

Early College in Maine: Expanding Opportunities
January 2008

“Allowing students to earn early college credit is an innovative policy to expand a state’s role in ensuring postsecondary education access for more students.”

--KnowledgeWorks Foundation

“Arrangements that allow high school students to participate in college classes...are high value programs, because they provide many of the important elements that have been missing from high school for most students: challenge, engagement, access to the adult world, and support.” --

American Youth Policy Forum

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Executive Summary

Educational attainment in Maine is below the national average and significantly behind the rest of New England. **As we look for better outcomes, early college is emerging as a leading strategy for change.** Early college, also known as dual enrollment, is defined here as high school students taking college courses for college and high school credit simultaneously. Typically, students enroll in a college class at a campus near their high school. Maine also has a widespread distance learning early college program. This report discusses early college programs in Maine that target underperforming students in order to improve the likelihood that they will complete high school, aspire to college, improve their academic preparation, and enroll in college after graduation. **Over the past several years, Maine has at least doubled the numbers of high school students participating in early college opportunities.**

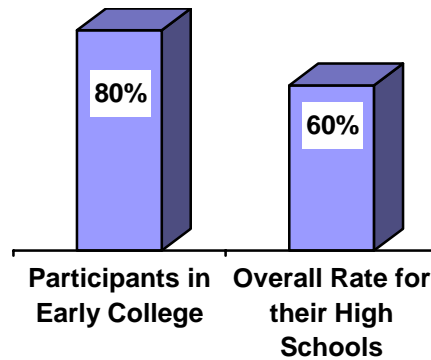
Potential benefits of early college include:

- ◆ **Increasing the academic rigor** students experience while in high school by exposing them directly to college-level work.
- ◆ **Providing access to more electives** than are available at the high school.
- ◆ **Improving the aspirations** of students who do not thrive in high school, and consequently may not consider themselves “college material.”
- ◆ **Enhancing the senior year** by giving students who have completed high school graduation requirements challenging, motivating coursework.
- ◆ **Familiarizing students with college life**, particularly when courses are taken on a college campus, taught by a college faculty member in a classroom with undergraduate students.
- ◆ **Reducing college costs** by allowing students to earn college credits, in some cases at no cost, thus reducing their time to degree.

This report is based on the experiences of 690 Maine high school students who took early college courses in spring 2006, fall 2006, and/or spring 2007. The report describes student characteristics, outcomes, and observations about early college. It also describes four different Maine program models to illustrate the different ways early college programs can be implemented and funded. Among the report’s key findings are:

- ◆ Nearly three-quarters (72%) of these early college students are from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor’s degree.
- ◆ The average high school GPA when students applied for early college was 87.3 on a 100-point scale.
- ◆ Just over one-half (52%) of participants improved their high school GPA during the semester(s) in which they took an early college class, with an average increase of 2.9 points on a 100 scale.
- ◆ **Nearly four in five early college students (79%) earned grades of 2.0 (equivalent to a C) or higher in their college courses, thus earning potentially transferable college credits.**
- ◆ In the class of 2006, 95% of students from five high schools who participated in early college during their senior year graduated on time. The overall on-time graduation rate at those schools was 88%.
- ◆ **Four in five 2006 graduates who had participated in early college (80%) enrolled in college within a year after graduation, compared with a 60% overall college-going rate at their schools.**

College Enrollment within a Year after Graduation



Recommendations include:

- 1) Provide stable funding for early college. The state, local school districts, colleges, and universities should each contribute to ensure that adequate funding is in place and is designed to grow with demand.
- 2) Identify and deliberately target underperforming students to participate in early college programs. Students who face more barriers to college stand to gain the most from participating in early college programs, and there is compelling evidence that many of them are up to the challenge.
- 3) Provide support for all early college students, and conduct outreach to ensure that students know how to access available support. At each high school and college, part of a staff person's time should be devoted to administering the early college program.

Background

Nationally, forty-seven states now have dual enrollment policies in place. Some programs offer college courses delivered at high schools, while others integrate high school students into courses on college campuses. Several national foundations have invested in various early college models, including creating entirely new early college high schools on or adjacent to college campuses. Rapid growth in early college participation has been documented in many states.

National research finds that early college experiences increase students' academic performance and educational attainment. Most early college students earn passing grades in their college courses, and they tend to be admitted to college at much higher rates than their socioeconomic peers. Other positive findings include improved school attendance rates, lower high school dropout and higher graduation rates, and improved confidence in math and writing skills among early college students (Jaschik). One report notes that, along with the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school, an equally important purpose of early college programs, particularly for low-income or first-generation students, is the opportunity to experience college and "to believe they are capable of succeeding in postsecondary education" (Lerner and Brand). Critics of dual enrollment point out that limited numbers of students have dual enrollment opportunities,

and express concern that the programs tend not to reach low-income or minority students (Krueger).

