

Evaluation of the Early College High School Initiative

Select Topics on Implementation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Early College High School Initiative

This report is the third annual synthesis report on the national evaluation of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI). The report focuses on the ECHSI implementation year of 2005–06 but also provides a longitudinal view of the initiative.

The foundation established the vision for the Early College High Schools (ECHSs) in this initiative. The basis of this vision is a set of Core Principles, which includes requirements for the ECHSs to:

- Provide students with an opportunity to earn college credits worth up to an associate’s degree or 2 years toward their baccalaureate while in high school,
- Find public funds to cover the college credits, and
- Compress students’ time to a postsecondary degree.

The initiative also encourages ECHSs to emphasize what the foundation refers to as “the new 3R’s”: rigorous instruction, relevant curriculum, and supportive relationships for all students. In addition, the initiative targets student groups that are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education.

The foundation has announced an intention to support the establishment of 175 to 200 ECHSs across the nation. In 2005–06, 77 of these schools had opened as the result of planning and financial and technical support from multiple partners. These partners included the foundation itself, Jobs for the Future (JFF), 17 intermediary groups that used foundation funding to create the schools, and local partnerships consisting of institutions of higher education (IHEs), school districts, and other types of local organizations that provided day-to-day management and oversight.

The intermediaries play a key role in the ECHSI. It is their responsibility to perform a number of functions crucial to the success of their ECHSs. Intermediaries must identify promising local partnerships among IHEs, school districts, and other entities; assist in fostering and solidifying those partnerships; distribute and monitor the use of the ECHSI funding for startup and early implementation of the schools; and support networking activities for the schools. In turn, the intermediaries have received support through technical assistance and networking organized by JFF. JFF’s role in the initiative includes three functions: (1) accountability, (2) technical assistance, and (3) work on creating federal, state, and local policy environments that encourage the kinds of blended high school–college experiences represented by ECHSs.

Local ECHS partnerships always include at least one IHE, usually a community college. Most commonly, the IHE partners with a school district. However, the initiative also includes many other kinds of partners, ranging from community organizations to charter-school management organizations to Native American tribes. Many of the schools are brand new. Others have converted from some other status, for example, Middle College High Schools that have now adopted the ECHSI core principles. A few are small learning communities situated within a comprehensive high school. In addition, the ECHSs vary on other dimensions, such as location (on a college campus or not) and whether they partner with a 2-year or a 4-year IHE or both.

Report Findings

This section provides a summary of the key findings presented in this third annual synthesis report for the ECHSI. The findings derive from visits to and interviews with individuals associated with a sample of ECHSs, interviews with the funded intermediaries, interviews with foundation staff, and an online school-level survey conducted in conjunction with JFF and the foundation.

The ECHSI Core Principles: Putting Ideas Into Practice

- The ECHSI Core Principles, as articulated in *Early College High School Initiative Core Principles* (JFF, 2003), include the stipulation that these schools serve students from populations typically underrepresented in postsecondary education. In general, ECHSs remained firmly committed to serving student populations that met this definition. This finding has now been sustained for 3 successive years of the initiative's implementation, suggesting that the principle has been well internalized throughout the initiative.
- The ECHSI Core Principles (JFF, 2003) originally stated that students will earn 2 years of college credits or an associate's degree and now state that students will earn up to 2 years of college credits. This change helped ECHSs struggling with the tension between the goal of serving underrepresented students who are also often underprepared for high school and readying them to undertake college work while still in high school. The schools seem to have made a commitment to offering opportunities for students to earn *some* college credits rather than an absolute number.
- ECHSs were increasingly involved with the middle grades as leaders strategized ways to have students enter 9th grade ready for college-preparatory or college-level work. However, only one-tenth of the ECHSs open by fall 2006 enrolled students in grades 6 through 8.

The ECHS Experience: Teaching and Learning in Early College High Schools

- A goal of the ECHSI is for the participating students to experience curriculum and instruction that meet the foundation's call for the new 3R's—rigor, relevance, and relationships in the classroom—at *both* the high school and college levels. Evidence from ECHS site visits suggests that individual examples of high-quality teaching and learning can be found within the ECHSI, but there remains considerable room for growth in this area.
- As noted in a previous report (AIR/SRI, 2006), the new 3R's were more evident in English/language arts instruction than in mathematics instruction, and in high school classrooms more than in college classrooms.
- In general, academic and social supports (e.g., advisories, access to instructors after class, counselors, tutoring) were prevalent but tended to be offered through the ECHS, even when the support was for college classes. However, many IHEs allowed ECHS students access to existing support services.
- Although few student outcomes are available for the population of ECHSs, the early indicators of student attendance and performance on standardized assessments are quite positive. Overall, the mean of the average daily attendance rates reported by ECHSs was 94 percent. ECHSs, on average, outperformed other area high schools on the percentage of

students scoring proficient on state English language arts/reading and mathematics assessments.¹

- According to students, instructors, and school leaders alike, ECHSs were succeeding in creating positive environments for learning and a college-going culture for many young people.
- At this stage in the initiative, some schools were reaching maturity, serving their full or nearly full complement of students in a 4-year or 5-year academic program that was, at a minimum, college preparatory. However, the ECHSI and its Core Principles call for something more. The ideal (which no ECHS yet claims to have attained) is a seamless, blended program of studies and accompanying supports that bridges the divide between high school and college. It is fair to suggest that, in the near future, exemplars of the model should begin to emerge.

Local ECHS Partnerships

- Analysis of information gained through interviews conducted in 2005–06 suggested the emergence of three partnership types as the ECHSI grew and matured:
 - Partnership type 1, in which the ECHS itself led the partnership
 - Partnership type 2, in which the ECHS and IHE or district partner shared the responsibility for the partnership
 - Partnership type 3, in which the ECHS and other partners (e.g., a community organization) shared the responsibility for the partnership
- Each of these partnership types offered strengths and weaknesses to the job of creating a strong ECHS. For example, in type 1 partnerships, where the ECHS itself shouldered most of the responsibility and accountability, the ECHS often enjoyed considerable autonomy in decision-making but had to be concerned about maintaining enough involvement from partners to ensure continuing success.
- In type 2 partnerships, where a school district and IHE or both provided substantial support to an ECHS, the ECHS most commonly was a district school, and frequently the district and the IHE had a long history of partnership on many fronts.
- Type 3 partnerships were similar to type 2 but involved some entity other than a school district (although a school district might also be on board) in partnership with an IHE to support an ECHS. The community partners in this type tended to be very deeply invested in the ECHS under development.

Intermediaries: How Their Characteristics Interacted With Their Work

- The intermediaries' work could be influenced by two characteristics: (1) the number of years that an intermediary had been working on developing ECHSs and (2) whether the

¹ These assessment findings should be interpreted with caution, as these data are a single point in time and are not adjusted for students' achievement levels prior to entering the ECHSs.

intermediary was developing a national network of ECHSs or a bounded, place-based network (state, city).

- The national intermediaries had greater latitude in continuing to recruit and develop new local partnerships with high potential. However, these intermediaries had to put more effort into establishing and maintaining networks and technical assistance for distant schools.
- The place-based intermediaries enjoyed early success in developing strong local partnerships with organizations eager to participate, but these intermediaries were having to exert greater effort to find and develop a second wave of local partners within their boundaries.
- Newer intermediaries benefited to some extent from the lessons learned by the intermediaries that first received foundation grants in 2002, but it was still necessary to learn many aspects of effective grant management through actual experience. Thus, while the more established intermediaries had accepted the need to hold their ECHSs (and local partnerships) accountable, the newest groups were feeling their way slowly and cautiously toward an accountability process.

ECHSI Learning Communities

- The entire ECHSI was designed to foster multiple levels of learning communities representative of more than the sum of their individual parts. Thus, at the broadest level, JFF's role in coordinating technical assistance brought together outside experts, foundation staff, intermediary organizations, and some representatives from local partnerships to share experiences and information that deepened the impact of what the initiative was accomplishing.
- In turn, most of the intermediaries created learning communities within their own networks of schools and provided more frequent opportunities for the often quite isolated ECHSs to support and learn from one another.
- The ECHSI's vision of a truly blended and articulated model of secondary-postsecondary education includes the hope that leaders and instructors at the ECHS and at the participating IHE will also establish a collaborative learning community over time. This hope was just beginning to be realized in a few locations as the new schools matured and more students were becoming the joint responsibility of the high school and the college.

Sustainability of the Early College High Schools

- Increasingly, intermediaries and local partnerships were focusing on sustainability issues that naturally included identifying multiple sources of adequate funding to support a nontraditional model of schooling; these issues also extended to concerns about maintaining staff stability and avoiding staff burnout.
- Factors that appeared to contribute to sustainability included a signed local partnership agreement delineating the responsibilities of all partners and the "friendliness" of state and local policies in allowing financial support for students who were participating in both secondary and postsecondary education sectors.

Summing Up

The findings reported above suggest that overall implementation of the ECHSI is proceeding apace, with good progress in developing local partnerships, opening a critical mass of ECHSs, and growing multiple levels of professional learning communities that will help sustain the initiative into the future. Mature intermediaries continue to refine their management and technical assistance activities as they support ECHSs that are beginning to graduate cohorts of students. Newer intermediaries and their schools are moving into the middle phase of implementation, learning as they go. In short, the ECHSI story at midpoint is a positive one.

The ECHSI began its work with what appeared to be a clear vision of what an ECHS should be. This vision was set forth as Core Principles (JFF, 2003) that would guide the planning and implementation processes undertaken by intermediaries and local partnerships. This evaluation report and the reports that preceded it (AIR/SRI 2005a and 2006) have documented some of the ways in which the original vision has been shaped by reality and by the exigencies of the process itself. One clear example of adaptation is the diffusion of the goal requiring all ECHS students to earn 2 years of transferable college credits or an associate's degree. Other Core Principles have also received some degree of modification — or scant attention. The general picture of the ECHSI at midpoint suggests that, within the learning communities generated by the initiative, the Core Principles might be productively revisited, refined, and revised to provide a better and perhaps more explicit roadmap for future developers of ECHSs.

Revisiting the Core Principles during 2006–07 would be helpful in another regard. So far, the ECHSI has looked outside itself for exemplars of small high schools with strong college-going cultures. For example, many local partnership teams have had invaluable opportunities to visit and learn from the work of University Park Campus School, in Worcester, Mass. However, University Park is *not* an ECHS, and despite its strong partnership with a university, it does not have the goal of developing a blended secondary-postsecondary experience. With more and more ECHSs reaching full implementation, it seems to be time for the initiative to bring together the Core Principles with best practice, now observable in operational schools. The ECHSI needs its own exemplars, including evidence of promising student outcomes. Furthermore, when the initiative identifies these exemplars, it should widely publicize their stories, to encourage the continued growth of and support for the idea of blended secondary-postsecondary programs.

About the Evaluation

Since 2002, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International (SRI) have worked together to evaluate the ECHSI. All the data collection activities are grounded in a conceptual framework (displayed in Chapter I), which denotes the key features that are measured in the evaluation and the interrelationships that will be investigated during analyses. Rather than testing a causal model, this evaluation is descriptive and attempts to document and describe the key features and their interrelationships for both formative and summative purposes.

This report provides findings based on qualitative and quantitative data collected in or about the 2005–06 academic year. The evaluation team collected qualitative data (e.g., interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations) from a sample of 24 ECHSs, 13 intermediaries, 4 subintermediaries, JFF, and the foundation. These qualitative data focused mainly on structural and design elements, as well as successes and challenges experienced during implementation of the ECHSs. The team also collected quantitative data on the population of open ECHSs from publicly available sources and through an electronic school-level survey that included items on such topics as student-selection criteria for admission, student course-taking opportunities, and support services.

CHAPTER I — Introduction

Overview of the Early College High School Initiative

In 2000, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation started funding several initiatives to improve America's high schools. These initiatives were designed to:

- Increase high school graduation rates — for all students and specifically for low-income, African American, and Hispanic students
- Increase college-readiness rates — for all students
- Increase college entrance and completion — for low-income, African American, and Hispanic students (The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006, p. 5)

Through several major initiatives, it supported the development of new networks and partnerships for high school improvement through the creation of additional high schools and reforms for existing high schools. Furthermore, the foundation funded efforts at the state and national levels to advocate for conditions conducive to growing and sustaining high school improvement (The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006).

The Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) — launched in 2002 — targets students who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary institutions, and gives them the opportunity to pursue a high school diploma and college credit simultaneously. While many students entering these schools are performing below grade level, Early College High Schools (ECHSs) put students on an accelerated path to college readiness and to college. Although college-level coursework in high school has traditionally been available only to academically advanced students, the ECHSI operates under the principle that improved high school instruction and curriculum tied to the incentive of earning college credits will motivate and educate struggling students, thereby increasing their interest in and access to postsecondary education.

The ECHSI is operated by 17 grantee organizations, or intermediaries, which receive funding to work with local partners, such as school districts, community organizations, high schools, and colleges, to open ECHSs. Figure 1.1 provides a description of all the participating intermediaries. The foundation also funded Jobs for the Future (JFF) to provide technical assistance to all other intermediaries and to the local ECHS partners.

Figure 1.1. ECHSI Intermediaries and Number of ECHSs Open and Planned in 2005–06

<p>The City University of New York (CUNY). CUNY is one of the nation’s largest urban public university systems. CUNY has a history of collaborating with New York City’s Department of Education to offer a systemwide program of college courses, college-oriented workshops, and special activities. Currently one of CUNY’s largest programs is College Now, which enables high school students, mostly in grades 11 and 12, to enroll in college classes. OPEN ECHSs: 3; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 10.</p>
<p>Center for Native Education (CNE). Located in downtown Seattle, Antioch University is part of a six-campus national system of postsecondary institutions. Antioch University houses CNE and has considerable experience working with Native American communities. All its ECHSs will be opened with Native American community partners, target Native American students, and include culturally relevant instruction and curricula. OPEN ECHSs: 8; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 18.</p>
<p>The Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC). FCCC is a cooperative consortium of California community colleges founded in 1998. The organization supports the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges; the chancellor’s office; and the colleges, districts, and foundations of the California Community Colleges system. Through the ECHSI, FCCC hopes to improve the path from high school to California community colleges. OPEN ECHSs: 7; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 15.</p>
<p>Gateway to College at Portland Community College (GTC). GTC offers alternative routes for high school completion and college preparation to students who are at risk for dropping out of high school or have already done so. The program originated at Portland Community College, which remains GTC’s base of operations. OPEN ECHSs: 5; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 17.</p>
<p>KnowledgeWorks Foundation (KWF). Operating in Ohio, KWF is a philanthropic organization dedicated to improving educational opportunities for all individuals. KWF pursues this goal by collaborating with public and private entities. These partnerships seek to improve educational outcomes for all students. OPEN ECHSs: 6; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 10.</p>
<p>Middle College National Consortium (MCNC). MCNC was formed in 1993 to support secondary and postsecondary public-sector educators in implementing educational reforms for “at-risk” learners. Schools affiliated with this network, known as Middle Colleges, receive ongoing technical assistance from MCNC. Located on college campuses, these ECHSs usually partner with community colleges. OPEN ECHSs: 13; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 30.</p>
<p>National Council of La Raza (NCLR). NCLR is the largest national constituency-based Hispanic organization. One of NCLR’s five key strategic priorities is education. NCLR’s ECHSs are located in areas serving largely Latino communities. OPEN ECHSs: 6; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 12.</p>
<p>North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP). NCNSP was established to address the college aspirations of underserved students in North Carolina. Funded in part by the state, it links the private and public sectors to advocate for high school innovation, to facilitate consensus-building that ensures students graduate ready for work or college, and to invest with partnering organizations to increase the number of small high schools that deliver a relevant curriculum. OPEN ECHSs: 12; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 75.</p>
<p>SECME, Inc. (SECME). SECME is a nonprofit corporation established to link engineering universities, school systems, and corporate and government investors. SECME’s mission is to increase the pool of underserved students prepared to enter and complete postsecondary studies in science, mathematics, engineering, and technology. OPEN ECHSs: 2; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 2.</p>

Figure 1.1. ECHSI Intermediaries and Number of ECHSs Open in 2005–06 (Continued)

Texas High School Project (THSP). THSP is a public-private initiative founded in the spring of 2004. THSP is managed by the Communities Foundation of Texas (CFT), one of the largest charitable community foundations in the United States. THSP is a partnership among CFT, the Texas Education Agency, the governor’s office, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. It is funded by CFT, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, and other philanthropic organizations. THSP, rather than opening ECHSs directly, funds four subintermediaries (all higher education organizations) to open ECHSs. OPEN ECHSs: 3; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 15.

Texas A & M University System (TAMU System). TAMU System is contracted under the THSP to help two sites open ECHSs in fall 2006. Its goal is to ensure that all ECHS students are fully prepared to enter a 4-year college upon graduation. Each site will partner with a college within the TAMU System. The ECHS grant is facilitated by the College of Education at Texas A&M University at College Station. OPEN ECHSs: 0; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 2.

Texas Community College Education Initiative (TCCEI). TCCEI is a nonprofit subsidiary of the Texas Association of Community Colleges, which began working with THSP in the summer of 2004. One of TCCEI’s aims is to increase access to community college for students across the state. Each of TCCEI’s ECHSs will be the result of collaboration between a community college and a local school district. OPEN ECHSs: 0; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 3.

University of North Texas (UNT). UNT’s ECHS work is an outgrowth of its participation on a regional P – 16 Council, an association of regional educational organizations concerned with student success from preschool through college. UNT is motivated by the belief that universities should play a role in ensuring a seamless transition for all students who have college aspirations. OPEN ECHSs: 0; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 3.

University of Texas System (UT System). UT System works with institutions of higher education (IHEs) in its system to create and open ECHSs in targeted regions. The Institute for Public School Initiatives manages the ECHSI for UT System. The Institute’s goal is to increase the number of high school graduates who have the academic skills they need in college and to engage in partnerships to improve student performance. OPEN ECHSs: 3; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 5.

University System of Georgia (USG). The P – 16 Office of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia is a partnership between the Georgia Department of Education and the University System of Georgia. This partnership hopes to increase college readiness and success of high school graduates traditionally underserved in the USG. OPEN ECHSs: 1; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 6.

The Utah Partnership for Education (UP). UP was established in 1990. It aims to increase the number of students with the skills to enter a variety of higher-paying jobs, to improve the quality of education in Utah through business-education partnerships, and to increase the research partnership efforts of business and university communities. OPEN ECHSs: 5; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 6.

Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (WWNFF). WWNFF, founded in 1945, is a nonprofit organization with three broad areas of interest: the liberal arts, access to and opportunity in higher education, and partnerships for learning. In its ECHSs, the foundation focuses on the liberal arts and on forming partnerships with 4-year state universities and private institutions. OPEN ECHSs: 7; TOTAL PLANNED ECHSs: 14.

National Evaluation of the ECHSI

To assist ECHSs in attaining the goals of the ECHSI, including improved rates of high school graduation, college attendance, and college completion, the foundation, in collaboration with JFF, developed a set of Core Principles. These principles defined the features of an ECHS believed to be necessary for meeting the ECHSI goals (JFF, 2003). The national evaluation is one of the ways in which the foundation will determine whether the ECHSI is meeting its goals.

Research Questions

Since fall of 2002, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), in collaboration with SRI International (SRI), has been conducting a national evaluation of the ECHSI. The evaluation, scheduled to end in 2009, has been designed to answer three primary research questions:

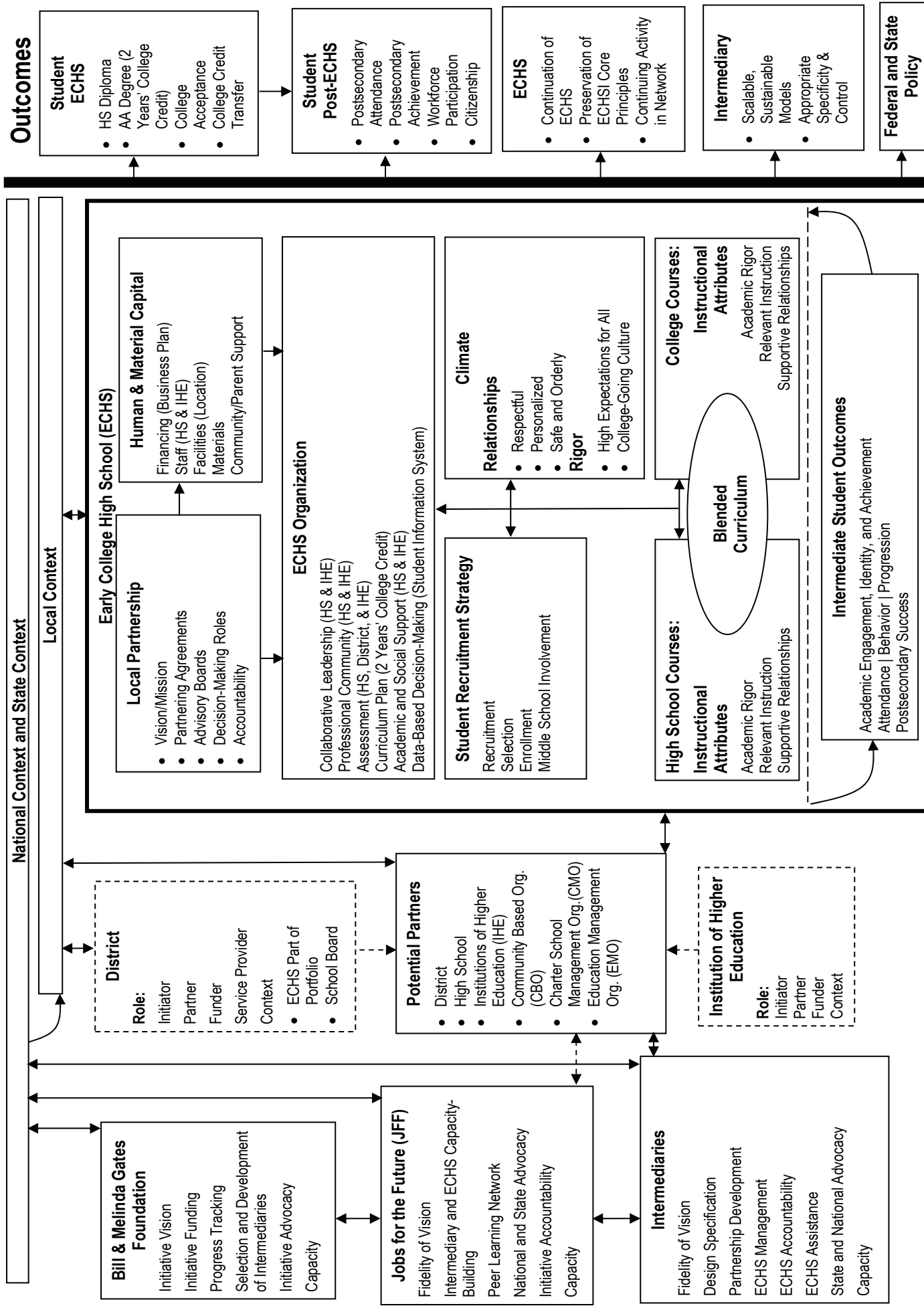
1. What are the demographic, structural, organizational, and instructional characteristics of ECHSs?
2. What factors support or inhibit the planning and development of ECHSs?
3. What are the intermediate and long-term outcomes for students attending ECHSs, especially for students traditionally underserved by the postsecondary system?

Conceptual Framework

All the data collection activities that inform these research questions are grounded in the conceptual framework originally developed during the first year of the evaluation in 2002–03 (see AIR/SRI, 2005a). This conceptual framework denotes the key features that are measured in the evaluation and the interrelationships that will be investigated during analyses. Rather than testing a causal model, this evaluation is descriptive and attempts to document and describe the key features and their interrelationships for both formative and summative purposes.

In 2005, AIR/SRI revisited the original conceptual framework with the greater understanding of the ECHSI gained from the 3 years of prior evaluation. The conceptual framework (see Figure 1.2) includes the intermediaries and the relationships among organizations associated with the planning and implementation of an ECHS. JFF supports the intermediaries; the intermediaries foster the local ECHS partnerships; and both the intermediaries and the local partners (e.g., an IHE and a district) support the ECHS. The conceptual framework also includes the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as an influential member of the ECHSI. At the center of the conceptual framework are the ECHSs. The factors listed within each box represent dimensions on which ECHSs might vary (e.g., structure) and the dimensions that ECHSs should possess (e.g., middle school involvement). Because all ECHSs offer a blend of high school and college courses, the center of the ECHS box shows both levels of courses (in the classroom environment) and the possible mutual influence of each level on the other. Intermediate student outcomes are inside the ECHS environment, where they occur. The outcomes expected at all levels of the initiative are listed to the right of the framework.

Figure 1.2. ECHSI Evaluation Conceptual Framework



Data and Methods

This report includes analyses of qualitative and quantitative evaluation data collected during the 2005–06 academic year and, for comparison purposes, integrates findings from prior evaluation reports. The evaluation team gathered qualitative data (e.g., interviews, focus groups, and observations) from 24 ECHSs, 17 intermediaries, and JFF. The team conducted multiple-day site visits to 10 ECHSs and telephone interviews with the high school and college leaders at an additional 14 ECHSs.² These 24 schools were selected because (1) they were in at least their second year of operation, (2) they had been sampled in previous data collection years, or (3) they had unique structural or contextual characteristics that warranted investigation. Table 1.1 describes the qualitative data collection activities and samples in each year of the evaluation. During 2005–06, qualitative data collection focused on structural and design elements of ECHSs, as well as on successes and challenges experienced during implementation of the schools. The team coded these data to identify central themes and the relationships among these themes, and examined the data for variability over time.

Table 1.1. Overview of ECHSI Evaluation Qualitative Data Collection Activities and Samples

Data Collection Activity	2002–03 (Pilot Year)	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
Intermediary and Subintermediary Interviews	7	13 (and JFF)	14 (and JFF)	17 (and JFF)
ECHS Site Visits	1	12	14	10
ECHS Leader Interviews	0	10	10	14
Description of Sampled ECHSs				
Year Opened		2002–03 = 4 2003–04 = 18	2002–03 = 1 2003–04 = 9 2004–05 = 14	2002–03 = 1 2003–04 = 13 2004–05 = 7 2005–06 = 3
Location		AZ = 1 CA = 4 CT = 1 FL = 1 IL = 1 LA = 1 MI = 1 NC = 1 NY = 5 OH = 1 TN = 1 UT = 1 WA = 3	AZ = 1 CA = 6 CO = 1 DC = 1 MD = 1 MI = 1 NC = 1 NY = 3 OH = 2 TN = 1 TX = 3 UT = 1 WA = 2	AZ = 1 CA = 6 CO = 1 FL = 1 GA = 1 MI = 1 NC = 1 NY = 2 OH = 2 TX = 4 UT = 2 WA = 2
Sampled in Previous Years		0	9	19

² The team visited one ECHS that was no longer considered part of the ECHSI starting in 2006. This site is discussed in the report only with regard to why it is no longer included in the initiative. Therefore, discussions about the general findings include the remaining 23 ECHSs (nine of which received site visits) and exclude this school.

In 2005–06, the number of ECHSs in the quantitative data collection population was lower than the total number of ECHSs open. There were 77 ECHSs open in 2005–06. However, the population, as defined by JFF for data collection activities, did not include any ECHSs affiliated with NCNSP (12 ECHSs) or THSP (3 ECHSs). Although these intermediaries were becoming integrated with the ECHSI network supported by JFF, they were not yet fully integrated in the data collection plans. ECHSs affiliated with these intermediaries will be included in future quantitative data collection activities.

Table 1.2 describes the quantitative data collection activities undertaken in 2005–06 and the number of ECHSs with data from each activity. Some quantitative data were collected through an online school-level survey. In 2005–06, this survey was developed and administered by JFF. The survey included topics such as student-selection criteria, student demographics, opportunities for taking college courses, and support services. Sixty of 62 ECHSs answered at least some of the survey questions (a 97 percent response rate overall). The survey, however, was lengthy and complex. As a result, respondents left many items blank. Therefore, throughout this report, responses from the survey are reported only when at least 80 percent of the population responded.

Table 1.2. Overview of ECHSI Evaluation Quantitative Data Collection Activities and Samples

Data Collection Activity	2002–03 (Pilot Year)	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06
School-Level Survey	N/A	22 ^a	50 ^a	60 ^b
Student Information System (SIS)	N/A	N/A	N/A	18 ^{b,c}
Collection of Publicly Available Data	N/A	N/A	N/A	58 ^{a,c}
Total Population of Open ECHSs	4	25	50	62

^a Administered or collected by AIR/SRI

^b Administered or collected by JFF

^c Number of ECHSs for which AIR/SRI received or collected at least some data

The Student Information System (SIS), an online data collection system that will include data on students attending ECHSs across the country, will be the primary repository for quantitative data to inform participants about the progress of the ECHSI. The foundation funded JFF, in its role as a coordinating intermediary, to support ECHSs and intermediaries by providing data through this central system. JFF led the requirements-gathering process (i.e., identifying the data that should be included) and found a vendor, Public Consulting Group (PCG), to house the data. The data are requested from and submitted by districts, schools, and IHEs. The SIS is designed to capture five types of data:

- School-level data (e.g., grades enrolled, support services offered)
- Student-level data on academic progress (e.g., courses taken, and grades and credits earned)
- Student-level data on background characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch)
- Student-level data on behavior (e.g., attendance, suspensions)
- Student-level data on standardized assessments

In 2005–06, although some districts and ECHSs submitted data, too few ECHSs had data for quantitative analysis. (See the following text box for a description of some of the challenges associated with developing the SIS.) Therefore, the evaluation team supplemented the incomplete

survey and SIS data by collecting data from publicly available sources, including school and district Web sites.

SIS—A Big Project Comes With Big Challenges

I think it's so much harder than people thought it would be and so much work.

—GTC Representative

In working to establish the SIS, JFF has encountered three different types of challenges: negotiating formal agreements with participants to share the data, working with the different types of data kept by the participants, and working with participants who might not have the capacity to provide the data.

