This was announced very suddenly so students had to be pulled out of classes to take the THEA. The cost of the THEA test is \$44, and the grant will pay for the first administration but parents have to pay if the student has to re-test.

The collaboration between the high school and the university benefits the students because it helps with closing the gap in achievement and helps retain students in college because they are better prepared. The college liaison stated that if the program officials target students earlier in their academic career (including elementary school), students will be more successful.

All communication from parents goes through the staff at the high school, specifically the counselor or a teacher. Sometimes the parents speak with the university's liaison. Communication between the parents and the college faculty is the same as at any other college in that the college professors do not talk to the parents because of FERPA.

Facilitators

Program teachers' common planning time was cited as one of the major accomplishments of the program. These planning times bring teachers from different content areas together to collaborate on closing student achievement gaps that may exist.

Collaboration between high school teachers and college faculty is reportedly good also. Program staff commented, "We feel that the college faculty is open to working with us. Even the department chairs have started to work with us. We do not want the expectation of college content or assessments lowered. The university professors are not open to modifying their instructional strategies."

Barriers

Some communication from the university would be better if it came sooner. For example, a registration deadline during the program students' sophomore year was missed, so a waiver was issued to let the students enroll for the summer session. In the fall semester, students needed to be fully enrolled at the university, which for some students involved additional testing. The THEA test is \$44, and the grant will pay for the first administration only.

Additionally, the college coordinator's office may not be familiar with all of the university's requirements. For instance, the mathematics department at the university has its own placement examination, which the high school found out about at the last minute.

Professional Development and Support

The assistant principal stated that this year she was involved more in the interview process for new program teachers than in previous years. She was specifically looking for experienced AP and pre-AP teachers who are dedicated to teaching. When the high school only offered the program as the school's smaller learning community that was specialized, it was thought that the best teachers taught program students. Since then, administrators have made efforts to get high quality teachers in the other learning communities as well.

Program teachers are provided professional development on use of the planning time they have been given as a result of the program. All School 6 staff participates in staff development focused on teaching in small schools. These sessions included consultants who presented on topics such as Small Learning Communities, Critical Friends, and cross-curricular teaching. There has also been staff development on Thinking Maps, Capturing Kids' Hearts, and Agile Mind. Staff also has learned about increasing the rigor and relevance of the curriculum, team leadership, AP strategies, and content-based training.

Teachers noted that so much staff development has been provided that it can be challenging for teachers to use everything they learn. Teachers also receive training on what is needed to prepare students for college.

Facilitators

The professional development offered to the high school teachers has been a facilitator of the school's success. All School 6 teachers benefit from professional

staff development given on behalf of the program. Teachers are well informed about teaching in an MC/EC program and about many curricula and school reform programs. The team teaching aspect in the program is seen as very advantageous because it allows teachers to collaborate with other teachers regularly and frequently. "I think it is the planning period that the teachers in {the program} have. It brought teachers from different content areas together to collaborate. This program has raised the bar for the whole school. The relationships built between the teachers and students are a real strength due to the smaller learning communities."

Barriers

A disadvantage to teachers' feeling professionally supported is a misconception that non-program students and parents have. They think that the program is comprised of the best students, but this is not the case. The students are no different from other students and are in the middle tier of their class. Lack of discipline problems is probably related to smaller class sizes and high expectations, but others still think that the students in the program get more advantages than other students. There is some truth to this in that the class sizes are smaller. Other than that, program students are described as "typical teenagers."

There is so much staff development that in the words of one teacher, "I didn't have time to implement what I had learned."

There may be a need for university faculty to have professional development on the needs/characteristics of high school students and pedagogical strategies that would be helpful to them. Such professional development would likely assist other college students who, though older, may have similar learning needs and styles.

Parent Support

Parental involvement is high, and overall parents are supportive of the program. Many parents appear to love the program, saying that their child is getting a good education. Parents describe the program as a close-knit community that is beneficial to the students. They credit the program with maturing the students, broadening their horizons, and improving their study skills.

Many parents meet once a month with their students and program staff. The liaison from the university usually attends these meetings.

Parents of the program students are a little more

demanding of both their children and the school, especially if the students are struggling or making a C when they have made all A's in the past. The principal and the assistant principal believe that parental demands, along with additional programmatic testing requirements, put a lot of pressure on the students. Still it is better for the students to struggle with college demands now, when it does not cost parents any tuition, than later when students are out of high school and paying for their post-secondary education.

All parents want the best for their children, but there is a great deal of diversity in what the parents understand about the requirements and rigor of the program. Students often pass or fail depending on how well the parents support homework completion.

Parents say that in the program, the students are very focused on academics. One parent said his son accesses the university website often to get ideas about careers. Some of the parents are realistic in that they say that if the student gets the work done, he/she will receive college credit. Other parents are unrealistic and say that if the student does not do the work, it is up to the high school teacher or college faculty member to make it happen. One teacher said that some parents do not understand that the student will get no dual credit if the student does not pass his/her classes for high school graduation.

Some parents want their children to get the 60 hours of college credit for economic reasons. Some parents said that graduation from high school with as many college credits as possible was the main goal. They are working with their children to find the right college for higher education later and will visit some college campuses in the spring.

During interviews, parents said they were told that students could successfully participate in extracurricular activities and meet the demands of the program; however, some students are being stretched as far as time commitments necessary to participate in the program and extracurricular activities. Students have to pick and choose, which does not please some of the parents. On the other hand, one parent interviewed shared the following, "We were told this would not interfere with any of the extracurricular activities and they have found a way to make it work, but it does interfere to some extent. My son goes to math twice a week and band three times a week, but I think this is good for him."

There was also an expectation that laptop computers would be issued to students, and that has not happened;

some program staff members are not sure where that expectation originated. They also are concerned because promises have been made to the parents and students, and they are concerned about how to deliver on those promises once the grant is over. Generally, parents look for students to be acclimated to college as well as high school.