In **Florida**, state law requires that all high school students with a 3.0 grade point average be offered dual enrollment opportunities, and more than 30,000 students take dual enrollment courses each year. Each school district has agreements with the local community college and/or state university to share the costs of dual enrollment courses; students do not pay college tuition. A recent study found positive relationships between participation in dual enrollment and high school completion, college enrollment, and persistence in college (Karp et al).

New York City has an early college program called College Now in which nearly 300 high schools and all 17 of the City University of New York campuses participate. College Now courses are free for students, and all public high school students are eligible to participate. The costs of the program are shared by the CUNY system and the New York City Education Department. In addition to dual enrollment courses, College Now includes campus visits and scholarship opportunities. Each CUNY campus develops its own partnership with local high schools. The program enrolls over 13,000 students each year. The program was studied recently, and participants were found to be more likely than their peers to pursue bachelor's degrees after high school graduation. Students who took two or more College Now courses earned better college grades than non-participants (Karp et al).

Ohio, which has a K-12 enrollment about nine times larger than Maine's, spends \$30 million each year on its Post Secondary Enrollment Options dual enrollment program, which allows qualified students in grades 9 through 12 to take college courses at no cost (KnowledgeWorks Foundation).

Washington's Running Start dual enrollment program, created in 1990, serves over 16,000 11th and 12th graders each year. Students may apply to any of the state's community colleges (several public four-year institutions also participate), and the college determines if a student is qualified using the regular admissions procedures. Students do not pay tuition; instead the student's school district reimburses the college at a statewide standard rate of \$98 per credit for academic programs and \$116 per credit for vocational programs. The school district retains 7% of these funds for counseling and overhead (State Board of Community and Technical Colleges).

In Maine, early college has been available to a limited number of high-achieving students for many years. More recently, early college opportunities have become available to a wider spectrum of students.

- ◆ Since 1998, the state, the University of Maine system, and the Maine Community College System have shared the costs of the Aspirations Program, also known as Early Studies, with the state paying one-half of tuition for dual credit college courses and community colleges and university system campuses waiving the other half. The program was initially limited to students with a B or higher grade point average. In 2005, student eligibility was broadened by allowing colleges to waive the GPA requirement and allowing high schools to recommend any student for the program.
- ◆ Some of Maine's private colleges offer free courses to a certain number of qualified local high school students. For example, Bates College invites high school seniors from the

surrounding communities to apply for its High School Scholars program. About 25 students are admitted each year, and can take two Bates courses, tuition-free, during their senior year.

- ♦ Maine's 28 career and technical education (CTE) high schools offer more than 150 courses with articulation agreements, meaning that students can concurrently earn community college and high school credit.
- ♦ The Great Maine Schools Project, now known as the Great Schools Partnership, seeded several key programs that led the expansion of early college opportunities and created new models based on local partnerships between high schools and colleges.
- ♦ The University of Maine is in the second year of an extensive distance learning early college program called Academ-e.
- ♦ The Maine Community College System's Early College for ME program, expanding to every high school by 2008, focuses on college preparation counseling and scholarships, and also offers some opportunities to take dual enrollment courses.

The number of dual enrollment early college opportunities for Maine students has increased rapidly in the past several years. The state recently increased its investment in the Aspirations program; 750 courses were funded in 2006-2007, nearly doubling the previous rate of about 400 courses funded per year (Maine Compact, 2007). And in fall 2007 alone, 670 early college courses were funded by the Aspirations program (Weeks). We estimate that overall, the statewide number of dual enrollment early college courses Maine high school students took doubled from around 1,000 in 2005-2006 to well over 2,000 in 2006-2007.¹ Some high schools are making it a goal to eventually provide early college experiences to every student.

The emerging Maine early college model focuses on placing high school students in courses taught by college faculty, preferably on a college campus with college students. Another key aspect of the Maine model is its focus on students who face barriers to college. A recent study of barriers to college in Maine found that academic track in school, parental education level, and, to a lesser extent, gender, are critical factors in determining students' college aspirations and the likelihood that they will fulfill those aspirations (Mitchell Institute).

The Maine Department of Education received a grant from the National Governors Association in 2005 to improve the state's high school graduation and college readiness rates. A portion of the grant funded the Access College Early (ACE) program, which provided early college start-up grants to 43 high schools and 16 postsecondary partners. ACE negotiated reduced tuition payments for early college students, and paid tuition for courses over three semesters beginning in spring 2006. 419 students participated in ACE, earning a total of 1,024 transferable college credits, meaning that they completed their college courses with a grade of C (2.0) or higher. This report includes both ACE students and another 270 students from six high schools with separate early college programs.

¹ These figures do not include Advanced Placement courses, which an increasing number of Maine high schools offer. Students can take AP exams after they complete these courses, and depending on their exam scores they may be able to earn college credit or place out of introductory college courses once they enroll.