The first major challenge comes from the sensitivity of the data being requested. To track the students over time, including after they leave high school, the SIS needs to identify students (e.g., with names and social security numbers). The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) gives parents rights regarding the privacy of their students' educational records. In keeping with FERPA's regulations, JFF must set up an agreement with each data provider (district or school) indicating that the organizations receiving the data will be conducting research on behalf of the district or school. By fall 2006, JFF was working toward establishing 129 data-sharing agreements with districts and ECHSs.

The second challenge results from collecting data from participants across the country. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires states to keep track of and report a wealth of student data. However, there is not a consistent standard for data; therefore, data definitions and organization vary tremendously from state to state and from district to district. These discrepancies have created hurdles for JFF and PCG as they work to fully populate the SIS database with universally discernible data. Such discrepancies make it challenging for districts and schools to submit data in a common format and for users of the data to analyze data across different states.

The third challenge comes from small districts or ECHSs without the in-house capacity to respond to these data requests. For example, one school had to increase the capacity of its electronic data system to handle the amount of data requested. In some instances, the data fields requested were not being collected and were therefore unavailable.

In working to overcome these challenges, JFF has experienced varying degrees of success. As of December 2006, JFF had received almost half the data-access agreements needed (63 of 129). During 2005–06, districts and ECHSs were able to submit data in varying formats, which meant that PCG struggled to understand and recode the data into a consistent format that would allow for cross-site analyses. As a result, in spring 2006, JFF and PCG reworked the data submission procedures and instituted a series of Web-based training sessions to teach schools and districts about the procedures. Although some sites and intermediaries participated in these training sessions, attendance was low through the end of summer 2006. Multiple sites were considered "pilot sites" and received extra assistance from JFF. For example, JFF provided assistance to one school that was inputting data from paper records.

SIS has been a large undertaking, and JFF and PCG have been active in assessing and mitigating the setbacks. With the several years of experience JFF and PCG have in attempting to collect such data, 2006–07 should see a more fully realized SIS.

Age of the ECHSI and Student Outcomes

It will take many years before ECHSs can move students through the full instructional experience (as many as 7 years for ECHSs with models that span grades 6–12). Although some outcomes, such as performance in high school classes and on assessments, may be available in the early high school years, most students’ outcomes — for example, high school graduation, matriculation for continued college education, and performance in college — come in the later part or after the ECHS years. The ECHSI also aims to have an impact on even longer-term outcomes, such as completion of a bachelor’s degree, which may take students an additional 2 – 4 years (or more).

To provide some perspective on the progress of students through ECHSs, Table 1.3 shows the percentage of ECHSs with each grade level (for the ECHSs that reported this information on the school-level survey). Most ECHSs, both new schools and those existing high schools adapting to this model, start with a few grades and then gradually integrate additional grades each year until they have their full enrollment in the ECHS. The important numbers to note with regard to student outcomes are how few ECHSs had grades 12 or 13 in 2005–06 — only 19 ECHSs nationwide. And, only 14 ECHSs graduated students in 2005–06; the remaining five ECHSs were 5-year programs that did not yet have a grade 13. Therefore, this table shows that the ECHSI is just starting to have a critical mass of ECHSs and students with the full ECHS experience. The major outcomes of interest (e.g., graduation rates, college-going rates, and college-completion rates) are just starting to be measurable in a large number of ECHSs.

Table 1.3. Grades Enrolled at ECHSs in 2005–06

	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Grade 13
Percent of ECHSs	10	8	2	88	81	58	40	6
Number of ECHSs	5	4	1	42	39	28	19	3

Total number of ECHSs answering these questions: 48.

Note: ECHSs that do not have grades were excluded.

Contents of This Report

This 2005–06 evaluation report comes at an interesting stage in the evolution of the ECHSI, when intermediaries, even most of the newer ones, had several years of experience; a growing group of ECHSs had worked with multiple cohorts of students; and the first four ECHSs (opened in fall 2002) completed their fourth year and graduated their first cohort of students.³ As a result, this report comes at an opportune time to reflect on where the ECHSI has been, what it has learned, and where it can go in the future.

In previous years’ evaluation reports (AIR/SRI, 2005a and AIR/SRI, 2006), discussions included most aspects of the ECHSI related to implementation. In this report, we cover fewer topics but probe more deeply into some areas that are particularly salient at this stage of the ECHSI.

³ ECHSs had previous graduating classes, but students in those classes had not attended the ECHSs for the full 4 or 5 years.

- Chapter II discusses the ECHSI Core Principles, including what they are, how the initiative has implemented them, and whether they are still “core” to the initiative.
- Chapter III examines the instructional and cultural environment of ECHSs, particularly regarding the degree to which ECHSs are blending the secondary and postsecondary educational systems.
- Chapter IV examines the different ways that local organizations partner to form ECHSs and how those arrangements affect implementation.
- Chapter V discusses the work of intermediaries, comparing and contrasting their approaches and activities based on when they joined the ECHSI and whether they are working nationally or within one locality.
- Chapter VI examines learning communities at all levels within the ECHSI, including among intermediaries, among ECHSs, and within ECHSs.
- Chapter VII reflects on the sustainability challenges confronting the ECHSI at the site, network, and state levels.
- Finally, Chapter VIII summarizes the major findings and discusses the midpoint of the ECHSI and where the ECHSI evaluation will go in future years.

CHAPTER II — ECHSI Core Principles: Putting Ideas Into Practice

At the broadest level, the ECHSI dedicates itself to creating high schools that straddle the secondary and postsecondary systems to offer students access to college earlier, with academic and social supports, and at little or no personal expense. The best-known goal of these schools is to help students earn 2 years of college credit. Although this might be the goal that most dramatically differentiates ECHSs from traditional high schools, it is certainly not the only common feature of ECHSs. At the start of the ECHSI, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, JFF, and the seven initially funded intermediaries described the common features that all ECHSs should possess in a guiding document called *Early College High School Initiative Core Principles* (JFF, 2003). The Core Principles can be summarized as follows:

1. ECHSs serve students from populations typically underrepresented in postsecondary institutions.
2. Students earn an associate’s degree or 2 years of college credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school.
3. The years to a postsecondary degree are compressed.
4. The middle grades are included or there is outreach to middle-grade students to promote academic preparation and awareness of the ECHS.
5. The ECHSs demonstrate the attributes of highly effective high schools.

Originally drafted in 2002, and slightly modified in 2003, this Core Principles document continues to serve as the specification of the goals for the entire initiative. Some of these Core Principles are very broad and open to interpretation (e.g., attributes of highly effective schools), and others are much more specific (e.g., 2 years of college credit). No matter whether the goals are specific or broad, however, what they have in common is very high expectations.

In practice, the implementation of some of these principles makes others more difficult. For example, targeting underrepresented students who may be producing work below their grade level and expecting them to earn 2 years of college credit while in high school might involve some tradeoffs. Intermediaries communicate these goals to the leaders of the ECHSs and help them implement these sometimes competing goals. As the initiative has progressed, ECHSs have made adaptations where they could not simultaneously meet all the ambitious goals. The experiences of and adaptations made by the ECHSs and their intermediaries have helped the foundation and JFF clarify the highest priorities of the ECHSI. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the participants in the ECHSI have implemented the Core Principles during the first 4 years of the initiative, how the ECHSs have adapted given the competing pressures of so many ambitious goals, and how the ECHSI overall has evolved.

Core Principle 1. ECHSs serve students from populations typically underrepresented in postsecondary institutions.

The Core Principles document describes the target population as “...students who are highly motivated but have not received the academic preparation necessary to meet high school standards, students who are English language learners, students whose family obligations keep them at home, and students for whom the cost of college is prohibitive” (JFF, 2003). High school students’ having access to college courses is not a new idea. Students identified as “gifted” have taken college courses while in high school (or have even advanced to college) for decades. What is different about ECHSs is that the whole structure of the schools has been transformed so that any student can also succeed in college classes — a groundbreaking proposal, considering that

this Core Principle calls for schools to serve students who may be academically behind grade level.

Intermediaries' Vision

As the above definition notes, the mission of the ECHSI is to target students not just on the basis of demographics but on academic preparation or lack thereof. This initiative is intended to serve students who are not receiving preparation for college in the local secondary school system. Most intermediaries have aligned their target populations with this Core Principle from the beginning, although their target populations have varied in specifics. For instance, NCLR specifies that ECHSs strive to enroll “Latino student populations and English language learners.” FCCC describes its target population as “students who are educationally and economically disadvantaged including but not limited to African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, persons with disabilities, recent immigrants, etc.” KWF specifies that its ECHSs should serve “underrepresented populations — including low-income, first generation, and students of color.” MCNC, on the other hand, just describes targeting “disadvantaged” and “vulnerable” students. GTC does not target specific racial or ethnic groups; instead, it focuses on “at-risk youth, 16 to 20 years old, who have dropped out of school.” Despite their differing targets, all these intermediaries intend to serve students from populations typically underrepresented in postsecondary institutions.

ECHSs' Implementation

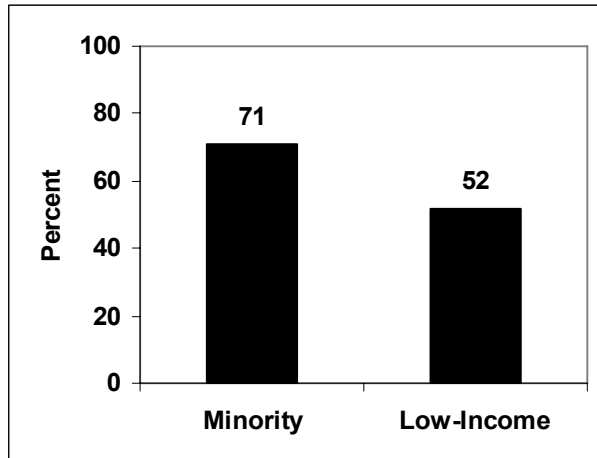
To examine how ECHSs have been implementing this Core Principle, the evaluation team examined the demographic characteristics of the enrolled students. At the most general level, ECHSs should be enrolling a student population with a similar demographic distribution as the surrounding district. For example, if a district enrolls 50 percent minority students overall, we would expect that the ECHS would have at least 50 percent minority students, even if this population was not specifically targeted.

ECHSs are recruiting and enrolling higher percentages of minority students and similar percentages of lower income students, relative to their geographic district.

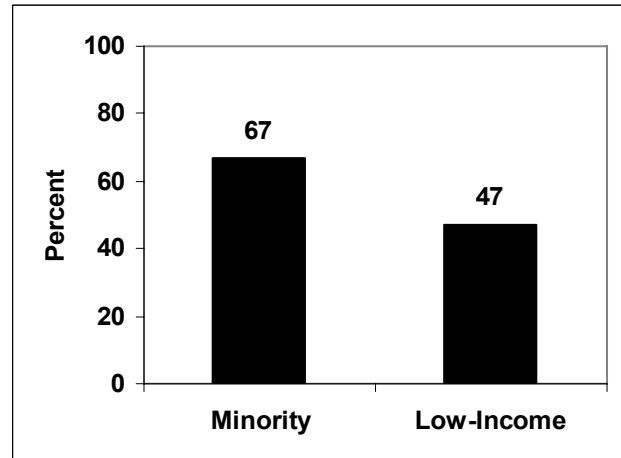
In the previous evaluation report (AIR/SRI, 2006), we noted that ECHSs enrolled high percentages of minority students, particularly when compared to the feeder districts. This pattern continued in the 2005–06 academic year (see Figure 2.1). On average, 71 percent of the student populations were from minority groups. Of these ECHSs, 67 percent had minority enrollments that were at least as high as or higher than those of their respective districts. In addition, on average, 52 percent of students enrolled in ECHSs came from lower income families (as measured by eligibility for the free or reduced-price lunch program or disadvantaged designation). Although this figure meant that large percentages of students in ECHSs were from lower income families, these percentages were not always as high as those of lower income students served by the geographic districts. Less than half the ECHSs (47 percent) enrolled percentages at least as high as their comparison districts.

Figure 2.1. Average Percentage Enrollment for ECHSs and Enrollment Comparisons to Geographic District

2005–06 average percentage enrollment of minority and low-income students in ECHS



Percentage of ECHSs with a percentage enrollment of minority and low-income students equal or higher to the geographic district.



ECHSs with publicly available data; Minority, n = 58, Low-income, n = 57

Note: For the 2004–05 analyses, the evaluation team had access to data detailing the percentage of students each ECHS drew from various surrounding districts. These data were not consistently available for ECHSs in 2005–06. Therefore, the analyses presented here compare each ECHS to the district in which the ECHS is located, although the ECHS may draw students from multiple districts. Also, district data represent the most recent publicly available data. In most cases, these data were from 2005–06, but in some cases, districts only had 2004–05 data available.

Comparisons using these two demographic statistics provide only a surface measure of the population of students targeted by ECHSs. The definition of targeted students (noted above) is much broader, and in selecting potential students, many ECHSs took multiple indicators into account, including whether the student would be the first in the family to attend college and whether there were any particularly challenging family situations that would make attending college unlikely. States and districts do not track data on these other indicators; therefore, we relied on the few indicators that were available. Despite this caveat about these comparisons, results do indicate that ECHSs are recruiting and enrolling higher percentages of minority students and similar percentages of lower income students, relative to their surrounding district.

ECHSs affiliated with an intermediary with few prescriptions concerning the students to serve struggled to settle on their target populations. As stated by a TCCEI (a THSP subintermediary) representative, “People can read those words about the population intended for these schools in different ways.” In these ECHSs, as noted in the previous evaluation report (AIR/SRI, 2006), determining the appropriate balance between ensuring outreach to underserved students while also attempting to enroll students with realistic chances of benefiting from the program proved to be a big challenge. For example, one high school instructor noted that the academic and social skills of most of the students were far lower than expected, leading to concerns that they were “in over their heads,” in terms of the rigor of the ECHS.

As discussed in the previous report (AIR/SRI, 2006), many ECHSs had developed entrance requirements to ensure that they enrolled students who were from targeted populations but were also prepared for the ECHS. One ECHS leader explained, “We now have an essay that they have

to fill out. We are having them do a math assessment to gauge where they are ... That wasn't being done before." On the other hand, some schools concerned about attracting students who were underserved by the school system had actually barred the highest-achieving applicants. Some intermediaries had required their ECHSs to do so. For instance, several ECHSs used students' class ranking in 8th grade as a selection measure, only accepting applications from students ranking in the 30th–90th percentile. This practice proved to be a source of contention. One ECHS leader noted, "A poor, minority kid who happens to be in the top 10 percent, but otherwise doesn't have any of the supports to help him get to college, [could] be denied entry." In fact, an intermediary representative heard reports of parents counseling their 8th grade students not to do well so they would be eligible for the ECHS.

ECHSs appear to have remained committed to serving a student population generally defined as "at risk."

Overall, ECHSs appear to have remained committed to serving a student population generally defined as "at risk." Although many sites described seeking out a more academically prepared population than previously, they stated that they did not feel that they were excluding students who could succeed in the program. Clearly, even with the best of intentions, this Core Principle can be challenging to implement. However, most ECHS leaders believed that they were meeting the spirit of the Core Principle because, as one ECHS leader noted, their "... doors [were] open to diamonds in the rough."

Intermediaries' Responses to Implementation

As the intermediaries worked with new ECHSs, they remained committed to the target population of students. As stated by an FCCC representative, "We're very clear ... that we operate in terms of outcomes and target students." However, ECHSs and intermediaries did not always agree on the appropriate target population. For example, one ECHS expressed resistance to CNE's focus on Native American students, citing concerns about the lack of academically prepared students in the area. Another ECHS broke ties with its intermediary and was no longer considered a part of the ECHSI because of the leaders' focus on being a magnet school for academically prepared students. Yet another planned ECHS was never opened because of conflicts over the issue of whom to serve. As described by the intermediary representative, "The university partners would not back off of making it [a] school for students with a high GPA." Some intermediaries cited concerns that ECHSs may be focusing too much on measuring academic preparation prior to admission; consequently, they are enrolling better qualified students who do not meet the foundation's criterion of being underserved. As a representative from the USG remarked, "Sites were trying to take the middle and upper groups because they knew these kids needed to do [the rigorous ECHS curriculum]."

Overall, despite the challenges in ECHS implementation and differences in definition, intermediaries largely stayed committed to their original vision for this Core Principle of working with underserved students. They approached these challenges by working with ECHSs to find ways to support students socially and academically rather than to change admission requirements.

Core Principle 2. Students earn an associate's degree or 2 years of college or credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school.

One of the early far-reaching goals of this initiative was to aim beyond mere exposure to college to support students in earning a meaningful number of college credits. By setting up a program designed to get students 2 years of college credit, the initiative could help students to save 2 years of tuition and to spend less time getting a bachelor's degree, or to have greater earning potential if

they do not continue with college after the ECHS. This was a very specific goal and has been the most challenging Core Principle for ECHSs to implement.

Intermediaries' Vision

Intermediaries initially required ECHSs to develop a plan for students to acquire 2 years of college credit. For instance, KWF emphasized the importance of its schools' having a plan that included "... a clear path from entry into the ECHS to all the way through the 60 hours of credit."⁴ CUNY specified its vision that "Early College schools enable students to earn 2 years of college credit prior to high school graduation." Even from the start of the ECHSI, however, some intermediaries took a different approach. GTC ECHSs were designed to target high school dropouts; these sites used college courses to complete the requirements for the high school diploma. The goal, therefore, was slightly modified from the Core Principle: Students should pass enough college courses to earn their high school diplomas rather than aim for a specific number of college credits.

ECHSs' Implementation

Some ECHSs opened with course sequences that were fully aligned with the goal of 2 years of college credit by high school graduation. For example, an existing school that adapted to the ECHS program set up a plan combining courses on the college campus and AP courses to get students more than 60 college credits by the 12th grade.⁵ Another site planned to allow students to begin taking courses to qualify for college credits as early as the summer before their 9th grade year, depending on their academic proficiency, so that they could accumulate the 2 years of college credit over a 4-year period.

However, tensions between enrolling the target population of students who were often academically behind and the struggle these students would encounter in obtaining the 2 years of college credit became evident almost immediately. ECHS instructors reported difficulties in providing students with college preparatory work because, as one instructor noted, the ECHSs "... have young people behind 2 to 4 years as far as their academic ability and readiness." However, the student populations were not universally performing poorly. In fact, several ECHSs noted the wide variation in academic preparation as the most significant challenge. One leader, particularly concerned about the bimodal distribution in students' skills at that ECHS, stated:

The disparity between high- and low-achieving students. That is a killer problem. I stay awake at night over that. We've got kids [who] can't add fractions, and they are in the same class with students who can talk about sixth-degree polynomials.

ECHSs responded to these issues with various approaches. Some of the more popular approaches, described in greater detail below, include:

- Having multiple college partners
- Having the same class count for college credit or high school credit, depending on performance

⁴ Commonly, students are required to earn 60 college credits to complete 2 years of postsecondary schooling. Therefore, participants in the ECHSI used the terms "2 years of college credits" and "60 college credits" somewhat interchangeably.

⁵ For details, see AIR/SRI 2005a, p. 34.

- Developing a plan for students to earn 2 years of college credit, but expecting only *some* students to complete it
- Reducing the total college-credit accumulation expectations for *all* students
- Taking a step away from college-credit accrual

One approach gaining momentum within the initiative was for ECHSs to partner with multiple IHEs. Usually, schools with multiple partners had one 2-year and one 4-year partner. At these ECHSs, students with more solid academic preparation started out with classes at the 4-year institution, and students who were not ready (i.e., who could not pass the entrance requirements) could start college courses at the community college. This approach was particularly helpful to ECHSs serving students who had a wide range of academic preparation. One ECHS leader was extremely enthusiastic about this arrangement and the options it made available for students to move toward an associate's degree or baccalaureate: "If you are going to open up the whole world to these underserved kids, you can't just [say], 'Okay we want you to partner with a 2-year college, and that's what your college is.'" State and local policies, such as funding, could often be a barrier to such arrangements, as could the location of the ECHS relative to potential partners. However, for ECHSs without such barriers, leaders were enthusiastic about offering multiple college-going options to their students.

Many MCNC ECHSs offered or had plans to offer classes that could yield either high school credit or dual credit (i.e., both high school and college credit for the same course). In these classes, there was a lower grade threshold for passing at the high school level than at the dual credit level. For instance, a grade of B or better would earn college and high school credit, and any lower passing grade would yield only high school credit. An MCNC representative expressed optimism about this approach to helping ECHSs develop an "organizational structure that [met] the needs of this huge range of kids."

By far the most common adaptation to Core Principle 2 was to recognize explicitly that *some*, but not all, students would obtain the 2 years of college credit. One model put in place at several sampled ECHSs involved setting up multiple paths to credit accrual, according to the schools' projections of each student's capabilities for credit acquisition. At one ECHS, three pathways were developed for students, including a path to 2 years of college credit, a path to 1 year of college credit, and a technical path to obtain career and vocational training. Another ECHS had students apply to a college path during their 11th grade year. All 11th grade students could take college courses, but the students on the college path took more courses and spent more time on the college campus. As one ECHS leader put it: "You have to be careful saying 60 [credits] is a goal for all of the students ... Sixty should be a goal, but maybe not for every student."

Some ECHSs have modified their goal to focus on all students' obtaining some college credit. For instance, one ECHS refined its mission to be a goal of 1 year of college credit, which in that state qualifies students for a high school degree with honorary distinction as well as some financial aid after high school. Another ECHS leader acknowledged scaling back the school's goal: "[The goal was] a minimum of 30 credits ... Gates originally wanted 60 credits, but looking at the state standards and curriculum, it would be quite difficult." ECHSs that set up course sequences to get students 1 year of college credit instead of 2 years tended to be partnered with 4-year IHEs with more rigorous entrance standards and introductory courses.

ECHSs have developed various strategies for integrating the college credit component. These approaches include: having multiple college partners, having the same class count for college credit or high school credit, developing a plan for students to earn 2 years of college credit, but only expecting *some* students to complete it, reducing the total college credit accumulation expectations for *all* students, or taking a step away from college-credit accrual.

A few ECHSs actually scaled back their focus on college-credit-bearing coursework to a focus on college preparatory courses instead. As the leader at one site stated, “With the population we have, we thought it should be more college preparatory.” One ECHS even went so far as to drop offerings of college coursework entirely in favor of preparatory work because, as the leader noted, the school needs to “... work on building [students’] skills so they are college ready.”

Intermediaries’ Responses to Implementation

In response to ECHSs’ concerns about the viability of the Core Principle requiring all students to obtain the prescribed 2 years of college credit, intermediaries were faced with the question of whether to adjust the target student population to a group more prepared for the rigor of the ECHSI or to adjust their credit goals to a more attainable level for the current target population. Intermediaries appeared to lean toward the latter. As described by an MCNC representative, “Number one, we still continue to serve the target population.” With this commitment to the target population, intermediaries have adjusted their goal for student outcomes. As stated by a USG representative, “It’s now not so much of a promise that all students will get 60 hours. We’ll do our best to help you reach your potential through this program.” Several of the Texas subintermediaries expressed similar shifts. As a TAMU System representative stated, “We want to have a plan in place to get up to the 60, but if we don’t, we’re not going to get fried over it.”

Essentially, intermediaries accepted the outcome that their ECHSs had the ability to positively affect the opportunities for their students, even if not every student would earn 2 years of college credit. As a representative from CNE put it, “Whether they will earn a full associate’s degree, I’m not certain. But an entire year’s worth of college is fabulous.”

Within the ECHSI, the language regarding college-credit accumulation now allows for ECHSs to provide “up to” 2 years of college credit.

Intermediaries and ECHSs reported back to JFF and the foundation the challenges that they and their schools were having with implementing the goal of 2 years of college credits for all students. JFF noted that since 2003, language in the initiative has switched to describing ECHSs as schools that are “designed so that” students earn “up to” 2 years of college credit.⁶ This subtle change was integrated into the Core Principles document. The newer language reads: “Students complete high school requirements while achieving UP TO [emphasis added] 2 years of college and/or an associate’s degree...” (JFF, 2003, page 4). However, most of the original language remains throughout the document. For example, the first page still reads, “...all early college high schools share the following characteristics: students earn an associate’s degree or 2 years of college credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school.” (JFF, 2003, page 1). Since 2003, there appears to be consensus among the initiative participants about scaling back this Core Principle; however, to what extent is still not explicitly stated.

⁶ Nancy Hoffman, personal communication, March 19, 2007.

Core Principle 3. The years to a postsecondary degree are compressed.

In the traditional public education pipeline, students spend 4 years in high school and then at least 2 years getting a community college degree or 4 years getting a bachelor's degree. The goal of the ECHSI is not just to extend high school to encompass the first 2 years of college but to make more efficient use of students' time so they pass through the pipeline more quickly. Therefore, a key result of this Core Principle should be that students earn a postsecondary degree in fewer years than they would have had they attended traditional high schools and then proceeded to college. ECHSs that are successful in this regard need to help students acquire enough credits, in the right courses, to allow students to transfer into a college with somewhat advanced status.

Intermediaries' Vision

ECHSs can help compress the years that students spend in pursuit of college degrees even if students do not get 2 years of college credit at the ECHS.

In general, intermediaries' visions for ECHSs provided ways for students to obtain a college degree in a compressed timeframe. For instance, MCNC described its model as a "5-year program culminating in an AA degree." CNE offered additional instructional time through summer school classes between each of the traditional high school years, rather than a full fifth year, to provide opportunities for students to obtain additional credits in a compressed time period. WWNFF described the desire for sites to provide students with enough college credits in the ECHS that they could continue "to complete the baccalaureate degree in 2, or at most 3, years at a strong educational institution."

ECHSs' Implementation

ECHSs have encountered challenges in implementing this Core Principle in the typical 9th through 12th grade high school framework. As described earlier, the limited academic preparation of many ECHS students has been a barrier to the promise of a degree, particularly within a compressed timeframe. This limitation has led most ECHSs to conclude that their target populations will not acquire 2 years of college credit in 4 or even 5 years of high school. However, students do not need to obtain 2 years of college credit to shorten their time to a college degree, as stipulated in this Core Principle. One semester or year of college credit during high school could still position students to attain this outcome.

Some ECHSs established alternate time schedules to obtain a college degree. For example, several ECHSs established programs that provided for a fifth year of high school (i.e., a grade 13). This arrangement provided more time for students to earn more college credits. However, students must earn more college credits in the 5 years of the program than they would have earned in 1 year in college to be on track for an overall compressed timeframe for earning a college degree.

Other ECHSs addressed this issue by focusing more attention on middle-grade outreach (discussed in greater detail under the fourth Core Principle, below). The hope was that efforts to include the middle grades would improve the preparation of students when they enrolled in ECHSs because expectations for success in the ECHS would be built into the curriculum starting in the middle-school grades.

Policy Context and the Core Principles

ECHS implementation decisions can be strongly influenced by local and state policies. For example, Colorado's policy prohibiting public funding of college courses for students under 16 years of age has an impact on how and when ECHS students can accrue college credits. Every intermediary and ECHS has stories of making compromises based on policy realities. More details about the policy environments faced by ECHSs can be found at www.earlycolleges.org in the following publications:

JFF's *Integrating Grades 9 Through 14: State Policies to Support and Sustain Early College High Schools* (2005) notes what policies are generally barriers to ECHSs and what changes might be made that would facilitate these schools' development.

JFF's *Smoothing the Path: Changing State Policies to Support Early College High School* (2006) builds on the previous report and provides a series of case studies that outline policy barriers affecting ECHSs and ways in which some of these barriers have been overcome in several states.

Intermediaries' Responses to Implementation

In their work with ECHSs, intermediaries emphasized access to and accumulation of college credit rather than specifically compressing the time to a postsecondary degree. Most likely, intermediaries had not yet focused on the full timeline to a degree because most students had not graduated from high school, let alone continued their education in other postsecondary institutions. Thus, intermediaries could not yet determine whether the students' educational years had indeed been compressed as a result of attending an ECHS.

Core Principle 4. The middle grades are included or there is outreach to middle-grade students to promote academic preparation and awareness of the ECHS option.

This Core Principle has two embedded components: academic preparation and information for students about ECHSs. The first, and more intensive, component involves absorption of the middle school grades within the ECHS model or outreach to potential students and/or their instructors to improve students' academic preparation. The second component involves ECHSs' efforts to educate potential students about the option to attend an ECHS and the means to applying and being accepted.

Intermediaries' Vision

For most intermediaries, implementation of this Core Principle had more to do with recruitment than with inclusion of middle-grade students. However, several intermediaries encouraged sites to include middle grades, or to partner with local middle schools. For example, from the onset, NCLR encouraged its ECHSs to partner with local middle schools "because early intervention is necessary to achieve their goals." CUNY has been the intermediary to most strongly embrace this Core Principle. One of the non-negotiable elements for its schools is that they serve grades 6 through 8, as well as the high school grades.

ECHSs' Implementation

In the absence of intermediary specifications to the contrary, most ECHSs implemented middle-grade recruitment rather than middle-grade inclusion or preparation. Regardless of the level of involvement with middle grades, ECHSs had to inform potential students about the option of attending an ECHS. For many ECHSs, that meant recruiting by staff, and sometimes students, at local middle schools. For ECHSs that included middle-school grades, recruitment efforts dipped into the elementary schools.