Parents are aware of the video conference for mathematics instruction and say that it has gone well because it gets students used to learning that way, but that there have been a few technological glitches. They say one of the major obstacles to doing more with the program is lack of money.

Facilitators

Parents say that their students are getting a good education which facilitates parents' motivation to support the program. They appreciate the opportunity their children have to accrue up to 60 free college credits. Communication with parents is frequent and seems satisfactory. One parent stated, "We have meetings once a month for all the parents and students. We go over things that are going on currently, and there is usually a representative from the university there. They will give us a heads up as to what is to come." A parent said that "the [program] teachers are fabulous and very dedicated. My son was bored in middle school but I have never heard him say that since ninth grade."

The parent conferences are reportedly better than they have been in previous years, with all four collaborating core teachers participating in these conferences. Two teachers "looped up" with their students from ninth to 10th grade, so they knew the students well and the students, in turn, knew their expectations.

Barriers

There is some disparity among parents regarding how much they understand the program and how realistic their expectations are. More communication with parents may be needed to resolve these issues. Parents also have concerns with the fact that college professors do not talk with them directly about the students due to FERPA issues. This is especially true for parents who have never been to college themselves. A liaison at the high school is in constant communication with the college and parents, but parents wish that they could be in direct contact with the professors at times "since the students are minors."

The FERPA issue was a common complaint in most of the MC/EC programs.

Some parents think that the school promised the students laptop computers, which has not happened. Parents also said that they "were told that the program would not interfere with extracurricular activities, but...it does interfere to some extent."

Counselor Support

One counselor is dedicated to working solely with the program students. Her role is varied. She schedules students at the beginning of the school year. This took a great deal of time as this was the first year that program students were eligible to enroll in college courses. What they can take depends on whether their admission status is automatic, by review, provisional, or probationary. At the end of the first nine weeks, she works with the students who have failed a course. She counsels the freshmen who fail and advises them about credit recovery. She is also in charge of their testing.

The counselor has to know every student and his/her transcript. She helps students with their IGP. The counselor helps students to monitor their credits to see that they are on track for their IGP. All students who enter the program are expected to complete the Recommended High School Program, but the counselor and other program staff push program students to complete the Distinguished Achievement Program.

Facilitators

Partly due to the counselor's work with students, college credit accrual and each student's course load are carefully monitored so students stay on track to graduate with a diploma and as many college credits as possible. The counselor said that student attendance at tutoring is emphasized and that the students "are surprisingly good at attending, especially the juniors and seniors."

Barriers

The counselor said that a timeline showing important dates at the university should be provided to the high school. The counselor as well as others mentioned how difficult it was to receive last-minute communications from the university and how this made it challenging for students to comply with college requirements. Coordinating high school and college classes can be a challenge. For instance, many students who are now eligible to take

college courses can take speech and health classes at the university. Unfortunately, many of the students have already taken those courses as high school freshmen or sophomores. This issue is expected to disappear with time. The program counselor added, "Next year with two cohorts in college, it will be even more difficult to keep up with the schedule. We have 85 to 89 students in the program taking college courses, and we will double that next year."

Summary

School 6's program differs from similar programs in that it was established as a partnership with two other high schools as well as a postsecondary institution. The School 6 program does not have its own building but is housed on the School 6 campus. The program began as a way to get more students into higher education following high school graduation. The program students face more financial, work, and family challenges than most high school students do. Some say that the program is overly ambitious as it encourages its program students to be involved in many high school extracurricular activities along with taking both high school and college courses.

School 6 now has two other small learning communities that coexist with the program and that also have a rigorous curriculum. Professional development is extensive. Student-teacher relationships are strong in the program, and students are guided by staff to set and achieve goals. The program faces challenges caused by scheduling, timelines for grade reporting, and communication constraints. Transportation between School 6 and the university and community college campuses is costly. Despite challenges, program staff and parents say that they see the students' maturity level increase as a result of the program, and the program has raised standards across the high school.

School 9 Introduction

School 9 is located on the local campus of a large state university. The program began in 1994 as a way of reducing the 40-50% dropout rate of students in two surrounding school districts, which are both K-8 districts. The school serves 158 students from the two districts as well as transfer students from other area school districts. More than half of the school's students are listed as

economically disadvantaged by the state. School 9 has 38 juniors and 34 seniors who are taking college classes. There is an application process for transfer students coming from schools other than those in the two districts. Transfer students must sign a contract that they will meet requirements such as attendance and transportation. School 9 officials describe the school as a year-round program with a foundation in self-paced curriculum and authentic assessment.

General Information

The principal and the former superintendents of the two districts collaborated to write the MC/EC proposal to expand the program so that students could take more college coursework and have their tuition paid. Additionally, grant funds have been used to purchase laptop computers, accessories, and books. The principal was given the responsibility of organizing and structuring the effort to establish the program. The official higher education partner is a local college although School 9 also has a relationship with the local university campus. The partnership with the college is of ten years' duration and is reported to have been strong since its formation.

In the beginning the emphasis was on technology preparation and "articulated classes," which were classes that students took at their high school but met the same criteria as entry-level community college classes. Now that the initial objective of getting more students to graduate from high school has been met, the goals have changed in that there is an increased emphasis on completing dual credit courses and helping students graduate with college credits. One objective is for students to take specific dual credit classes that will transfer and apply to their college degree plan.

The main goal of the program is that it be student-centered. In the last two years the school has increased the number of students taking college courses as well as the number of college courses taken. School 9 has experienced an increase in students graduating with almost two years of college credit and going on to four-year colleges and universities. The program also has increasing numbers of students taking online courses. Early on, the number of university courses a student could take was limited, but a student could take an unlimited number of courses at the college. There are now no limits at either higher education institution.

The enrollment limit at School 9 is 200 students. The colleges do not limit the number of high school students who can enroll in a given course. School 9 students can now take any college course that applies to their degree plan. Students who have historically struggled with academics have gone on to graduate from high school under the distinguished achievement program (DAP) and continued on to college.