Student Outcomes & Observations

This section summarizes student characteristics and outcomes for 690 Maine high school students who took early college courses in spring 2006, fall 2006, and/or spring 2007. As shown in the table below, most early college students were female, and most were seniors. Nearly three-quarters (72%) are from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor’s degree.

- ◆ Prior to participating in early college, 60% of students had taken Algebra 2 or a higher math course. Only 18% had taken Precalculus.
- ◆ 59% of students had never taken an Honors or Advanced Placement level course before they participated in early college.
- ◆ The average high school GPA when students applied for early college was 87.3 on a 100-point scale.
 - Female students had an average GPA of 88.1, compared with 85.7 for male students.
 - The average GPA among students with at least one parent with an associate degree or higher was 88.1, compared with 84.3 among “first-generation” students (those whose parents do not have education beyond high school).
- ◆ Just over one-half (52%) of participants improved their high school GPA during the semester(s) in which they took an early college class, with an average increase of 2.9 points on a 100-point scale.
 - Male students were more likely than female students—55% compared with 48%—to improve their high school GPA while participating in early college.
 - 60% of first-generation students improved their high school GPA while they were participating in early college.

Early College Student Characteristics

	Female	Male	
Gender	64%	36%	
	Juniors	Seniors	
Year in High School	40%	60%	
	First-Generation*	Non-College Tradition*	
Parents’ Education	31%	72%	
	One	Two	Three
Early College Semesters	80%	19%	1%
	Lowest	Highest	Average
High School GPA Before	52.5	98.4	87.3
	Increased	Decreased	Same
High School GPA After	51%	47%	2%

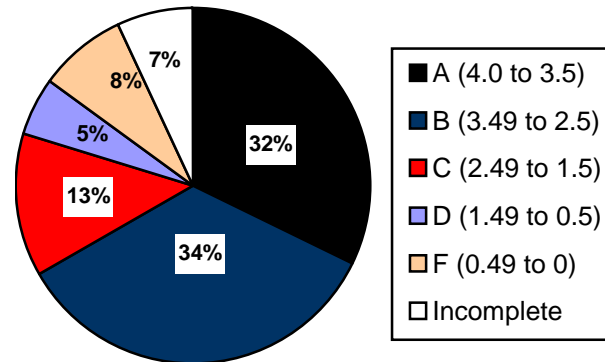
* **First-generation** students do not have a parent with any education beyond high school.
Non-college tradition students do not have a parent with a bachelor’s degree.

College Grades

- ◆ Nearly four in five early college students (79%) earned grades of 2.0 (equivalent to a C) or higher in their college courses, thus earning potentially transferable college credits.
 - 74% of male early college students earned college grades of 2.0 or higher.

- 75% of students who had not taken an honors- or AP-level course in high school earned grades of 2.0 or higher.
- 83% of first-generation early college students earned grades of 2.0 or higher in their college courses.
- ♦ Two-thirds (66%) of early college students earned college grades of B or better.
- ♦ Students with higher high school GPAs when they entered the program tended to earn better grades in their early college courses than did students with lower high school GPAs.

Grade Point Average (GPA) in Early College Classes



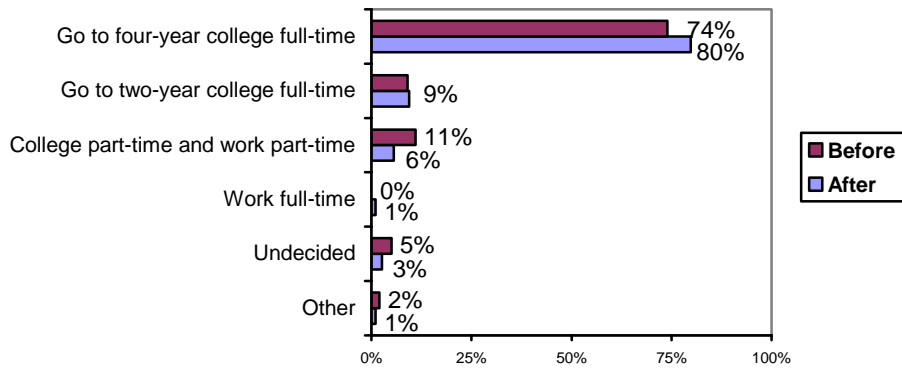
Graduation and College Enrollment

- ♦ In the class of 2006, 95% of students from five high schools who participated in early college during their senior year graduated on time. The overall on-time graduation rate at those schools was 88%.
- ♦ Four in five 2006 graduates who had participated in early college (80%) enrolled in college within a year after graduation, compared with 60% of all graduates.
- ♦ After graduation, participants enrolled in the local college where they had taken early college classes at slightly higher rates than their classmates—43% enrolled in the local college, compared with 39% of all graduates who went to college.