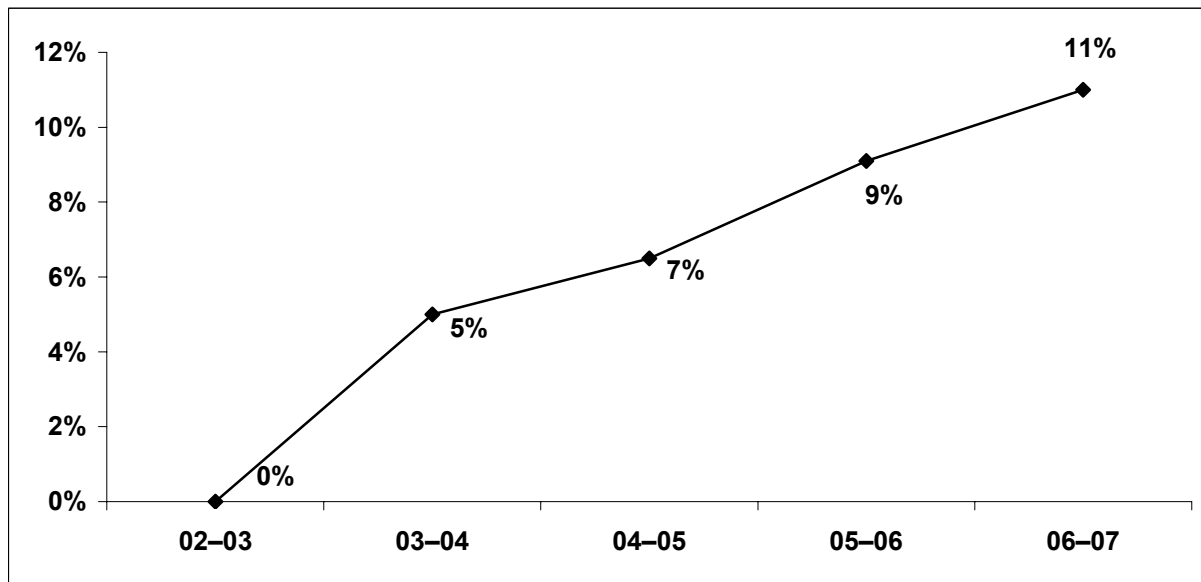
During the early years of the ECHSI, few ECHSs included activities to raise the academic preparation level of students in the middle grades. For example, some site leaders saw their role as simply connecting with administrators at the middle-school level to "... let them know what we [were] looking for so they [had] a heads up," as one site leader stated. The fact that ECHSs made minimal effort to raise the academic preparation of middle-school students was likely due to intermediaries' and school leaders' more immediate focus on opening the schools.

Many ECHSs reported adding middle-school outreach efforts beyond recruitment after their first full academic year. These sites commonly reported that, after working with incoming students, they came to believe that students needed stronger academic preparation before starting the rigorous ECHS curriculum. ECHS staff discussed implementing or planning bridge programs to provide what one ECHS leader described as "... mechanisms for helping [students] to develop so that they [could] get to a level where they [could] start taking the English and the math courses at a college level." One site, for instance, was operating a program at four area middle-school campuses to begin to prepare students for the rigor of the ECHS. Another site with a partner middle school implemented a pre-early college class to ensure that the middle school was, as the high school leader put it, "... prepping kids to be ready to take college courses in high school."

Campuses with specific partner middle schools had an easier time working with potential students. For example, several sites discussed plans to include middle-school instructors in professional development activities to support student learning before entering the ECHSs. Schools with several years of experience with middle-school partners acknowledged the benefits of such an arrangement, and one school leader stated that the ECHS "established formal relations with a feeder school, which [created] a pipeline from middle into postsecondary." However, this approach was a less feasible option for an ECHS drawing students from many different middle schools.

As the ECHSI progressed, a slow but steady increase occurred in the percentage of open ECHSs that included middle-school grades (see Figure 2.2). By 2006-07, 14 ECHSs affiliated with five different intermediaries enrolled students below 9th grade. In 2005-06, several ECHSs discussed plans to develop models incorporating the middle grades in future years.

Figure 2.2. Percentage of ECHSs Enrolling Middle-School Grades From 2002–03 to 2006–07



Source data: JFF (2006)

Total number of ECHSs with grade-level information available, by academic year: 2002–03: 4; 2003–04: 20; 2004–05: 46; 2005–06: 77; 2006–07: 127

Intermediaries' Responses to Implementation

Most ECHSs implemented middle-grade recruitment rather than middle-grade inclusion or preparation. However, both intermediaries and ECHSs are becoming increasingly interested in preparing middle-school students for the rigorous ECHS curriculum.

In 2005–06, there was some evidence that intermediaries were becoming more explicit about middle-grade outreach than they were at the beginning of the ECHSI. For instance, CNE noted: “Middle school students need to be involved in Early College in some fashion.” Although not as strong, FCCC’s message to its ECHSs was, “If you want to be a 7– or even a 6–12 [ECHS], we encourage it.” However, FCCC continued to call the decision to add middle grades “...a school-level, district-level thing.” Although not all intermediaries had explicit requirements for middle-grade outreach, this previously minor Core Principle had gradually come more to the forefront of discussions within the initiative as a consensus emerged that ECHSs needed more than 4 years for students to complete the rigorous ECHS curriculum.

Core Principle 5. The ECHSs demonstrate the attributes of highly effective high schools.

The language the foundation uses around this Core Principle evolved since the beginning of the ECHSI. Initially, the “attributes of high-performing schools” included:

- A common focus on key, research-based goals, and intellectual mission
- Small, personalized learning environments, with up to 400 students per school
- Respect and responsibility among students, among faculty, and between students and faculty

- Time for staff collaboration and a partnership with parents and the community
- Technology as a tool for designing and delivering engaging and imaginative curricula
- Shared vision for student success among students, parents, staff, higher education, and community partners
- Consistent focus on instruction through a culture of learning and support
- A focus on student outcomes through continuous assessment of student progress (JFF, 2003)

In 2004, the foundation shifted its focus to the new 3R's — Rigorous Instruction, Relevant Curriculum, and Supportive Relationships — which encompassed all the previously delineated attributes. As a result, ECHSI participants also changed the way that they talked about the instructional goals of their schools.

Intermediaries' Vision

Intermediaries explicitly included these features in their visions for ECHSs. As expressed by a UNT representative, “The 3R's — those are non-negotiables.” TCCEI staff described feeling strongly aligned with the 3R's model, saying that they felt “bringing relevance to students through the education process [was] one of the best and most important things that we [could] offer through these schools.” Because the new 3R's were so broad, many intermediaries had existing design elements that encompassed these attributes or they developed elements that put their own stamp on the new 3R's. For example, GTC used only college courses to cover all high school content — one manifestation of rigorous instruction. MCNC also had established design principles for its sites that aligned with the new 3R's. CNE developed 13 design elements for schools; these elements were based on the original attributes of effective high schools, as defined by the foundation. SECME developed a 12-element model encompassing these attributes.

ECHSs' Implementation

Most ECHS sites were cognizant of the 3R's. One ECHS described in detail its commitment to this vision as follows:

Our school system has an emphasis on 3R's, as [do] most of the urban school systems, and those are rigor, relevance, and relationships. And the rigor of course speaks to the challenging level of the work; it's not just busy work, it's not meaningless work. It has to be something that's going to cause students to think and further develop their critical thinking skills. The relevance has to do with the meaning, even if it's geometry. You start off where you relate it to children's lives so that they'll see why they need to do it. The last one, the relationships, small school size, we have been able to do some things and build relationships among teachers and students and everybody here that will help make people feel that there are people who know you, and they know what your capabilities are, and they have these dreams for you, and they are counting on you to do this, that, and the other.

The message of the 3R's is even reaching the student level. During one school visit, a student speaking to visiting ECHSI representatives noted the ECHS's focus on the new 3R's.

However, ECHS instructors and administrators alike struggled with how to implement the new 3R's. They talked about the value they placed on high-quality instruction and the tensions involved in ensuring that they hired and retained instructors who related well to students (and were thus able to provide the strong personal relationships), but who were also highly qualified (and thus able to provide rigorous and relevant instruction). In particular, rigorous instruction came up most frequently as a challenge even to define — and an even greater challenge to implement. As one ECHS leader put it, “Rigor is kind of a tough cookie to crack. If you aren't careful, it becomes something you talk about in esoteric terms, and you never reach the point of saying anything.”

ECHSs were familiar with the new 3R's but noted some struggles with how to define and implement them.

When asked about plans for increasing rigor, the interviewed leaders who mentioned specific plans tended to focus on increasing students' access to high-level content. For example, several school leaders cited plans to incorporate more Advanced Placement (AP) courses into their curriculum. However, AP courses, as seen by many educators, give preference to breadth over depth, and to knowledge of facts over critical thinking. Therefore, plans to increase the number of AP courses might not increase the level of rigorous instruction taking place in ECHSs.

Intermediaries' Responses to Implementation

After their ECHSs started to open, some intermediaries initiated activities to improve the 3R's in their models. NCNSP, for instance, devoted time and resources to coming up with a method for defining and measuring rigor in the classroom, including the development of several rubrics to help instructors identify what rigor looked like in the classroom. UT System specifically expressed a push for adherence to the 3R's for all its ECHSs. Many more used established conferences and meetings to discuss the 3R's and how they should be defined in an ECHS.

Summary

This chapter has described the evolving nature of participating intermediaries' and ECHSs' understanding of the Core Principles as well as the challenges of trying to reach multiple ambitious goals simultaneously. As a result of their experiences, intermediaries and ECHSs have re-evaluated and reinforced aspects of the principles. The current implementation status of each Core Principle is summarized below:

- **Serving students from populations typically underrepresented in postsecondary institutions:** The ECHSI continues to emphasize recruiting and enrolling the target student populations. Enrollments of minority and low-income students in the ECHSs demonstrate this emphasis. On average, ECHSs had enrolled 71 percent minority students and 52 percent low-income students. Most ECHSs had enrollment percentages as high as or higher than their geographic school district.
- **Earning an associate's degree or 2 years of college credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school:** The foundation has made adjustments based on the experiences of the ECHSs, saying, “The goal of 60 college credits is a definable outcome that pushes us to a high goal but at the same time may not be the only way.” Within the initiative, participants speak of designing ECHSs so that students can earn “up to” 2 years of college credit.

- **Compressing the years to a postsecondary degree:** While ECHSs reported difficulty implementing this principle in a grades 9–12 model, some sites have achieved success by implementing grades 6–12 or 9–13 models.
- **Including middle grades and/or providing outreach to middle-grade students:** In general, ECHSs have shown increased participation in and focus on this component as a valuable tool in developing the skills and motivation of future ECHS students.
- **Demonstrating the attributes of highly effective high schools:** While these attributes can be difficult to define and measure, ECHSs appear committed to providing high-quality education using the language of the new 3R's. Much work remains, however, with regard to understanding what the new 3R's mean and determining how to implement them.

CHAPTER III — The ECHS Experience

ECHSs share a common goal to increase the academic achievement of their students by strengthening and accelerating their academic experience. As discussed in the previous chapter, among the Core Principles is the expectation that ECHSs should offer students an education that is rigorous, relevant, and based on strong relationships — characteristics of an effective school that, within the foundation, have come to be known as the new 3Rs. This chapter starts by reporting on some early student outcomes. Next, the chapter considers the instructional environment that contributes to these outcomes. In particular, it describes instructional strategies observed in both high school and college classrooms, looking for evidence of the 3R's. This chapter also examines the academic and social supports that the ECHS experience offers to students, on both the high school and the college side. Along with the support programs and services, the chapter discusses the climate of ECHSs. Particular attention is paid to the ECHSs' efforts to establish a college-going culture, resulting in students' increased awareness of and confidence about their postsecondary options. Finally, this chapter addresses a question not yet addressed in previous reports on the ECHSI: how blended is the ECHS experience? Although no one knows exactly what the ideal blended experience will look like, some ECHSs have taken concrete steps to ease students' transition from high school to college. This chapter concludes with an examination of the ECHS experience in light of this aspect.

Early Outcomes

The primary goals for ECHSs all pertain to student access to and success in college. Although data on student performance in college (either within or after the ECHS) were not yet available,⁷ students' attendance and performance on state assessments provided an initial look at how ECHS students were progressing.

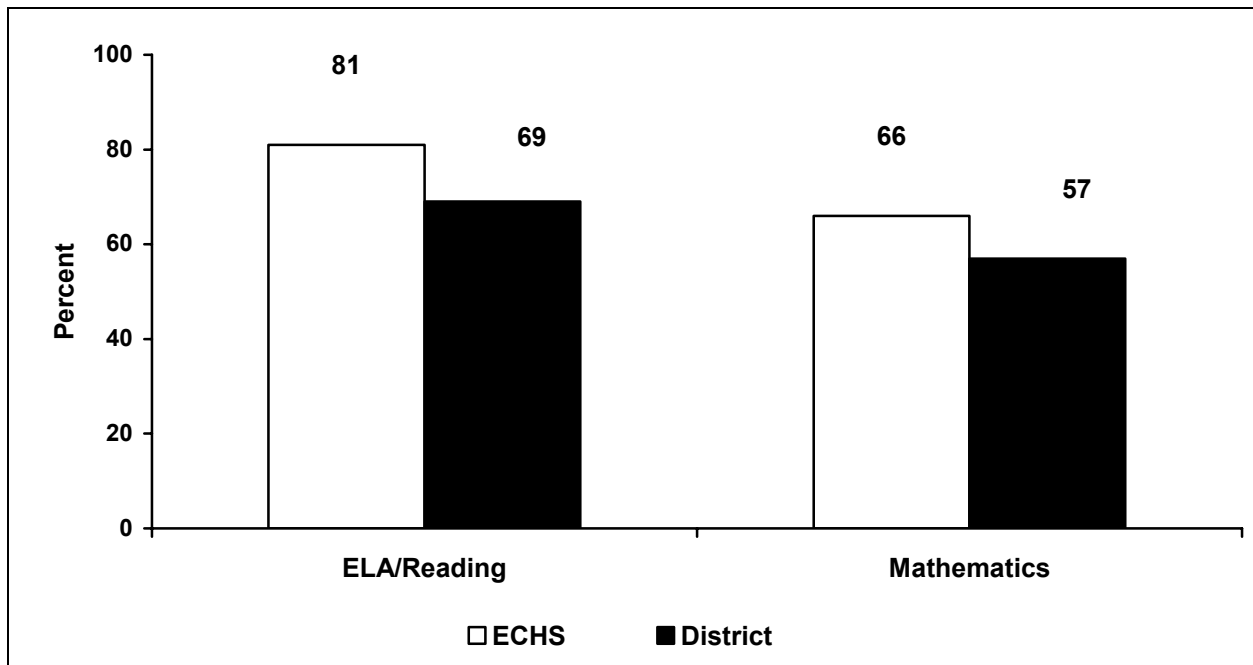
One of the early successes noted by ECHSs is their attendance rates. In 2003–04, the mean average daily attendance rate at ECHSs was 91 percent (AIR/SRI, 2006). In 2005–06, the mean average daily attendance rate reported by ECHSs was 94 percent.⁸ These data demonstrate that ECHSs continue to have success in keeping students in the classroom, which should result in better educational outcomes.

By collecting assessment data published on Web sites, we have a first glimpse into students' academic achievement. Figure 3.1 shows the percentage of ECHS students scoring “proficient” or above on their respective state's English language arts (ELA)/reading and mathematics tests. Some context for these percentages is provided by comparing the ECHSs' performance to the performance reported in the geographic district where the ECHS is located. These data are based on school-level averages and are not adjusted for student demographics or for students' academic achievement levels before entering the ECHS.

⁷ See discussion in Chapter I about available data and the development of ECHSs in the ECHSI.

⁸ The fall 2005 school-level survey, the source for the school survey data reported throughout this report, asked about 2004–05 attendance rates. The response rate for this survey item was too low to include these data in this report. The data reported here are from the school-level survey administered in the fall of 2006. This survey was administered to all ECHSs open in 2006–07, including those working with NCNSP and THSP that were not surveyed in 2005–06. Of the 77 ECHSs that were open in 2005–06, 60 provided 2005-06 average daily attendance data (a 78 percent response rate).

Figure 3.1. Percentage of ECHS and Comparison District High School Students Scoring Proficient or Above on Their State's 2005–06 ELA/Reading and Mathematics Assessments



Total number of ECHSs: ELA/Reading, n = 44; Mathematics, n = 43
 Geographic District: Reading, n = 44; Mathematics, n = 43

Note: These data cover 80 percent of the ECHSs open in 2005–06, with the following caveats. First, no NCNSP or THSP ECHSs were included, because those ECHSs did not participate fully in the JFF data collection activities in 2005–06. Also excluded are the ECHSs that did not enroll the state's tested grades in 2005–06 or ECHSs having too few students to report results.

Academic performance, especially on state-mandated exams, is a high priority for schools. Of schools surveyed, more than three-fourths (82 percent) indicated that students must pass a high school exit exam in order to graduate.⁹ Because so much is tied to this benchmark of accountability, it behooves schools to push students to do well on these exams. As demonstrated in Figure 3.1, more than three-fourths (81 percent) on average of ECHS students passed their high school standardized exam in ELA/reading, while two-thirds (66 percent) on average passed mathematics. Comparing students in ECHSs to the overall district average, ECHS students fared better overall than students in district schools. Although not shown on the figure above, the majority of ECHSs (84 percent) had a higher average percentage of students proficient on the ELA/reading exam than their respective district average, and close to three-quarters (70 percent) of ECHSs had a higher average percentage of proficient students in mathematics than their districts. Although the goal for all ECHSs is to have *all* students exceeding the state's proficiency levels, the figure at least shows that ECHSs, on average, performed better than other high schools.

⁹ Percentage is based on the 54 ECHSs that responded to this item on the school-level survey.

Instruction in ECHSs

Introduction to the New 3R's

An effective ECHS should not only prepare students for college but see them through to initial success in college. The new 3R's, as promoted by the foundation, are important contributors to such an agenda. Instruction should be *rigorous* to build content knowledge and learning habits and *relevant* to engage students. In addition, strong, personalized *relationships* among instructors and students should support student engagement and achievement. Together, these pieces should prepare students for the high demands of college coursework while engaging them in the learning process and addressing individual needs to improve current areas of weakness.

Rigor

The first of the new 3R's, rigorous instruction, is critical to taking students who may be academically behind grade level and moving them into college during the high school years. Research indicates that exposure to challenging material is necessary to develop students' abilities to comprehend complicated information (Carbo, 1997). Furthermore, Adelman (2006) suggests that the difficulty of high school courses is the best predictor of successful college completion, even more so than high school grades or SAT scores. As students prepare for and participate in a college setting that traditionally requires a great deal of independence, the ability to synthesize and deeply understand the content of their instruction will be important. Rigorous instructional strategies build these analytical skills in all levels of coursework to make ECHS students more effective learners.

The discussion of rigor can involve several components. These evaluation data allow for an exploration of classroom instruction and the demands placed on students. In that context, an earlier evaluation of a different Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation initiative, the High School Grants, developed the following definition for assessing rigor in the classroom (AIR/SRI, 2005b): Rigorous instruction requires students to (1) build on existing knowledge and skills to create or explore new ideas; (2) demonstrate conceptual understanding of important content; (3) organize, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize information; (4) communicate clearly and well; and (5) revise work, based on informative feedback (p.14). Note that this definition of rigor is about instruction; it does not cover the level of rigor in the content being taught. For the purposes of the evaluation, the level of rigor was primarily assessed through classroom observations but also through instructors' descriptions of adaptations to the syllabus, teaching style, or grading standards they applied when teaching ECHS students.

Relevance

The second of the new 3R's, relevance, is a key component of the ECHS experience. One goal of the ECHSI is to reduce the number of students dropping out of high school or failing to go on to college. Recent research on high school completion rates found that students' perception about the connection between their school work and their future was a major factor in high school completion (Bridgeland, DiIulio, Jr., & Morison, 2006). Based on those findings, policy analysts have advocated a "focus on making learning engaging, relevant, and connected to the future" (Lerner & Brand, 2006, p. 4). According to the definition used in the High School Grants evaluation (AIR/SRI, 2005b), the following components should be considered part of relevant instruction: assignments requiring students to (1) address questions or problems with real-world applications; (2) make choices about what they will study and how they will study it; (3) take on

plausible writing roles and submit their work to real audiences; and (4) build on previous skills and knowledge, and transfer skills and knowledge to other settings (p. 14).

Relationships

Relationships are also central to students' learning in ECHSs, playing directly into students' classroom experience, particularly in the form of respect, responsibility, and personalization. Strong relationships can provide students with access to both academic and social support, offer students valuable academic or professional role models, and be a driving force that motivates or empowers them to succeed. Strong relationships should also provide instructors with information that allows them to individualize instruction to better meet students' academic needs. Strayhorn (2004) argues that the key to effective rigorous instruction is that it should take place in a supportive environment where learning goals are clear and achievable, so as to prevent students from feeling disengaged or overwhelmed.

ECHSs attempt to straddle the secondary and postsecondary systems and, in doing so, create a blended academic experience across both. It is not sufficient to merely provide access to traditional college courses. All instruction, both in high school and college courses, should exhibit the new 3R's.

Source Data

The analysis below is based primarily on observations of 18 high school classes and 16 college classes across nine ECHSs. To determine the level of rigor evident in the classroom, the evaluation team examined the actions of the instructor and the activities of the students for evidence of the characteristics of rigor listed above. Classes that demonstrated evidence of some features of rigor for at least part of the observation period were considered rigorous. A similar process was employed to examine evidence of relevance and relationships. Analysis of this small sample provided illustrative examples, but not generalizable evidence, of the extent to which classroom assignments and instructional strategies exhibited rigor, relevance, and relationships.¹⁰ To supplement this data source, the evaluation team examined survey data, as well as interviews with leaders, staff, and students. The section that follows looks at the instruction in high school and college classes observed in 2005–06.

Overview of High School Instruction

This section takes a brief look inside ECHS classrooms. The evaluation team conducted nine site visits and observed 18 high school classes: 8 mathematics classes, 7 ELA classes, and 3 classes in other subjects.

Rigorous High School Instruction

In classrooms observed in 2005–06, elements of rigor occurred to varying degrees and were most readily found in ELA classes; these findings are consistent with those from 2004–05 (AIR/SRI, 2006). In many observed ELA classes, instructors asked students to demonstrate conceptual understanding and to organize, interpret, evaluate, and synthesize information. In one classroom, the students had been discussing a magazine article about a new law that banned the sale of some

¹⁰ Ideally, an evaluation of instruction would include multiple sessions of data collection within many classrooms at many different ECHSs. Because of the small sample size and single data collection point at each sampled ECHS, we consider these examples to be illustrative of possible broader themes rather than definitive findings within the ECHSI.

violent video games to minors. The instructor first asked students to write a list of pros and cons of the law. Next, students had to write a summary of the article. The instructor then asked students to write a persuasive article arguing for or against the law; the instructor wrote her own essay to model the process. She also provided feedback on students' earlier work, selecting examples of strong and weak work to discuss briefly with the class. This process allowed students to demonstrate a conceptual understanding of the content and to revise work based on informative feedback.

Another classroom provided opportunities for students to demonstrate conceptual understanding, through dialogue, about the play *Othello*. In this particular class, the instructor pushed students to engage in discussions that transcended a literal interpretation of the text. Prompted by the instructor to provide a discussion question, one student asked his classmates, "What do you think the symbolism is behind the chess pieces?" Throughout the discussion, the instructor facilitated students' participation and validated their opinions, while allowing students to control the conversation. Consistent with the concept of rigor, students were expected to express their interpretations clearly and demonstrate their understanding of the literature instead of simply restating themes or memorizing passages.

Rigorous instruction requires that instructors give students a chance to deeply understand and communicate their work. In some classrooms, the ELA instructors who were observed did not provide students with these opportunities. In these classrooms, the instructors had a tendency to answer their own questions before allowing students adequate time to arrive at conclusions, thereby doing the majority of the interpretation for students. In some classrooms that did feature open discussions, conversation was dominated by a few students and did not provide an equal opportunity for all students to build or demonstrate their understanding.

In a sample of high school classes, observers noted that instructors used rigorous instructional strategies frequently during ELA classes but less so for mathematics classes.

While examples of rigorous instructional strategies appeared frequently across a variety of ELA classes, limited examples of rigorous instruction were evident in the observed mathematics classes. Although observers noted a few examples of students demonstrating their mathematical thinking and

problem-solving to their classmates or instructors, these strategies were not the norm. Most frequently, observed classes provided little opportunity for deep understanding of subject matter. In a typical classroom period, the instructor led the class through a series of concepts and practice problems on the board in preparation for that night's homework assignment. Another observed mathematics lesson consisted primarily of homework review, with the instructor occasionally reminding students that they needed to know concepts because they would be on their standardized tests. In general, these lessons tended to emphasize mastery of basic computational procedures or memorization of facts rather than deep discussion of mathematical concepts, ideas, or applications.¹¹

¹¹ It is interesting to consider this finding on the rigor of mathematics instruction, given that the ECHS students performed better than their district counterparts on mathematics assessments. Several explanations are possible. First, the evaluation team did not evaluate instruction in a way that is representative of the entire initiative; these observations were brief and in a few purposefully selected ECHSs. Second, we did not observe instruction in comparison to high schools in the same districts. Perhaps the instruction was even less rigorous in these schools. Third, perhaps ECHS students entered the school with stronger mathematics skills than students at other district high schools and, irrespective of the instruction, were likely to score higher on the mathematics assessments. Fourth, this observation is a measure of instruction, rather than content. It is possible to provide rigorous content without using rigorous instructional strategies (e.g., using lectures).

Relevant High School Instruction

In 2004–05, observed classrooms demonstrated few examples of students engaged in tasks that were relevant to current issues or readily applicable to a real-world problem. In 2005–06, high school classrooms and interviews with high school instructors provided frequent evidence of instructional practices that incorporated relevance.

Across subject areas, a number of classrooms featured instruction that encouraged students to make real-world connections. However, these examples occurred less frequently in mathematics classes.

Across subject areas a number of classrooms featured instruction that encouraged students to make real-world connections. In one classroom the instructor connected a discussion of the French Revolution to current times by asking students what they would revolt against today. This prompted dialogue about the war in Iraq, high gas prices,

immigration, and religion in school. In another classroom, the observation took place at the same time that students in the district were protesting immigration legislation. The instructor adjusted the focus of the day’s lesson to address the student walkouts and engaged students in a frank exchange of ideas surrounding the issue. Similar examples were observed at many schools across various subject areas. As one school leader explained, “We’re always going for the most real-life application[s] possible.”

Observations indicated that relevant connections took place less frequently in mathematics classrooms. In these classes, instructors often promoted strategies or concepts as important to master in order to succeed on state assessments or college placement tests. However, instructors rarely addressed the connection between mathematics content and strategies and their use outside an academic environment.

Representing another element of relevant instruction, some schools reported providing students with the opportunity to present their work to real-world audiences. At one school, students completed a student-teaching project in which small groups prepared a 1-hour lesson. The project culminated with the students’ teaching the lesson to an actual elementary school class. At another school, students participated in an outreach project in which they created a mural in the community. Students began the project by doing research and community outreach to identify the need for a mural and to select the individuals they wanted to represent. For students who might not otherwise recognize the value of their high school education, this exposure to legitimate applications of their work helped reinforce its importance.

In many observed classes, instructors allowed students to make choices in their studies. The areas of choice ranged from reading materials for silent reading to research topics for class projects. In addition, in some classrooms, evidence was found of students’ playing an active role in instructional decision-making. As one example, students were able to negotiate with their instructor a due date for an assignment. The instructor explained that he wanted students to feel responsible for meeting deadlines.

In addition to classroom activity, some features of ECHS school design incorporated opportunities for relevant learning experiences outside the classroom. Internships allowed students to develop a sense of responsibility while receiving exposure to real working opportunities. Half the ECHSs surveyed (50 percent) listed internships as a design feature, and several leaders indicated during interviews that they planned to incorporate internships in the future.¹² In interviews, respondents provided several examples of internships and service learning

¹² Percentage is based on the 54 ECHSs that responded to this item on the school-level survey.

projects, including work in a science lab, volunteering in a college academic department, and painting a mural for a local Boys and Girls Club.

Relationships in High School Instruction

Strong relationships are an important component of the ECHS experience. They tend to emerge early in ECHS development and have been abundantly evident in each year of the evaluation. Relationships allow instructors to personalize their instruction and meet the unique needs of individual students; in fact, in 2005–06, ECHSs had a number of strategies in place to personalize instruction.

To this end, individualized curriculum plans were in place or under consideration as a design feature of several schools. One ECHS did away with the traditional grade-level separation and instead allowed students to work through the curriculum at their own pace by establishing a series of benchmarks that students had to attain before progressing. Some schools focused on tailoring the curriculum to students' needs, rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach.

Looping was another strategy that appeared with some regularity and contributed to both personalized relationships and more personalized instruction. In looping, instructors remained with the same group of students for multiple years. Of schools surveyed in 2005–06, 44 percent indicated that they designed student groups to remain with the same instructor for 2 years or more.¹³ Many school staff expressed sentiments that agreed with the research finding that this arrangement “foster[ed] trust and intimacy between students and teachers” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). An instructor described the benefits of the looping system in this way:

I think the looping aspect has worked really well because, coming from a teacher's point of view, you know students so well and you can tell when they're having an off or on day, and you can tell whether it's something serious — if it's something you need to look into more. You can see student progress and how they mature. For students, it's good because they get to know their teachers, so they form a trust relationship with teachers, which I don't think they would naturally.

Although not the norm, many ECHSs integrated features to promote personalized instruction including using benchmarks rather than grade levels, looping, small-group or individualized instruction, and assessments tied to individual learning styles.

Classroom strategies were another means of promoting personalization. Among those observed in 2005–06 were small-group instruction, individual conferences, one-on-one support, differentiated expectations, and instruction or assessments tied to individual learning styles. Although high levels of personalized instruction were evident in some classes, they were not evident in others where, for example, students received whole-group instruction or worked on a common assignment with little input from the instructor.

Overview of College Instruction

ECHSs must overcome both logistical and instructional barriers to help students successfully complete college courses. The discussion below starts by reviewing the choices ECHSs have made about the ways to integrate college courses. Some of these decisions were based on

¹³ Percentage is based on the 54 ECHSs that responded to this item on the school-level survey.

pragmatic factors, whereas others were based on instructional priorities. Following this review is a discussion of the observed instruction in college courses.

