SECTION 1: EMC History, EMC Entities, the Michigan Early Middle College Association, and Dual Enrollment

Introduction

College in high school programming has seen increased interest from stakeholders across Michigan, and the state has seen incredible growth in the number of districts and public-school academies that have selected to seek approval to open an Early Middle College (EMC). At the beginning of the 2026-2027 school year, there are 190 EMCs in partnership with 48 colleges and universities.

The Michigan Department of Education's Office of Career and Technical Education (MDE-OCTE) oversees EMC programming in Michigan and provides support to secondary and postsecondary institutions that currently operate or are interested in opening an EMC. The MDE EMC Unit has developed this EMC Administrator Manual to support EMC staff.

History of Michigan Early Middle Colleges

Traditionally, throughout the nation, Early Colleges or Middle Colleges were high schools where 100% of the students were working toward a high school diploma and postsecondary credit. Early Colleges were geared toward advanced students, who had the opportunity to graduate in four years with a high school diploma and postsecondary credit or an associate degree. Middle Colleges were for students behind on high school credit and needing additional social/emotional support.

Michigan's approach to EMCs was to blend the approach of Early Colleges with the philosophy of Middle Colleges. Michigan has also opted to alter the traditional EMC model by allowing districts to provide a five-year program of study (POS) and choose to set up the EMC as a high school, program, or consortium, thus increasing access and opportunity for students.

In 1991, the first Middle College was opened in Michigan by Dr. Chery S. Wagonlander on the campus of Mott Community College and was named Mott Middle College. The establishment of Mott Middle College was supported by the Middle College National Consortium. Dr. Wagonlander also served as the Executive Director of the Michigan Early Middle College Association (MEMCA) from 2005 through 2021.

The Michigan approach to EMCs changed with the passage of the Postsecondary Options Act, PA 160, in 1996 and the Career and Technical Preparation Act, PA 258, in 2000.

The legislation resulted in the following:

- An increased number of college courses that EMC students could take while in high school.
- Identification of EMCs as unique five-year models.
- Permission for districts to choose between a high school EMC entity or a program serving a cohort of students. In 2020, MDE made a third category for consortia EMCs.
- Permission for districts to collect foundation allowances for 5th year EMC students.
- Tracking EMC students by flagging them in the Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI) System.
- Secured a waiver from the United States Education Department (USED), which allows EMC students to be considered on-time graduates after five years for Adequate Year Progress (AYP) reporting.
- Authorization of the MEMCA Technical Certificate.
- Permission for sites other than the high school to be eligible as locations for earning concurrent credit.
- Encouragement to districts to exercise school of choice options, allowing the release of a student from one school to another, including the entry into an EMC.

EMC Philosophy and Populations Served

The EMC experience can benefit all students. MDE's philosophy is that the students who can most benefit from an EMC experience are students who are:

- Economically disadvantaged
- Underrepresented
- Underserved
- Underperforming

Underrepresented students may include students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, English learners, students of color, etc. In Michigan, EMCs are encouraged to support first-generation, underrepresented, underserved, underperforming, and at-risk students, but each individual school can determine the focus and acceptance requirements of the EMC. The guidance is that the above student demographics could benefit most from the support structures, teaching philosophy, and unique environment provided by an EMC.

EMC Definition and Student Outcomes

An EMC is a Michigan Department of Education (MDE) approved five-year Program of Study (POS). An EMC allows students to stay enrolled in high school for an additional fifth year in order to take college classes. Students can complete up to 60 college credits, an associate degree, or other approved credentials while also

earning credits that may transfer to bachelor's granting institutions. EMCs also include a specific and deliberately designed course of study that includes unique social and emotional student support services.

The credentials/EMC outcomes that a student can achieve include a high school diploma and one or more of the following:

- 60 transferable college credits
- An associate degree
- A professional certification
- The Michigan Early Middle College Association (MEMCA) Technical Certificate
- Participation in a registered apprenticeship

A professional certification is any certificate or industry-recognized credential for which a pupil prepared by taking coursework provided by an eligible postsecondary institution.