High School Program Description

The program is publicized by the high school counselor who goes to the nearby middle schools in various school districts and speaks to the eighth-grade students. There is also a pamphlet about the program and information on the School 9 website. Students apply to get into School 9 beginning in January or February of their eighth-grade year. The school receives more applications than there are ninth-grade openings, so a committee reviews the applications, which include the student's grades, letters of recommendation, and other information. There is also an interview with applicants and their parents. Students are notified of acceptance by the end of March or early April. The program admits all types of students, including those in special education or gifted/talented programs.

High school classroom activities are flexible. In some classrooms students work at different paces, while other classes are more structured. The individual pacing makes the program work well. Health science classes often involve project-based learning. Additionally, the school has created alternative methods of grading to help students stay on track. For instance, if a student fails Algebra I because of poor grades in three course units at the end of the year, the student only needs to retake the three units the following year instead of taking the whole class again.

A reading specialist at the school determines all of the students' reading levels to be sure teachers are supplying each student with the appropriate grade-level reading materials. Smaller classes and few discipline problems were the main advantages of teaching in the program, as reported by teachers.

There are consequences for the high school students if they do not do their work. There is an advanced studies director who keeps track of each student's work. All students follow the high school curriculum. There is a great deal of individual attention provided by the high school and students can progress at their own level. The high school

purchased Curriculum Collaborative through their Regional Education Service Center, so that students who transfer from another district within the state will be exposed to the same scope and sequence of the TEKS.

Classes at the high school range from two to 20 students in size. Not all students at the high school take college courses. The counselor maps out courses for each student based on the student's goals. The Advanced Studies students get a map based on what they want to study after high school graduation. A welding program for students who are interested in that career is offered in a neighboring district; interested students receive transportation to take courses in this program. The school supports both vocational and academic tracks, and students have the opportunity to job-shadow adults in the community.

The school also sponsors many clubs that provide community service opportunities for the students. There are UIL opportunities, student council, business clubs, and some sports. Since student enrollment at School 9 is limited, everyone has to be involved for the clubs to work. Football and cheerleading are not offered and funds are not spent on these types of extracurricular activities.

Students say that the opportunity to take college-level classes is one of the benefits of the program. Interest in college courses and credits is high, and information is provided to students about possible future careers. The nurturing atmosphere of the school was mentioned as another benefit, along with the small classes, self-paced learning, and the individual attention given to each student. Students who have graduated often return to the high school to talk to their teachers, which illustrates their attachment to the school.

Students receive both high school and college grades. Both the students and parents are learning the difference between the high school and college instructional environments. The high school Director of Advanced Services said that there is a need to better monitor the progress of the students in the college classes. Any tests or other assessment instruments used are the same for the high school and college students.

While the college and the high school both issue mid-term grades, parents have to be informed that the college mid-term grade will not necessarily be indicative of the final grade. Parents receive a progress report for students failing after three weeks of class; at six weeks parents get to review all of their student's work. Parents can request an

appointment with a particular teacher after reviewing the work. If a student is caught up in one class and behind in another, the student can attend the class in which he/she needs to catch up if the teacher gives permission.

There is a College Placement Committee that is directly involved in the program. Students must go through the committee process before they can enroll in college courses. The committee will examine all of the information about a student—his/her current course load, GPA, and extracurricular activities—and then will encourage the student to take more or fewer college courses depending on the overall view of the student’s activities and responsibilities. Five to seven teachers serve on the committee. The committee tries to put each student in an environment where he/she can succeed, and if the committee members are not comfortable with a student’s work ethic, they will not recommend that student for college courses.

School 9 also offers computer and information technology classes, and students at the school serve as the information technology department for District 8. They build computers and install applications. There is an Entrepreneurship program and a class called Entrée that works with a company called Pride Computers. These students take non-functioning computers apart, identify the problem, put them back together and boot the operating systems to get everything working. The students run the wiring for the computers at a local K-8 school. Everyone can take this class whether or not they are on the associate’s degree track. There also is a mandatory Internet orientation for students who want to take online courses.

The high school runs Study Island, a computer program that provides preparation for TAKS testing. There is also individual tutoring if needed. High school coursework is monitored weekly, with close supervision of class work and homework. Many students taking college courses get academic support from their high school teachers. The mathematics teacher might tutor a student taking a college mathematics class, either online or on campus. Teachers know which students are struggling academically and encourage the student to work more on mathematics, for example, if that is a class where the student is having difficulty. Students are put on probation on a weekly basis if their grades are low; if a student stays on probation for two weeks, he/she loses the privilege of being in extracurricular activities until the grades improve.

Sometimes students take Accuplacer, an online college placement test, and do not score high enough to start college courses. The program staff finds ways to help those students so they will not have to wait and take remedial courses at the college. Currently, School 9 does not pay for remedial courses as the college does not want too many students in those courses.

Between 80% and 90% of School 9’s students go on to some type of higher education following graduation. In every class there have been students who are the first in their family to go to college.

Facilitators

Small class size is a major advantage at School 9. All students have the chance to feel supported. Some students might not seek support because they are shy, but teachers are expected to reach out to them and give them individual attention. The school environment is quiet and orderly. The principal, who came from a Class 4-A district, sees no disadvantages to the program. School representatives are invited to other districts and states to talk about how to set up a MC/EC program.

There is a reading specialist on campus who has ascertained the students’ reading abilities to be sure they receive the appropriate level of reading materials. This practice is believed to facilitate instruction.

The program staff tries to meet the needs of every student. They try to be resourceful and do whatever it takes. Balanced with that service are high expectations. As one educator said, “This school does not have the behavioral problems other schools have. We have zero tolerance and high expectations that keep students busy and out of trouble. A student transfer can be revoked if there are discipline issues.”