Plans for after High School

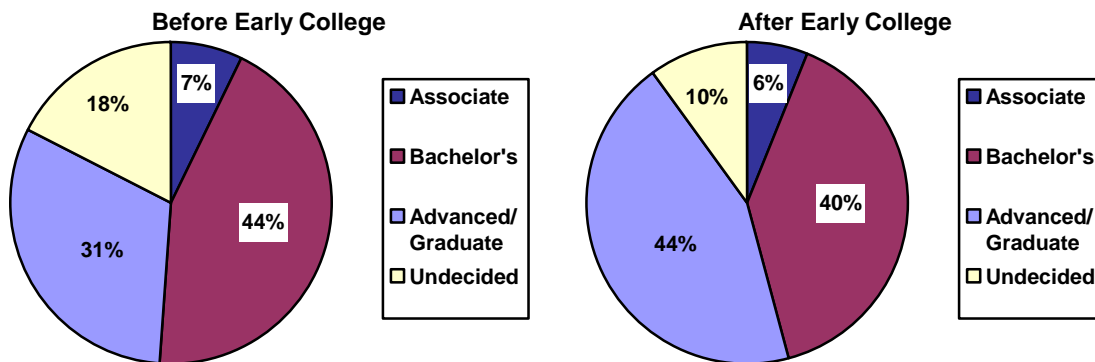
Students were asked about their post-high school plans when they applied for early college and again at the end of the semester. Before enrolling in early college courses, 74% of students said they planned to enroll in four-year college and 9% said they planned to enroll in two-year college. This suggests that early college students were comparable to all Maine students in terms of their post-high school plans; 78% of a representative group of high school juniors and seniors surveyed in 2006 reported that they planned to enroll in four-year college right after high school, and 7% planned to enroll in two-year college (Mitchell Institute). At the end of the early college semester, slightly higher proportions of students reported intentions to enroll in four-year colleges (see chart below). Among students who reported before starting early college that they planned to go to college part-time after high school, by the end of the semester two-thirds (67%) had changed their plans. Of these, 75% now reported that they planned to go to college full-time.

Post-High School Plans Before and After Early College



Students were also asked about the highest degree they eventually hope to complete both before and after participating in early college. Initially, 46% of the students reported that they hoped to complete an associate or bachelor’s degree, and this proportion grew to 51% after participating in early college. Before participating in early college, 31% of students reported that they hoped to complete an advanced degree; this share grew to 44% after participating in early college. Among students who were undecided at the beginning of the semester about the highest degree they eventually hoped to complete, 70% reported at the end of the semester that they eventually hope to complete an associate, baccalaureate, or advanced degree.

Highest Degree Students Eventually Hope to Complete



About one in three participants (35%) reported that they faced barriers to fulfilling their plans. Of these, two-thirds (67%) named financial barriers such as the high cost of tuition, inadequate financial aid, or large student loans. Other barriers included getting admitted to the desired program, balancing college with work, and logistical issues of getting started at college.

Student Observations about Early College

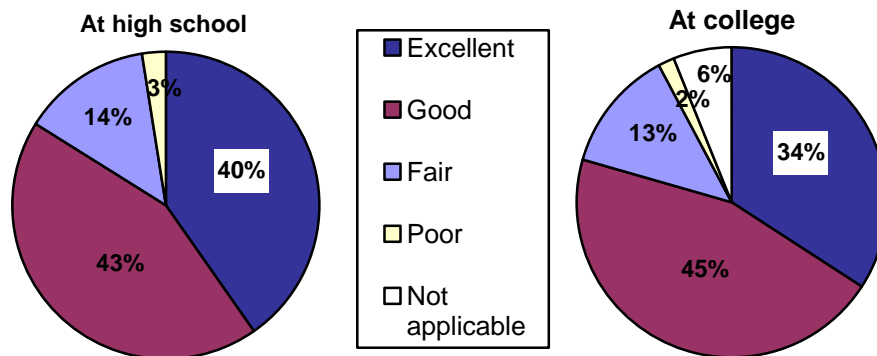
Asked to rate their experience at college, 92% of early college students rated it positively. One-half (50%) of respondents rated their college experience *excellent*, 42% rated it *good*, 7% rated it *fair*, and 1% rated it *poor*. Student comments included:

- ♦ “At first I thought it was going to be difficult to adjust to adding another class, but it was an easy transition.”

- ◆ “It was good, but with extra-curricular activities it was not so hot. I had to miss school. But the class was very good.”
- ◆ “I grew up a lot. Since it was a college course I never wanted to blow it off. I matured as I made sure I was at class on time and always did my assignments.”
- ◆ “My experience was absolutely wonderful; an amazing teacher, a great class and a very special environment. [The] only thing that could be easier is the way grades are transferred to my high school. I really love this program and am extremely pleased with my time here.”
- ◆ “The program made me more comfortable and confident with the idea of going to college.”