A school district or intermediate school district (ISD) must apply to the MDE for approval to open an EMC. Students, parents, and guardians must be made aware of the five-year commitment for an EMC

EMCs must have a formal agreement with at least one Michigan public or private college or university and maintain formal agreements with all postsecondary partners.

EMC Entity Types

Early Middle College **High School** is a stand-alone public high school, where 100% of the pupils are enrolled as EMC pupils.

Early Middle College **Program** is a high school program designed to serve less than 100% of the high school population.

Early Middle College **Consortium** is comprised of multiple school districts with one coordinating agency.

High-Quality EMC Program

The definition of a high-quality EMC program includes:

- Academic programming with a career and college readiness curriculum embedded.
- A student-centered philosophy providing social-emotional and wraparound support by secondary and postsecondary.
- A culture of continuous improvement and data-driven decision-making.
- Robust, active partnerships between secondary and postsecondary.
- Organizational leadership support that provides dedicated EMC staff, resources, and professional development dedicated to supporting EMC students/families.

- Access and equity for all students.
- A comprehensive early middle college program of study for each student.
- Timeliness, accuracy, and fidelity in student reporting.
- Students exit with at least one of the five on-track EMC graduate outcomes.
- A career and college readiness culture throughout the school.

On-Track and Off-Track Graduate Definitions

EMC students will be considered **'on-track'** graduates by earning a high school diploma while also earning an associate degree, a MEMCA Technical Certificate, a professional certification, participation in a registered apprenticeship, or 60 transferable college credits. An exit status code of 40 would be entered in the Michigan Student Data System (MSDS).

EMC students will be considered **'off track**' graduates by earning a high school diploma but **NOT** earning an associate degree, a MEMCA technical certificate, a professional certification, participation in a registered apprenticeship, or 60 transferable college credits. An exit status code of 41 would be entered in the MSDS.

Steps To Start an EMC

1. Assess the interest in establishing an EMC with key stakeholders.
    a. Secure resources and support.
2. Develop a plan and vision based on the design principles, beliefs, and best practices in EMC programs.
    a. Consider EMC staff resources, recruitment, and social and emotional learning support.
3. Reach out to potential postsecondary partners to explore POS options for students.
    a. Consider degrees available, credit transferability, and costs to students and families.
4. Attend an MDE "Opening an EMC Workshop" for prospective EMCs.
    a. Develop a project plan with key steps for EMC opening and checkpoints.
5. Incorporate "The Big Four" Dimensions of College Readiness into the curriculum for students (see page 10).
6. Submit an EMC Application to MDE by the annual EMC Application deadline.

EMC Design Principles

COLLEGE-FOCUSED ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Schools implement comprehensive, standards-based curricula that provide a bridge to postsecondary studies and incorporate both high school and college coursework.

STUDENT ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Supports are offered to all students to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs in high school and in the transition to college.

HIGH SCHOOL/COLLEGE COLLABORATION

High schools and colleges take joint responsibility for students' educational success and establish structures that permit high school students to take college courses.

CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

High schools and colleges engage in evidence-based discussions to continuously improve students' experiences and outcomes.

"The Big Four" Dimension of College Readiness

Taken from "What Makes a Student College Ready?" Dr. David T. Conley, October 2008, Education Leadership, Vol. 66, Number 2.

1. **Key Cognitive Strategies**
   Formulate, investigate, understand, analyze, evaluate, integrate, exercise precision, etc.

2. **Key Content Knowledge**
   College knowledge and subject area big ideas.

3. **Key Self-Management Skills**
   Organizations, judgment, study groups, seeking help, reflection, academic behaviors, etc.

4. **Key Knowledge About Postsecondary Education**
   College selection, adult living, applying, financing, college culture, deadlines & details, contextual skills & awareness, etc.