Barriers

School 9 has what is described as an expensive, but cost-effective program. There is a desire for more funding for items the program still lacks. For example, the principal makes announcements in the courtyard because there is no public address system. Having more staff, an assistant principal and an aide to the Director of Advanced Services were also mentioned as being on the school’s wish list.

It would be beneficial to tell eighth-grade students more about the program so that they are thinking about ACT preparation and career planning, and what they need

to do to plan for post-secondary education, even before they get to high school. The program needs more space and the district officials have discussed building a new high school near this one and close to the university to allow for more classrooms. Administrators say that if that happens, the proximity of the high school and the existing K-8 school would make it easier to push expectations of college attendance down to the lower grades and align the curriculum from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Because the program is small, School 9 offers AP Biology one year and AP Chemistry the next. It cannot offer them concurrently because there are not enough students who will enroll in these classes. The staff overcomes this situation to some extent by having online college courses available, but most students want to go to the campus to take college courses. Some interviewees said that it would be good to offer more post-secondary courses, especially for career preparation. Additional vocational courses beyond the welding and building trade courses currently offered also would be beneficial, but additional resources would be needed. According to the principal, "Transportation, finding drivers and paying for the cost of gas, for example, to take students to a nearby district to attend vocational courses, are ongoing issues." The principal also stated that "it would be good to offer more courses, not only academic but career preparation - besides welding and building trades, which is something I pursued on behalf of one student who was very blunt in saying he would never go to college for an academic degree. The students are driven to the nearby district for these courses."

College Program Description

The current program partners are the college and the university. Students take classes at both institutions, and all School 9 students eat lunch in the university cafeteria with supervision from School 9 teachers. Students attending classes at the university walk across the street, while students attending classes at the college are provided transportation by the high school to the college campus. If a sophomore has a high enough SAT or ACT score, he/she can take college classes at either campus. Usually the School 9 students take two college classes per semester. The college will create a class (for example, U.S. History) if the high school has enough students who want to take it at a certain time. There are an increasing number of students taking college courses and an

increasing number of college courses being taken overall. Students take college courses in accordance with their degree plans, which are continually monitored by School 9 staff to ensure these plans are being followed. Grant funds are used for college tuition.

Students work with the Director of Advanced Services who guides them with regard to the College Placement Committee, the college tests such as Accuplacer, scheduling issues, and other matters. When they begin high school, School 9 students receive a photo ID that allows them access to the university building. Once students are enrolled at School 9, their progress in college courses is monitored, and any concerns are dealt with quickly. About 35 students per semester are enrolled at the college in a variety of classes. The high school students do not mingle with the college students, and the high school teachers monitor this. The opportunities to take college courses were described as operating "like a reverse funnel." The students who were in the program early on had to choose among a fairly narrow range of courses, but now the selection of courses is much wider.

The college faculty members have not had to modify curriculum in any way for the high school students, and the high school staff said that high school students easily blend in with the college students. Students tend to do better in the college environment than they do taking college courses in a high school environment. This is true not only academically, but also in their social skills and study habits.

The high school students in the college courses are assessed no differently than the college students. A college faculty member contacts the high school liaison directly if a School 9 student is failing, but other than that, college faculty makes no assessment or instructional changes. Students at the high school can log onto the college website and access their grades and course information for all of their dual credit enrollment classes.

Most of the time the college students do not know there are high school students in the class. The professors do not single out the high school students in any way. As the community is small, many of the college students know the high school students. School 9 students can sometimes be identified on the college campus because they may wear their school's colors, but in larger courses and online courses it is not easy to tell the difference and everyone seems to prefer it that way. School 9 students are expected to participate in class in the same way as the college students.

FERPA applies to all students at the college including high school students, so professors do not talk directly to parents about School 9 students' progress. FERPA regulations are being reviewed this year to determine what information can be shared with parents.

There are many safety nets in place to ensure that students at least get their high school diplomas. For example, students enroll in high school as well as college English, so that if they fail the college English course, they will still have the credits needed for high school graduation if they pass the high-school English class. If they do well in the college course, they can drop the high school course. The program staff said this policy is necessary to prevent students from failing to graduate because they are taking college-level courses. Following graduation this past year, many students went on to the local campus of the large university. Some went to other universities, or continued their studies at the college.

Facilitators

Students say that the free college classes are the greatest benefit of the program. They appreciate the fact that they can acquire employable skills, which provides a financial incentive for students who come from low-income households and also builds the student's self-esteem. The school has moved beyond the goal of getting 100 percent of students to graduate (the dropout rate was 1.9% last year according to the TEA) to a new goal of having all students graduate with college credits. Program staff said that some students graduate with many college credits, and many students graduate with some college credits. As only three or four students per year graduate without having college credits, School 9 is making progress toward this new goal.

According to the college coordinator, the collaboration benefits the college in that the college wants "to provide educational services to our service area and our community." School 9 is seen as facilitating that effort. Economically, School 9's program adds to the enrollment of the college and helps people in the community afford college. Students have the potential to have at least 24 credit hours by the time they graduate. A committee at School 9 examines a number of criteria such as student GPA and the maturity level of the student to assess how many college credit hours the student is capable of taking.

The high school gets data from the college about each

student's success in the courses. Overall, the students do as well as, or better than, the regular college students. Because there is a committee deciding what and how many college courses to recommend for a student to take, the student is usually prepared to succeed. College faculty concurs that the School 9 students are well prepared overall. School 9 staff works at focusing the students on academics. The quality of student writing has improved, and the amount of work the students do has increased. Staff members said that students achieve a broader world view than students at a regular high school. "Students tend to do better in the college environment than in the high school when they are taking college courses – not only academically but also in soft skills such as study habits and personal responsibility" said one teacher.

Barriers

School 9 is a year-round school, so when it adopts its calendar, the school staff looks at the university calendar and aligns with it as much as possible. Even so, it is not always easy for students to get the courses they need. Small enrollment size also limits the number of possible course offerings for School 9 students.