Students were asked to rate the support they received, such as academic help, campus orientation, and help with schedule conflicts. More than four in five early college students (83%) rated the support at their high school *good* or *excellent*, and nearly four in five (79%) rated the support at college *good* or *excellent* (see charts below).

Student rating of support provided



Students were asked how often they got help, such as advice, resolving schedule conflicts, or referral to campus resources, from someone other than a teacher. About one-half (49%) of respondents never got such help, 44% of students say they got help several times during the semester, and only 7% reported getting help every week. Student comments include:

- ◆ “The help I received was either from my professor or my teachers at the high school.”
- ◆ “Many of my advisors and also my boss allowed me to reschedule events and it helped.”
- ◆ “I had friends that had taken early college classes.”
- ◆ “I did not know who else to go to for help and [the guidance counselor] was not available most of the time.”

Early College Models

Lewiston High School

Lewiston High School enrolls over 1,400 students. The school has developed an extensive early college program for juniors and seniors. Lewiston's program is unique in that the high school partners with more than one postsecondary institution; students take early college courses at Bates College, Central Maine Community College, and the University of Southern Maine's Lewiston-Auburn campus. The program is open to juniors and senior who are passing their core high school classes, and it actively recruits students with B and C averages, especially students who would be the first in their family to attend college and male students. During the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, nearly 200 Lewiston students took early college courses, and they earned more than 530 transferable college credits. Students take a wide variety of college courses, with College Writing, Psychology, and Sociology being the most popular.

Lewiston received a grant to expand college preparation activities, including early college, in 2005. The grant allowed the school to fund a staff position, the Aspirations Coordinator, to work in conjunction with the guidance office. The Aspirations Coordinator serves as advisor to all early college students, works with postsecondary partners, coordinates related whole-school activities such as college visits for sophomores, and staffs an Aspirations Lab where all high school students can explore college and careers and receive support when they apply for college admission and financial aid. The school department has added a line item to its budget to cover the Aspirations Coordinator's salary and associated programming costs indefinitely.

Joshua

Joshua, now a senior, describes his high school experience before participating in early college as "boring, not challenging...I lacked interest in most of the classes I was taking, but I had to take them because of the curriculum requirements. It didn't take long for me to be fed up with the high school's system and I started getting apathetic." Joshua has taken college courses at Bates College and USM as well as an online course through UMaine's Academ-e. His parents and brother all started college but left without a degree, and Joshua plans to enroll in a four-year college next year. "I think the largest barrier is the almighty dollar. I'm really grateful to the early college program for giving me more options and challenges while footing the bill."



In Lewiston, one-half of the tuition for most early college courses is paid by the state's Aspirations Program, and the other half is waived by the colleges. In 2006-2007, the school had to pay only \$3,500 of the \$53,000 in total early college tuition costs. Students are responsible for paying college activity fees and for books, which usually totals between \$165 and \$225 per course. According to the Coordinator, "I have found that the colleges are eager to have early college students...A number of students end up enrolling in the school where they take the courses, the state does pay half the tuition, and empty seats are filled." She advises establishing

strong relationships and regular communication with designated administrators at the colleges: “I have sent flowers and pastries to thank them. I have also sung their praises in writing and verbally to their superiors. Without them I could not coordinate the program. They answer my many questions, alert me about policy changes, advise me on course selections, and keep a watchful eye on things for me.”

Lewiston Early College Student Characteristics

Gender	Female 55%	Male 45%	
Early College Semesters	One 70%	Two 25%	Three 4%
High School GPA Before	Lowest 63.6	Highest 98.3	Average 88.2
High School GPA After	Increased 45%	Decreased 51%	Same 4%

- ◆ Prior to participating in early college, 71% of Lewiston students had taken Algebra 2 or a higher math course. Only 22% had taken Precalculus.
- ◆ 45% of Lewiston students had never taken an Honors or Advanced Placement level course before they participated in early college.

College Grades

- ◆ 80% of Lewiston early college students earned grades of C or higher in their college courses.
- ◆ 29% earned college grades of A or A-.
- ◆ 38% earned college grades between B+ and B-.

Graduation and College Enrollment

- ◆ In the class of 2006, 94% of Lewiston students who participated in early college during their senior year graduated with their class, compared with 85% of the class as a whole.
- ◆ More than four in five 2006 graduates who had participated in early college (83%) enrolled in college within a year after graduation, compared with 61% of the entire graduating class.

Downeast Community Learning Alliance (DECLA) with the University of Maine at Machias (UMM)

Five Washington County high schools—Jonesport-Beals, Lubec, Machias, Narraguagus, and Shead—formed a school improvement alliance, funded by a Great Schools Partnership grant, in 2003. One of the key strategies the alliance has pursued is early college opportunities for students. The program is open to any junior or senior who meets course prerequisites and “has a good chance of being successful in a college class.” During the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic years, 115 students from the DECLA schools took early college classes at the University of Maine at Machias and earned 333 transferable college credits. The ACE program funded 41 of these courses.