Michigan Early Middle College Association (MEMCA)

MEMCA, founded in 2005, is a voluntary alliance of educators, led by an executive director and governed by a leadership council. MEMCA's purpose is to significantly increase the collegiate and postsecondary success and completion rate of Michigan youth. The group comes together to share best practices, develop a community of learners and reflective practitioners, and share research with the broad high school transformation community. MEMCA provides the vehicle for awarding the MEMCA

Technical Certificate. MEMCA believes that Dr. David T. Conley's work should be studied and embedded in all EMC models.

MDE has had an MOU on file through 2025 designating the responsibilities of MDE and MEMCA regarding EMCs.

Purpose of MEMCA

The purpose of MEMCA is threefold:

1. Professional development
    - Reflective practice
    - Professional learning community
    - Best practice dissemination
    - Technical assistance for members and groups seeking to develop new EMCs
2. Research and contribution to the literature related to EMCs
    - Share outcomes and best practices
    - Contribute unique perspectives to high school transformation literature
    - Share student voice as well as educator voice
3. College and Career Readiness
    - Conferring the opportunity to EMCs to award the MEMCA Technical Certificate
    - Supporting schools in developing college and career readiness curriculum

MEMCA Technical Certificate

An EMC has the option to present a Career and College Readiness Curriculum for approval by the MEMCA Leadership Council before its first EMC cohort graduation. This approval will allow the EMC the right to confer the MEMCA Technical Certificate. This certificate will support students entering the EMCs who are behind on high school credit, and/or may not graduate with an associate degree, a professional certification, have not participated in a registered apprenticeship, or have not received 60 transferable college credits. The MEMCA Technical Certificate can be awarded along with another EMC outcome and gives EMCs another award that will allow them to graduate students with a successful on-track outcome.

To award the MEMCA Technical Certificate, an EMC must present the college readiness curriculum and EMC overview to the MEMCA Leadership Council and receive approval. The Council reviews presentations from schools periodically throughout the year. The EMC must be in the second year of operation or further and attend a meeting with MEMCA Leadership to learn about the requirements necessary to confer the MEMCA technical certificate. MEMCA staff will contact the EMC to invite staff to prepare to present to the Leadership Council and schedule a date for the presentation. The presentation team should include the district

administrator, a counselor, a teacher, an EMC Coordinator, and postsecondary partners.

To receive a MEMCA Technical Certificate, a student must complete the following:

- The Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC)
- A minimum of 15 non-remedial college credits
- The member school's MEMCA-approved College Readiness Curriculum

And one (1) of the following options:

- 100 hours of verified community service
- A minimum of 40 hours of verified career exploration, internship, job shadowing, or clinical experience
- Or a combination of the two that equals 70+ hours

College and Career Readiness Curriculum

A college and career readiness curriculum teaches EMC students the academic, social, and emotional skills and college knowledge needed to transition successfully from high school to postsecondary. The curriculum should teach the differences between high school and college, prepare them for college-level coursework, and introduce them to college majors and careers.

Many EMCs begin teaching the curriculum in a summer orientation or boot camp. Some will include a college readiness course taught by the EMC or the postsecondary. Others continue to deliver the curriculum during a seminar or advisory period. The Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) offers the Your Future Matters: College and Career Planning course, which some EMCs have adapted for their college and career readiness curriculum. The college and career curriculum should progress each year to meet the specific needs of EMC students. A best practice for continuous improvement is for secondary and postsecondary EMC staff to meet regularly to evaluate EMC students' needs and adjust the curriculum accordingly.

College and career readiness units of study may include:

- College orientation
- Introduction to the student learning platform (Canvas, Blackboard, etc.)
- Analytical and research skills
- Note-taking
- Time management
- Leadership
- Planning and organization skills
- Study skills
- Tests and test anxiety
- How to access college resources
- Communication skills
- Career preparation

- Employability skills

Many EMC High Schools regularly assess EMC students' academic and non-academic indicators throughout the college and career readiness curriculum to determine whether they are ready for college classes. This process is known as credentialing, which is a research-backed process that helps increase success and retention for students.

MEMCA Membership

There are no fees to be a member of MEMCA. All EMCs are automatically enrolled in MEMCA as members once the application to open a new EMC is approved.