College faculty finds it somewhat troublesome to do interim grade reporting for the high school students, but the college is supporting efforts to help faculty accomplish that task. The high school staff lets the high school students know that the interim grade reporting may not affect the final grade at all, because the college grade is often based on another deliverable, such as a final research report.

It is sometimes a difficult adjustment to consider the different grade reporting time frames of the high school and colleges. A formal process for mid-semester reporting has been developed over time. This has been a learning process for both the higher education institutions and the high school.

Another barrier has been created by some educators from the nearby public school systems. They were described as "territorial" and were reported as saying that the college courses were not sufficient to displace high school courses.

The school also has to educate the parents about what is involved in students taking college courses. Parents want to deal personally with professors at times, but the professors usually will not talk with them directly because of FERPA, so parents must deal with professors through the high school liaison. Some parents object to having to work through the high school liaison.

Communication and Collaboration

The high school does not have a library, lunch room, or gymnasium, so the school uses the facilities at the university. The high school staff and students know which college professors are accepting, communicative, and easier to work with than others. The high school teachers and college faculty arrange dual-credit articulated classes that are aligned in terms of the syllabi and TEKS but there is little day-to-day communication between high school teachers and college faculty.

Communication between parents and college faculty members is almost always through the liaison and not directly with the college faculty. Student-led parent-teacher conferences feature the students' portfolios, including reflections on high school classes. Homeroom teachers invite parents for the conferences. Ninety percent of students and their parents participate in these conferences.

Facilitators

The student-led parent-teacher conferences seem to work very well. The school reportedly works very hard to be sure that parents can meet the contract requirement of attending parent-teacher conferences. All interviewees who mentioned the conferences did so positively.

As high school students and staff know which college professors are easiest to work with, the strength of these relationships probably facilitates instructional quality in School 9 students' college courses. Teachers stated that, "This is a very nurturing environment so it is a shock for students to go to a big university ... but it definitely prepares them better than if they didn't go across the street to [the university]."

Barriers

High school teachers do not communicate very much with college faculty. Both parties might benefit from more communication and collaboration. Interim grade reporting was mentioned as troublesome by the college representative; the college is supporting the faculty to facilitate the process.

There is need for ongoing education of parents as to responsibilities of both parents and students in taking college courses. Students have to be more self-motivated to succeed in college courses than they do in high school courses. Professors do not talk to parents, and parents need to understand that, and work with the college liaison to get information about their child's progress in college courses. There also seems to be a need for more outreach

to middle schools to prepare their students for School 9. Teachers stated that, "We want to push these concepts to the eighth-grade level so they are thinking about ACT preparation and career planning and what they need to do to plan for post-secondary education."

The program has also not received sufficient publicity or recognition. Parents said that the school has sold itself short because the community does not know about the good things going on there.

Professional Development and Support

Teachers are hired carefully because much is asked of them. Individualizing instruction and being available to support students requires a huge time commitment. High school teachers work closely with students to assist them with the content areas. For example, the mathematics teacher will tutor a student taking a college mathematics class. According to the principal, "Teachers are expected to encourage and expect every child to go to college, whether for a tech prep certificate or an academic degree."

Though those high expectations exist for teachers, there is not much professional development available specifically for middle college programs with strategies to help staff obtain those goals. There is professional development on gifted students, No Child Left Behind, and other topics relevant to high schools. Seamless Transition is offered in Austin. Program staff has presented at the Mid-Winter Conference in Austin and at higher education conferences. The school is part of the national Successful Practices network and also affiliated with a group from Dallas that is sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Facilitators

School 9 teachers have presented what they do at two professional conferences and have participated in professional development around topics related to high schools. The school's membership in the Successful Practices network facilitates the knowledge of best practices in teaching. The small size of the program makes it easy for most stakeholders to communicate with each other. Some interviewees said that most program activities were done on a fairly informal basis. The principal stated that, "We get it all, but we are small and so we can address the students' needs."

Barriers

Having little professional development specific to early

or middle college high schools is a developmental barrier to program staff. If there is specific professional development available related to middle colleges, the staff does not know about it. According to the principal, “This is one area where there is not much out there for middle college programs.”

Parent Support

Parent support is described as “active” and “excellent.” Parents believe that the school addresses the needs of their children. School 9 is considered an alternative to neighboring large high schools. Parents appreciate that the district provides transportation for the students to the college to take courses.

Parents as well as students are interviewed prior to students enrolling in the program, so parents know how they will be expected to support the student and the program. An orientation for new parents and students is offered during the first few days of school or just before school starts. Parents’ level of involvement in School 9’s programs varies. Parents contract with School 9 staff to attend four parent-teacher conferences per year, and around 90% of them do attend these meetings.

Parents receive high school grades and college grades on the student report card, and mid-term grades from the high school and from the college, if their child is enrolled there. Students check their grades online. The college will issue mid-term grades but parents have to be informed that this will not necessarily be indicative of the final grade. Both the students and parents are learning the difference between the high school and college instructional environments.

Parents expect the program to give their children the opportunity to earn free college credits. Many non-program parents do not know that School 9 has an MC/EC program. Some who are not involved call it the “smart school” and think it is a charter school. Parents say that the school is willing to let the students customize their education program. One parent stated that the district provided transportation to School 9 from the K–8 school for her daughter to take Algebra I there when she was in eighth grade. If a parent makes a convincing case for it, program staff will work with the parent to provide the program that he/she is seeking. Things are done on a somewhat informal basis because the town and program are small.

Parents expect a more personalized learning environment for their children, and this expectation appears

to have been met. They say the university’s College of Business faculty especially likes the high school students. The professors know who the high school students are and know them to be conscientious and motivated. Parents are involved in every decision School 9 makes, and students have a great deal of input into what they want to do with their lives from the time they enter School 9. Multiple extracurricular activities (with the exception of football, band, and cheerleading) are offered.

