

The Michigan High School Initiative

Secondary to Postsecondary Transitions Action Team Report

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In addition, the Department of Education sponsored a Michigan Early College Institute to develop a strategic plan for expanding Early and Middle College High Schools in Michigan. Participants are listed below:

List of Participants in the Michigan Early College Institute

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Charge to the Action Team

The purpose of the action team was to research and recommend specific strategies to expand opportunities for Michigan high school students, particularly underserved students, to earn college credit while still in high school.

Goals:

1. Determine features of early college learning experiences that should be supported by Michigan state policy. (e.g. collaboration between high school and college faculty, transferability of credit, availability to underserved populations.)
2. Recommend state policies that remove barriers to student participation in college equivalency courses including Advanced Placement, dual enrollment and formal articulation.
3. Assist Michigan's Center for Educational Performance Information (CEPI) in the creation of a P-16 data tracking system by recommending specific data that needs to be tracked.
4. Recommend changes in the dual enrollment law that encourage college credit programs, particularly for underserved students.

Deliverables and Timelines:

1. Determine features of early college learning experiences that should be supported by Michigan state policy. (e.g. collaboration between high school and college faculty, transferability of credit, availability to underserved populations.)
February – March 2006
2. Recommend state policies that remove barriers to student participation in college equivalency courses including Advanced Placement, dual enrollment and formal articulation. **January – May 2006**
3. Assist Michigan's Center for Educational Performance Information (CEPI) in the creation of a P-16 data tracking system by recommending specific data that needs to be tracked. **March – April 2006**
4. Recommend changes in the dual enrollment law that encourage college credit programs, particularly for underserved students. **(February – March 2006)**

Essential Questions for Research and Action

Credit Transfer

One issue that continued to surface throughout our discussions was the transfer issue. Some universities in Michigan have policies under which they will not accept for college credit any work that also resulted in high school credit. We heard many accounts of students who received dual enrollment credit at a community college only to lose that credit upon transferring to a university. It is clear that under current Michigan law there is little that can be done to alleviate this concern. Perhaps the best that we can do is provide and widely disseminate information on transfer policies of all public institutions of higher education in Michigan. This information could be used by students, parents and secondary school personnel to plan an optimum path to successful completion of postsecondary education.

Definitions of Terms

Another ongoing concern is the inconsistent use of terms such as Early College, Middle College, Direct Credit, Dual Enrollment, Concurrent Enrollment, Small Schools. Many schools have used these terms to describe their programs, but the some terms are used for different types of programs. Given Michigan's autonomous system of higher education, it is doubtful that one could enforce a common set of definitions of these terms.

The Process

The action team met monthly beginning in October of 2005 to address the goals outlined in the charge. The team reviewed research documents and heard presentations from individuals involved in programs providing early college credit. Recommendations were compiled and then reviewed at subsequent meetings.

The Michigan Early College Institute met for two consecutive days to review information regarding Early and Middle College High Schools and to develop recommendations. Participants included Joel Vargas of Jobs for the Future and CeCe Cunningham of the Middle College National Consortium who provided a national perspective. At the conclusion of the Institute, a writing committee was constituted to draft recommendations.

Many members of the action team participated on the NGA Grant College Credit subcommittee that was also charged with developing recommendations for expanding early college learning experiences.

It is important to note that it was not possible for every member of the action team to participate fully in its discussions and development of recommendations. Therefore, the recommendations should not be considered endorsed by each member but represent a consensus of those who were able to participate.

Recommendations

Recommendations of the action team fall into three general categories: Common Features of Early College Learning Experiences, Dual Enrollment and Advanced Placement. Recommendations regarding Middle and Early College High Schools are also included in this section.

Common Features of Early College Learning Experiences

As the Department of Education moves forward to increase the number of early college learning experiences for students in Michigan, it should consider creating experiences that have the following characteristics.

1. Credit should be transferable from one institution to another
 - a. High school to college
 - b. School district to school district
 - c. College to college
 - d. College to high school
2. Policies and practices should be communicated and marketed to districts, parents and students.
3. The merits of early college learning experiences should be communicated to districts, parents and students.
4. Early college learning experiences should be featured as a pathway that aligns with the new graduation requirements.
5. Early college learning experiences should be accompanied by a free flow of information among educational institutions.
6. Funding options should be included.
7. Home-schooled students should be included.