One interesting aspect of the nine ECHS site visits in 2005–06 was that observers had the opportunity to visit 16 core academic college courses, more than in the past. These included four literature or composition classes, four mathematics classes, five science classes (including biology, chemistry, and physics), and three classes in the social sciences. In contrast, in 2004–05 the observations were conducted in only 12 college classes, five of which were electives, support classes, or developmental (noncredit) courses. The following are several examples of classes observed in 2005–06:

- An American government class taught on the college campus with only ECHS students enrolled. The class focused on various aspects of elections and phases of the presidential election process. For the first part of the class period, the instructor lectured about the process. She then demonstrated a Web site about the electoral college. Finally, students worked in groups on an activity to formulate party platforms.
- An introductory biology class taught on the college campus by both a high school and a college instructor. The lesson focused on hereditary patterns and replication of the DNA molecule structure. The college instructor gave a slide presentation and lectured while students took notes. Both instructors interjected questions for students, and students responded.
- A physics class taught on the college campus with only ECHS students enrolled. The class was a laboratory experiment. The instructor provided written instructions to teams of students, who worked to measure the volume of gas in cylinders and document the results. The instructor circled the room, assisting groups of students, and later demonstrated to the class how to graph the results.
- A composition class taught by an instructor from the college on the high school campus. The focus of the lesson was the use of primary and secondary sources in research. At the very beginning of the period, students reported on the status of their independent research projects. The instructor then provided a brief lecture on primary and secondary sources, discussing issues of relevance and point of view. She then provided students with a practice exercise to identify primary and secondary sources. Students read the articles and completed the exercises aloud, with facilitation and support from the instructor. For the last part of the class period, students worked on their independent research projects.

Approaches to Integrating College Courses

ECHSs are designed to give students the opportunity to graduate with a high school diploma as well as up to 2 years of college credit. Doing this successfully requires helping students make the transition from high school courses to college courses while maintaining high expectations and positioning students for success. ECHSs take multiple approaches to combining high school and college coursework. One way is for students to remain on a high school campus taking college-level courses taught by qualified high school faculty or visiting college faculty. Other structures rely on access to a college campus; ECHS students may go to the college campus to take courses offered solely to them, or they might enroll individually or in small groups in existing courses available to the general population of the college. Exposure to the college campus and other college students—what could be called “the authentic college experience”—is an important element of the full transition to college.

As demonstrated in the above bulleted list of observed classes, ECHSs took different approaches to integrating college classes. Site visits to nine ECHSs in 2005–06 found that all but one had students taking college courses (see Table 3.1). The evaluation team examined the plans the remaining eight ECHSs had in place for helping students make the transition from high school to college. All eight provided students with at least a partial transition to college. For example:

- Three of the ECHSs provided a structured program that used a variety of strategies to ease students into the college experience. All three allowed students to begin taking college classes in 9th or 10th grade, but course options were limited. All three provided some initial support by having college courses for their younger students taught by a high school instructor or a college instructor on the high school campus. In addition, all three provided older students with the opportunity to take college courses in the most authentic setting—on the college campus, alongside traditional college students.
- Three of the ECHSs provided college courses but did not move students all the way to integrated participation on the college campus. One of these ECHSs allowed students to begin taking college courses, taught by college instructors, in 10th grade. However, all its college courses took place on the high school campus. Another of these ECHSs provided entry to college classes in 10th grade but had only high school instructors teaching college classes; to get the “authentic experience,” students at this ECHS could take summer courses on the college campus. A final ECHS in this group provided college courses beginning in 11th grade, but they were taught only on the high school campus by high school instructors, with no college campus access.
- Two of the ECHSs provided a personalized program; students could start college coursework any time between 9th and 12th grade, depending on their readiness. Both ECHSs offered college courses on the college campus, although one had ECHS students in classes only with other ECHS students, whereas the other had ECHS students enrolled alongside other college students.

Table 3.1. Methods of Integrating College Courses at Nine ECHSs Visited in Spring 2006

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HS Campus • HS Instructor • ECHS Students Only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HS Campus • IHE Instructor • ECHS Students Only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IHE Campus • IHE Instructor • ECHS Students Only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IHE Campus • IHE Instructor • ECHS & Traditional College Students
ECHS A	No college courses offered			
ECHS B				
ECHS C				
ECHS D				
ECHS E				
ECHS F				
ECHS G				
ECHS H				
ECHS I				

A variety of factors influence the type of college access and transition plan in place at each ECHS. Some ECHSs have developed programs offering graduates a transition and, eventually, access to an authentic college environment, but some ECHSs have not. The cost of offering

college courses and the challenges with transportation were the reasons cited by sites that did not provide students with a transition to the college campus.

Integrating College Courses at One ECHS

At this ECHS, a curriculum plan is in place for students to earn 60 college credits by the summer after their senior year. The table below displays the school's curriculum plan for the gradual integration of college courses.

Grade	Location	Courses	Credits Possible
9th	<i>No college courses</i>		
10th	Students begin taking college courses. These courses are taught on the high school campus to provide extra support and a more sheltered experience.	During the academic year — 1 course <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory art or introductory music During the summer — 2 courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College success skills • Career planning 	Up to 10 college credits
11th	Some courses on the college campus. This is a gradual transition; students remain on the high school campus for high school courses and a college support course in the morning. Then they go to the college campus for classes in the afternoon.	During the academic year — 3 courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College algebra or trigonometry • Introduction to chemistry • American history During the summer — 2 courses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal justice • Introduction to computer applications 	Up to 26 college credits
12th	Students will take most of their courses on the college campus. They will continue to attend a college support course three times per week at the high school.	During the academic year — varies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College composition • Introduction to political science • Consumer economics • Science and math courses selected based on individual needs and interests • Students select a major and may take one or two courses in their major area of study each semester 	Up to or more than 24 college credits

This ECHS benefits from co-location with the college campus, making it possible for students to take courses on the college campus without concern for the time or costs of travel between campuses. Even so, all has not gone according to plan. The actual course schedule for students does not match the curriculum plan outlined above. In some cases, the difference is a reflection of a policy challenge; for example, it was determined that the college English and history classes do not align well with the high-stakes state assessment. Therefore, students are not enrolled in those college courses. There are other types of variations in students' course schedules as well. Some students were enrolled in college courses such as Standard First Aid and Coaching Sports rather than the typical high school PE class. And a student with advanced art skills and interests was enrolled in Historic Restoration rather than the introductory art class. Like most ECHSs, this school has had to be flexible in reviewing and revising its curriculum plan to take into account local challenges and individual student needs.

Some ECHSs have made adaptations to the delivery of the college courses to ease students' transitions. An example of such a structural adaptation is the conversion of some semester courses to year-long courses. The instructor of one of these "stretch" courses explained that he covers all the same material that the regular college course covers because he knows the credit may be transferred to another institution, but he uses the extended timeframe to insert additional lessons that reinforce challenging or fundamental concepts. "Other college instructors can't do that," he said, "but I have the flexibility to do so." In this sense, the ECHS environment may not only be useful in providing access to college-level work, but may be superior to the traditional approach in its ability to help students make the transition from high school to college expectations.

Rigorous College Instruction

Many people, both inside and outside the ECHSI, wonder if ECHS students are taking rigorous college classes or a somehow weakened version due to the students' age and possible lack of preparation. In 2004–05, interviews revealed that college instructors were more likely to maintain their usual standards if ECHS students were enrolled alongside other college students, rather than comprising the entire class. In 2005–06, observations, along with interviews of college instructors, revealed that, while not all instruction in college classes met the criteria for rigorous instruction, in most cases ECHS students were attending college courses that offered them very similar experiences to those of other college students. Students' course-taking and specific examples of instruction in college classes are discussed below.

When interviewed about their instructional approaches, most college instructors noted that lecture is their predominant mode of instruction. Observers of college classes corroborated the self-reported data; lectures and traditional textbook-based lessons predominated in the classes they observed. These lessons often required very little of individual students in the way of synthesis, communication, or revision. For example, the instructor in a college algebra class read from the text, demonstrated problems, and responded to questions posed by students. In this lesson, since very few students voiced their ideas or understanding of the concepts, most did not receive any feedback to inform their learning.

Instructors of college courses noted that they are careful to maintain the level of content rigor when teaching high school students. Although the content may be college-level, observations of sampled classes revealed largely lecture-based instruction rather than more rigorous instructional strategies.

Nevertheless, some instructors made it a point to use more rigorous instructional strategies. Recognizing the value of feedback in developing writing competence, a college instructor used reflective writing assignments that included revisions of selected work based on her feedback to students. In another course, a college chemistry instructor provided students the opportunity to develop and demonstrate understanding of molecular structures by building models with manipulatives and labeling

them; students also had to defend their structures and labels to the class. These were not isolated incidents; observers noted the use of presentations and group critiques in several classrooms— instructional strategies designed to increase students' ability to communicate their ideas about course content to a group of peers and revise their understanding or presentation based on feedback from the group.

College instructors and leaders were quick to point out that the courses ECHS students took were as challenging as the courses traditional college students took. Instructors who were interviewed insisted that ECHS students received no special treatment. In cases where these students took

their college classes as a cohort, instructors reported being extra cautious about sticking to the prescribed college syllabus, assignments, and assessments. A college mathematics instructor at one school shared a sentiment expressed by many other college instructors when he explained his vigilant defense of the standard of expectations in the courses he taught to ECHS students: “We cover the same material. I give the same homework. [Students] take the same tests. They also need to produce the same results.”

Integration of ECHS students into college courses is important for creating high expectations and providing an authentic college experience. Our data indicate that, while much of the college instruction ECHS students received is similar to that received by other college students, it might not have the level of instructional rigor envisioned by the foundation.

Relevant College Instruction

In college courses offered through ECHSs, many interviewed instructors stated that they made real efforts to help students engage and connect with course content. In addition, observers noted examples of instructors incorporating real-life examples, providing students with choices, or drawing on students’ personal experiences. College instructors who taught classes that were largely or entirely composed of ECHS students commonly expressed that such elements were an important adaptation for ECHS students.

Sometimes the effort to relate college academic content to students’ lives or the larger world was fundamental to a lesson or assignment. For example, in a college writing class, the instructor selected a film because he believed students would relate the characters and themes in the film to their own lives and therefore provide stronger analysis on the assigned film critique. In some cases, instructors made efforts to connect information being shared in a more traditional lesson (such as a lecture or a discussion) with students’ experiences and interests. To teach persuasive writing techniques, an instructor engaged students in an impromptu discussion of the current debate on immigration issues; and at another ECHS, an instructor peppered his lecture about Piaget’s stages of development with examples of behavior students might have seen from their younger siblings or cousins.

Many interviewed college instructors stated that they made real efforts to help students engage and connect with course content. College instructors who taught classes that were largely or entirely composed of ECHS students commonly expressed that making the content more relevant was an important adaptation for ECHS students.

In addition, several interviewed college instructors worked to give students an understanding of how their academic knowledge was relevant in the larger world. Interviewers heard from several college leaders and instructors echoing a similar theme. An IHE leader stated, “The objective is to read, understand, to apply. The goal is to learn the stuff and apply it to your life. Application is so important.” As was the case with the high school classes, observers of college classes noted, English, composition, and social science classes included more references to

current issues and offered students more choice about their work than did mathematics and science classes.

Relationships in College Instruction

In visited ECHSs, students had closer relationships with high school instructors of college courses than with college instructors. Regardless of the instructor's background, observers saw little individualized instruction in college courses.

Interviewed college instructors appeared to have less time than high school instructors to develop relationships with students; however, the amount of contact was not uniform. Qualified high school instructors who taught college courses at some ECHSs had the opportunity to build on existing relationships with students. In many cases, however, students took college classes on the college campus

or were taught by college instructors who came to their high school. Students in both these scenarios experienced far less frequent contact with their instructors. In all these observations, however, there was little, if any, evidence of individualized instruction. This might be due to the constraints placed on instructors of college courses (whether primarily a college or a high school instructor) to stick closely to an established syllabus.

Academic and Social Supports

As documented in previous years, students entered the ECHS program with various levels of academic preparation. ECHSs were therefore challenged to provide ongoing support to students, responding to different needs at different points in the progression through the program and to the different needs of individual students. Ideally, all students in the ECHS would receive support through structures built into the program, such as advisory classes or formal tutoring sessions. As individual student needs arise, targeted assistance should ensure that each student is successful. ECHSs face the additional challenge of providing the right supports to students as they make the transition into college classes. This support can be a challenge because these students may require more support than typical college students (who are older) and because the college courses may be taught at a remote campus or by a separate faculty. A theme from last year's evaluation report (AIR/SRI, 2006) was that ECHSs were struggling to find the right mix of supports for students and to provide consistently high-quality supports. Site visits and interviews in 2005–06 revealed that ECHSs are still grappling with these issues but have made some progress—particularly within the high schools.

Supports in the High School Environment

Most ECHSs offered advisories or support classes integrated into the school day and tutoring programs. Some ECHSs were even able to offer a range of social supports. Barriers to more intensive support included lack of funding for additional staff and lack of transportation for activities outside the normal school day.

Most ECHSs incorporated activities such as advisories or support classes into the school day. In fact, 85 percent of ECHSs had support classes.¹⁴ One school leader described the support class as a safety net, ensuring that there was one adult responsible for checking on the progress of each student. She said that if a student was doing poorly in any area, it was up to the student's adviser to know that and create a plan to address it. The system works, she said, "because we've touched bases with that child enough and that child feels comfortable enough to say,

'[Adviser's name], I don't get this geometry. I need some help,' if he doesn't want to say it to his teacher."

¹⁴ Percentage is based on the 54 ECHSs that responded to this item on the school-level survey.

At most ECHSs, tutoring programs were a major component of the support system provided to students. In 2005–06, 85 percent of ECHSs had formal tutoring programs.¹⁵ Most of these took place during school (57 percent) and/or after school (80 percent).¹⁶ More than half the ECHSs that had tutoring programs offered sessions five or more times per week.¹⁷ For example, one ECHS’s guidance counselor said, “After school we have a study table. There is [also] an after-school math class.” Citing the value of tutoring offered on Saturdays, the principal of one ECHS said, “We have 50 kids plus at Saturday school. Once the kids hear we are there for them, they come. Not all will come, it is voluntary, and you can’t force kids to come, but many do.”

Sometimes ECHSs found that particular students required individualized and aggressive intervention. To keep students “on track” to completing the program, one school offered students the opportunity to make up credits at an alternative school. Another school had an intensive 4-week program to remediate students deficient in English or mathematics. Additionally, instructors at one ECHS periodically generated a “D/F list,” showing which students were not succeeding in certain courses. The instructors then worked with the students who appeared on this list to get them whatever support was necessary to help them succeed and to hold them accountable. Similarly, one principal delineated a specific, mandatory intervention for struggling students: attendance at monitored academic support sessions rather than independent study hall or college classes. He stressed the mandatory nature of this intervention and its positive results: “They *have* to come in. The teachers are available and that’s worked fairly well. We had 9 kids in that situation. After the second semester, I think seven of those nine worked their way out by the next progress report.”

ECHSs often removed obstacles that prevented students from engaging in a demanding curriculum. One ECHS was able to provide extraordinary supports for students because of its co-location and partnership with a community organization. This ECHS intentionally recruited students who had experienced difficulties in life, ranging from students in foster care to those who had been homeless. The ECHS then attempted to provide its students with numerous social supports, to address what otherwise might have been obstacles to the students’ success in school. Among the services available to students was a nursery/day care. Several students who were single mothers used the day care, and they described it as essential to their ability to go to school. Although this example is atypical of the breadth of available nonacademic supports, other ECHSs were similarly attuned to barriers and what supports student might need to be more successful.

As important as it is to provide this comprehensive support system to ECHS students, doing so is not without obstacles — the most obvious being lack of funding. Although instructors provided much of the academic support in their “off” hours, it was hard for some ECHSs to cover the social and emotional support the students needed. One principal, for example, said, “It would be good to have a room with social workers, but that won’t happen” because of the financial difficulties within the district. Another principal felt the need for a greater number of counselors for “students who need added support because they don’t have it at home,” but funds were not there for that level of support. At one ECHS, students reported that the one full-time school counselor was often so busy that, to see him, they would “have to chase him until he [got] tired of you chasing him.” Lack of funding to provide necessary support staff was a significant obstacle faced by some ECHSs.

¹⁵ Percentage is based on the 54 ECHSs that responded to this item on the school-level survey.

¹⁶ Percentage is based on the 46 ECHSs that had tutoring programs, as indicated on the school-level survey.

¹⁷ Percentage is based on the 46 ECHSs that had tutoring programs, as indicated on the school-level survey.

Some ECHSs encountered barriers to offering tutoring and other academic supports before school, after school, or on the weekends. Transportation outside the regular school day was an ongoing challenge at most ECHSs. In some cases, students also faced competing priorities such as extracurricular activities and responsibilities at home. Some ECHSs found that the students better utilized supports when these were part of the general program and the existing school day. Structuring supports so that students used the ones they needed was a significant challenge for ECHSs.

Supports in the College Environment

Students may require varying types and degrees of support to succeed in their college coursework. While supports can take many forms, they should be strategically planned and implemented and readily accessible to students. Although either the high school or the IHE staff may provide formal supports, there is demonstrated value in students' having access to informal support networks at the IHE (Tinto, 2006). Currently, awareness of the need to support students who are taking or preparing to take college classes is widespread, but the type of supports available to ECHS students varies, as does as the accessibility of supports.

Most ECHSs offered a course to introduce students to college and its expectations. Although in many ECHSs students had access to all support services available to traditional college students, this was hard for students to take advantage of when the ECHS was not located on or near the college campus. Location also limited the availability of college faculty members for out-of-class-time interactions with ECHS students.

At many ECHSs, students take an introductory college course or seminar to learn about the college's expectations. Of the surveyed ECHSs that offered support classes, 80 percent indicated that these covered college or postcollege topics (e.g., careers).¹⁸ Some IHEs already had developed such a course for all entering students, while others developed or customized the course specifically for ECHS students. Such classes encompassed one or more of a variety of topics, from orientation to the campus and facilities, to advice and mentoring on managing the college workload, to practice and preparation in key academic areas. One ECHS leader stated that the school routinely placed students into a college study-

skills class and only occasionally excused from this requirement students who had exceptionally strong academic preparation.

GTC has developed one promising model for supporting ECHS students in college classes. Building on early evidence of effectiveness, GTC was in the process of expanding its newly developed academic-support classes; these were similar to labs offered as a corollary to science classes and foreign language classes at some universities. The classes were staffed by content experts who could provide help with existing assignments or develop complementary assignments to aid student learning, and students received college credit for participating.

Several IHE partners that did not offer any direct supports for the ECHS students expressed an interest in developing programs to ease these students' transition and ensure their success. One college leader expressed this burgeoning awareness:

We need to develop an orientation program for [the students] prior to [their] coming to college instead of just throwing them in. We do it for our other students Next fall, [the ECHS schedule] starts 2 weeks before ours, so we can

¹⁸ Percentage is based on the 46 ECHSs that had support classes, as indicated on the school-level survey.

go down there and do the orientation on their campus and then continue that on our campus. Especially the new students, they'll meet us and get a better idea of what we are expecting; then, on our campus, they can see classrooms and talk to teachers and be better prepared for classes when they begin.

Another college leader expressed awareness that preparation and support for entering the college environment could begin early: "I am proposing to start building in a personal development class catered to 9th and 10th graders. That would be a great way for students to prepare for [college] courses, so they know what the expectations are." As stated previously, awareness of the need for such supports at the IHE is crucial to the development of support structures and strategies that capitalize on the partnership and offer students the best preparation and support possible.

Many ECHSs and IHEs determined that ECHS students should have access to any and all support services available to all other college students. When asked about services available to ECHS students taking college classes, most ECHS and IHE leaders recited a litany of such supports, including tutoring centers, labs, and libraries. Some ECHSs reported that these were well utilized. An IHE leader commented that the college tutoring services were popular with students; the high school leader pointed out that the college library was a valuable resource because the high school "doesn't have what you would call a real library." In many cases, however, staff and the students themselves reported that they did not frequently use formal support services. Respondents cited a variety of reasons for this, from lack of visibility of the services to lack of access due to transportation issues. ECHSs that were not located on the campus or within walking distance of their college partners were experiencing the greatest obstacles to ensuring that students could access college supports.

Informal supports essentially comprise interactions between ECHS students and their college instructors outside class time. These interactions are an important part of the learning process for most college students. Most instructors expect that students will visit them during office hours or email them to gain clarity about ideas and to get feedback on assignments. The amount of interaction between students and instructors varied among ECHSs visited in 2005–06, and the characteristics of the ECHS (i.e., when, where, and with whom ECHS students took their college classes) played some role in that variation.

In some ECHSs, students took all or nearly all their college classes from qualified high school instructors. These students had ongoing access to their instructors and therefore benefited from being able to interact informally with them about college coursework. In most models, however, students had limited access to college instructors outside class. In some cases, the instructor came to the ECHS campus only to teach the class; in others, the ECHS students visited the college campus to take classes, but their time there was limited. Some students reported that their instructors from the IHE made efforts to interact informally. One student said,

I talked a lot with the professor. We worked out a way; he was really coaching us to email him a lot. We had a study period professor, and he would help and he would email us. The chemistry professor would come an hour early and stay an hour after to help, especially around tests; sometimes he would come during the study period.

However, more students who took college classes from college instructors noted that this arrangement inhibited their opportunity for informal interactions with the instructors.

ECHS Climate

Research has documented that various aspects of school climate, including personalized relationships, safety, and orderliness, as well as mutual trust and respect among students and adults, can affect student achievement (Lee, Chen, & Smerdon, 1996; Lee et al., 1999). Adults should model respect and responsibility, should know students well, and should be able to use their knowledge of individual students to meet students' needs. In addition, schools should have policies in place to encourage the development of student maturity, including respect and responsibility. This section reviews why each of these is an important aspect of a successful ECHS and discusses the evidence of progress in these areas.

Climate in the High School Environment

Students and staff at ECHS sites visited in 2005–06 nearly universally reported that their school environment was very safe. At a few ECHSs, school leaders kept the ECHS safe by enacting tight security procedures. One site retained security guards and, according to a student at that school, “[Staff were] psycho about security.” Another ECHS screened students upon campus entry and limited their interaction with students from the neighboring high school. These strategies allowed ECHSs to maintain tighter control over their students, shielding them from potential distractions and providing an environment in which they could focus on their education. At one school in particular, students mentioned safety as a primary reason they chose to attend the ECHS over other district high schools, and an instructor described the school as “a safe haven.”

Site visits over multiple years have shown that ECHSs were nurturing strong relationships on their high school campuses. Students and instructors at ECHSs consistently reported close relationships, an important characteristic of effective small schools (Wasley et al., 2000; McRobbie, 2001). One instructor discussed the nature of her relationship with her students, saying,

I really get to know them well when I am dealing with 55 [students]. I know them: how they write, how to assist them on their path. I think I get to know them on a personal level too. We exchange CDs [and] books. We have a book club in the junior class that we started, and we talk about books after school once a quarter. It is very, very personal, and I feel real connected to the kids. It is a sweet relationship.

Strong relationships are important in part because they provide students with a resource and a guide for handling themselves in times of conflict or difficulty. One student's comment in a focus group highlighted the role of the instructor in personally supporting students:

At a regular high school, there is not the same kind of environment. Just by looking at my face [the teacher] knows if something is wrong with me. I really think this school has helped me through a lot of problems.

Reports like this one were frequent. Most ECHS instructors seem to have embraced the role of providing emotional support to the students in their schools. Students consistently expressed appreciation for their instructors and, in return, an unwillingness to “let them down.”

Site visitors also found continued evidence that ECHSs had done well developing a culture of respect on the high school side. In high school classes observed in 2005–06, students tended to be prepared, engaged, responsive to directions from instructors, and respectful of the needs of other

students. In focus groups, ECHS students consistently stated that their school environment was one in which learning was taken seriously. A student at one ECHS explained, “Some of the people in our grade who had a lower GPA . . . I think by going to this school, it motivated them. They might have C’s, but they are trying.” Another student praised the ECHS environment because it was one in which students did not allow interpersonal issues to interfere with their education: “I know a lot of people who want to be here because they don’t have to deal with stuff like at a regular high school, like a whole bunch of drama. Here, everybody knows everybody else; so if there is drama, it gets squashed quickly.”

ECHSs do not just assume that caring instructors and orderly classrooms will produce students who are able to take responsibility for themselves and their learning. Most ECHS instructors reported focusing energy and attention on developing students’ sense of responsibility. Of the ECHSs with support classes, 72 percent reported using these classes to improve students’ social and personal development skills.¹⁹ Activities to nurture students’ sense of responsibility took various forms. From working in the school’s front office to serving on the student government or the school advisory board, students in many ECHSs have built-in opportunities to practice making responsible decisions outside the classroom. Several of the visited ECHSs reported that they had learned over time how to better assist students in developing the ability to meet deadlines and juggle multiple responsibilities. For example, an instructor stated that the school has instituted regular meetings with the 9th grade students to address issues that inevitably arise with its youngest students, such as attendance and homework completion.

Overall, the evaluation team found strong evidence of safe, supportive, nurturing school climates at the ECHSs visited.

Overall, the evaluation team found strong evidence of safe, supportive, nurturing school climates at the ECHSs that were visited. Almost all ECHS leaders considered establishing a positive school climate foundational to the success of the school, and they

demonstrated such a climate by establishing an atmosphere of safety and respect, nurturing strong relationships between individual students and instructors as well as communicating their seriousness about student learning. The development of a positive high school climate, while not without its challenges, appears to be a strength of the schools in the ECHSI.

Climate in the College Environment

The experience for ECHS students on the college campus was more varied than that on the high school campus. While respect and responsibility were highlights of the college environment, the role of instructor–student relationships varied greatly both within and across the sites visited in 2005–06.

Site visitors observed respectful interactions between students and staff and among students themselves in all ECHS college classes. ECHS students attending classes with other college students often blended in. On one site visit, observers noted that ECHS students who acted playful, even rowdy, at the high school changed their entire demeanor to fit in with their college peers. They spoke in lower, more even tones, addressed their instructor formally, and walked slowly and confidently through college buildings. When asked about the change, students explained that at the college they feel they are treated “more like adults.” The concepts of respect and responsibility seemed integrally related in the minds of students when it came to discussing their conduct in their college courses. As proof that they were trusted with taking additional responsibility for themselves, they cited such examples as the fact that they could reschedule

¹⁹ Percentage is based on the 46 ECHS that had support classes, as indicated on the school-level survey.

classes and tests and that their topics of study were not prescribed or “censored.” Most of the students who were interviewed expressed both awareness and appreciation for the responsibility that they bore for their own success or failure in the college environment.

Site visitors observed respectful interactions between students and staff and among students themselves in all ECHS college classes. There was more variability in the relationships between college faculty and ECHS students than between high school faculty and ECHS students. Some college faculty made an effort to forge relationships with students; many did not.

Site visitors frequently heard that only some of the college instructors forged relationships with ECHS students. Although many instructors expressed a desire for students to feel respected and confident, the amount of effort the instructors invested in ensuring that students felt that way appeared to vary. When asked if they felt that their college instructors knew them well, students tended to respond not with examples of instructors who knew them well personally but with examples of college instructors providing any contact outside the scheduled class period, such as inviting students to dinner, giving out

their email addresses and cell phone numbers, or visiting the high school campus to offer tutoring sessions. Describing one such relationship, a student said,

[The professor] was like another adviser. He was always available for help. He gave me his email and office address. I don't think he knew me as well as [my high school teacher] but he knew me well enough.

Students were quick to express appreciation for college instructors who made an effort to be available to them and to build relationships. Such relationships appeared to be more common for ECHS students taking classes as a cohort, but the interactions did not appear to be systematic or formalized.

College-Going Culture

In a strong college-going culture, both the high school and college environments interact to instill in students the understanding of what college may require of them, the desire to attend college, and the confidence that they can succeed there. Since the inception of the initiative, ECHSs have worked hard to create college-going cultures.

The primary ways that ECHSs help students to understand what will be expected of them in college is by having them attend college. ECHSs with programs located on or near college campuses found that the college environment is a great teacher about college expectations. Even students articulated the importance of exposure to a college campus. When students were asked what they would do to make the ECHS program better, one said, “I’d want it on the [college] campus and take classes up there and have our own building. Not in the high school.” A second student added, “This feels more like high school. If we want to think more about college, it would be easier [to do so] on the college campus.” For schools not located on college campuses, providing students with access to their partner IHEs was a challenge. For example, it was difficult to arrange for students to take college courses on campus, participate in on-campus activities, and use the college’s resources.

The majority of the sampled ECHSs demonstrated some commitment to informing students about the process for applying to college, whether applying to the partner colleges or other institutions. For example, some ECHSs enlisted the support of the college guidance staff to explain to students admissions and enrollment procedures. At one ECHS, a college counselor met with all the

sophomores, juniors, and seniors to discuss the partner college's entrance requirements and optional courses of study. "My role," he said, "is to get them the information they need and ensure they are following the process to enter the college." One ECHS offered field trips to colleges; the goal was to provide students with the opportunity to see what various college campuses looked and felt like. In addition, the students researched a variety of colleges in their advisory groups, comparing admissions requirements, tuition, and available areas of study across institutions. The school leader explained, "We're trying to expand their knowledge of what it means to go to college in as many ways as we can." Students at another ECHS expressed feeling confident about the college application process due to support from their instructors and administrators. A senior said, "They make you aware of your options after high school. They remind you about test dates and college application due dates." A classmate added, "The principal asks me every day about college applications. He won't do a recommendation letter [unless the application is complete]."

ECHSs also work to get students to think of themselves as "college material." Many students said that they felt as though ECHS students were treated as college and precollege students. One student said, "The teachers just assume we are going [to college]." While students frequently cited their instructors as sources of inspiration regarding future educational plans, some ECHSs looked beyond their own staff, enlisting speakers from local colleges or industries to echo the school's message about the importance of attending college. An ECHS principal explained, "In our program, we bring a lot of speakers in that focus on getting students to think of themselves as college students ... by telling them, 'You're going to college.'" In many cases, the message has sunk in. A student at that ECHS, when asked about his future plans, shrugged nonchalantly and said, "This is a college prep school."