Early expectations for the school did not take into account the possibility of offering college courses because the program was still in negotiation and development. One parent had a counselor in a neighboring high school who tried to dissuade her child from entering School 9 because the counselor thought that the regular high school would provide a better education, but School 9 has met this parent’s expectations. Parents say that School 9 is a safer environment than the other high school because it does not have the behavioral problems the other high school has. Parents say that School 9 has zero tolerance for misbehavior, as well as high expectations that keep students busy and out of trouble. If there are discipline issues, a student can be dismissed from the program and sent back to the regular high school.

Parents expect that their children will go on to college, and that indeed occurs, as some students have already been accepted to college next year. Even if students map out their courses from their freshman to senior years, they still have an opportunity to change their goals after taking all the basic courses. Many students in the program were at risk for dropping out, so the program gives them an opportunity to learn that they have talents that they did not know they had. The school focuses on having a zero dropout rate.

There are students at School 9 who get college credit and who are not from families where college is an expectation. Some of these first-generation students earn an Associate’s degree while they are at School 9.

The motto of the school is “Is it good for the students?” Parents said that many public schools just want to push students through the academic program; at the end of the students’ senior year, those schools end up with students who do not know how to think well. At School 9, the students get some concept of the real world and how to think for themselves. That is what parents see as the big difference between School 9 and a regular high school.

Facilitators

The overall level of parent support is a facilitator to the program as a whole. It was described as both active and excellent. Parents seem pleased at how School 9 students acquire college credits and at the number of students who graduate and go on to college. This is an incentive for parental support of the program. Program staff interview parents as well as students prior to students enrolling in the program, and parents along with students attend orientation, so that parents learn how to support their children and the program.

Parents say the school is very committed to its students and to their success. This perception may facilitate parental involvement and support. One parent's comment was, "This school is student-centered. The teachers work on educating them for life, not just for getting out of high school."

Barriers

The program seems to be under-publicized to parents of high school students and the community. There are parents whose children are not in the program and who do not understand what the program is or does. One parent stated that the community does not know enough about the program. More communication to parents and community about the purposes and activities of the program might increase the overall level of support.

Counselor Support

The evaluators interviewed the Director of Advanced Services, who serves as a "counselor" to students. There is also a regular high school guidance counselor who was not interviewed.

School 9 students enrolled at the college have access to all of the campus and online counseling services. The Director of Advanced Services functions as the career counselor and helps students select their college courses in preparation for committee review. The student then presents a portfolio to the committee, which is comprised of teachers and college liaisons. The Director spends a lot of time monitoring where the students are physically located at any given time and managing them so that they stay on task. There is now a sign-in system to help locate students.

The Director of Advanced Services also serves as the TAKS testing coordinator. She also is responsible for checking the students' IGPs and the official transcripts to be sure students are meeting all graduation requirements. At the

time of the site visit, the Director was focused on registration for university courses. The Director receives the fee bills and pays them. This takes time as the high school students get a reduced rate for fees but not tuition, and the district pays the tuition and fees at both the university and the college.

There is a regular high-school guidance counselor who schedules ACT/SAT testing and also arranges visits from representatives of colleges. This counselor also handles IGPs. A few parents expressed concerns about the quality of advisement provided by the regular high school counselor.

Since the school has grown, it is taking more transfer students and this growth has resulted in the need for better processes. The Director of Advanced Services says the IGPs need to be better documented. The school has implemented a weekly probation that is a more stringent requirement than the state's no-pass no-play requirement. Students have learned to manipulate the school's probation so that if there is an athletic game in which the students do not care about playing, they will let their grades slide and take an extra week to get their work done. The Director said the rules should be stricter with more immediate consequences. She believes that some students are coming to School 9 unprepared for high school, including some who are reading at a very low grade level. She says that the program staff needs to know more about where students are academically when they arrive at the school, but it takes as much as three weeks for staff to determine each student's academic ability.

The Director also said that students and parents do not take enough responsibility to maintain the amount of effort needed to be successful in college, and that while 90% of students graduate, only 40% go on to college. (This figure does not match what other interviewees said.) In addition, she says that both students and parents need to do more to meet testing deadlines, and that in general there is some passivity and lack of goal orientation displayed by students and parents.

She tries to get university representatives to come to the school and provide information, but says that it is difficult. She cites the need for a test-preparation class and a full-time career-vocational counselor to produce more employable college graduates.

Facilitators

There is an Avance program held at the high school that helps to provide opportunities for parents to participate in GED programs held at the high school. The Director said

that this program helps to break the cycle of passivity and lack of orientation to higher education.

The growth of School 9's collaboration with the college and the university has required the development of new processes by counselors in order to ensure academic quality and individual attention for student needs. Staff report that, "Opportunities for students at this school to take higher education classes have expanded tremendously over the past two years — there have been increasing numbers of students and more successful integration of students into the college experience."

Barriers

According to the Director of Advanced Services, IGPs need to be better documented. More test preparation would be helpful, as would attention to the level of preparedness of students when they enter the program. She also stated that there was some passivity and lack of goal orientation among some students and parents. The Director, parents, and students might work together to find ways to facilitate more active participation. She finds it difficult to know where students are located throughout the day and spends a great deal of time monitoring their whereabouts. She also thinks rules about passing classes should be more strictly and immediately enforced as students sometimes work the system in their favor. According to the Director of Advanced Services, "It is understandable that the freshmen will be a little lost, but our juniors and seniors shouldn't be. If we are passing 100% of our students in their classes, why aren't they passing the TAKS on the first attempt?"

Summary

School 9 began as a way to reduce high dropout rates. Before School 9 began, the dropout rates in the two participating school districts were between 40-50%. School 9's official dropout rate, as listed by the TEA, is 1.9%. Most School 9 students now graduate with at least some college credits. They have a wide variety of college courses from which to choose. School 9 teachers prepare their students for college-level work and a committee assesses each student's level of preparedness before that student is permitted to enroll in college classes. There are issues with coordinating the high school and college calendars and schedules for grade reporting. The program needs funds for some additional items it lacks, such as a public address

system. The small size of the school (158 students) limits the number of high school courses that can be offered. Technology education is rigorous, with School 9 students serving as the information technology department for District 8. The student-led parent-teacher conferences are a unique feature of this program. Parents actively support the program and say that it helps the students to mature academically and socially.