DECLA has used grant funds to pay a regional coordinator and to fund early college tuition costs. UMM agreed to reduce tuition for early college students by 25% and to waive most of its

fees, and a university-based Coordinator has been instrumental in implementing the early college program. The Coordinator notes that “university and high school personnel are in frequent, often daily, contact. Of necessity, any barriers that may have existed between the participating institutions have fallen as a true partnership has formed between the campus and the area high schools” (Wolf).

In 2005, the university surveyed faculty members who had taught early college students. Faculty rated three-quarters (76%) of early college students *very prepared* for college work and 24% *somewhat prepared*. “If the EC students were discernable, it was because they outperformed other UMM students...most EC students performed *better* or *about the same* as other UMM students in the areas of class attendance, motivation, behavior in class, quality of academic work, interaction with faculty, and class participation” (Famous).

DECLA Early College Student Characteristics

Gender	Female 69%	Male 31%	
Parents' Education	First Generation 29%	Non-College Tradition 62%	
Early College Semesters	One 70%	Two 25%	Three 4%
High School GPA Before	Lowest 75.4	Highest 98.0	Average 89.9
High School GPA After	Increased 54%	Decreased 42%	Same 4%

- ◆ Prior to participating in early college, 68% of DECLA students had taken Algebra 2 or a higher math course. Only one in four (25%) had taken Precalculus.
- ◆ 44% of DECLA students had never taken an Honors or Advanced Placement level course before they participated in early college.

College Grades

- ◆ 88% of DECLA early college students earned grades of C or higher in their college courses.
- ◆ 39% earned college grades of A or A-.
- ◆ 35% earned college grades between B+ and B-.

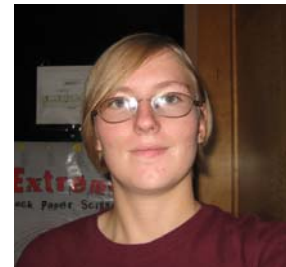
Graduation and College Enrollment

- ◆ In the class of 2006, 100% of DECLA students who participated in early college during their senior year graduated with their class, compared with 97% of the classes as a whole.
- ◆ More than four in five 2006 DECLA high school graduates who had participated in early college (84%) enrolled in college within a year after graduation, compared with 52% of the entire graduating classes.

Samantha

Samantha took two UMM courses, English Composition and Drama, during her senior year of high school, and earned a 4.0 GPA. Samantha says, “I enjoyed both of my classes and didn’t have a problem keeping up with the homework.” Samantha had a high school GPA of 84.1 (C+) before taking early college courses. “My high school classes were not very challenging. This made my high school experience very dull, and I didn’t care as much about my school work because it was too easy.” During her last high school semester, Samantha earned a 94.8 GPA. Samantha is now enrolled at the University of Maine at Farmington as a full-time student. She plans to earn a bachelor’s degree, but is undecided about her major. “The main barrier is a poor math background. In two out of three fields I have been thinking about majoring in, math is important.”

As a first-generation college student, Samantha says, “I was very scared about going to college; the early college classes helped me realize that it’s a big step, but not one that I wasn’t prepared to take.” Growing up, Samantha says, “I always knew [college] was something I was going to do because neither one of my parents did. I expected it to be very difficult. It’s not hard, but it’s not easy either. [Early college] prepared me for the work load that I now have. Secondly, it made me feel more comfortable and ready to go off to college and get a degree.”



St. John Valley Early College Partnership

University of Maine at Fort Kent (UMFK) has developed an early college partnership with three area high schools: Fort Kent Community High School has a student body of about 400, Madawaska Middle/High School enrolls roughly 500 students in grades 6-12, and Wisdom Middle-High School in St. Agatha has 150 students in grades 7-12. The program is designed to expose “at-risk” students to the college level work. The high schools are responsible for identifying students who are struggling in high school and who may not plan on attending college to participate in early college. The University allows participants to enroll in any 100- or 200-level course that does not have prerequisites. An Early College Coordinator, housed at the college, counsels students, assists them in accessing college resources, and works with the partner high schools.

The university and the high schools received grant funding to offset start-up costs and to cover tuition costs for the first four early college semesters. The program began with 15 students in the fall of 2005. Through the spring 2007 semester, 103 students took one or more early college courses at UMFK, earning a total of 342 transferable college credits. All these courses were funded by the ACE program. English Composition was by far the most popular early college course at UMFK.

The University’s assessment report of the early college partnership questioned whether the program has targeted the intended students, as more than one-half students (54%) indicated in surveys that they saw the program as a way to get free college credits before completing high

school. However, nearly one-third of participants (32%) indicated at the end of the semester that they were much more determined to attend college than before (Cabada).