ECHS students tended to think of themselves as college bound and expressed a sense of confidence about attaining that goal. Some students interviewed in focus groups spoke of transferring to local universities with the credits they had earned; others spoke of earning advanced degrees and pursuing well-articulated career goals. For example, several students at an ECHS said they planned to attend a local private 4-year university. "I'll major in criminal justice with a minor in theology," said one student, who added that she planned to earn her doctorate. At an ECHS in Texas, students cited varied component institutions of the state system that they might eventually attend, based on their various interests: architecture, business and accounting, and engineering. Still others talked about the personal qualities and coursework needed to achieve

ECHSs located on the campus of their IHE partner had an easier time establishing a strong college-going culture by virtue of being able to offer students more regular opportunities to observe and engage in activities on the campus. The majority of the sampled ECHSs demonstrated some commitment to informing students about the process for applying to college, be it the partner college or other institutions. ECHSs also worked to get students to think of themselves as "college material."

career goals such as becoming a lawyer or a pediatrician. Although a few students expressed some uncertainty about their postsecondary plans, the overwhelming majority confidently shared the futures they envisioned for themselves.

Each year, the evaluation team found that the visited ECHSs had achieved some success in promoting a college-going culture. A pattern noted in 2004–05 was that ECHSs located on the campus of their IHE partner had an easier time establishing a strong college-going culture by virtue of being able to offer students more regular opportunities to observe and engage in activities on the campus. Findings from site visits in 2005–06 were consistent with this pattern.

The ECHS Experience — How Blended Is It?

Research suggests that the lack of coherence between high school and college requirements contributes to many students' failure to complete their intended educational path. This is particularly true in the case of poor and minority students (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). For example, researchers have documented that state content and skill standards are often not aligned at the high school and college level (Somerville & Yi, 2002) and that the skills required for success in high school often fall short of the types of skills required for college (Haycock & Huang, 2001). In recent years, several researchers have postulated that even some competent high school students lack the knowledge “of the differences between negotiating high school and college academic organizational environments” (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005, p. 157). Ideally, ECHSs should diminish the gap between the high school experience and the college experience by providing their students with a more blended experience.

The idea of a blended experience has not been well defined within the initiative. The ECHSI Core Principles (JFF, 2003) state, “Early college high schools demonstrate new ways of integrating levels of schooling to better serve the intellectual and developmental needs of young people.” As interpreted by the evaluation team, this statement implies that integration should be the core of the blended experience. The ECHS structure can create a blended experience in which the transition to college courses gradually builds expectations and demands for students while softening an otherwise abrupt change. Communication can also promote a blended experience, with constant dialogue between high school and college programs about the skills students need to develop in their high school classes. In evaluating the ECHS experience, it is important to consider how ECHSs are accomplishing this blending.

How Blended Is the Instruction at ECHSs?

Given the diversity of instruction in both high school and college classes, how blended is the instructional experience at ECHSs? All the ECHSs the evaluation team visited were working to ensure that their academic plan allowed all students the opportunity to take at least some college courses. ECHSs also appeared to be considering carefully issues related to students' academic readiness and maturity while attempting to create a sheltered introduction to the rigor of college coursework and still holding high expectations. For example, “stretch” classes — one-semester classes taught over a full academic year — exposed students to the expectations of college classes at a pace that allowed students to adjust to the increased demands before moving on to authentic college classes. Some ECHSs used another instructional design element to smooth the transition from high school to college; they allocated both high school and college instructors to team-teach entry-level college courses to ECHS students. ECHSs will need to think creatively to navigate challenges particular to their situations as they strive to create academic structures that support students through the college transition.

In examining the data on the various ways ECHSs structure the instructional experience across high school and college, the evaluation team noticed an interesting tension. Many ECHSs provided students with a sheltered college experience by offering college courses primarily or entirely on the high school campus. A truly blended experience, however, implies at least some exposure to an authentic college experience: classes on the college campus, with a college instructor and alongside college students. In 2005–06, several ECHSs were struggling with logistical obstacles to providing this opportunity and were unable to prioritize the pedagogical and developmental needs of students in their decision-making.

As stated previously, students were somewhat less likely to experience the type of instruction deemed desirable by the foundation (rigorous, relevant, and based on strong relationships) in their college classes than in their high school classes. One might argue that to create a truly blended instructional experience for students mere access to college is sufficient to achieve the foundation's goals and that improvement of college instruction is a matter for the IHEs themselves to address. However, the ECHSI Core Principles (JFF, 2003) state, "The challenge is not only to establish a small-scale, nurturing environment and rigorous academic standards for

All the sampled ECHSs were working to ensure that their academic plan allowed all students the opportunity to take at least some college courses. In facilitating this transition, ECHSs developed different structures for college courses (e.g., stretch classes and high school-college instructor teams). Many ECHSs provided students with only a sheltered college experience by offering college courses primarily or entirely on the high school campus. Students also received different types of instruction in high school and college classes, potentially leading to a disconnected instructional environment.

high school but to maintain this environment for the first 2 years of college-level work." In other words, the 3R's must permeate both levels of the ECHS experience.²⁰ An effective blended experience, then, must address the quality of both high school and college instruction, as well as the ways in which they blend together, to meet the needs of ECHS students.

There is an inherent challenge in creating a successful transition to college. Any effort to support and prepare students cannot come at the expense of high expectations for college performance. A gradual and seamless transition might best address students' needs and gradually build rising expectations until students are fully prepared for college classes. An effective transition will require schools to think strategically to ensure that students receive adequate preparation without sacrificing any of the initiative's goals.

How Blended Are the Support Systems at ECHSs?

As stated earlier, students at ECHSs located on college campuses appeared able to access a variety of supports across their high school and college experiences. At ECHSs not located on college campuses, however, the support systems on the high school side tended to be quite distinct from those on the college side. In fact, students at several ECHSs reported relying on their high school instructors for support in all their classes because supports at the college were "too far away" or because students felt "uncomfortable" utilizing college support centers. Therefore, ECHSs are being challenged to find creative ways to provide academic and social support to students as they transition to college course-taking.

A strategy used at some ECHSs not located on IHE campuses was strategic communication between the college and ECHS staff. Interviewees at several sites reported that college instructors emailed the ECHS staff when ECHS students were missing classes or doing poorly. At one ECHS, a high school staff member accompanied the 10th grade students to the college each week and quickly checked in with college instructors. Such strategies are promising examples of proactive communication practices that, if incorporated consistently, could provide a safety net for ECHS students who require monitoring and support in their transition to college.

²⁰ The features of rigorous and relevant instruction are based on definitions developed to examine the high school instructional environment. It bears consideration within the ECHSI if these are the features that should also be present in college instruction.

How Blended Are ECHS Climates?

Ideally, the ECHS experience would be characterized by a supportive and nurturing climate from beginning to end. The personalized relationships established on the high school side of ECHSs would extend through students' transition to the college side.

Some ECHS students reported that feelings of safety, familiarity, and caring pervaded both their high school and college experiences. Other students, however, expressed distress over experiencing very different atmospheres and having to juggle very different types of relationships in their high school and college environments. One student offered an example of the differing degrees of personalization she experiences at her high school and college, "Here you can go to the principal and she'll show you some sympathy, but not at the college. At the college, they know you by your social security number." The different climates can affect not only students' sense of comfort and familiarity but their sense of academic empowerment. A student talked about her struggle to reconcile the differing climates at her high school and college:

We have two different atmospheres. That is one thing I am trying to balance out. That is why I am sliding between my classes. [The ECHS] is smaller, and you know everybody. But [there's] a lot of immaturity, too. At [the college], there are a lot of people; it can get boring because you don't have anyone there you know.

Another student echoed his classmate's concern: "Atmosphere is a big thing for me . . . I usually like to get involved, but sometimes I feel intimidated [at the college]. I don't have that problem at [the ECHS]."

Some ECHS students reported a positive climate in both their high school and college experiences. Other students, however, expressed distress having to juggle very different types of relationships in their high school and college environments.

Ironically, it seems that students who experience what we refer to elsewhere as the benefit of "an authentic college experience" — that is, being taught by college professors, on a college campus, with other college students — may in fact be the most vulnerable to the gap between the climates at their high schools and college campuses. ECHSs therefore must pay special attention to this issue.

Summary

Although few student outcomes are available for the population of ECHSs, the early indicators are quite positive. Overall, ECHSs had a mean average daily attendance rate of 94 percent. Also, ECHSs, on average, outperformed other area high schools on the percentage of students scoring proficient on state ELA/reading and mathematics assessments. This chapter provided some context for understanding what might be contributing to this early success on assessments. The chapter examined the instructional practices at a select number of ECHSs and the strategies for supporting students on their accelerated academic path, as well as the general climate of ECHSs and the efforts of ECHSs in developing a new, blended model for the high-school-to-college transition.

Site visits conducted in nine schools indicated that ECHSs have been largely successful at the following:

- **Establishing strong, nurturing school climates based on respectful and caring relationships among staff and students.** Many instructors and school leaders cited these relationships as a strength, noting that students who might otherwise be considered “at risk” were encouraged and motivated to work hard in the ECHS setting.
- **Establishing a college-going culture.** Students across many sites not only conveyed a strong academic identity but shared specific goals for their postsecondary education and career plans. ECHSs are still working toward providing consistently rigorous and relevant instruction.

The following are areas where ECHSs continue to develop:

- **Demonstrating all aspects of the new 3R’s.** Observed high school classes demonstrated more features of the 3R’s than did college classes. ELA classes at both levels were particularly likely to demonstrate these features of instruction. Of the 3R’s, rigorous instruction appeared to be to be most challenging for ECHSs to integrate.
- **Supporting high school and college learning.** ECHS are continually refining their support systems. As the ECHSI matures, more ECHSs are incorporating college preparation and orientation classes and more targeted supports, in addition to general tutoring. Supporting students through their college coursework remains a challenge for some ECHSs, particularly those located some distance from a college campus.

A new question raised in 2005–06 is the degree to which ECHSs have been able to create a seamless transition for students from high school to college by blending the experience of the two previously distinct stages. Some ECHSs are making changes to the structure of college classes, while others are developing concerted communication plans, in an attempt to ensure that students do not get lost or stuck between the distinct environments of high school and college. The next chapter provides details concerning the different types of partnerships that have evolved to engage in this challenging work.

CHAPTER IV — Local ECHS Partnerships

As the previous chapter illustrated, creating an ECHS that is truly a blended experience is challenging, and much of a site's success in this regard is based on the establishment and nurturance of strong local partnerships. The previous chapter focused on what ECHSs do to educate students. This chapter explores how local partnerships have developed to support the implementation of these instructional programs, paying particular attention to the roles and responsibilities of different partners in starting and sustaining ECHSs.

ECHSI Partnership Types

In the ECHSI, local partnerships have generally consisted of the ECHS, an IHE, and a local school district. Of course, variations exist, such as the involvement of charter management organizations (CMOs), other external partners, or multiple school districts or IHEs. Although the configuration of most partnerships has remained largely the same over time, exceptions do exist. For example, after disagreements over vision and implementation, one ECHS partnered with a different IHE in a community college system, and an ECHS that originally had multiple IHE partners now has only one. In addition, several ECHSs added a second IHE to their local partnerships in 2005–06. Those partnerships generally now consist of a 2-year and a 4-year IHE; the new IHEs were added to broaden the range of students' course-taking options and alleviate financial constraints on the original IHE partners.

To understand better how local partners approached the tasks of starting and sustaining an ECHS, the evaluation team compared local partnerships in the 23 schools visited or interviewed in 2005–06. The team based its comparisons on the nature and extent of support provided by the IHE(s), districts, and other partners. Analyses considered the type of human, financial, and material resources the partner provided to the ECHS as well as whether the partner was actively involved or merely a means of access to facilities and resources. The evaluation team also examined the level of involvement and engagement of partners (e.g., whether they served on ECHS advisory boards, the extent to which they felt responsible for the ECHS). As a result of this analysis, the 23 sampled schools were grouped into three categories:

- Partnership type 1: ECHS leads the partnership.
- Partnership type 2: ECHS and IHE or district partner share the responsibility for the partnership.
- Partnership type 3: ECHS and other partners (e.g., a community organization) share the responsibility for the partnership.

In analyzing the partnership types, the evaluation team considered active support from faculty and leaders as key in determining the degree of commitment from the partner, because the investment of human resources signals a personal commitment. For example, if a district or IHE partner provided some in-kind resources, but IHE or district personnel were not actively engaged with the ECHS, the partnership was placed in type 1. Of the sampled ECHSs, 30 percent fell into type 1, 52 percent into type 2, and 17 percent into type 3.²¹

²¹ As noted earlier, these ECHSs were not randomly selected for participation in the qualitative data collection activities. Therefore, the 23 ECHSs described in this chapter are not representative of the distribution of ECHSs overall. Rather, they are illustrative of the kinds of partnership arrangements that are emerging throughout the ECHSI.

This chapter will explain partnership types in detail, exploring wherever possible the changes over time in terms of individual partnerships within each type. First, however, a brief summary is given of some general ECHS characteristics by partnership type.

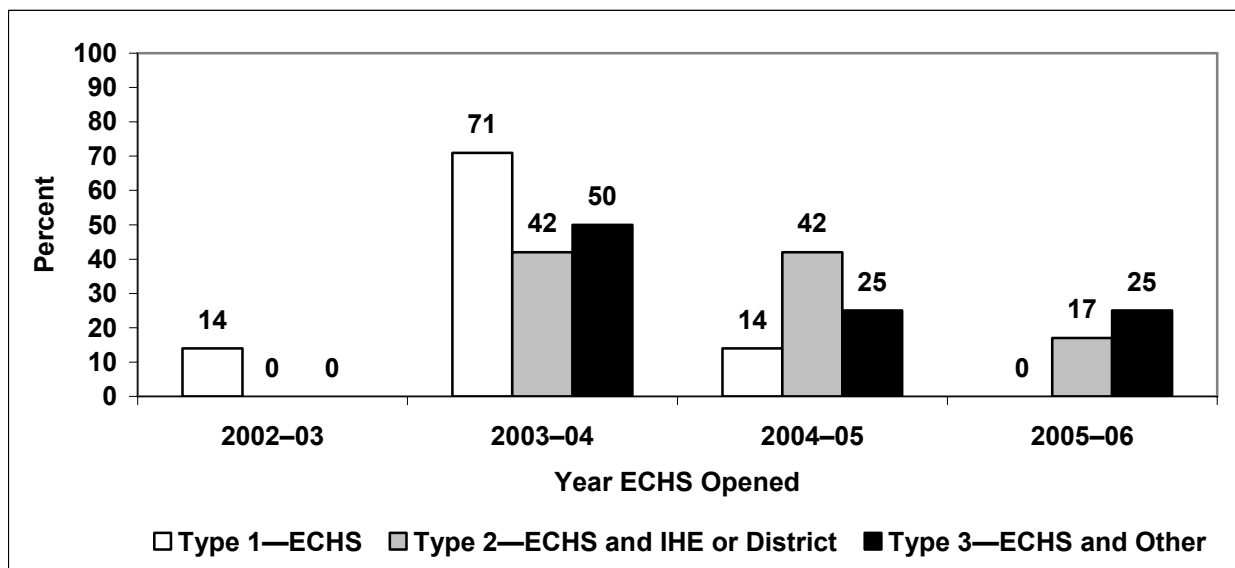
Basic Characteristics of Partnership Types

In partnership type 1, the ECHSs lead the partnership. They are mostly older and charter ECHSs. In partnership type 2 ECHSs, the ECHS and IHE or district partner share the responsibility for the partnership. These are mainly public district high schools on a college campus with a 4-year IHE partner. In partnership type 3, ECHSs and other partners share the responsibility for the partnership. Few ECHSs are in this category, and they exclusively have 2-year IHE partners.

Some basic characteristics of ECHSs varied by partnership type. ECHSs in type 1 tended to have opened during the earlier years of the ECHSI, whereas schools the other two partnership types tended to open in later years (see Figure 4.1). Partnership types 1 and 3 tended to be charter schools (71 and 75 percent, respectively, compared to only 17 percent of ECHSs in partnership type 2). Given the fact that type 2 ECHSs are characterized by strong IHE participation, it is not surprising that these ECHSs tended to be located on college campuses (42 percent). Schools in type 1 (29 percent) and type 3 (none) were less likely to be located on college campuses. In the sample, type 2 ECHSs also were

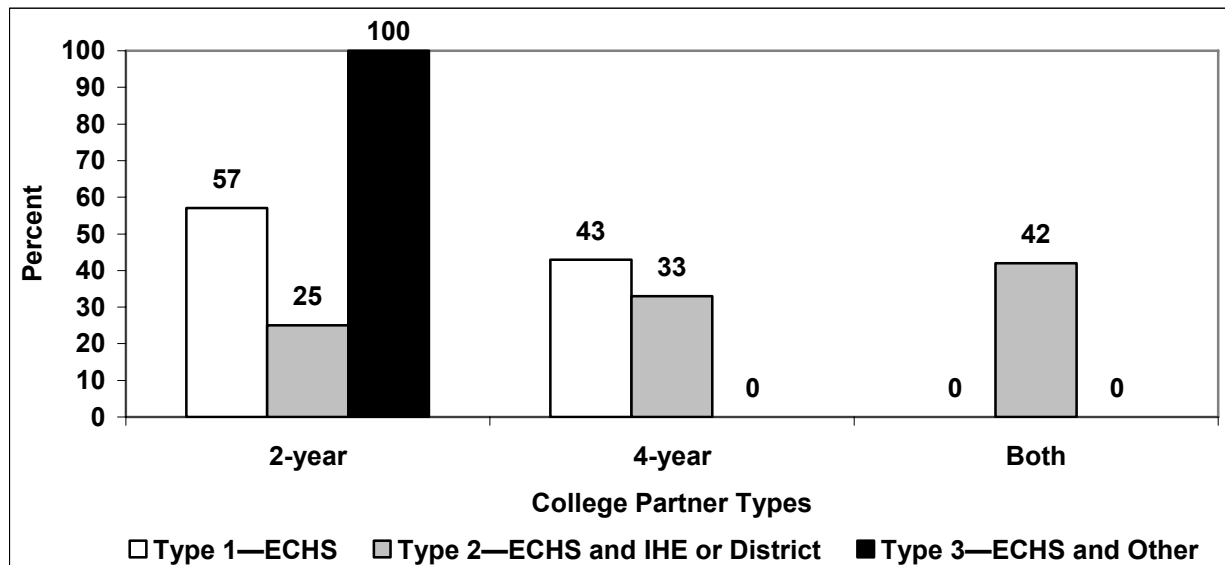
more likely to partner with 4-year IHEs (either exclusively or also with a 2-year IHE) than the other two partnership types (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.1. Percentage of ECHSs Sampled in 2005–06 by Year Opened and Partnership Type



Total number of ECHSs: Type 1: 7; Type 2: 12; Type 3: 4

Figure 4.2. Percentage of ECHSs Sampled in 2005–06 by IHE Partners and Partnership Type



Total number of ECHSs: Type 1: 7; Type 2: 12; Type 3: 4

Note: “Both” refers to ECHSs that have partnerships with both 2-year and 4-year college partners.

Partnership Type 1. ECHS Leads the Partnership

In the first kind of partnership, the ECHS bears most of the responsibility for the implementation and operations of the school. Thirty percent (or seven ECHSs) of the 23 ECHSs where interviews or visits were conducted in 2005–06 fell into this category; in nearly all those cases, the ECHS was primarily accountable for the school’s overall progress. This partnership type is characterized by minimal to substantial financial, human, and material resources but little direct or active support from the district or IHE partner.

IHE Support

For the most part, IHE partners in this category were supportive financially. Some IHEs provided facilities for the ECHS, including space on the IHE campus, and nearly all provided a liaison to the ECHS — usually a vice president or dean — and faculty to teach or oversee college courses. However, a few IHE partners in this category shared the view that they could not “take college resources to support a high school” and thus provided very few resources of any kind to the ECHS. Only two of the seven IHEs declined to provide any kind of tuition relief; nearly half provided full tuition waivers or paid the salaries of the instructors who taught dual-enrollment classes. When discussing tuition relief, it is important to note that in states with favorable dual-enrollment policies, state funds rather than the IHE pay for tuition. In other states and at private institutions, the IHE may actually be bearing the costs of dual enrollment; this could explain why some IHEs provide partial or no tuition relief. (See the text box for resources related to state dual-enrollment policies.)

Reports on State Dual-Enrollment Policies

To understand the policy context for dual enrollment, several organizations have undertaken studies that characterize state policies and practices. For more information, see the following:

Accelerated Learning Options: Moving the Needle on Access and Success. This study of state institutional policies and practices regarding integrating college into the high school years was prepared by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education in June 2006.

Available at: http://www.wiche.edu/Policy/Accelerated_Learning/report/ALO.pdf

Add and Subtract: Dual Enrollment as a State Strategy to Increase Postsecondary Success for Underrepresented Students. Prepared by JFF in 2005, this policy primer for states provides an overview of dual enrollment, a rationale for its expansion, and guidelines (including funding models) for states wishing to implement dual enrollment for a wider range of students.

Available at: <http://www.earlycolleges.org>

Redesigning High Schools: State Legislation and High School Reform. This report, published by the National Conference of State Legislators in 2005, examines recent state legislative policy reform on high school issues to better meet the needs of students.

Available at: <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/HSPprimer.htm>

As far as providing human capital to directly support the ECHS, its instructors, or its students, the IHE partners in partnership type 1 were not so involved. Typically, they provided “passive” supports to students and ECHSs. For instance, some IHEs provided materials for dual-enrollment courses, but most did not offer direct support, such as helping with recruitment or providing instructor workshops. Similarly, dually enrolled students had access to resources and supports on the IHE campuses, but in most cases the IHEs did not offer programs or services specifically for ECHS students or take steps to ensure that ECHS students were using the supports available to them. Therefore, although students could avail themselves of tutoring, writing, or library support, the onus was on them or the ECHS to initiate those services. In several cases, the IHE and ECHS were located many miles apart, precluding students’ use of IHE support services. As one college leader noted, “We have made sure that the school is aware of the resources, but from a logistical point of view, it is difficult for students to take advantage of the situation.” In some cases, physical distance also limited ECHS/IHE faculty collaboration in this partnership type.

IHE partners in this partnership type were generally supportive financially but provided few human resources. Also, several IHE partners in this partnership type provided very few resources of any kind to the ECHS.

The fact that distance posed a barrier lends some support to the “power of place” concept, which refers to the benefits of having an ECHS located on a college campus. Only two of the seven ECHSs in this category were located on the IHE campus. The fact that most ECHSs were located apart from the IHE could partly explain why most of these partnerships were amicable but did not have as much participation from the IHE as in partnership type 2.

District Support

It is important to note that most of the ECHSs that were in type 1 partnerships were charter schools, and many acted as their own “district.” State-charter-school or district-charter-school status added a layer of complexity in understanding the dynamics between a district and the

ECHS in its jurisdiction, as well as in understanding the various levels of supports and services the district provided. In some cases, the district was either absent from the picture or antagonistic. For instance, one district partner did not want to lose money by sending students to a charter school; this factor contributed to a strained relationship between the district and school. In the case of one state-charter school, the relationship with the local district was difficult, but without another viable alternative, the ECHS had to rent space from the district. At one point, this school also purchased transportation services from the district before seeking out another service provider. Still other schools in this category had amicable relationships with their local school districts and enjoyed the autonomy that their charter-school status afforded.

For their part, school districts in this category provided ECHSs with varying levels of supports and services, such as transportation, food services, professional development, and special education services. Involved districts provided, at most, services as part of “the normal high school structures,” as one ECHS principal put it. Several districts provided few, if any, supports and services. Most districts in this category did not, for example, provide transportation. This meant that ECHS students or the schools bore that responsibility.

Districts also provided ECHSs with varying levels of financial support, including facilities, principal and instructor salaries, and in one case, college tuition support through grade 13. Because ECHSs in this type of partnership shouldered most of the load, financial issues weighed heavily on the minds of ECHS and district leaders. One ECHS principal feared that the district believed the ECHS would be too expensive to sustain without increased support from the IHE partner or other sources. From her perspective, the ECHS was still too new — in its third year of operation — and “the jury [was] still out” on whether the school would receive continued financial support from the district. Financial concerns were also the chief reason for one local partnership’s inability to reach a long-term agreement. There had been disagreement between the local school district and the IHE partner surrounding cost-sharing responsibilities; the district recognized the success of the ECHS and wanted to maintain it, but the district also wanted to closely monitor the cost per student.

Most of the ECHSs in partnership type 1 were charter schools, and many had little interaction with districts. Involved districts provided services as they would to any district high school. Several districts provided few, if any, supports and services. Whether an ECHS was a district or charter school, a lack of direct district involvement placed the onus on the ECHS to sustain itself.

In partnership type 1 ECHSs, district officials provided oversight but were not directly or actively involved in the ECHS. In at least one case, an ECHS principal felt that the district (including her direct supervisor at the district level) did not have a solid understanding of the needs of the ECHS, even though it had been operating for several years. The staff and faculty at this ECHS were stretched thin, but the district was dragging its feet about providing the additional administrative staff the school had requested. In another case, a district charter-school coordinator reported that, although the district had

not been involved in the development of the ECHS, the ECHS could purchase services from the district (e.g., professional development). As these examples illustrate, whether an ECHS is a district or charter school, a lack of direct or active district involvement placed the onus on the ECHS to sustain itself.

Advisory Boards

One potential avenue for increased IHE or district involvement is participation on an advisory board. However, the majority of ECHSs in partnership type 1 either had no advisory board or had

one without clear decision-making authority. The absence of advisory boards on which one or more district or IHE representatives might have served blocked one avenue for partners to be more actively engaged in the operation and direction of the ECHS.

Satisfaction With Division of Responsibility

Despite the great amount of responsibility shouldered by the ECHS leaders in this partnership type, most expressed satisfaction with the partners' participation. However, some hoped that the partners would become more involved over time.

Despite the great amount of responsibility shouldered by the ECHS leaders in this partnership type, most expressed satisfaction with the division of responsibilities between partners. It appears that this satisfaction came with time. Most ECHSs in this partnership type had been open at least 3 years by 2005–06, and the ECHS-district or ECHS-IHE relationships in some of these local partnerships

became closer over time. Those improvements had not yet resulted in a shift in the division of the workload, however.

Although it is not clear whether stronger relationships will eventually lead to increased balance among the partners, at least two ECHS principals hoped that they would. Both leaders believed that their partners had adopted a wait-and-see attitude before fully committing to the ECHS. One principal explained that the ECHS still did not have broad backing at the IHE, in part because the IHE “needed to see if we were the real deal or not before they really committed to us.” That principal was optimistic that positive outcomes in the form of successful graduates might give the ECHS credibility with the IHE and thus ensure broader support.

An Example of Partnership Type 1

One ECHS was a strong example of a type 1 partnership. The IHE partner had generally been skeptical about the ECHS's goals. Although the IHE liaison was available as needed and served on the school's board, the partners agreed that the high school would do most of the work, making requests of the IHE and intermediary as needed. The school's responsibilities were further increased by its status as a charter school that is not part of a school district. In short, the principal has carried the brunt of the development responsibility for the school's first years. To the principal's credit, the school graduated its first class in 2005–06, with some very positive outcomes for students (e.g., acceptances to 4-year colleges).

At first glance, this type of partnership might seem undesirable, even untenable. Indeed, some ECHS partners would agree with these sentiments. However, the fact that most partners in this category simultaneously agreed that the responsibilities were not equally shared *and* expressed satisfaction with the overall relationship also indicates that this seemingly skewed balance can be appropriate. For some ECHS leaders, the allure of autonomy wins out over the desire for increased support and shared responsibility. A discussion between two ECHS leaders aptly sums up this tension:

Leader 1: I think we could use a more equal partnership [with the IHE] ... really we are doing almost all of it ourselves.

Leader 2: There is a pro and con to that...

Leader 1: Yeah [laughing]. We get a lot of control that way.

Partnership Type 2. ECHS and IHE or District Partner Share the Responsibility for the Partnership

In contrast to partnership type 1, this second type of partnership is more equal. The IHEs and districts share with the ECHSs the responsibility for starting and sustaining these schools. Twelve of the 23 schools (52 percent) where the evaluation team conducted interviews and visits in 2005–06 were in this partnership type. Two ECHSs would previously have been categorized as type 1, but in 2005–06 they became type 2 partnerships as collaboration with their partners increased.

Examples of Partnership Type 2

One manifestation of this shared responsibility is that, at six of the 12 ECHSs in this category, IHEs or districts contributed to or were responsible for student success:

- In three of these 12 ECHSs, districts or IHEs shared responsibility with the high school for student success.
- The district alone was accountable in a fourth case.
- The IHE was not officially accountable, but it played an advisory role to the fifth ECHS.
- The IHE was not officially accountable but was assuming the risk of the sixth ECHS and therefore had a vested interest in its success.

The real hallmark of this type of partnership, besides shared accountability, was active support. In some cases, that support came from either the district *or* the IHE, but five of the 12 schools in this category enjoyed active support from both their district *and* IHE partner. In those five cases, the district and the IHE had relationships with each other that predated the ECHSs. For example, one IHE and district had partnered on several initiatives related to instructor recruitment and preparation, and the college leader reported that the university always looked to the district as its “number one partner” when writing grants. In this case, the district was the initiator of the ECHS grant, and the pre-existing partnership paved the way for IHE support from the outset.

IHE Support

In terms of providing financial resources and facilities, the IHEs in this category did not differ greatly from those in the first category. During 2005–06, the ECHSs received full or partial tuition relief for nearly all dually enrolled students. About 40 percent of the IHEs in this category also provided space on the IHE campus, compared to about 30 percent in the first partnership type.