One parent summed up the promise of School 9: "By the time my daughter is 21, she will have her Master's in accounting. If students map out their courses from their freshman to their senior year, they still have an opportunity to change their goals after taking all the basics." School 9's motto, "Is it good for students?" continues to guide decisions to make post-secondary education a reality for all of its students.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The overall goals of the MC/EC program are to provide an accelerated instead of remedial environment for educationally underserved students and to smooth the transition from secondary education to postsecondary education. The programs appear to be achieving those goals. This chapter will discuss conclusions from findings presented in the previous chapters.

Failure of some programs to file required interim financial and progress reports resulted in a limitation of the evaluation findings, as certain data were not available.

Another limitation concerns the differences in student identifier data reported by campuses in the summer of 2006 to TEA as compared to data filed with the PEIMS data collection system. At times districts did not submit student identification numbers to TEA, preventing merging of student program participation data with student demographic, course taking, and achievement data acquired from TEA. This limitation may introduce discrepancies in data reported from different sources.

Description of Students

Middle College/Early College (MC/EC) Expansion Grant funds were intended for schools targeting educationally underserved, at risk, economically disadvantaged students. A large majority (65.9%) of program students are Hispanic, compared to the population of the state, in which 45.3% of students are Hispanic. Slightly fewer program students (10.6%) are African American, compared to 14.7% of the student population of the state. Only 20.9% of program students are white, compared to 36.5% in the state. Program students are largely economically disadvantaged (57.4%) compared to 55.6% of students in the state. 47% of participating students

were listed as at risk of dropping out of school.

About half of the students surveyed see themselves as very similar to their peers as far as time spent on homework, academic, and non-academic activities. The students were most likely to view themselves as different from peers in the amount of time spent on paid work. Over half of students said they spend less time working for pay than their peers.

Students reported that they most often heard about the MC/EC program from a counselor or teacher. However, when making the decision to attend a program school, parents and self were the most common influence. Students also reported that most of the people close to them, including parents, closest relatives, teachers, and to a lesser extent friends, think that the most important thing for them to do right after high school is attend college. Students in the program receive advice and support from a variety of sources.

Schools are following the grant requirement of recruiting at-risk, underrepresented, economically disadvantaged students.

- Seventy-seven percent of students come from minority ethnic groups.
- Fifty-seven percent of students are economically disadvantaged.
- Forty-seven percent of students are at risk of dropping out of school.
- Students view themselves as very similar to peers except in the area of time spent working for pay.
- While students learn about the programs from high school teachers and counselors, the decision to attend is most heavily dependent on family and self.
- Students have strong support from friends and family to attend college.

Program Implementation

In general, schools are following the grant requirement to have Individual Graduation Plans (IGPs) in place for all students. Some of the large, comprehensive high schools report difficulties ensuring that all students, not just program students, have an IGP. Whether or not the intent of the grant was to require an IGP for all students outside of the MC/EC program but in the same schools, that is the interpretation of school administrators. Schools report few obstacles in the execution of their articulation agreement with a postsecondary institution.

School Climate

High school teachers completed the School Climate Inventory (SCI), which consists of seven dimensions, or scales, logically and empirically linked with the five constructs associated with successful school reform efforts. The seven scales are Order, Leadership, Environment, Involvement, Instruction, Expectations, and Collaboration. The measure is scored using a 5–point, Likert-type scale which ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores being more positive.

Average scale scores on the SCI scales across all 10 schools were consistent with national norms. The items used to construct the Instruction scale were rated the most highly (4.0), and the Order scale items were rated the lowest (3.4). On each of the seven scales, teachers in the 10 schools surveyed for this evaluation rated their schools at or higher than the national norm. Although the average across these schools on the Order construct was the lowest of the scale values at 3.4, it exceeds the national average value of 3.26, which may reflect the positive effect of MC/EC programs on even the most difficult aspect of school climate.

An overall average score was also calculated for each school. The highest overall average SCI scores came from School 1, District 1; School 7, District 6; and School 10, all of which had overall mean scores of 4.0. These three schools, according to high school teachers, have a very favorable school climate. The lowest scorer, School 8, District 7, had an overall mean score of 3.1. As even the lowest mean is on the positive side of the scale, high school teachers by and large said that school climate in these programs was favorable.

The evaluators have several recommendations for grantees based on the results of the teacher surveys. First, look at ways to make pull-out programs somewhat

less disruptive to instruction. Second, evaluators recommend that administrators and high school teachers look together at all factors that reduce instructional time and adjust the schedule so that this time is better protected. Third, look at policies and/or practices that could increase the trust level among college faculty, high school staff, students, and parents. Fourth, greater teacher and student participation in decision-making and problem-solving would mean more buy-in from both groups. Fifth, increase the number of invitations to parents to make classroom visits. Parents might be more likely to support school activities if they were invited more often to see what is going on at school on a day-to-day basis. Sixth, put additional measures in place to track student attendance, find out why students are late or absent so often, and take action to improve attendance. Seventh, review student disciplinary practices, and introduce or strengthen reinforcements that encourage positive behavior and discourage its opposite. Eighth, look at additional ways to involve the business community, possibly having students participate in community projects and encouraging business leaders to serve as students' mentors.

Findings from the analysis of teacher surveys show that:

- Teachers in MC/EC programs find their school climate to be positive;
- Eighty-five percent of teachers and 86% of students describe their school as safe;
- SCI scale values were highest on the Instruction construct; and
- SCI scale values were lowest on the Order construct, but scores were still high.