St. John Valley Early College Student Characteristics

	Female	Male	
Gender	61%	39%	
	One	Two	
Semesters of Participation	76%	24%	
	Lowest	Highest	Average
High School GPA Before	74.0	98.5	91.2
	Increased	Decreased	Same
High School GPA After	55%	43%	1%

- ◆ Prior to participating in early college, 55% of St. John Valley students had taken Algebra 2 or a higher math course. Only 20% had taken Precalculus.
- ◆ 58% of these students had never taken an Honors or Advanced Placement level course before they participated in early college.

College Grades

- ◆ 90% of St. John Valley early college students earned grades of C or higher in their college courses.
- ◆ 40% earned college grades of A or A-.
- ◆ 43% earned college grades between B+ and B-.

Graduation and College Enrollment

- ◆ In the class of 2006, 100% of St. John Valley students who participated in early college during their senior year graduated with their class, compared with 95% of their classes as a whole.
- ◆ 92% of 2006 graduates who were early college participants enrolled in college within a year after graduation, compared with 69% of their entire graduating classes.

Jessica



Jessica took two UMFK courses, English Composition and Child Development, during her senior year, and is now a full-time student at University of Maine. “Both of my parents did not attend college, but I knew that I would need a college degree to accomplish some of the goals that I had in life. The early college program...started to get me used to the different structure of college classes [as] opposed to high school, and how more material is covered at a faster pace. I had to deal with more time management and discipline to complete my tasks on time without teachers guiding you by the hand. It is completely up to you to get your homework in on time and if it is not in, you suffer the consequence.”

Academ-e

In 2006, the University of Maine launched a distance learning early college program called Academ-e. The program makes it possible for seniors at all Maine high schools, regardless of geographic location, to take internet-based, dual credit UMaine courses online. Students have access to course materials during evenings and weekends so that they do not interfere with high school schedules, work, and extracurricular activities. Students are nominated by high school principals, teachers, or guidance counselors to participate in Academ-e. One-half of tuition and all fees are waived for Academ-e courses; currently the average cost to students of a three-credit course is \$327.

Academ-e courses are designed to include on-campus experiences and to ensure adequate student and faculty interaction. Academ-e includes a mandatory campus orientation for students and a parent, guardian, or guidance counselor at the beginning of the semester. At orientation, students register their laptop computers, receive campus e-mail accounts, receive a tutorial in the online course software, and attend the first class meeting face-to-face with their professor and classmates. Parents and counselors attend a special session about college admissions and financial aid information while their student is in class.

In 2006-2007, the ACE program funded 127 Academ-e courses. This led Academ-e administrators to “encourage high schools to nominate not only students whose records demonstrate that they are college-bound and ready for university level work, but also students who demonstrate potential for success despite underperformance in high school.” Among Academ-e students who received ACE scholarships, 79 (62%) completed their courses and earned grades of C or higher. Among all students who completed Academ-e courses in 2006-2007, 43% enrolled in UMaine in fall 2007, a figure administrators consider surprisingly high.

In 2007-2008, Academ-e is offering 13 college courses with a total of about 250 student slots. UMaine officials report that demand for Academ-e courses is growing, and they are considering offering more course sections in the next academic year. They have also observed that fewer students dropped Academ-e courses during the fall 2007 semester than in the previous two semesters.

Cross-Site Observations

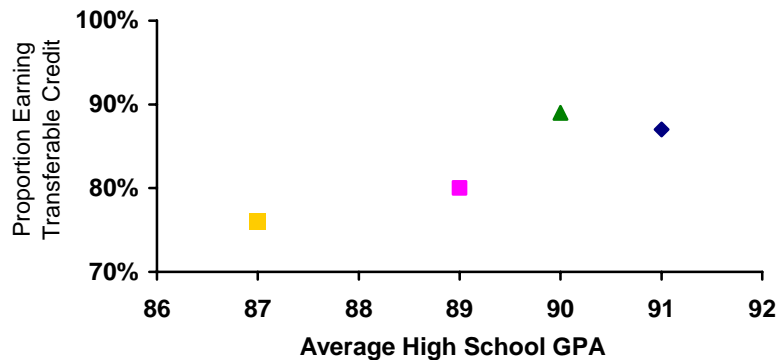
Early College Success Rates

Programs that serve lower-performing students have higher course failure rates, as shown in the chart below. For example, 20% of Lewiston early college students—whose average high school GPA was 88.2—did not complete their early college courses with grades of C or higher, compared with 13% at Fort Kent, where the average student GPA was 91.2. For the ACE program overall, student GPAs averaged 86.7, and 24% did not complete their courses with transferable credits.

One important policy consideration is designing programs to ensure that students are not punished for early college course failures or withdrawals. In the ACE program, tuition was paid for all students enrolling in an early college course, regardless of their performance. In this way,

students had the chance to experience college-level work relatively risk-free. Even for students who do not earn college credits, this “reality check” may help them to ultimately be more successful in college than they otherwise would have. Several students who did not complete their college courses made comments like, “Better time management on my part would have helped.” The majority (63%) of these students still reported that they expect to go to college full-time after graduation.