IHEs in this partnership type also provided courses and other supports specifically targeting ECHS students. For example, IHEs offered such supports as summer enrichment or orientation programs, intensive tutoring, preparation for standardized tests, mentoring, and counseling for ECHS students. One IHE offered a seminar for African American males at the ECHS to foster their college-going expectations. Many IHEs in this category were also active in recruiting students, developing the curriculum, serving as advocates for the ECHS at the state level, or providing professional development. One ECHS principal felt especially well supported by the IHE partner, noting, “When the instructors were still at their greenest and not prepared to handle classes to the best of their abilities, [the IHE] screened, interviewed, and hired instructor coaches

to come in and work with the brand-new teachers.” Other ECHS leaders in this category similarly appreciated the support and assistance from their IHE partners. Still, burnout was a concern. According to one principal, “[Our] teachers are much more emotionally burdened than other teachers. The downside is that the work is relentless.” As this principal’s comments show, even with supportive partners, the work of starting and sustaining an ECHS can take a toll on ECHS staff.

During 2005–06, the ECHSs in partnership type 2 received full or partial tuition relief. IHEs in this partnership type also provided courses and other supports specifically targeting ECHS students, assisted in recruiting students, helped to develop the curriculum, provided professional development, and served as advocates for the ECHS at the state level. Some ECHS leaders and instructors indicated that there was little communication or collaboration between IHE and ECHS faculty.

In addition, even when IHEs were actively involved and highly supportive, some ECHS leaders and instructors indicated that there was little communication or collaboration between IHE and ECHS faculty. In one such case, an instructor noted that faculty members at each institution had different perspectives on teaching, due in large part from existing in “two different worlds.” According to that instructor, “I don’t know if [the relationship between college and high school faculty] can be much better ... because there are so many institutional barriers.” From these cases, it is clear that the IHE can share the load with the ECHS by working in parallel to, as opposed to being fully integrated with, the ECHS.

Other ECHSs and IHEs in this category were more blended, suggesting that there is more than one viable model within this overall partnership type. Chapter VI explores in more depth the issue of IHE-ECHS faculty collaboration.

District Support

Districts in this partnership type exhibited a high level of engagement of district leaders.

Like the IHE partners, the district partners in partnership type 2 took a more active role and had a deeper level of involvement in the partnership than those in partnership type 1. In addition to offering many of the same types of supports and services as their counterparts in partnership type 1, a greater percentage of districts in partnership type 2 provided transportation services for ECHS students. A striking aspect of this district involvement was the level of engagement of high-level district leaders, including superintendents. Through participation on ECHS advisory boards that had some degree of decision-making power, district leaders remained actively involved in the partnerships, thus taking advantage of an opportunity that was often not available to district officials in partnership type 1. As another example, a regional superintendent sought to develop a better understanding of the ECHS model by asking questions and cultivating a relationship with the IHE liaison. In yet another example, one superintendent described the support of local school board members as key to the viability of the ECHS, stating, “[The ECHS] would have faltered if they had not been as supportive.” High levels of engagement and active support from the district might be attributed to the fact that the majority of ECHSs in this category were district schools, and several of those districts were initiators or co-initiators of the ECHS grant. As such, districts clearly demonstrated their commitment to supporting the ECHSs.

An Example of Partnership Type 2

As a co-initiator, the school district played a major role in the implementation and ongoing development of one ECHS. The school district provided the leadership support for the ECHS by spearheading negotiations to establish it; superintendents from several local school districts were also involved in those discussions and approved moving forward. The ECHS principal met with the local superintendents and school boards biannually to keep them informed of the school's progress and vision. Two advisory boards — one that makes decisions about operational issues and another that makes decisions about institutional issues — include representatives from the school district, including the superintendent. Most recently, the superintendent successfully fought on behalf of the school against state legislation that would have adversely affected dually enrolled students. Needless to say, this was a boon to the ECHS.

Satisfaction With Division of Responsibility

Many ECHSs in this partnership type experienced strong district support, facilitated by their status as district schools, and strong IHE support, facilitated by their location on the IHE campus.

As one superintendent who sits on an ECHS advisory board reflected, partners in type 2 ECHSs "... rolled up their sleeves and did what needed to be done [to make the ECHS successful]." Several characteristics probably put people in the position to "roll up their sleeves." First, ECHSs in this partnership type were more likely to be noncharter, district high schools.

Therefore, district staff were involved at least as much as they would have been with any other high school. Also, ECHSs in type 2 partnerships were more likely to be on a college campus and to have multiple IHE partners. Both these features likely made receiving services from the host IHE easier and increased the supports and the engagement of IHE staff from the multiple IHE partners. The key to fostering this kind of partnership appears to be getting many different partners and making it easier for partners to get involved; this, in turn, leads to active engagement and support. Of course, a pre-existing relationship between the district and IHE can facilitate such a partnership.

Partnership Type 3. ECHS and Other Partners Share the Responsibility for the Partnership

The third partnership type is very similar to partnership type 2. In type 3, however, the support for ECHSs largely comes from community-based partners, such as Native American tribes or other community organizations, in addition to IHE partners and districts. As with partnership type 2, these supports include facilities, services, and help to find additional funding, as well as supports for the instructors in the form of professional development. These partners also provided supports for students and families through tutoring, counseling, social services workshops, parental programs, and enrichment programs.

Two of the four ECHSs in this category had tribal partners, and the tribal support was wide ranging and instrumental. For example, one tribe provided most of the services to the ECHS by running an after-school tutoring program for any tribal member, providing emotional support through a local health service organization, offering workshops and social services, and having tribal elders teach native language classes. At the second ECHS, a leader of the tribe wrote the original ECHS grant, and the tribe's council played an advisory role for the ECHS. The tribe also

provided funding for an instructor, a counselor, a tribal liaison, the school's sports program, computers, and a van.

The IHEs associated with the tribal schools were also actively involved with the ECHSs. According to one principal, "This is a labor of love of two communities, definitely the [IHE] folks and the tribal community here, so I feel like [responsibility has] been really shared in that way." (See text box for a description of this ECHS.) Because of the supports they received from their IHE partners, these two ECHSs would have been a type 2 partnership but for the presence of the external partner.

An Example of Partnership Type 3

In its first year of operation, responsibilities for implementation and operations at one ECHS were shared by a Native American tribe, an IHE partner, and the ECHS. Whereas the tribe focused largely on providing services and supports, the IHE was heavily involved in all aspects of decision-making for the school. The college vice president and the ECHS leader handled daily decision-making. Two college leaders, a tribal representative, and the ECHS leader served on the school's Board of Directors, which dealt with all academic and instructional issues. The IHE's business office handled all financial matters for the school, and the college vice president spearheaded the instructor-recruitment process. The IHE also gave the school many resources, including equipment for a music studio that the ECHS students started and virtually every piece of furniture in the building that the school occupied. The high school leader asserted about the partners that the ECHS was "our baby together."

The other two ECHSs in this category were charter schools that served as their own districts and were operated by nonprofit, community-based organizations (CBOs) that also managed the schools' charters. These CBOs added strength to the implementation of the ECHSs by providing a broad array of services, including financial supports, professional development opportunities for instructors and administrators, transportation services, academic tutoring, and facilities. One CBO provided the ECHS with grants for HIV prevention, parental programs, and a music program that covered part of the music instructor's salary. The ECHSs also had access to a broader set of supports and services — mostly health and social services for at-risk youth — by virtue of their partnerships with the CBOs. To varying degrees, the IHE partners of these two schools were also supporting the ECHSs. One of those ECHSs relied on the CBO to a greater extent than on the IHE and without the CBO would have been a type 1 partnership.

Two of the four ECHSs in this partnership type had tribal partners. The other two ECHSs in this partnership type were charter schools operated by nonprofit, community-based organizations. Supports from the community partners included usual school supports (e.g., funding and professional development) as well as supports for students and families (e.g., counseling, parental programs, and enrichment programs).

Over the life of the ECHSI, these types of community-based partners have tended to be deeply invested in their partner ECHSs. In these four cases, that investment manifested itself as direct and active involvement with the ECHSs. The fact that the schools greatly appreciated the support and expressed satisfaction with their external partners indicates that partnership type 3 is yet another model of a local partnership that is capable of supporting an ECHS.

Factors That Facilitate Effective Partnerships

The data collected on the local partnerships pointed to several factors that emerged as themes, both from sites where the local partners were satisfied with the distribution of responsibilities and from sites where partners identified factors that would improve their partnerships:

- **A common understanding of the goals and purposes of early college.** Several local partnerships became more collaborative after the partners came to a shared vision. At one ECHS, faculty members in the graduate school of education who were interested in working with the ECHS were required to visit the school and be interviewed by the principal to ensure their commitment to and suitability for teaching ECHS students. Another intermediary educated IHE partners about the goals and mission of the ECHSI, highlighting important differences between ECHS students and regular college students, so that the IHEs could better serve ECHS students.
- **Flexibility among partners, particularly in terms of policies and procedures.** Some ECHSs where interviews were conducted in 2005–06 appreciated that their partners were becoming more flexible. For example, one IHE began allowing students additional attempts at passing the college placement exams, and student support staff there became better at working with ECHS students. On the other hand, adverse policies hampered several ECHSs. One example was a district where instructors had to be hired on the basis of seniority; some ECHS and IHE leaders believed that such stringent requirements could lead to the hiring of instructors who were not committed to the goals of the ECHS.
- **Active and engaged IHE liaison.** According to several of the ECHS and IHE personnel interviewed in 2005–06, the amount of time that the IHE liaison devoted to the ECHS was crucial. At one ECHS, for example, the new IHE liaison spent less time than her predecessor had. The principal noted that although the new liaison was very effective, “... it is not the same as having someone almost assigned to you exclusively or as a primary responsibility.”
- **Close proximity of the ECHS and IHE.** Nearly two-thirds of the sampled ECHSs were not located on an IHE campus. In some cases, the distance between the ECHS and the IHE was negligible, but in other cases, distance proved to be a challenge. Certainly, this does not preclude partners from building and sustaining an effective relationship; however, proximity facilitates collaboration and face-to-face interaction between ECHS and IHE partners.

Summary

A local partnership is one of the linchpins of building and sustaining an ECHS. In partnership type 1, more common among the older ECHSs, high school staff worked largely independently of district and IHE support. Although some ECHSs desired more from their partners, other ECHSs accepted this as a trade off for receiving more autonomy. ECHSs in partnership type 2, which tended to be charter schools with at least one 4-year IHE partner, received the greatest support from district and IHE partners. The location of many of these ECHSs on IHE campuses likely was the result of (or led to) greater IHE support. ECHSs’ designation as district high schools likely had the same reciprocal impact on district participation. Finally, partnership type 3 was relatively uncommon, but where it emerged, it provided strong support for ECHSs, particularly in the absence of strong IHE and district support.

These three partnership types may not be the last word on the diversity of partnership arrangements, because the analysis relied on a small sample of existing ECHSs and more new ECHSs open each year. These partnership types may also be related to the degree of successful ECHS implementation; however, too few ECHSs were included in this analysis to make this connection. Furthermore, with ECHSs throughout the country, a variety of contextual influences have an effect on the efficacy of each of these partnership types. The three types described in this chapter, and the variations that have developed within each, are evidence that whatever the partnership configuration, key leaders must be engaged and must work together to ensure success and mitigate the challenges that will inevitably arise.

CHAPTER V — Intermediaries: How Their Characteristics Interact With Their Work

The intermediaries participating in the ECHSI play a pivotal role in the successful development and establishment of ECHSs. Yet their approaches are affected by various characteristics. This chapter examines the relationship of two variables—geographic focus and maturity within the ECHSI—as well as intermediaries’ work with schools.

Table 5.1 includes the classification of intermediaries used throughout this chapter. The original seven intermediaries funded in 2002 are considered part of phase I, as they have been involved since the start of all ECHSI activities. The remaining ECHSs, in phase II, were funded in 2003 and 2004 after the initial grant round. To understand the classification of geographic focus, it is important to understand that, during the tenure of the ECHSI, the foundation modified its approach to supporting the reform of high schools, moving from a national focus to a focus on specific cities or states. There has also been a shift in the criteria used in selecting intermediaries to guide the development of ECHSs. Most of the intermediaries selected in 2002 were either already supporting an existing national network of schools or were believed to have the capacity to develop a national network of schools. Throughout this chapter, we refer to these as *national* intermediaries. With the shift from a national focus to a focus on certain geographic areas, most of the intermediaries selected in the second phase, along with a few of the intermediaries originally selected in 2002, had strong ties within selected places. We refer to these intermediaries as *place-based* intermediaries.

Table 5.1. 2005–06 ECHSI Intermediaries by Year Received Grant and Geographic Focus

Intermediary	Year Received ECHSI Grant	Geographic Focus
(Phase I)		
CNE	2002	National (initially place-based)*
KWF	2002	Place-based
MCNC	2002	National
NCLR	2002	National
SECME	2002	National
UP	2002	Place-based
WWNFF	2002	National
(Phase II)		
CUNY	2003	Place-based
FCCC	2003	Place-based
GTC	2003	National
NCNSP	2005	Place-based
THSP	2003	Place-based
TAMU System	2005	Place-based
TCCEI	2004	Place-based
UNT	2004	Place-based
UT System	2004	Place-based
USG	2004	Place-based

*CNE began as a place-based intermediary. In 2004, CNE received additional funding from the foundation to open ECHSs nationally.

Partnership Development

As discussed in the 2003–05 evaluation report (AIR/SRI, 2006), a major role for the intermediaries is to foster the development of successful partnerships between local high schools and colleges, districts, and any other community partner. This process involves selecting appropriate sites and partners with whom to work. Intermediaries reported selecting sites by using a range of methods, from broad efforts, such as creating and distributing Requests for Proposals to potential partners, to more targeted site selection, such as asking IHEs or CBOs to identify potential partners. Of particular note in this discussion are the different challenges facing intermediaries that continue to open ECHSs nationally and those that focus on specific geographic areas.

National Intermediaries

Intermediaries with a national focus have the flexibility to select states and sites that will be amenable to starting ECHSs. The national intermediaries have encountered challenges with various partners, but they have the freedom to look elsewhere for other partners or to change the types of organizations with which they work. For instance, MCNC found that working with small districts was more challenging than working with larger districts where there was often more infrastructure to support schools. NCLR and CNE moved toward a preference for opening charter schools because of past problems with local school districts around both public schools and district-charter schools. Regardless of their differing viewpoints, all these intermediaries were able to look nationally for partners that they felt were most conducive to starting a successful ECHS.

Place-based Intermediaries

Place-based intermediaries have faced challenges selecting new partnership sites, given the limited geographic areas from which they can choose. The most dramatic example is NCNSP. Finding partnership sites slowed down after the first wave of ECHSs opened. Partners that were most interested in the initiative joined early on, and NCNSP then had to make extra efforts to recruit partners. An NCNSP representative reported,

I think that my job will change in the sense that schools won't come to me to ask to become an ECHS. I'll have to go out and target schools and recruit them to become an ECHS. So I think I will have to specifically target communities.

Similarly, TAMU System was struggling with what to do when they had tapped out all the potential partners but had not yet distributed all the funds. CUNY, working within one school district, faced many challenges, such as space constraints; finding adequate facilities was difficult, and two of its three operating ECHSs were overcrowded. In addition, CUNY had difficulties locating ECHSs near IHEs because of the New York City Department of Education's inability to guarantee particular locations for new schools. Therefore, given the restrictions on geographic area, place-based intermediaries had to do more local problem-solving to develop viable partnerships, whereas national intermediaries could find new areas in which to start schools.

Despite the challenges of a more limited pool of potential partners for place-based intermediaries, having the governor or state department of education behind the initiative has enabled states to move the initiative forward. One place-based intermediary felt the support of the governor

enabled its work in a way that national intermediaries did not experience. An NCNSP representative reported,

I think the governor set a pretty ambitious goal to get this up and running. I have to say that the upside of all of that is that the work is very supported, and because we have multiple partners, the governor makes things happen that can't happen as an intermediary across several states.

A JFF representative noted that having a state network often provided an entry for adding ECHSs. She said, "It's also been easier to drive the broader [college] access completion agenda [in a state], to use it as a policy lever, when there are state networks, rather than a network not connected to the state." JFF and intermediaries had been working to make the policies in certain states more conducive to ECHSs. For example, USG developed a National Governor's Association grant on high school reform that included ECHS as a model for the state.

As the foundation focused the ECHSI in a few places, it encouraged the national intermediaries to open ECHSs in these same focus places. This shift made it more difficult for national intermediaries with a focus on certain populations to find sites with both the interest and capacity to open schools. MCNC was encountering an issue of saturation in certain states. GTC, which targeted high school dropouts, felt that the foundation's interest in certain places led GTC to pass up strong candidates in other locations. GTC was concerned that it was working in geographic areas that might be overcrowded, and the potential partners might not be as "hungry" or they might feel entitled to receive foundation funding. Both CNE and GTC added requirements before awarding grants to make sure the sites would be successful. In other words, the national intermediaries' initial advantage in selecting the ideal partners for their models diminished as they were restricted to the same focus areas where other ECHSI intermediaries, and even other foundation-supported high school reform initiatives, were working.

Engaging IHE Partners

All intermediaries have experienced the challenge of engaging IHEs in the partnership, a crucial part of any successful ECHS. The FCCC director reported,

We have become much clearer about the fact that, to be successful in this initiative, you need to engage the colleges at the highest level and place them in a role of leadership; empower them to engage in secondary partnerships.

The 2003–05 evaluation report (AIR/SRI, 2006) discusses how intermediaries assisted sites in developing working relationships among the partners, including hiring an IHE–high school liaison, facilitating meetings between the partners, and establishing a system of communication between the partners and the intermediary. Several intermediaries involved their IHEs in partner selection by asking them to identify potential high school partners. The intermediaries' work to engage IHEs continued in 2005–06.

National intermediaries have a broader field from which to select sites. As the ECHSI has progressed, however, and both national and place-based intermediaries have been working increasingly in the same states and cities, they have started to encounter similar challenges in finding local partners. Intermediaries have also been focused on developing stronger partnerships with IHEs.

Despite their intermediaries' assistance, many sites have had difficulty recruiting IHE partners. NCNSP had trouble enlisting community college partners, who were resistant because of the level of effort required to plan and implement an ECHS. The intermediary was trying to partner with 4-year IHEs, but state universities had more difficulties waiving tuition than community colleges and had to use scholarship funds to cover the tuition of the ECHS students. Furthermore, several key players from the state university system did not support the ECHSs. FCCC staff changed their recruitment strategy when

two ECHSs had trouble generating IHE faculty support. They chose IHEs that were more experienced working with the ECHSI's targeted student populations and then put the onus on the IHE to find secondary partners. USG opened its first ECHS as a professional development school for the partnering college, with the hope of engaging the institution with the high school's growth.

As the ECHSI continued to grow, intermediaries had to reassess and adjust their partnership-development strategies as necessary. While adding partnership sites presented various challenges, especially in light of the foundation's focus on particular geographic areas, intermediaries were working to create viable solutions. In response to lessons learned, intermediaries also focused more attention on building good relationships with college partners once partnerships had been established.

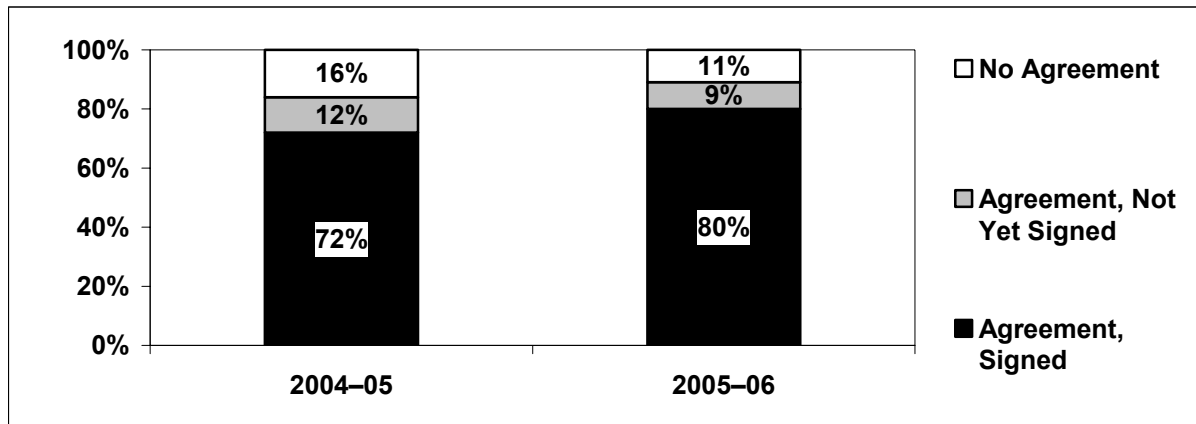
Grant Management

Intermediaries do not oversee the day-to-day management of their affiliated schools. ECHSs have another organization, such as a school district or state charter board, that is primarily responsible for managing the facility, developing assessments, determining the policy for hiring school staff, and allocating resources based on student enrollment. Intermediaries, however, can have an effect on the management of ECHSs through requirements established in formal partnership agreements. Then, once the agreements are in place, intermediaries can monitor sites' progress, using strategies such as extensive reporting requirements and conducting their own data analyses.

Formal Partnership Agreements

One strategy intermediaries use to influence managerial decisions is a formal agreement for all partners. At the beginning of the initiative, several intermediaries did not require a signed partnership agreement outlining the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each partner of the ECHS. Most intermediaries became stricter about partnership agreements, however, and the percentage of schools with partnership agreements increased from the previous year (see Figure 5.1). In 2005–06, 89 percent of ECHSs reported having a partnership agreement, such as a memorandum of understanding (MOU), compared to 84 percent in 2004–05. Also, in 2005–06, ECHSs more frequently reported that every partner had signed the agreement than was the case in 2004–05 (80 percent and 72 percent, respectively).

Figure 5.1. Percentage of ECHSs With Signed, Unsigned, and No Formal Partnership Agreements in 2004–05 and 2005–06



Total number of ECHSs: 2004–05: 43; 2005–06: 54

Grant Oversight

Although intermediaries were not involved in the daily management of their sites, intermediaries were engaged to varying degrees in tracking their ECHSs’ use of grant funds and the results that ECHSs were getting. As the ECHSI progressed, intermediaries increased the level and detail of monitoring, which could be seen in the kinds of data required in the school application process, the expansion of the grant agreement, the tightening of benchmarks, and the increased collection of data by intermediaries in 2005–06.

Intermediaries’ sophistication and comfort with grant management increased with age and experience in the initiative. More experienced intermediaries (primarily those in phase I) either always had or had developed extensive benchmarks (usually based on the ECHSI benchmarks developed by JFF and the intermediaries) and reporting requirements. For its new sites in 2005–06, CNE created semiannual contracts that listed the benchmarks according to each phase. The intermediary could use the benchmarks pertaining to each phase to guide school progress, and schools were directed to collect and report evidence mapping the benchmarks. One intermediary representative explained,

They’re supposed to put all those documents in evidence of meeting those benchmarks and goals in school portfolios, so when we go out to site visits or the coaches go out on site visits, we can check off what is being done and what isn’t being done. So we can create a profile of where our schools are at any one time.

One school leader reported, “[CNE has] a lot of requirements in terms of our documentation. They’ve gotten progressively more specific in their requirements over the years.” GTC also made strides in tracking progress of its sites through advanced benchmarking activities. This intermediary worked with its schools to agree on quantifiable benchmarks and to share data with one another to facilitate making improvements.

Some of the work of the earlier intermediaries assisted the newer intermediaries (those in phase II). FCCC developed a new grant agreement in 2005–06 to deal with schools that had underspent their allocated funding. This intermediary modeled the new grant agreement after GTC’s but was more specific about expectations for rolling out funding and about where the

money should be directed. An FCCC representative stated, “We’re finding that we have to work with the partnership to understand where we want that money spent, and then we have to follow up to make sure it is spent.” The existing schools had to adjust to the increased structure. As one intermediary representative reported, “We have had to work hard over this last year to educate and realign the existing schools around our core principles and benchmarks ... We’ve raised the bar. They’re getting it, but it’s taking a while.” CUNY worked on developing a more outcomes-based application process that required ECHSs to detail what outcomes they expected to see for the various ways in which they proposed using the grant money.

The newest intermediaries were more leery than the established ones about having too much reporting and oversight too soon, preferring instead to build trusting and helpful relationships with the developing schools before turning to more formal reporting. One USG representative realized the need for monitoring but said, “It’s a thin line we’re trying to walk. We don’t want to be so overwhelming that we are losing the relationship.” A TCCEI representative shared similar views, preferring to use her own notes and records to file reports for the intermediary, THSP, rather than requiring official reports from the ECHSs.

Collecting Data on ECHSs

One potential source for reducing the reporting burden on ECHSs is the Student Information System (SIS). The ECHSI is in the process of developing a comprehensive system to contain data on all ECHSs. Although system development has presented persistent challenges and therefore is taking more time than anticipated, as described in Chapter I, JFF and the intermediaries continue to emphasize the importance of using data, thus building among the ECHSs a desire and capacity to use the system once it is online. As a JFF representative noted, “Some intermediaries didn’t have a process for data; now there’s a vision.”

Several intermediaries created their own strategies to collect data from their ECHSs. MCNC was working with an outside entity, the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST), as a strategic partner. NCREST helped MCNC to collect data, analyze program implementation and student outcomes data, and develop new tools.²² In 2005–06, MCNC formed a working group to develop practices for data-driven decision-making that ECHSs might use to improve school and student outcomes. In strategy, GTC was in the process of developing a database to provide data for the SIS and also allow the intermediary to do cross-site comparisons.

The ECHSI benchmarks continued to be a resource for intermediaries, and many intermediaries increased their accountability requirements in 2005–06. Newer place-based intermediaries were adjusting to the dual role of providing support to ECHSs and simultaneously holding them accountable for their progress.

A few intermediaries also provided assessment tools to assist their ECHSs in collecting specific and rich data about student learning. As its schools matured, CUNY recognized that ECHSs needed a diagnostic tool for their middle-school grades. A CUNY representative reported,

We’ve begun introducing some early assessments in the middle-school grades that are less about gatekeepers than they are

²² NCREST’s funding to work with MCNC ends in May 2007.

about helping to diagnose where students are in reading and math skills. We just introduced this [in 2005–06]. We've asked all the schools to use the GRADE assessment which is from AGS.²³

Likewise, KWF recommended and made available Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing to all its sites. MAP testing is aligned with the content standards of many state assessments, including the Ohio Graduation Test.²⁴

ECHS Accountability

Many of the earlier intermediaries developed clear consequences for ECHSs that did not meet the benchmarks. MCNC tied the review of its schools to benchmarks and severed its partnership with several schools that did not meet these benchmarks. CNE withheld funding from one school until leadership changes within the district and school were resolved. WWNFF was withholding funds for one site where the IHE has not yet granted approval for courses. Many newer intermediaries were just starting to experience challenges with ECHSs' meeting the terms of the grants and had yet to develop clear consequences for those sites.

A few challenges regarding grant management were specific to the age of the schools. Phase I intermediaries were pondering what continued obligation, if any, a school had to adhere to the ECHSI principles. In other words, is a school obligated to adhere to the ECHSI model when that school can no longer seek and receive assistance from an intermediary? For example, one ECHS was considering changing its target student population and hence would no longer be in compliance with the goals of the initiative. In another situation, an intermediary might choose to switch the direction of its work and be unable to support ECHSs in the future. Intermediaries started to consider the obligation of these ECHSs to the ECHSI.

Determining the most appropriate response when ECHSs were no longer compliant with the terms of the agreement continued to challenge some intermediaries. Yet intermediaries identified several strategies for managing their affiliated ECHSs, including: increasing the level and detail of monitoring the schools, withholding funding from the sites, or cutting ties with the sites.

In summary, as the intermediaries' role in active ECHS management tended to be fairly limited, most intermediaries had developed strategies for grant management. Intermediaries used signed agreements to ensure their input into ECHSs' management decisions, and they increased their level of monitoring of school implementation activities. Because funding to more schools is ending as the ECHSI matures, intermediaries will have to identify guidelines for how schools are and are not accountable to the intermediaries and the Core Principles of the ECHSI.

Technical Assistance

Providing technical assistance, such as coaching, conferences, and resources, to their affiliated ECHSs was one of the most important roles of national and place-based intermediaries. Providing equitable technical assistance had been, and continued to be, a challenge, especially for national intermediaries due to the location of their schools across the country. To meet this challenge,

²³ The Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE) is an assessment developed by AGS Publishing (American Guidance Service, Inc.). The group test is used to assess students' reading skills, document their progress, and plan appropriate instruction.

²⁴ More information on this test is available at <http://www.nwea.org/assessments/map.asp>.

national intermediaries used a combination of onsite coaching, conferences, and professional development opportunities to support their ECHSs.

National Intermediaries

Intermediaries with established school development programs, such as MCNC, were well positioned from the start of the ECHSI to anticipate, identify, and meet the needs of new ECHSs and existing schools adapting into ECHSs. Integral to MCNC's technical assistance plan were the conferences it hosted each year. As the number of schools in its network increased, to lessen the travel burden for the ECHSs, in 2005–06 MCNC shifted from a national technical conference to regional meetings, each hosted by an ECHS. Other national intermediaries without such a long history in school development worked in the first several years of the ECHSI to develop adequate support systems for their ECHSs located in multiple states. For example, NCLR, which was challenged in its efforts to support ECHSs that were located a significant distance from established offices, continued to use regional staff to design technical assistance plans based on a needs assessment for the schools they oversaw. This approach led to more targeted assistance for those schools. Parlaying their strength in developing partnerships with IHEs, WWNFF partnered with a CMO to supplement the support offered by their coaching staff in 2005–06. Finally, as CNE broadened its focus from place-based to national, it eliminated state-based positions and hired additional coaches to support sites across the country.