Dual Enrollment

Michigan has received a National Governors Association Grant to conduct a review of its dual enrollment laws, policies and practices. Some of the barriers to dual enrollment as it is currently practiced in Michigan include the following:

1. There is no assurance that dual enrollment credits earned through one college will transfer to another college.
2. Current law requires that the class must be held on a college campus.
3. The school district must give high school credit in order to get the full foundation allowance.
4. It is not clear if a college professor teaching a dual enrollment class would be considered “highly qualified” for NCLB.
5. Legislation passed in the fall may prohibit dual enrollment in the 5th year.
6. It is not widely understood that current statute does not prohibit a district from supporting dual enrollment regardless of grade or testing status.

7. The cost of text books is prohibitive.

The following recommendations should be considered in revisions to the current dual enrollment law:

1. Clarify the issue of highly qualified as it relates to dual enrollment.
2. Allow dual enrollment in the fifth year of high school.
3. Clarify the option for school districts to support dual enrollment beyond the law without regard to age or testing status.
4. Combine the CTE and non-CTE dual enrollment laws into one.
5. Provide for transfer of dual enrollment credits.
6. Include money for texts.
7. Treat dual enrollment as part of compulsory education.
8. Specifically include virtual classes as eligible for dual enrollment credit.

Advanced Placement

In June of 2004, Governor Granholm created the Cherry Commission with a charge to identify strategies to double the number of Michigan residents with degrees or other credentials of value within ten years. One of the resulting recommendations from the Cherry Commission is to expand opportunities for “early college” achievement so that 50% of the state’s high school students are earning college credit by the year 2015. Increasing participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses and exams is a promising strategy for accomplishing these goals. According to the College Board, 45% of students who have taken one AP course and 61% of students who have taken two or more AP courses are completing their bachelor’s degrees in four years or less. Only 29% percent of students who enroll in colleges without having taken AP are completing their bachelor’s degrees on schedule.

Since the year 2000, Michigan has realized a steady increase in the number of students participating in the AP program. Much of that increase has come from low-income, African American and Latino students. From 2004 to 2005, the number of students taking AP exams increased by 7.2% (24,070 to 25,803), the number of exams taken increased by 8.2% (38,020 to 41,150) and the number of passing scores (3+) increased by 6.1% (15,862 to 16,823). In Arkansas, a state that recently required all of its high schools to offer AP classes, the number of students taking AP increased by 108%, the number of exams taken increased by 107%, the number of passing scores increased by 34% but the pass rate dropped from 43.9% to 28.2%.

In order to increase participation in AP programs in Michigan, the state must:

- Require all school districts to make available to their students at least 4 certified AP courses, one in each of the disciplines, English, Math, Social Science and Science preferably in a face-to-face format within the school. An alternative could be to offer dual enrollment in place of AP.
- Require districts to communicate the availability of AP classes.

- Encourage districts to provide the prerequisite courses needed for AP.
- Remove unnecessary barriers for students to take AP classes.
- Devise a system to use PLAN data to identify students for AP
- Support teacher professional development for AP and pre-AP teachers
- Offer an economic incentive for schools to increase participation in AP classes and tests and to cover the cost of lower student class size in AP classes.
- Pay the cost of up to two AP exams for all students who are following the Michigan Merit Core curriculum
- Negotiate with the College Board to reduce the cost of the AP test

Early and Middle College High Schools

Early and Middle College High Schools represent two very effective strategies to provide students with opportunities to earn college credit while in high school. Middle College High Schools (MCHS) are high schools on a college campus designed to meet the needs of underserved youth. They provide a seamless secondary to postsecondary educational continuum and innovative curricula and pedagogy along with a nurturing environment. The location on a college campus provides an environment that may better meet the needs of students who have not been successful in the more traditional environment. Students are given access to the college facilities and services and take college classes as appropriate. Early College High Schools (ECHS) are small schools designed to graduate underserved and at risk students with a high school diploma and simultaneously an Associate's degree or up to 60 transferable credits. Middle College-Early College (MC-EC) High Schools combine the major characteristics of Middle and Early Colleges in that they are located on college campuses and include the Associates' degree or 60 credit expectation. By compressing the curriculum and providing opportunities for students to experience college early, these schools have the potential to increase high school and college completion rates.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation along with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Corporation of New York, is funding a national expansion of Early College High Schools in the United States with a goal of creating 180 by 2008.

In the fall of 2005, the Michigan Department of Education commissioned a Michigan Early College Institute to develop a strategic plan for significantly increasing the number of Early and Middle College High Schools in Michigan.