High School GPA and Student Success in Early College at Four Sites



One high school coordinator notes, “It is important to warn students that drop policies are much stricter in college and if they drop a course they must do so in the first ten days of the term... And it is important for them to understand that if they drop mid-semester, it is an F which will stay on their transcript.” A UMaine official notes that, in the Academ-e program, faculty members have made some adjustments for teaching high school students, including more frequent testing and providing students with feedback on their progress earlier in the semester. These changes have contributed to a lower rate of dropped courses in the second year.

Start-Up

It takes time for early college programs to get to scale. High schools and colleges must build partnerships, develop and implement processes and protocols at each site, and build student awareness and demand. At the University of Maine at Machias, 34 early college students participated in the first semester of the program, and enrollment steadily climbed over the next three semesters, with more than 80 students participating by spring 2007. The ACE program served 33 students in its first semester, 183 in its second, and 243 students in its third and final semester.² At the University of Maine in Augusta, the number of students participating in ACE more than doubled—from 14 to 39—in the first two semesters of the program.

At UMaine, with a year of experience under its belt, “Academ-e now has a history in schools, and is being well-supported by guidance offices. The schools now have a better understanding of what is required, and demand is growing,” the distance learning coordinator reports. At Wells High School, which now has a well-established early college program, coordinators believe that student word-of-mouth proved to have the greatest impact on building demand and increasing enrollment in the program.

² The sum of students per semester is greater than the total number of ACE participants (459 compared with 419) because some students participated for more than one semester.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a challenge for early college programs. While programs like Lewiston’s have found ways to minimize tuition costs and have made early college a part of the school district budget, successful early college programs that are funded by one-time grants “can generate problems when student demand exceeds available funding...participating institutions may eventually face the unhappy dilemma of having to ration access” (Wolf). Schools need to plan ahead for ways to fund future semesters of early college so that funds do not run out once word has spread and student demand for early college is thriving. Many early college programs started with multi-year grants, then had difficulty replacing the funds when the grant periods ended. Successful high school sites have built early college line items into their budgets, and they rely on tuition waivers from colleges and state funds to cover some of the costs.

Recommendations

Educational attainment in Maine is below the national average and significantly behind the rest of New England. Improving college-going among recent high school graduates is one important way to raise educational attainment in our state, and early college programs show promise for helping to achieve this. The early college students we studied were more likely to matriculate into college than their peers (80% compared with 60%).

Particularly when early college programs serve underperforming high school students and those who face greater than average barriers to college, they have the potential to help more students both to develop college aspirations and to realize those aspirations. Maine’s state government, local school districts, and colleges and universities can work together to ensure that effective early college opportunities are available to growing numbers of students:

- 1) **Provide stable funding for early college.** The state, local school districts, colleges, and universities should each contribute to ensure that funding is in place and is adequate to grow with demand.
 - ◆ The state should continue to fund the Aspirations program, and increase funding when demand exceeds available funds.
 - ◆ Local school districts should add budget line items to provide stable funding for early college support personnel and for need-based scholarship funds to help students with tuition, fees, books, and transportation.
 - ◆ Colleges should develop policies to provide discounted tuition and fee waivers for early college students.

- 2) **Identify and deliberately target underperforming students to participate in early college programs.** Typically, these students include:
 - ◆ Students not in an Honors/AP academic track
 - ◆ Students whose parents did not go to college
 - ◆ Male students

In the early college programs studied here, despite having lower high school GPAs, these students performed as well as their peers in their early college classes. Since these students

face greater than average barriers to college, they stand to gain the most from participating in early college programs.

- 3) **Provide support for all early college students, and conduct outreach to ensure that students know how to access available support.** Roughly one in five early college students in this study (21%) did not earn transferable college credit for their courses. In an early college program at Wells High School and York County Community College, visible student support at both the high school and the college is a key program component. A 2006 study of that program found that only 14% of students did not earn transferable college credit, and the students had a considerably lower average high school GPA (82.9) compared with students in this study (87.3) prior to participating in early college (Great Maine Schools Project). The strong support provided for early college students in the Wells program probably played a key role in the high success rate students achieved.

At each high school and college, part of a staff person's time should be devoted to administering the early college program. These coordinators should be responsible for creating awareness of the program among students and staff, working with the high school or postsecondary partners, and advocating for early college students at their institution. Key early college support functions include:

- ♦ Identifying and recruiting underperforming students who can benefit from early college.
- ♦ Assisting students in selecting appropriate college courses in light of their interests and academic strengths.
- ♦ Ensuring that students know about college deadlines, policies, and resources.
- ♦ Helping students resolve scheduling conflicts with high school classes or extracurricular activities.

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