Place-based Intermediaries

Place-based intermediaries benefited from the relative ease of providing technical assistance to ECHSs across smaller distances. FCCC created a network in California and planned to establish four demonstration sites that would be a resource for all ECHSs in the state. Several mature place-based intermediaries were offering networking opportunities to ECHSs as a key professional development opportunity to reach the greatest number of school staff and promote peer learning. In 2005–06, CUNY initiated a series of networking dinners to bring together principals, college liaisons, and representatives from all intermediaries with ECHSs in the school district. To reach beyond the school leaders, CUNY also created a series of four workshops that were open to high school and college instructors involved with any ECHS in the district. Topics included rigor in the classroom, getting to know students, and assessment tools. Several other place-based intermediaries were leading activities in designated geographic areas and were seeking participation from all ECHSs, regardless of intermediary affiliation, with the intent to address common issues (e.g., dual-enrollment policy) relevant to ECHSs in the shared demographic area. Finally NCNSP, serving a relatively large geographical area, held institutes in various locations throughout the state so that everyone could participate with relative ease.

Providing Technical Assistance Across the Implementation Life Cycle

Many intermediaries also faced the challenge of providing sufficient effective technical assistance to schools at different stages of development. Earlier intermediaries, in particular, had to develop plans to provide differentiated support to schools. The technical assistance plans of the phase I intermediaries called for tailoring the technical assistance to a school's development stage. For example, CNE provided three distinct stages of technical assistance after a grant was awarded: the planning year stage, the implementation stage, and the transitioning stage. A few phase II intermediaries with schools at different stages also addressed this issue; yet most phase II intermediaries had schools at the same early implementation stage. Thus, they had not yet grappled with providing support to schools at different stages of development, and their technical assistance appeared to target a few specific areas or to be offered on an "as-needed basis." It is

unclear whether phase II intermediaries will shift their technical assistance resources to other areas, such as instruction or sustainability, as their schools age.

Several intermediaries instituted new activities to generate the involvement and support of existing IHE partners. In the past, NCLR had great difficulty developing appropriate partnerships with IHEs. In 2004–05, it added a staff member who coordinated an IHE working group. The group meets during part of NCLR’s cohort meetings to network and share best-practice ideas. According to an NCLR representative, college partners then have a voice and are working together and sharing what they have learned. Using another tactic, MCNC, an organization with more experience working with K–12 than with college staff, was forming a cross-site team of high school and IHE faculty to look at mathematical data for the purposes of real integration between high school and college and increased rigor. WWNFF was exploring the idea of forming a national faculty of WWNFF scholars who had in-depth expertise in the subject area of bridging high school and higher education; this faculty would then help train IHE staff.

An area of variance across intermediaries was in the level of technical assistance they provided to ECHSs. Place-based intermediaries benefited from proximity to ECHSs. Yet it appeared that several newer intermediaries had not yet developed long-term technical assistance strategies. Meanwhile, the technical assistance that many national intermediaries provided became more consistent across sites with the addition or reallocation of staff.

As mentioned in the 2003–05 evaluation report (AIR/SRI, 2006), many intermediaries had to make decisions about providing support for schools in which funding had ended. In 2005–06, some intermediaries had extended their contacts with sites to provide technical assistance even after funding has ended. GTC decided to increase its commitment to replication sites by providing support for 5 years rather than phasing them out after 3 years. Twice a year, CNE coaches still visited schools that had transitioned out of the grant funding. One ECHS leader said,

[CNE staff have] been there as much as they were before [the grant ended]. They invite us to Design Days and send us updated information. They dedicate staff hours toward finding us new funding.

JFF continued to change the kind of assistance it provided to intermediaries throughout the initiative. One JFF representative noted,

Initially [at the beginning of the initiative], the needs were start-up, coherence, core principles, providing research and support for them, figuring out how to do the initiatives. Now some schools are 4 to 5 years old. The emphasis is on instruction and performance of the schools more than start up.

The majority of phase I intermediaries had a specified school model. In helping phase II intermediaries develop their model, JFF increasingly used the University Park Campus School, in Worcester, Mass., as a model site. As a JFF representative stated, “University Park provides common language and consistent vision.” The University Park program had become popular, and attendance at its summer institute had increased from 60 participants in 2004 to 100 participants in 2006. An FCCC representative noted that, with JFF’s assistance, staff were developing capacity internally so it became, “Don’t give the man the fish, teach him how to fish.”

Summary

It is clear that new issues emerged for intermediaries as the ECHSI progressed. In most cases, intermediaries were able to develop solutions that addressed many of the challenges they faced, but they were still working on others. The following were some key areas of intermediary work:

- National intermediaries have a broader field from which to select sites that will be amenable to creating ECHSs. Given the limited geographic areas from which place-based intermediaries can choose sites, they have faced more challenges in selecting new partners. As the ECHSI has progressed, however, and both national and place-based intermediaries have been working increasingly in the same states and cities, they have started to encounter similar challenges in finding local partners with the capacity to open and sustain an ECHS.
- Budget shortfalls afflicting districts and the inflexibility of districts to adjust to the needs of the ECHSs emerged as concerns for some intermediaries, while others had difficulty obtaining district buy-in, especially with charter schools, and recruiting or engaging IHEs as full partners in the initiative. Several intermediaries were surprised by the unwillingness of districts to provide services that the schools needed as they matured. Hence, more mature intermediaries learned that relationships between the local partners could be strained as schools matured or funding ended. The emergence of these concerns led intermediaries to re-evaluate the partnership development process.
- The ECHSI benchmarks continued to be a resource for intermediaries. Many intermediaries increased their accountability requirements in 2005–06 through the alignment of benchmarks with partnership agreements. Additionally, intermediaries refined data collection efforts and provided professional development for the use of data as a means to improve instruction. Newer place-based intermediaries were adjusting to the dual role of providing support to ECHSs and simultaneously holding them accountable for their progress.
- Determining the most appropriate response when partners were no longer compliant with the terms of the agreement continued to be a challenge for some intermediaries. Yet intermediaries identified several strategies for managing the partnership with their affiliated ECHSs. These strategies included increasing the level and detail of monitoring of the schools, withholding funding from the sites, or cutting ties with the sites.
- Since the ECHSI began, the area of greatest variance across intermediaries was typically in the level of technical assistance they provided to schools. Place-based intermediaries benefited from proximity to ECHSs. Yet it appeared that several newer intermediaries had not yet developed long-term strategies to support affiliated schools throughout the implementation process. Although earlier intermediaries had the challenge of developing technical assistance for schools at different stages in the ECHSI, the technical assistance that many national intermediaries provided became more consistent across sites with the addition to or reallocation of staff in 2005–06.

CHAPTER VI — ECHSI Learning Communities

This chapter focuses on the learning communities that have been created and facilitated among the various ECHSI stakeholders (e.g., JFF, the intermediaries, and the local ECHS partners). Learning communities are groups of people who have a commitment to the generation and sharing of new knowledge, high levels of communication and collaboration, and a shared vision that brings a common focus and incentive to reflect on practice (Fulton & Riel, 1999; Wilson & Ryder, 1998). Learning communities can be created across schools, districts, states, and national professional organizations. Individuals at the various levels of learning communities have the opportunity to discuss their work and tackle problems in an atmosphere of trust and support (Lieberman, 1996). This chapter examines how the ECHSI participants at all levels — across the ECHSI, within and across intermediaries, and within ECHSs — create and facilitate learning communities.

JFF's Role in Facilitating Learning Communities

JFF, acting as the ECHSI's coordinating intermediary, has played a significant role in supporting the other intermediaries participating in the initiative. Through its technical assistance function, which includes partner meetings, University Park Campus School institutes and residencies, and the literacy project, JFF has had an ongoing role in developing learning communities for the intermediaries and ECHSs. Although hands-on in the earlier years of the initiative, in recent years JFF has started to give the intermediaries more responsibility in developing their own learning communities. In this way, JFF hopes to lead a gradual transition that eventually will enable the intermediaries to continue their own learning communities in the future.

Partner Meetings

Since 2002, JFF has held biannual partner meetings primarily for the intermediaries. Initially, all the meetings were organized and led by JFF staff. Over time, intermediaries have become more active in organizing and leading the presentations. Intermediaries first participated by leading small group sessions and breakout groups, then transitioned into making presentations. At the November 2005 meeting, JFF had a committee of intermediary representatives create the meeting agenda. The purpose of this meeting was to understand the role of an intermediary in developing, supporting, and sustaining ECHSs, and to share best practices and stories from other intermediaries. Although a few sessions were still led by JFF, intermediaries presented case studies on best practices, successes, and challenges, as well as hosting site visits to local ECHSs. The sessions allowed some extra time for information-sharing, and various intermediaries held poster sessions.

The transition went even further at the June 2006 meeting. The intermediaries set the goals for the meeting. These goals were to learn about promising practices in student support and professional development, to discuss difficult issues being faced by the ECHSs, and to plan collaborative work for the following year. The breakout groups at the meeting were led mainly by representatives from one or more of the intermediaries, rather than by JFF or external experts. Through these meetings, JFF has helped the intermediaries learn how to form and support learning communities. The amount of scheduled networking, group work, and information-sharing time has also increased.

Intermediaries have become more active in organizing the biannual ECHS partner meetings, giving these intermediaries a foothold in supporting and sharing with one another.

JFF still funds these biannual conferences with funding from the foundation, but it is not clear how long that role will continue. In the event that JFF no longer convenes these meetings, there is a question as to whether intermediaries can sustain the learning community, particularly when the funding to cover

the expense of these meetings for all participants is gone. Therefore, although it is likely that the relationships developed among intermediaries will continue to serve them in this work — at least from a distance — it is unlikely that there will be large-scale, cross-intermediary meetings after JFF’s coordinating role is completed.

University Park Campus School

The visits to University Park Campus School summer institutes and residencies have enabled the participating ECHS staff to develop ongoing relationships across sites.

Although JFF’s technical assistance is primarily focused on the intermediaries, JFF staff also work directly with the ECHSs and have helped foster the development of learning communities. JFF has arranged opportunities for ECHS teams (including both high school and college staff) to visit the

University Park Campus School, a small, grade 7–12 model school site in Worcester, Mass. This model site enables staff within and across various ECHSs to come together and develop a common vision. As stated in Chapter V, University Park’s summer institutes have become popular, and attendance has almost doubled since 2004. In addition to these institutes, JFF has also sponsored eight 2-day leadership residencies at University Park, with a total of 132 participants from various ECHSs sponsored by a number of different intermediaries. JFF has also provided an opportunity for instructor leaders to form professional learning communities to share best practices. For example, JFF retained four participants from the 2004–05 leadership residencies as mentors to the 2005–06 participants. JFF also holds monthly conference calls between leadership cohorts and University Park instructors for “on-the-spot consultation.” These leadership residencies enable the instructors to develop ongoing professional relationships across schools after the completion of the residencies.

Literacy Project

As discussed in last year’s evaluation synthesis report (AIR/SRI, 2006), JFF also provided school-level technical assistance through a literacy project funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This work was initiated in response to a need JFF noted across multiple ECHS sites. Importantly, JFF built the literacy project in collaboration with researchers and practitioners in this field, creating a learning community in which all levels of the ECHSI could be involved. During 2004–05, the first year of the literacy project, nine school teams comprising ECHS instructors (both college and high school level) and principals participated; in 2005–06, five more school teams joined. JFF also attempted to link the work on the literacy project with the University Park Campus School institutes, to expand the respective learning communities. Team members from many of the 14 literacy project schools have participated in residencies and summer institutes at University Park, attended semiannual literacy institutes organized by JFF, created schoolwide literacy action plans, and implemented diagnostic assessments to guide literacy instruction at the ECHSs. Through the literacy project, JFF provided an opportunity for school staff and administrators to develop a shared sense of purpose around solving common problems.

JFF has promoted an ongoing learning community through the literacy project's advisory board. The board will be important in sustaining the literacy work at each school and the spread of the literacy project to other ECHSs.

JFF also promoted the development of ongoing learning communities through the literacy project. JFF staff created an advisory board for the project to aid in planning future work. As of summer 2006, board members included one literacy coach from each intermediary, two principals, and three instructors. JFF viewed the advisory board as important to the sustainability of the work in each

school and the spread of the literacy project to other ECHSs. In early 2006, JFF also developed a leadership network for school leaders participating in the literacy project. This network brought school leaders together to share common issues in ECHS implementation. In March 2006, JFF organized a retreat for school leaders to discuss schoolwide literacy work, as well as best practices in leading an ECHS. About all these endeavors, a JFF representative said, "We're trying to teach [intermediaries and school leaders] how to build these supports." Research has shown that ongoing collaborative activities result in more instructional impact than one-time professional development sessions (e.g., Garet et al., 2001; Desimone et al., 2002). By starting with training and continuing with support and conversations once instructors and administrators return to their schools, JFF increases the likely impact of the literacy project.

Models for Intermediaries

JFF views all three of these activities — partner meetings, University Park Campus School activities, and the literacy project — as opportunities to model learning communities for the intermediaries. Through the partner meetings, JFF has been gradually involving the intermediaries more in setting and arranging their own agendas. Through the University Park Campus School activities, JFF has been involving the intermediaries both in planning the visit for their ECHSs and in conducting follow-up activities with the participants. The intermediaries also provide input to JFF so that the activities can be tailored to meet ECHSs' needs and intermediary goals. Similarly, intermediaries are involved in the planning, participation, and ongoing training as part of the literacy project. JFF hopes that, through the intermediaries' participation in these activities, they will learn how to work with their schools in providing site-specific supports.

Intermediaries' Role in Creating Learning Communities for ECHSs

Individual ECHSs tend to be isolated by geography from other ECHSs and by differences in missions from other local high schools. Therefore, one of the central supports intermediaries provide for their ECHSs is to facilitate the development of learning communities among ECHSs. The learning communities facilitated by the intermediaries are important, because the ECHSs can share best practices, draw from one another's experiences, bring new ECHSs into the initiative, communicate over great distances, and support one another when the intermediary's role diminishes or ends.

Intermediaries facilitate learning communities through professional development activities (e.g., conferences, visits to other ECHSs) and through other networking activities (e.g., online communities, regular phone or in-person meetings). Most sampled sites were pleased with the professional development and networking opportunities available to them. Interviews with sampled ECHSs appeared to show that the more networking opportunities an intermediary provided, the greater the ECHS's satisfaction with the intermediary.

Professional Development Activities

Most intermediaries have been offering some form of professional development activities to their ECHSs since the beginning of the ECHSI. An important feature of quality professional development activities is that they offer people membership in a “constructive” community: a group of professionals engaged in a common struggle to educate themselves so that they can better educate their students (Lieberman, 1996). In 2005–06, most of the intermediaries continued to offer ongoing activities that foster the development of peer-to-peer learning communities.

Conferences

Intermediaries offered a variety of conferences that facilitated effective learning communities for their schools across a broad array of topics. Frequently intermediaries noted that building connections was also an important purpose for getting together. Additionally, the conferences provided the opportunity to align expectations and accountability practices across ECHSs in the network. The following are several examples of the conferences that intermediaries are conducting for their ECHSs:

- MCNC’s comprehensive model for professional development sets up as many as four conferences each year, including two meetings that focus on literacy and the ECHS design principles.
- FCCC holds three institutes per year for ECHS leaders and high school and college instructors. In addition to literacy, college readiness is an ongoing theme; a new theme in 2005–06 was the “culture of integration” between the high school and college experience.
- NCNSP provides a number of conferences, seminars, institutes, and other professional development opportunities to ECHS staff through the Teaching for Results Network.
- Starting in 2005–06, WWNFF has arranged for particular groups of its schools to connect at its professional development conferences.
- CNE has four conferences per year, and a CNE representative reported that the annual conferences served as an opportunity “to get everyone there in person to meet each other and showcase their strongest components and be a peer learning support system for one another.” This networking community is particularly beneficial for schools that are isolated geographically. As the CNE representative explained, “Most Indian-student-serving schools are extremely isolated — so our network serves an important role.”

Following the work of JFF and its literacy project, many intermediaries have focused on literacy as a common theme through which to engage ECHS staff. One instructor from an MCNC school was pleased that she was able to “get with people in the [MCNC network] to talk about how to increase literacy in the classroom.” NCLR, with its particular focus on ECHSs that serve large proportions of English language learners, has also provided professional development centered on literacy. Some of the affiliated ECHSs have participated in NCLR’s Leadership Institute for Latino Literacy, a 1-week program to assist schools in improving students’ literacy skills. In 2005–06, NCLR integrated more content on catering to English language learners, because many NCLR schools require this specialized knowledge. WWNFF also has a literacy initiative that involves visits from WWNFF staff and attendance at literacy conferences. FCCC includes literacy as one of its ongoing themes during its meetings and institutes. In 2006, NCNSP held a

2-day seminar on “Reading and Writing for Learning” as a follow-up to the literacy strand at its 2005 summer institute. Thus, the literacy focus is quite widespread in the ECHSI community.

Instructors and leaders reported that these opportunities benefited their work, through both the content and the connections they made to others. The leader from one MCNC ECHS noted that the networks that develop through these activities were invaluable: “It has been tremendous to work with others around the country.” Another MCNC leader of a school adapting from middle college to the early college model noted: “I’m more likely to go to one of the other middle college principals [for help] than someone in the district.” The principal from one school called NCNSP’s staff development “incredible” and “relatively intense.” And the principal from one WWNFF school reported that the networking with other schools was a crucial form of support: “[The networking] I hope will continue after the grant is over because I think that ... is a very, very useful way to learn from each other, to codify best practices.” An instructor from this school continued this sentiment:

I just think it’s very helpful to talk to other instructors and administrators that are in the same position and try to figure out different ways to deal with problems. I actually learned a lot at this last meeting, from presentations and also from other schools.

Site Visits

The integration of site visits with other professional development activities, such as meetings, has been growing in popularity among intermediaries. Rather than having conferences in meeting rooms, several intermediaries are using ECHSs both to demonstrate implementation in action and to host the meetings in general. Site visits are also used as learning experiences in and of themselves.

MCNC has facilitated ECHS site visits since the beginning of the ECHSI. In the beginning, all the visits were to one of the original MCNC sites. In 2005–06, MCNC added other ECHSs to its host roster when it started to hold regional meetings. According to an MCNC representative, the regional meetings “took place in schools, and all of the time was spent visiting the classrooms and looking at the work, getting images of what the work looks like with kids in schools, and then debriefing ...” NCLR holds cohort meetings two to three times per year at various ECHSs around the country. NCNSP arranges for sites planning to open ECHSs to visit established ECHS sites.

Interviewees discussed the importance of these site visits both for the content of the visit and the connections made during the visit. Regarding the content, the principal and staff from one MCNC school commented on how useful visits to other sites were for ECHS implementation, particularly when they saw the “power of the site” for ECHSs located on college campuses. ECHS staff from NCLR schools reported that visiting other schools was one of the most beneficial supports that NCLR provided. The leader from one ECHS noted, “We get to visit other NCLR schools under the [ECHSI]. We get a chance to talk to faculty and see what they are doing. It was helpful, and we had some workshops during that time.” Regarding the connections made during the site visits, an NCLR representative explained,

They definitely email each other and contact each other regularly. They also visit each other’s schools. I know if someone discovers something that they are excited about, they do a lot of a sharing ... There are a lot of positive indicators that our schools are becoming a robust learning community.

One NCNSP representative stated,

[Site visits are] probably one of the highest ranked parts of the planning phase. Participants say there is a huge paradigm shift in what they plan to do, a lot of the [implementation] proposals will mirror what they saw on visits.

An ECHS staff member noted, “The benefit does not just come to the visitors, but also to the host site.” The leader from an ECHS that had hosted visitors stated, “It was so exciting. We had 54 people from different parts of the country, all part of the early college vision.”

Regularly Scheduled Meetings

In addition to the formal professional development activities, such as conferences and site visits, many intermediaries hold more regular meetings for ECHSs to discuss issues as they arise. For example, KWF invites ECHS leaders, IHE leaders, superintendents, and union leaders to networking events two to three times per year, and TCCEI hosts meetings for representatives from its three ECHSs every month to discuss common issues and to share ideas. UP also holds quarterly principals’ meetings so that these administrators can share best practices and solve problems. FCCC holds monthly conference calls for ECHS staff.

Although meetings and site visits are popular means for shared learning across the initiative, the expense and logistics involved with these activities limit their frequency. Therefore, intermediaries supplement these activities with other more frequent opportunities for ECHSs to connect.

Networking at a Distance

In 2005–06, more intermediaries were using or planned to use technology as a way to network schools. Some intermediaries provided basic technology for networking needs — for example, CNE discussed creating a learning community via an email system for instructors to contact one another. Other intermediaries, however, were creating more complex systems for networking among ECHSs. MCNC was creating an online community, Polilogue. ECHS principals and faculty use Polilogue to “come together in virtual communities to discover resources, secure guidance and support, share knowledge, and collaborate on critical work of shared benefit” (MCNC, n.d.). FCCC created its own virtual site for its schools; this site provided free conference calling and Web conferencing. By spring 2006, the site had just become operational, and only principals and IHE liaisons were invited to participate. Instructors would be invited when the Web site was more established. In 2005–06, THSP was in the process of developing a Web site with links to each ECHS and to JFF. A THSP representative reported that she envisioned the Web site to be a clearinghouse of information with templates, but she also wanted it to serve as a network where the subintermediaries could communicate with one another.

Variations in Support

Professional development opportunities (e.g., conferences, visits to other ECHSs, Critical Friends groups) and networking activities (e.g., online communities, regular phone or in-person meetings) that have been facilitated by intermediaries seem likely to continue after the ECHSI. Instructors and school leaders reported that these opportunities were beneficial both in content delivered and the cross-site connections made.

Not all intermediaries are structured to provide professional development opportunities like the ones detailed above. Personnel from some ECHSs complained that their intermediaries did not offer enough professional development opportunities, or that what was offered was not on target. For example, staff and principals at one ECHS wished the intermediary could be more helpful in locating and providing materials and training for staff. Another intermediary provided some professional development to its ECHSs through a summer institute; however, the meeting was not specifically for ECHS staff, and a school leader felt that it was

not relevant for ECHSs. ECHSs needed structured help from intermediaries to develop learning communities among schools. Staff affiliated with these intermediaries reported that they would really like to have organized, cross-ECHS meetings.

Cross-Intermediary Learning Communities

The examples noted thus far have been about intermediaries creating networks for their own ECHSs, but as the number of ECHSs in several locations has increased, intermediaries have also worked to connect their ECHSs with others in the same state or city. FCCC took the lead in 2005–06 in creating a learning community of all California ECHSs, regardless of their intermediary. FCCC’s goal was to establish four ECHS demonstration sites in California that exemplified its themes of literacy, college readiness, and the culture of integration into college. Once demonstration sites were established, a network including FCCC schools and other California ECHSs would be able to schedule site visits or communicate with one another, using some of the virtual tools available through FCCC. The foundation urged MCNC to focus its current support efforts on Texas; in spring 2006, MCNC was arranging for a large group of Texas ECHS staff to visit one of its school sites the following September.

As the number of ECHSs in several locations has increased, cross-intermediary networks have developed to connect ECHSs with others in the same state or city.

The most established cross-intermediary network has been developing in New York City. In 2004–05, CUNY spearheaded the New York City ECHS Network. During that year, the network partners sponsored an event, “Opening the Doors to College,” to explain what ECHSs are and to generate support

and interest. In 2005–06, CUNY provided networking dinners every 6 weeks for principals, college liaisons, and representatives affiliated with various intermediaries. CUNY also created a series of four workshops that were open to high school and college instructors connected with any ECHS in New York City. A representative from CUNY noted,

It’s been a pretty good-sized group ... I think everyone has felt like it’s important to know what’s happening across this network. We’ve also felt like it was important to do something that reached beyond the principals and that was probably more substantive than just networking with one another.

Critical Friends: A Formal Process for Strengthening ECHS Learning Communities

Some intermediaries in the ECHSI are creating Critical Friends networks to foster learning communities at the individual site level.* Led by a Critical Friends coach, there is a review process, during which small groups of colleagues come together to reflect on and analyze their teaching and leadership skills.

MCNC offers Critical Friends reviews to all its schools every 5 years. MCNC considers these reviews both a self-evaluation process and an outside evaluation process through which schools receive insights from other educators facing similar problems. Additionally, in 2005–06, MCNC implemented Mini-Critical Friends reviews with its new ECHSs. During the Mini-Critical Friends reviews, school coaches and staff from more established ECHSs visit new ECHSs for 1 full day. The focus of these reviews is the new school's progress in implementing its schoolwide literacy plan and MCNC's design principles. The MCNC director explained,

It builds the community across the country. It allows the new schools, even though they're so new, to kind of stand back and take stock of the progress they have made. And I think that's really important for new schools because it's an overwhelming job, and to get both positive feedback from their colleagues, but also some pointed questions that hopefully will push them to continue to do the work in a more thoughtful and deeper way ...

MCNC has also introduced another peer-review program, the Self-Reflection Peer-Review process. The peer-review process, led by an MCNC coach, lasts 3 years. According to the MCNC representative, the first year focuses on teachers' self-reflections on their instruction; the second year focuses on peer reflections based on time spent in colleagues' classrooms; and in the final year, a committee is established to set up peer reviews for all teachers. The MCNC representative feels that this process is "extraordinarily powerful in terms of community building and sharing of expertise and capacity building." The leader of a school that implemented the peer-review process in 2005–06 said, "[I] saw the benefit of building our teacher base by having teachers supporting teachers."

Although this work was pioneered by MCNC within the ECHSI, other intermediaries have adopted all or some of its features. NCNSP began implementing Critical Friends groups in its schools. NCNSP plans to train all ECHSs to be Critical Friends in order to improve instruction. According to an intermediary representative,

We realize that we are a small staff, and that we can't pull this off by ourselves without doing something to help our schools help themselves. So our hope is that we'll get this [Critical Friends training] to help develop conversations around rigor. We'll set it in motion and schools will begin to have conversations for themselves.

KWF also has given its schools Critical Friends training. For example, one-third of the staff at one KWF-supported ECHS attended Critical Friends training, and these staff members have, in turn, trained the rest of the staff during common planning time. FCCC, NCLR, and CNE also have ECHSs engaging these groups.

* More information about Critical Friends Groups is available at:
<http://www.nsrffharmony.org/research.html>.

As reported in the 2003–05 evaluation synthesis report (AIR/SRI, 2006), in 2004–05 nearly all intermediaries had created or had specific plans to create some kind of networking forum. Yet the robustness of the networks varied. In 2005–06, the majority of the intermediaries had embraced the idea that networks of ECHS leaders and staff are a vital way for the ECHSs to learn. Those

ECHSs who were part of a strong network across ECHSs viewed it as helpful, and those who were not part of a strong network wished that they had more networking opportunities.

ECHSs Create Local Learning Communities

One of the primary goals of the learning communities established across the ECHSI and across intermediaries is to give ECHS staff the support they need to develop strong learning communities within each school. Learning communities at the school level involve supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. These kinds of learning communities have also been termed “communities of continuous inquiry and improvement” (SEDL, 1997). Research points to other positive outcomes of professional learning communities, reducing instructor isolation, shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for students’ success, powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice, significant advances in adapting teaching to the students, and commitment to making significant and lasting changes (SEDL, 1997). In 2005–06, many of the sampled ECHSs engaged in creating effective professional learning communities for their faculties through onsite and offsite, ongoing professional development that included common planning time and collaboration among the high school faculty. Lagging somewhat behind are professional learning communities that include both high school and college faculty.

Professional Development

The research on successful learning communities discusses the role that professional development plays in moving beyond skills training and generic in-service delivery models to a more flexible, continuous engagement with other experts in the field (Fulton & Riel, 1999). High-quality activities tend to have active learning opportunities, longer duration, groups from the same school participating (e.g., all instructors from a department), and ongoing follow-up activities (Desimone et al., 2002). In other words, high-quality professional development results in a new learning community that can support the staff in the development of new skills.

In 2004–05, most of the professional development described by instructors at sampled ECHSs was in the form of stand-alone seminars and workshops, rather than ongoing training. In 2005–06, interviewees at sampled ECHSs provided numerous examples of ongoing professional development. Many of these examples had the characteristics of high-quality professional development. Instructors at many ECHSs had opportunities to participate in onsite professional development specific to early college, including realigning goals, taking responsibility for student learning, and active learning opportunities on reform-oriented approaches (e.g., project-based learning, small learning communities, differentiated instruction, standards-based curriculum). This diversity led instructors at one site to report that they were pleased with the level and quality of the professional development that they received. An experienced instructor who was new to the ECHS commented, “I have never been at a school where I had so many opportunities for professional development.” At another site, a professional development subcommittee formed in the 2005–06 school year identified topics and created a 6-month professional development plan for the ECHS. Topics included classroom management for new instructors and interdisciplinary planning that focused on the integration of reading and writing across the curriculum, using literacy strategies learned during JFF-sponsored conferences.

Other components of quality professional development and effective learning communities are shared personal practice and reflective dialogue among instructors. Experienced instructors at a few sampled ECHSs led professional development sessions for new instructors. The staff at one

site shared with one another their expertise in different areas, such as behavior management and writing. One instructor at that site said,

I've held sessions about different ways to encourage writing in the classroom. So, the teachers definitely take the lead. We have a nice mix here where we have a number of new teachers, but also a lot of experienced teachers.

At another ECHS, one-third of the staff attended Critical Friends group training with the district. In turn, these staff members trained the rest of the faculty during their common planning time. These kinds of reflective peer-review opportunities contribute to successful learning communities for instructors.

Across the sampled ECHSs in 2005–06, instructors participated in some onsite local (school-supported or district-supported) professional development offered by external providers. These professional development activities usually were not specific to the ECHSI and did not have the features of effective professional development; they were usually of shorter duration and did not necessarily promote active learning opportunities. Topics included mathematics, literacy, instructional strategies, teaching English language learners, long-range academic planning, and interdisciplinary techniques to use across courses. At one site, the mathematics instructor said the assistant principal was more than willing to approve any professional development he desired. As noted above, research has shown that, without ongoing support for concepts covered in professional development activities, these activities are unlikely to have significant impact on instruction. This was particularly the case when individuals participated in activities on their own.

