

THE EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Another type of credit-based transition/acceleration program is early college high schools. The Early College High School (ECHS) Initiative, sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and coordinated by Jobs for the Future, is helping to establish over 170 small schools by 2008 that will allow students to earn a high school diploma and an associate's degree (or up to two years of college credit) in five years.¹ Jobs for the Future suggests that early college high schools "might be seen as an extreme form of dual enrollment because students earn the AA degree while still in high school."² In a similar vein, the state of North Carolina recently launched a new initiative, called Learn and Earn, which will pair new small high schools with colleges, giving students the option of earning a high school diploma and an associate degree or two years of college credit in five years.³

- One of the best known schools in the Early College High School Initiative is the Middle College Charter High School (MCHS) located on the LaGuardia Community College campus. MCHS, which was founded as an alternative high school for "at-risk urban youth with college potential" in 1974 and preceded the ECHS Initiative, was redesigned as a middle college-early college in 2002. (Middle college-early colleges are early college high schools located on a college campus. For more details on the history and redesign of middle college-early colleges, please see Appendix A.) The school enrolls approximately 500 students.⁴ In addition to encouraging students to complete college courses while in high school, MCHS seeks to create a unique learning environment that is small, reflective, collaborative, focused on career education, and requires students to complete long-term assessment projects. MCHS receives a great deal of attention and is often cited as a national model.⁵ Approximately 80 percent of its entering students graduate from MCHS, and close to 75 percent of its graduates enroll in college.⁶ (Please see <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/mchs/> fuller description of this program.)

¹ The Early College High School Initiative. Accessed September 2, 2006, <http://www.earlycolleges.org/>; Marcia Glick, *Teaching Early College High School at LaGuardia Community College* (Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, May 2006). Accessed May 25, 2006, http://www.jff.org/download.php/TeachingECHS.pdf?file=TeachingECHS.pdf&KC_PubID=292.

² Hoffman, Nancy. *Add and Subtract: Dual Enrollment as a State Strategy to Increase Postsecondary Success for Underrepresented Students*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, April 2005, Page 10. Accessed June 9, 2006, http://www.jff.org/download.php/Addsubtract.pdf?file=Addsubtract.pdf&KC_PubID=28.

³ State of North Carolina Office of the Governor. "Gov. Easley Announces 'Learn and Earn' High School Program." Press Release, September 8, 2004. Accessed June 9, 2006, <http://www.newschoolsproject.org/documents/LearnandEarnrelease.pdf>.

⁴ "Who We Are At Middle College Charter High School." LaGuardia Middle College Charter High School. Accessed September 1, 2006, <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/mchs/info.htm>; see also Early College High School Initiative. *By the Numbers*. November 1, 2005. Accessed September 4, 2006, <http://www.earlycolleges.org/Downloads/ECHSIByNumbersLong.pdf>.

⁵ "Celebrating a Decade of Awards and Citations." LaGuardia Middle College Charter High School. Accessed September 1, 2006, <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/mchs/awards.htm>.

⁶ "Who We Are At Middle College Charter High School." LaGuardia Middle College Charter High School. Accessed September 1, 2006, <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/mchs/info.htm>.

The ECHS Initiative is relatively new, and thus solid results are not yet available. However, Jobs for the Future has reported that for the 10 early colleges that were a part of the Middle College National Consortium in the 2003–04 academic year, 96 percent of students passed their courses.⁷ Furthermore, a recent return on investment analysis of the ECHS Initiative, based on data from ECHS schools in California and New York, concluded that ECHS schools deliver “a greater return on investment than comparable traditional high schools,” that states benefit from their investments in ECHS schools so long as the cost structure is not significantly different from other traditional high schools, and that students and families benefit from enrolling in ECHS schools.⁸

⁷ Hoffman, Nancy. *Add and Subtract: Dual Enrollment as a State Strategy to Increase Postsecondary Success for Underrepresented Students*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, April 2005, Page 9. Accessed June 9, 2006, http://www.jff.org/download.php/Addsubtract.pdf?file=Addsubtract.pdf&KC_PubID=28.

⁸ Palaich, Robert, John Augenblick, Samara Foster, Amy Berk Anderson and Douglas Rose. *Return on Investment in Early College High Schools*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, July 2006. Accessed August 22, 2006,

http://www.jff.org/download.php/APA_ECHS_ROI_071906.pdf?file=APA_ECHS_ROI_071906.pdf&KC_PubID=307; see also Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. *Accelerated Learning Options: Moving the Needle on Access and Success*. Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, June 2006, Page 67. Accessed June 23, 2006, http://www.wiche.edu/Policy/Accelerated_Learning/report/ALO.pdf.