College Readiness

Students completed an adapted version of the NELS 88 survey which measured school attachment, to which additional questions were added requesting future plans and perceived benefits of the program.

Students strongly indicated that participating in a MC/EC program had been beneficial in several areas. They reported a positive impact on their plans to attend college (81%) and college readiness (75%). The two areas that students said had not been positively impacted were the time that counselors spent with them and applying for financial aid. Possibly these two areas are related; if so, it would be worth examining

how students and counselors spend time together and to look at ways that this time might become more productive, including providing help with the financial aid application process. The latter is an area in which parent involvement might be increased also.

Almost all (99%) students reported that they plan to attend college, and they had taken a variety of tests in preparation for their post-high school education. Approximately 70% of students in Grades 11 and 12 had taken the PSAT, while 28% of 11th-grade students and 65% of 12th-grade students had taken the SAT. These percentages support the claim of students that they intend to go to college, because in general they are following through with activities that support the intent. Eighty-three percent of 12th-grade students report that they have applied to college, and 80% have already been accepted.

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

- Ninety-nine percent plan to attend college;
- Seventy-five percent of 11th- and 12th-grade students had 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; and
- Eighty percent of Grade 12 students have been accepted by at least one college.

Postsecondary Education Plans and Likelihood of College Success

Students in the MC/EC programs have ambitious plans for their post-secondary education. Thirty-six percent plan to finish a four- or five-year degree, 23% a master's degree, and 25% a Ph.D., M.D., or other professional degree. In line with these plans, they are taking advanced courses at a higher level than students in their schools overall. A larger percentage (25%) of MC/EC program students took at least one advanced course than the average for their schools overall (10%). By Grade 11, program students had taken roughly the same number (3.5 vs. 3.3) of credits in advanced courses as the average student in their school, but by Grade 12, MC/EC program students had taken an average of 7 credits, compared to 6 for students in their schools overall.

Although it was not possible to report on actual post-secondary results for these students, they have

plans to pursue further education and are earning credits in that direction:

- Thirty-six percent 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 master's;
- Students take advanced courses at a higher rate than students in their schools overall; and
- Students earn more credits for advanced courses than students in their schools overall.

Student Perceptions and Performance

Students participating in the MC/EC program perceive the program to have had a positive impact on their academic performance and relationships with teachers and other students. In addition, the students completed a school attachment measure that asked about their comfort level with various aspects of their schools. Overall, students seem satisfied at their schools. Scores on a 5-point scale spread from 3.8 to 4.2, so the level of attachment to MC/EC schools in general is quite high, and the program's appeal to students seems assured.

In 2005, 57% of students enrolled in the MC/EC program met THECB Higher Education Readiness Standard in reading/English Language Arts (ELA) compared to 28% of students in the 10 schools overall. In 2006 reading/ELA, 38% of the students in the program group met the THECB standard compared to a school average of 23%. In mathematics, 61% of MC/EC program students, and 32% of students overall had scores that met the THECB standard in 2005. In 2006 mathematics, 57% of program students met the standard compared to a school average of 23%.

Early analysis of student performance shows that:

- Students report 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/ELA than students in their schools overall.

Promising Practices

While the three MC/EC programs selected for site visits differed in many ways, there were some common themes. The first strength of all three programs was the way students matured as they continued in the program. A combination of challenging college-level coursework

and being around older college students both seem to contribute to this maturation. Second, the level of individualized attention and academic support given to these students is high. Third, all programs incorporated rigorous curricula across all subjects and involved students actively in the learning process. Fourth, free college credits are a major benefit to these students who may be from families with a low socioeconomic status and/or who may not have had any family member attend college before; the free college credits are also appreciated by the parents.

All three programs also faced some challenges. They all find scheduling difficult with the need to coordinate high school and college calendars. The varying timelines for grade reporting are also difficult to manage. All of the programs could benefit from more funding, as they all lack certain items or staff which vary by program. Finally, parents find FERPA requirements frustrating because these requirements prevent parents from speaking directly to college professors about their student's progress in college classes. Still, even with these challenges, the MC/EC programs are making a difference in the lives of many high school students who would otherwise drop out or not attend college.

In general, the schools reviewed in this evaluation are fulfilling the goals of encouraging students from groups historically underrepresented in higher education. While a lower proportion of student participants (10.6%) are African American than students statewide (14.7%), a higher proportion of program participants (65.9%) are Hispanic than students statewide (45.3%).

The overall picture of the MC/EC program is bright. Teacher and student survey results were favorable although some issues could be addressed to make the program stronger. High school teachers report strong instructional quality, leadership, and high expectations of students. Students say the program has piqued their interest in attending college and succeeding in the workplace. Early student achievement measures were favorable, with students reaching the THECB Higher Education Readiness Standard at a higher rate than their peers. A higher percentage of program students took advanced courses than their peers.

The U.S. Department of Education (2003) has stated that it may take as many as five years for reform efforts to impact student outcomes. Results of the student outcomes

for this evaluation should be viewed as preliminary information about the impact of the MC/EC program. What follows is a summary of program strengths and opportunities for improving the program.

Program Strengths

- Positive student achievement in terms of TAKS scores meeting higher education requirements
- Positive student achievement in terms of percentage of students taking advanced courses
- Positive overall school climate
- Positive instructional quality
- Positive program leadership
- Positive expectations of students
- Positive school environment
- Positive student work ethic
- Positive impact on students' expectations of attending college
- Positive impact on students actually applying for college
- Positive relationships between high school teachers and students
- Positive collaboration among college faculty and high school staff

Opportunities for Improvement

- Careful monitoring of student college credit accumulation
- Time spent with counselors, especially in regard to financial aid opportunities
- Attendance, tardies, and discipline
- Parent involvement
- Business community involvement
- College faculty involvement in school decision making
- Student involvement in keeping environment attractive
- Student involvement in helping to solve school-related problems
- Record-keeping as it pertains to student data that will be required by TEA

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