Given that the ECHS is a relatively new concept, there are no longitudinal data regarding the success rates of ECHS students. There are however data on MCHS and MC-EC High Schools. A January 2006 report of the National Center for the Restructuring of Education Schools and Teaching indicates that in 13 new MC-EC schools 64% took one or more college classes. Of these, 96% passed their classes. The students were 59% female, 80% non-white and 43% English language learners. These pass rates were the same for males and females, did not differ by racial or ethnic group and did not differ for students eligible for free lunch versus those who were not.

Mott Middle College (MMC) located on the campus of Mott Community College enrolls 357 students, 137 of whom are students of color. Of those 357, 138 are dual enrolled taking 336 higher education classes. Over the past ten years MMC has averaged a 5.2% dropout rate compared to a 32% rate for high schools nation wide. During the same period 84.6% of MMC's graduates have enrolled in college compared to a national average of 59%. This is particularly impressive given that MMC admits a large number of students who have not been successful in the traditional high school setting.

Inherent in the concepts of "early college" learning opportunities and Early and Middle College High Schools (E/MCHSs) is the conviction that all learners aspire to individual economic independence and that with adequate support (personal, academic and financial) every learner can meet college standards which are rapidly becoming the same as workplace standards. Also, learners will persist when:

- They are connected to faculty and guidance counselors
- They experience "hands on" advising, career assessment, counseling, and mentoring
- They are part of a learning community
- They experience low student to teacher ratios
- They experience a personalized environment
- They can minimize personal issues
- They experience educational activities that match their learning styles and learning readiness
- They experience "academic intrusiveness"
- They experience a supported, accelerated learning environment
- They have a chance to start over

In the interest of the learner, schools must use the tools of time, personnel, space, facilities, competence and assessment to provide environments that will meet all students' needs.

Michigan currently evidences several policies and initiatives that, like E/MCHSs, are intended to better align, coordinate, and support the transition of all high school students into and through postsecondary education. The state is currently in the process of redefining its high school graduation requirements to provide a rigorous curriculum of study for all high school students. The Michigan Department of Education is coordinating efforts to develop course content expectations for all of the core high school courses. Beginning in 06-07 the state will begin using the ACT as its primary high school assessment tool. Additional assessments, including end of course assessments are also being planned. There is increasing collaboration between K-12 and 13-16 educators in forging partnerships and models that serve students on a 9-12 continuum. Michigan has an existing history of dual enrollment policy. K-12 districts and postsecondary institutions understand the uses and strengths of the policy.

Certainly one of the major obstacles to creating E/MCHSs in Michigan is financial. The current dual enrollment law provides a financial disincentive for school districts to get

involved with E/MCHSs or other dual enrollment initiatives. The cost of transportation and text books often is an obstacle to students becoming involved in dual enrollment. Under current policy, high school students are not eligible for any financial aid. Schools districts and colleges lack the resources to house and staff E/MCHSs. The design and target population of E/MCHSs necessitate resources for close collaboration by high school and college partners to co-design a 9-14 integrated course of study and the support systems to ensure the success of students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. If the state supported the marginal costs of E/MCHSs, it could gain come efficiencies in lower remediation needs and accelerated time to degrees by E/MCHS graduates.

Another issue is the flawed perception by many Michigan citizens that one does not need higher education in order to obtain a family-supporting job. Michigan has a history of well-paying manufacturing jobs but these jobs are rapidly disappearing and being replaced by high-tech and high skilled jobs that require at least some postsecondary education.

Michigan has a history of local autonomy in education. This makes it very difficult for the state to influence educational institutions and promote any specific initiative. For example, two universities in the state refuse to accept dual credit because they feel that credit earned in high school should not also be counted as college credit. The state has very little leverage on these institutions to affect a change in these policies.

Faculty and staff buy-in can also be an obstacle, particularly when labor agreements are involved. College staffs are sometimes reluctant to accept high school students in their classes. High school labor unions are concerned about an erosion of their bargaining unit if high school students are taking college classes.

The following is a list of components of a practical vision for Early and Middle College High Schools in Michigan.