Dr. Chery S. Wagonlander EMC Excellence in Practice Awards

Two awards are presented annually at MDE and MEMCA events in recognition of Dr. Chery S. Wagonlander and her leadership in creating the Early Middle College System in Michigan. The awards recognize Excellence in Practice in EMCs at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. A link to the application, process, timeline, and details is available on MDE's EMC web page.

College in High School Opportunities

There are several ways for high school students to earn college credit. Students can follow one of the three pathways listed below or "mix and match" to accelerate academic progress.

1. **Early Middle College:** Designed to allow a pupil to earn a high school diploma while also earning an EMC outcome by continuing education for a 5th year of high school. EMCs provide a structured experience for students that is fortified by structured and intentional student support services. EMCs also include a specific and deliberately designed course of study that includes unique social and emotional student support services.

2. **International Baccalaureate (IB)**: IB is a two-year curriculum available in an IB-approved school where students learn a second language and follow an international focus. There is an emphasis on asking challenging questions, critical reflection, developing research skills, and studying the theory of knowledge. Students submit a final project at the end of the IB program. Community service is encouraged. Students earn an IB Degree, not individual college credits.

3. **Advanced Placement (AP)**: AP classes are high school classes that address a college-level curriculum. There are nationally designed AP courses in different subject areas that provide students with the opportunity to take

college-level courses in high school that are taught by AP-trained high school teachers. AP courses are also available online.

4. **Postsecondary Credit Agreement(s)/Articulated Credit**: High school courses that are aligned with college-level content. Students can earn college credit after successfully completing the course and meeting specific requirements. Postsecondary Credit Agreement(s)/articulated credit provides students with a way to start in a career field and potentially earn college credit while in high school. The programs align with specific programs of study at the postsecondary level. A high school teacher and postsecondary faculty agree on the student learning outcomes for a class to articulate from the high school to the college course. Usually, a student must earn a certain grade in the course and then enroll in the college to have the credit added to the college transcript. Postsecondary credit agreements seek to reduce remediation and duplication of coursework and ensure the smooth transfer of credits to colleges post high school education.

5. **Direct Credit/Concurrent Enrollment**: College courses taught at the high school by qualified instructors. Students receive both high school and college credit simultaneously. Direct credit is usually associated with a college faculty member teaching the college course at the high school. Concurrent enrollment is usually used to describe college courses taught in high school by high school teachers who are also adjunct college faculty. The terms direct credit and concurrent enrollment are used differently throughout the state.

6. **Dual Enrollment (DE)**: High school students take actual college courses (either on a college campus or online) and earn credit that potentially applies to both the high school diploma and the college transcript. Dual Enrollment provides an opportunity for students in ninth grade or higher to take college classes while in high school. High school students may participate in dual enrollment by attending at least one high school course and simultaneously attending a degree-granting postsecondary institution.

   Dual Enrollment courses are available to all students meeting the eligibility requirements as outlined in the MDE's Dual Enrollment FAQ. Students may or may not receive unique social/emotional support or complete a degree or certificate while participating in dual enrollment.

   Under Dual Enrollment, students enroll in individual courses as outlined in the students' Educational Development Plan (EDP) but are not following a specific degree plan. Dual Enrollment provides for up to 10 postsecondary courses, but a school district can exceed the 10 courses if it is part of the student's EDP. Dual Enrollment is guided by the Postsecondary Enrollment

Options Act (PA 160 of 1996) and the Career and Technical Preparation Act (PA 258 of 2000) and provides for payment from a school district's state aid foundation grant. Visit the Dual Enrollment web page for more information or contact the Office of Education Services and Jeff McNeal at 517-241-6958 or mcnealj1@michigan.gov.

The Dual Enrollment and Early Middle College: What's the Difference? The document provides additional information on the differences between DE and EMC, and the College Credit in High School Program Definitions gives additional information on other College in High School Opportunities, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate.

EMC students can use any combination of College in High School Programs to advance on an academic pathway.