1. By the year 2010 Michigan will have twelve new ECHSs, MCHSs or MC-ECs in strategic locations across the state.
2. The state funding process will hold harmless (no loss of foundation aid) schools that participate in ECHS or MCHS and include additional startup funds as well as funding to provide special support services.
3. Local districts or ISDs will collaborate with higher education institutions to create E/MCHSs.
4. The Dual Enrollment Law will encourage participation in E/MCHSs.
5. The State will establish grade 9-16 innovation zones to create and structure E/MCHSs.
6. Credits earned in E/MCHSs will be easily transferable between and among all educational institutions.
7. E/MCHSs will have the flexibility to facilitate students learning at various rates through the educational systems.

8. E/MCHSs will meet all graduation and assessment requirements within the context of competency based and dual credit systems.
9. Equivalencies between high school classes and college classes will be standardized.

Strategies for implementation of this vision include the following.

1. The Michigan Department of Education should establish an office under the direction of the CAO and in collaboration with the Michigan High School Initiative to implement the development of E/MCHSs. This office would:
 - a. Develop and communicate the characteristics identified with an E/MCHS
 - b. Identify and endorse potential sites for E/MCHSs
 - c. Identify potential funding sources and assist potential sites to apply for the funds
 - d. Provide technical assistance in cooperation with existing resources during the planning phase and in the first 3-5 years for new E/MCHSs
 - e. Establish a consortium of Michigan E/MCHSs
 - f. Devise a plan to continue expanding E/MCHSs in Michigan
2. Through this office each potential M/ECHS site will seek startup funds from the following suggested funding sources:
 - a. The State of Michigan (must develop an RFP)
 - b. Private Foundations
 - c. Corporate Sponsors
 - d. Bill and Melinda Gates Educational Foundation Intermediaries (e.g. Middle College National Consortium, Antioch University Seattle and Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation)
3. Current policies should be employed or modified as necessary to encourage E/MCHSs
 - a. Policies to support the ability of a student to leave a home school to attend an E/MCHS
 - i. Eliminate all high-school-based criteria for dual enrollment for students who meet the college criteria
 - ii. Allow ninth and tenth graders to dual enroll where appropriate
 - iii. Ensure that E/MCHSs are eligible to receive the per student foundation allowance. The state should also provide additional funding to low income students to cover the cost of textbooks and other fees not covered.
 - iv. Include a 5th year and up to an age of twenty as allowable for dual enrollment and attendance in a high school program
 - v. Michigan should seek to provide a special category for E/MCHSs in meeting and reporting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements. For example, New York has done this recently so as not to penalize E/MCHSs designed to graduate students from high school within five years but graduate not only with a high school diploma but also with substantial college credit.
 - b. Policies that promote concurrent college credit

- i. College faculty teaching college classes for dual enrollment will be considered “highly qualified” by the criteria of No Child Left Behind
- ii. Transfer policies of postsecondary institutions regarding dual enrollment should be widely communicated
- iii. Autonomy: E/MCHSs should have enough autonomy to make decisions that enable them to accelerate academic advancement for students and to integrate secondary and postsecondary education

In order to attain Governor Granholm’s goal of doubling the number of Michigan residents who obtain college degrees and other valuable credentials, it will be necessary to establish meaningful alternatives for youth who do not fulfill their academic potential in traditional school environments. E/MCHSs can provide the environment needed to promote student success in high school and then on through college.

E/MCHSs are not theoretical constructs but rather real schools enrolling real students. They provide a mechanism to ease the complexity of the transition from high school to college and assure that students stay in school, attend college and get the postsecondary education required to fulfill careers in today’s society.

Making an investment today in E/MCHSs will provide dividends in the future in the form of a better educated workforce with a better employment rate and a higher earning potential.

Because early college high schools provide both secondary and postsecondary education, they have the potential to catalyze change in both of these educational sectors. They can provide the bridge that brings the two together and help create meaningful educational reform throughout the K-16 system.

Opportunities and Challenges

Currently, a window of opportunity exists in which substantial changes in policies related to early college learning experiences can be made. The State Board of Education has requested a comprehensive set of recommendation be presented at its June meeting. The legislature seems poised to take some action to expand early college learning options for Michigan students.

Challenges will certainly include funding issues. Many of the barriers to expanded participation are financial, both for the student and for the schools. The state is also struggling with finances and will likely have difficulty finding substantial dollars to support early college learning experiences.

Next Action Steps

The recommendations in this report must be considered along with those from the NGA Leadership Team to form recommendations that will go to the Board of Education. If the Board adopts the recommendations, strategies must be developed, similar to those related to the new graduation requirements to encourage the legislature to fashion these recommendations into law.