As discussed in the 2003–05 evaluation synthesis report (AIR/SRI 2006), professional development for college instructors lagged behind opportunities for high school instructors. In 2005–06, there was still a need for joint collaborative professional development for high school and college instructors to build effective learning communities across the two faculties. Although some college faculty had opportunities to attend the University Park Campus School institutes and residencies, and some intermediaries specifically included college faculty in conferences, the professional development offered to the high school staff usually was not offered to college faculty at sampled ECHSs.

Collaboration

The so-called “powerful collaboration” that characterizes professional learning communities is a “systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice” (DuFour, 2004). At many of the ECHSs, collaboration among the high school faculty was taking place.

High School Faculty Collaboration

One of the primary mechanisms through which many ECHSs have developed learning communities and ensured collaboration among ECHS instructors is the establishment of common planning time. In general, instructors appreciated these opportunities to come together more frequently with their peers. ECHSs took a variety of approaches to integrating common planning time. A few schools implemented late-start days and weekly half-day planning sessions. Instructors from two ECHSs reported that school days were shortened either weekly or monthly for professional development activities where instructors worked on specific topics or in interdisciplinary teams. One ECHS adjusted the schedule in 2005–06 because instructors wanted common planning time for collaboration.

ECHSs continue to strengthen their learning communities through onsite and offsite, ongoing professional development, including common planning time and collaboration among the high school faculty. Attempts are also being made to include both high school and college faculty in these learning communities.

When asked about how this common planning time was used, instructors reported a variety of activities. At one ECHS, instructors reported discussing the curriculum, student work, classroom management, and other issues. At another ECHS, the principal described these sessions as the time when instructors can discuss students who are having difficulty and can share strategies and techniques. At yet another site, instructional staff used common planning time to integrate thematic units linked to real-world context,

provide peer coaching, and meet about individual students. Some instructors across the ECHSs were developing and aligning their own curriculum, and others were working with administrators on curriculum mapping during their common planning time. One ECHS officially allotted time every morning to collaborative planning for its instructors, although many instructors reported using that time more often for grading papers, checking work-related email, or tutoring students. In this case, the common planning time did not foster a successful learning community because these instructors were not usually working with one another or with administrators; rather, they were doing administrative tasks on their own or working with students.

IHE and High School Faculty Collaboration

In 2004–05, few sampled ECHSs demonstrated collaboration between their high school staff and the partner IHE instructors. In 2005–06, there were multiple documented examples of new and ongoing attempts to develop collaboration. At one site, collaboration between the two faculties increased in the weeks leading up to the start of the college courses at the ECHS. According to the principal, the high school and college instructors had “come a long way in coming to terms with a common vision with each other.” At another ECHS, the principal reported that subject area curriculum teams met regularly to work on curriculum development. Additionally, the IHE English department spent some time working with the high school’s English instructors on ways to prepare students for the language arts section of the state assessment. Because the first students at one ECHS reached 11th grade in 2005–06 and were taking more classes at the IHE, college and high school faculty started to interact more often than in the past. For example, both faculties had been involved in some interdepartmental meetings in English, mathematics, and chemistry. Some collaboration also occurred among high school and college instructors at another site where all instruction took place at the ECHS. Instructors from both levels met quarterly to discuss progress and talk about adjustments to be made. At another site, members of both staffs collaborated on curriculum and course design at their annual retreat, and several college faculty members continued to visit the ECHS campus and provide mentoring to instructors. However, because the ECHS was not located on the partner’s college campus, aside from the annual retreat, opportunities for collaboration among the high school and the college faculty were limited during the school year.

Despite examples of collaboration between ECHSs and IHEs, interviewed staff in the majority of the sampled schools reported limited collaboration among high school and college faculty, and the collaboration that staff did report was often not formally or regularly integrated into the faculty schedule. It did not appear that the faculties necessarily collaborated more when the ECHS was located on the IHE campus than when it was off campus. Some schools had no collaboration, while others had a few instructors meeting on occasion regarding content and curriculum.

Although time constraints were the most commonly mentioned barrier to collaboration, several other barriers included the absence of college classes being offered, changes in the ECHS vision and staff, and geographic constraints. For at least two ECHSs, collaboration occurred less than in the previous year because no college classes were offered at the college campus in 2005–06, and the college’s collaborative role with the high school on the college coursework had diminished. At one ECHS, barriers to collaboration included the change in the coordinator’s position from full time to part time and turnover of personnel. At one site, most college faculty did not know about the ECHS program or that it was located on the campus. At another site, high school instructors reported having time at the beginning of the semester to meet with some IHE instructors, who were mostly adjunct faculty, but these meetings did not continue through the academic year. All these factors made it difficult to coordinate collaboration opportunities between high school and college faculty and to create effective learning communities across the two levels.

In sum, it appears that ECHSs are focusing on developing professional learning communities. Ongoing quality professional development that provided active learning opportunities was being offered at many sites for high school faculty. In general, however, professional development lagged behind for college faculty, although efforts were being made to include both high school and college faculty in these learning communities. Collaboration and communication between the two levels has increased at some sites. At other sites, however, challenges exist that thus far have prevented both faculties from successfully building a learning community.

Summary

This chapter focused on the successful learning communities that have been facilitated and developed across the ECHSI. Following are some of the activities within and across the intermediaries’ and ECHSs’ learning communities:

- At the biannual ECHS partner meetings, intermediaries have become more active in organizing and leading the presentations, giving these intermediaries a foothold in supporting and sharing with one another.
- The visits to University Park Campus School summer institutes and residencies sponsored by JFF have enabled the participating ECHS staff to develop ongoing relationships across schools.
- JFF has also promoted an ongoing learning community through the literacy project’s advisory board. The board will be important in sustaining the literacy work at each school and the spread of the literacy project to other ECHSs.
- Professional development opportunities (e.g., conferences, visits to other ECHSs, Critical Friends groups) and networking activities (e.g., online communities, regular phone or in-person meetings) that have been facilitated by intermediaries are likely to continue in most instances. Instructors and school leaders reported that these opportunities were beneficial both in content delivered and the cross-site connections made.
- As the number of ECHSs in several locations has increased, cross-intermediary networks have developed to connect ECHSs with others in the same state or city.
- ECHSs continue to strengthen their learning communities through onsite and offsite, ongoing professional development, including common planning time and collaboration among the high school faculty. Attempts are also being made to include both high school and college faculty in these learning communities.

CHAPTER VII — Sustainability of the Early College High Schools

As more and more ECHSs reach the end of their ECHSI grants and as the first intermediaries approach the end of their involvement in the ECHSI, it is time to look ahead to how all the hard work that has gone into the initiative will be sustained for the long term. This chapter focuses on sustainability, defined as the capacity of the schools to maintain adequate financial and human resources, a compelling program of studies, and the strong partnerships necessary to ensure continued existence into the future as an identifiable option for the students in a defined enrollment area.

The foundation's investment in the ECHSI has been and continues to be substantial. Nevertheless, it has always been the understanding between the foundation and ECHSI intermediary organizations that the schools developed through this initiative would eventually need to become self-sustaining. The intermediaries have used various strategies for distributing the foundation funding to ECHSs; in general, however, schools have been able to expect to receive grants for only 3 or 4 years. For an increasing number of the schools, that time is over. In addition, although several intermediaries have received subsequent grants to extend their involvement, other intermediaries are reaching the end of their grants. Therefore, ECHSs and their partnering IHEs and intermediaries have been intensifying their focus on what they need to do to increase the likelihood that they will achieve sustainable programs. A few themes emerged across intermediaries and sites sampled in 2005–06. These sustainability themes all have one thing in common: they require a good deal of planning and commitment. Many of these issues have been mentioned in previous AIR/SRI evaluation reports but have begun to receive more emphasis from ECHSs and their intermediaries as grant funding expires for more ECHSs.

The principle challenge to sustainability is stable funding. As the original seed money from the foundation's grant is used up, ECHSs must secure additional grants or other outside funding. Sometimes ECHSs are assisted by strong partnerships — formal or informal — with their IHEs and their districts. Comprehensive (and signed) MOUs have the potential to secure the future of ECHSs, at least for the duration of the agreement. This chapter discusses each of these sustainability concerns in turn, including a perspective on the intermediaries that have been increasingly active in supporting their ECHSs in terms of sustainability. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the sustainability of some of the key features of the ECHSI through integration in broader high school reform activities.

Challenges to Sustainability

Funding

Sustainability of ECHSs hinges upon funding. As stated above, the original grant funds were intended to provide schools enough money to get their programs started but were not intended to sustain the ECHSs long term. ECHSs are at least partially supported by district and/or state per-pupil funding, but experience has shown that this governmental funding is not necessarily sufficient to meet all the financial demands of ECHS programs. Per-pupil funding may cover adequately the high school portion of a program, but the increased costs of ECHSs are most often related to college course-taking — tuition, books, fees, and transportation. In addition, at their inception, ECHSs often begin with fewer students (e.g., 100 9th graders) than they intend to have at capacity (usually about 400 students); so for a few years, the per-pupil funding for which the school qualifies is barely adequate for the high school portion of the program.

As their ECHSI grant periods end, many ECHSs, often assisted by their intermediaries, are attempting to supplement per-pupil funding by making attempts to secure additional funding through grants or business support. In this way, the ECHSs are not notably different from many public schools in the United States that rely on “soft” money for both essentials, such as professional development, and extras, such as upgraded technology. However, grant-writing will not solve the ECHSs most expensive funding issue — the costs of the model’s higher education component. Ultimately, ECHSs’ long-term survival will depend on changes in local, district, and state policies, such as dual enrollment and seamless P–16 funding streams that will create an environment friendlier to the goals ECHSs seek to achieve.

The Particular Challenge of Funding College Textbooks

As just one example of the additional funding necessary to run an ECHS, the impact of needing to purchase college textbooks for ECHS students is a significant sustainability issue, according to a number of ECHS staff interviewed. There is a fundamental difference between the K–12 and the higher education systems. K–12 school districts provide students with their books. Higher education requires individuals to purchase what are often very expensive textbooks. Furthermore, in higher education, individual faculty members choose the textbooks and supplementary materials that will be used in their classrooms, in contrast to the K–12 tradition of schoolwide or districtwide textbook adoption. Thus, unless participating higher education faculty agree to use the same texts for several years, books purchased for one ECHS student in a given year may not be reused by students in subsequent years. The cost burden of helping students acquire the college textbooks that they need can be a very real sustainability issue. For example, a THSP representative and representatives from all its subintermediaries have echoed the same sentiment: their current funding for textbooks will run out in about 2 years, and then they will need to seek external funding. One Texas college leader said that, after the funding is gone, “Hopefully the legislature will cover [it]. If not, we are seeking external funding. If you’re talking about financial issues, that’s the number one.” This is not just a Texas problem. The high school leader at one ECHS in California said:

... [T]he textbooks continue to be a challenge. We are trying to create a system where we buy and warehouse the books, but that limits our ability to be responsive to individual kids, if they are taking different classes that were not taken the semester before ... So far, we have been playing it by ear and making it work. But to make it sustainable, we have to find another method for funding of books for some courses.

Indeed, textbook acquisition serves as just one tangible example of the struggle ECHSs have to obtain funding. Limited by local or state policy as to how they can apply certain funds, ECHSs must come up with creative, alternate funding sources to meet the program’s needs. Until ECHSs are embedded in an environment where policy facilitates rather than impedes their survival, they will be forced to scramble and find their own short-term funding solutions. Said one college leader:

Individual colleges can figure out on their own how they’re going to do this from year to year. But the fact is that sustainability is going to depend on policy that is established by systems ... It would be useful if the region and the [state] department of education understood this and were talking about it and moving toward a resolution, which they might be.

ECHSs in California that are partnering with community colleges may fare a bit better in terms of sustainability. At least two such ECHSs indicated that, because of current policy in California,

their ECHS programs should be sustainable. A college leader at one ECHS in California explained an advantage surrounding the policy of partnering with a community college:

Given the fact that most of these students are [eligible for] free and reduced lunch, they qualify in the state of California for what we call a BOG, Board of Governor's waiver. And the BOG waiver basically buys books at the community college level for low-income students. The state of California has a ton of safety nets for low-income people, and [this college] has a lot of low-income people, and we are used to using every one of those safety nets. There will not be a single kid in this school who has to be turned away because she can't afford the textbooks. That will not happen.

IHE Partners

ECHSs are at least partially supported by district and/or state per-pupil funding, but experience has shown that this governmental funding is not necessarily sufficient to meet all the financial demands. As their grants end, many ECHSs are attempting to supplement per-pupil funding by securing additional funding through grants or business support. Many ECHSs are finding that strong partnerships with their IHEs can help stretch their budgets.

Currently, many ECHSs are finding that strong partnerships with their IHEs can help stretch their budgets. For example, one high school administrator stated that the ECHS's sustainability plan rests on ongoing assistance from the IHE; the most important element of their sustainability may be that the college partner continues to pay for the college classes taken by ECHS students. One IHE partner is dedicated to finding additional grants and funding opportunities to help support its commitment to pay the ECHS students' tuition costs during and after their ECHS years. In both these instances, the colleges perceive real benefits to their own missions from their partnership with ECHSs. Both types of institution are

fully committed to serving students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

District Partners

Another aid to sustainability for ECHSs is a strong partnership with their district(s). In discussing the role districts should play with ECHSs, an FCCC representative said that districts should be committed, be part of the leadership, and be flexible with ECHS management. Overall, the ECHSs have had varied success in forging relationships with districts. One ECHS leader, for example, felt that, although there was significant support within its college partner, sustainability depended on the school district's providing adequate funding to the college. Although this principal felt that the district was interested in keeping the school viable, significant struggles related to the limited resources the district provided. On the other hand, as one positive example of an ECHS-district partnership that was working well, one ECHS received much of its funding from the district, which funds the ECHS in the same way it funds its other high schools. In addition, the IHE was committed to help find additional funds for the college courses; so this ECHS is well positioned for its future when the original grant dollars run out.

The issue of who pays for college courses looms large as a sustainability concern across the initiative. It is worth noting that district policy may have been one of the most limiting factors to the advancement of ECHSs — specifically, the funding constraints imposed by local dual-enrollment rules. High school leaders at one ECHS discussed how a policy restricting dual-enrollment reimbursements played out at their site:

The only issue that comes up is regarding tuition dollars, as to how those are going to be paid for, and our district feels like, with public funds, the school can't pay for tuition. So then we either have to pay for tuition through grants or through tribal reimbursement for tuition. So that's a district policy issue that would affect the program.

ECHSs and their intermediaries across different districts are confronting with varying success the issues of district policy that hinder funding of college courses for high school students.

State Policies

State policies have also affected how ECHSs and their partner IHEs are funded. For example, in some states, dual-enrollment policy allows both the ECHS and its partner IHE to count the same student toward enrollment if that student is actively taking classes at both institutions. In those states where “double-dipping” is allowed (e.g., North Carolina), ECHSs should be more financially stable and sustainable. Elsewhere, states such as California fund both sectors for dual enrollment by the same student, but with provisions that restrict students’ ability to attend college classes. In other states, however, either the ECHS or the IHE — but not both — may count the student in their enrollment. The institution that is not allowed to count that student, therefore, loses out on funding. Obviously, this situation is a barrier to the sustainability of ECHSs. (The text box below notes policies that may facilitate the development and sustainability of ECHSs.)

State Policies That May Facilitate the Sustainability of ECHSs

- Average daily attendance/full-time-equivalent student funding for both the secondary and postsecondary partners
- Supplemental funding for start-up costs and student support services
- Dual-credit courses that can count toward high school graduation requirements (e.g., students can take college courses and still take required state end-of-course exams for high school graduation)
- Articulation agreements that outline the courses that can be taken for dual credit and ensure that those credits can be accepted at any of the state’s public 2-year and 4-year colleges
- Waivers or exemption processes that allow ECHSs to circumvent policy barriers within the state
- A linked data system between the secondary and postsecondary education systems that tracks student progress and outcomes

Partnership Agreements

Not surprisingly, signed MOUs are an important part of ECHSs’ sustainability plans. Having the responsibilities of each partner explicitly stated in a formal agreement — perhaps unnecessary in the short term — gives some sites peace of mind as they face the future. For example, there is a strong relationship between one ECHS and its IHE partner, but the MOU, unsigned by the district, will not be legally binding in the future. The short-term plan is that the district will be assuming some of the costs currently covered by the IHE; but without the signed MOU, the

ECHS is pursuing grant funding, just in case. Another ECHS is in a similar situation: it has a strong relationship with its partner IHE, but signing of the MOU hinges on negotiations between the district's and the IHE's lawyers. The negotiation process has, on occasion, been difficult. As an example of the peace of mind that a signed MOU can bring, one high school leader said that, after a bit of a struggle to work out what costs the students were responsible for,

We have it in writing now that the kids are only paying health fees. That was challenging for a while because without that assurance, it didn't seem long-term sustainability would be viable.

Another measure of confidence an MOU can provide relates to leadership turnover at the ECHS. A change in leadership, for example, might mean that an entire program's goals, structure, or funding could be altered or eliminated. A signed MOU is a great preventive for this insecurity, although GTC was one intermediary that said that even *with* a signed MOU, a change in district leadership might mean that GTC needed to work with the new leader to "re-cement buy-in."

Staff Burden

In addition to leadership turnover, staff turnover may also have an impact on the sustainability of the ECHS. Specifically, when demands on instructors are so high that the instructor burn-out rate is elevated, the program may struggle as new staff needs to be trained. A high school instructor warned that the high energy level and time commitment required of instructors might result in high instructor turnover:

It is a lot of work as a teacher, and I can't see myself doing this for 4–5 years. I don't have the energy for it. Unless we can spread out the work, we will lose teachers. If we keep going the exact same way, we are going to lose a lot of teachers, and we will have to retrain.

Having the responsibilities of each partner explicitly stated in a formal partnership agreement gives some sites peace of mind about their future. Turnover of staff is a potential challenge. A strong MOU may protect an ECHS in the case of leadership changes, and a strong partnership with the IHE partner may reduce the burden on the high school staff and in turn instructor turnover.

One avenue for reducing some burden on ECHSs is to find more ways to take advantage of student supports available at the partner IHE — a challenge for many sites (as noted in Chapter III). Indeed, the ECHS program is so intense and time-consuming that indicators of staff and leadership turnover probably should be monitored in coming years to estimate the effect of turnover on the sustainability of the ECHSs.

Intermediaries' Responses to the Challenges

One way that intermediaries have addressed the issue of sustainability is by requiring all sites to build a sustainability plan into their grant application. Although this was not required of sites joining the ECHSI early on, by 2005–06 some intermediaries required ECHSs to include plans to continue the program after grant funding ends, with the hope that this process would focus ECHSs' eyes on the future. CNE, for example, explicitly states that all ECHS sites must include a sustainability plan before they will receive funding. A principal at one of the CNE ECHSs thinks this is a wise decision, saying,

I think you have to build in that piece of sustainability at the onset, not when you get to the end of the money. I think in that first year, part of the grant needs to be talked about. Okay, we have this grant for 5 years or 3 years; what are districts and partners going to do to sustain it?

FCCC also requires that their ECHSs demonstrate a plan to be self-sustaining by the time the grant period ends. GTC reviews each new site's application for whether or not it will be sustainable postgrant. These are examples of three intermediaries that are taking a proactive approach to ensuring sustainability from an ECHS's inception.

One way that intermediaries have addressed sustainability is by requiring sites to build a sustainability plan into their grant application. Intermediaries are also employing other strategies, such as conferences and networks, to help ECHSs increase their knowledge of and plan for their own sustainability.

Intermediaries are also employing other strategies to help ECHSs increase their knowledge of and planning for their own sustainability. Using such activities as conferences, workshops, and networks of ECHSs, intermediaries are instructing or helping ECHSs support one another as they plan for their future. WWNFF, for example, has emphasized sustainability at its conferences and has implemented 13 key aspects of school design and implementation

(e.g., leadership and governance, policy environment, the implementation plan, evaluation, and budget) to assist sites as they plan for their future. CNE has been considering diversifying its Design Days by providing different focuses for schools at various stages of development, including issues related to sustainability. Additionally, CUNY and other ECHS intermediaries supporting schools in New York City have successfully applied as a network of ECHSs to become part of New York City's Autonomy Zone. The establishment of the Autonomy Zone, since renamed the Empowerment Zone, is part of broader reform efforts in New York City to allow schools greater flexibility in budgeting, hiring, curriculum and instruction, and professional development. The CUNY director and leaders from other intermediaries such as WWNFF, thought the network might "help schools sustain themselves as schools working toward a slightly different set of outcome goals than other typical schools in New York City."

One Intermediary's Approach to Ensuring ECHS Sustainability

WWNFF identified 13 key elements of school design that are essential to the successful implementation of an ECHS and that are consistent with the Core Principles of the ECHSI. Over the last few years, WWNFF has refined the 13 keys and linked them to its efforts to support ECHSs. For instance, partnership development, technical assistance, and continued funding are tied to the 13 keys. Benchmarks and deliverables are also linked to the keys, and an intermediary representative noted, "They are what tell us if the site will be sustainable in the long run." Along with integrating the 13 keys into all of their work with the schools, WWNFF also requires new ECHSs to use grant funds to hire a high-level university director, usually an administrator or faculty member with standing. One of the primary roles of the university director is planning for long-term funding and sustainability of the school. Combining the focus on the 13 keys with the requirement of a high-level university director, WWNFF hopes to ensure that sustainability is front and center for its schools and is considered from the inception of the schools.

Sustainability Through Influence Outside the ECHSI

As noted throughout this chapter, ECHS sustainability will be more assured when the schools are located within supportive policy environments. One way to make policy changes more likely is

for larger reform efforts within states to adopt some of the key features of ECHSs and to establish an environment more amenable to programs that cross the high school and college boundaries.

As a high-profile national high school reform initiative, the ECHSI has attracted many different organizations and government agencies interested in using all or part of the model to improve high school education. In particular, recent years have seen states acting as intermediaries and beginning similar initiatives that draw on parts of the ECHS model. Despite some deviations from the model, JFF considers these state initiatives to be “in-sync with the designs and principles of early college.”

Several states have created programs similar to the ECHSI as a component of their school reform efforts. For instance, Pennsylvania adopted Project 720 as a pilot program in 2004 and is currently in the process of expanding the program statewide, with the mission “to encourage more academic rigor and support for students, as well as a stronger focus on connections between high school and college” (Gewertz, 2006). In addition, Maine’s Early College for Maine (ECforME) program provides outreach, dual enrollment, and funding assistance to 11th grade students deemed “capable of succeeding in college but having no plans yet for college” (MCCS, 2006). The program plans to expand to all high schools in the state by 2008.

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Other intermediaries have undertaken efforts that indicate their vision of the ECHSI as having a potential to create long-term systemic change. KWF staff, for instance, have begun sharing the lessons they have learned, through their participation in the ECHSI, with the state legislature and department of education in a process they describe as “exporting piece[s] of the early college into our vision of high

schools as a whole.” This represents perhaps the most positive effect of the initiative. Participants will be able to use the lessons they have learned through the work with a small number of high schools to impart those goals and lessons to the broader community.

As these larger efforts take root in more states, ECHSs currently located in these areas are likely to benefit from the attention, and these states may also turn into opportune places for the establishment of additional ECHSs.

Summary

As things stand now, 4 years into the ECHSI, the issue of sustainability looms large for increasing numbers of schools. The following are some early themes emerging about supports for and threats to ECHS sustainability.

- Although Chapter IV notes that these schools seem to be able to thrive under different partnership types, it is likely that issues of sustainability — particularly financial stability — will be more easily resolved if strong partnerships are in place to open up multiple sources of funding.
- As the ECHSI funding ends, ECHSs are facing varying degrees of sustainability concerns. Some sites rely primarily on district per-pupil funding, while others have been able to secure outside grants and may only face minor issues of diminished resources, at least in the short term, after the ECHSI grant is over. Other sites will hit a crisis point if they are not able to find additional financial support when their grants end.

- The sustainability of an ECHS is only partly (but importantly) a matter of funding levels. These schools must also concern themselves with issues such as staff stability, which is an essential component of sustainability, and the continuing ability to attract students who generate government dollars.
- Finally, work of the ECHSI might be affecting the larger high school reform goals in many states. As this impact progresses, it may make the policy environment more conducive to ECHSs' sustainability.

ECHSs, their intermediaries, IHE partners, districts, communities, and states will all need to be working together to ensure the future of ECHSs beyond the ECHSI.

CHAPTER VIII — ECHSI Summary and Next Steps

In 2005–06, the ECHSI was 4 years old. The number of ECHSs in operation had grown to 77 — more than one-third of the total intended by the foundation. Essentially, 2005–06 represents the midpoint of the 7-year initiative. In another 3 years, a critical mass of ECHSs will have graduated one or two cohorts of students, and the earliest implementers will have graduated students who will ideally have completed undergraduate degrees. The midpoint is a time to reflect and take stock of the vision for the initiative and the evidence that the vision is being achieved.

Current Status of the ECHSI

As noted in this report, the ECHSI has come a long way toward developing a network comprising a new breed of instructional institutions: schools that cross the divide between high school and college education. The following are some themes this report has noted concerning what is going well and where some challenges remain.

Findings for the ECHSs

- ECHSs continued to focus on serving students underrepresented in postsecondary institutions. This focus is exemplified by ECHSs' proportionally higher enrollments of minority students and similar enrollments of students from low-income families, as compared to the enrollments of other area schools.
- Most visited ECHSs were moving toward integrating some college courses for some students. However, the number of available college credits and the percentage of students enrolled varied considerably by school.
- Increasingly, ECHSs were focused on outreach to prepare students in middle-school grades, and more schools were including these grades in their programs.
- Observed ECHS high school classes showed evidence of the new 3R's, although rigorous instruction was elusive, particularly in mathematics classes.
- Although observed ECHS college classes showed evidence of the 3R's, rigorous, relevant, and relationship-based instruction was less evident in students' college classes than in the high school classes.
- ECHSs took the lead in supporting students socially and academically, even for college classes. The level of support required by students could be substantial for ECHSs, requiring either considerable funding to hire support staff or increased instructor time.
- Among the most evident successes of ECHSs that were visited were the positive climates they have established. Some sites were challenged to fully develop a college-going culture when their location makes connections with the college environment difficult.
- Preliminary evidence of student outcomes is promising. Overall, the mean average daily attendance rate reported by ECHSs was 94 percent. ECHSs had a higher average percentage of students scoring proficient on their states' assessments in ELA/reading and mathematics than did other high schools in the districts in which they are located.

Findings for the Partners

- An effective blended high school–college experience must address the quality of both high school and college instruction, as well as the ways in which they interact together to meet the needs of ECHS students. Working across the secondary and postsecondary divide continued to be one of the greatest challenges for ECHS partners. For example, ECHSs continued to struggle with bringing together high school and college faculty to develop an inclusive professional learning community.
- ECHSs that did not receive much support from districts or IHEs generally wished for more, although these schools appeared to be getting up and running.
- ECHSs with more supports from IHEs, districts, or other organizations had more resources to rely on, including professional development for teachers and supports for students and families.

Findings for the Intermediaries

- As more intermediaries were seeking to open ECHSs in a few geographic locations, it was becoming harder to identify capable and committed local partners.
- However, the focus on a few geographic areas has led to the establishment of cross-intermediary collaborative networks and shared work on improving policy environments.
- Most intermediaries continued to offer conferences to support ECHSs, and an increasing number were supporting ECHS site visits and ongoing virtual networks. Generally, the more support an intermediary offered, the more pleased an ECHS was with its intermediary.
- Earlier intermediaries were struggling with the responsibilities the ECHSs have to the ECHSI as the foundation grants expire. Newer intermediaries were struggling with balancing technical assistance and grant-oversight activities.
- JFF has been instrumental in building the network of intermediaries and assisting with the professional development of ECHSs. JFF staff members have been working toward empowering the intermediaries and school staff to carry on and support one another once JFF's grant is over.
- Sustainability is gradually becoming more of a concern, although many intermediaries have made sure that participating ECHSs have concrete plans to continue funding after their grants end.
- Sustainability will be viable to the extent that the ECHSI participants, at both site level and intermediary level, have a positive policy environment.

Revisiting the ECHSI Core Principles

Throughout this report, we have noted the status of the ECHSI 4 years into its reform work and the need for the ECHSI participants to reflect on the future direction for the initiative. One current challenge facing the ECHSI is to determine if and how the Core Principles should be modified. If

the participants in the ECHSI do decide to revisit the Core Principles with more experienced eyes, they might consider the following questions:

- **ECHSs serve students from populations typically underrepresented in postsecondary institutions.**
 - What are examples of admissions standards that are too high and thereby miss the target population?
 - Is it possible to have an ECHS that is too inclusive, therefore setting up some students to not be successful?

- **Students earn an associate’s degree or 2 years of college credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school.**
 - Should this still be one of the stated outcomes expected of all ECHSs? Although this goal has been modified in some instances, in others it is still the explicitly stated goal for all ECHSs. Perhaps the new language noting that ECHSs are “designed so that” students earn “up to” 2 years of college credit should be used throughout the Core Principles. Or, as noted below, maybe the “compressed time frame” is a more appropriate goal than 2 years of college credit, which historically has received most of the focus within the ECHSI.
 - Is the emphasis on college-level credits or on authentic college experiences?
 - If the emphasis is on college credits, then AP courses or other high school–centered instructional experiences can comprise the college component of an ECHS.
 - If the emphasis is on authentic college experiences, then ECHSs that do not have plans for students to spend time on a college campus would not be as fully implemented as those that do.
 - Do programs that prepare students for different educational paths (e.g., career and technical programs) fit into the ECHSI vision?

- **The years to a postsecondary degree are compressed.**
 - This Core Principle addresses:
 - Providing college credits for all students, with some increase in high school time allowed, but not as much as the time students would have spent in college.
 - Ensuring that any college credits students earn while in the ECHS transfer to other IHEs so that they can finish their degrees (associate’s or bachelor’s degree) more quickly.
 - Should this Core Principle, which is not much discussed by ECHSI participants, receive more emphasis than the principle of obtaining 2 years of college credit?
 - Is the success of an ECHS based on the **years** it takes students to receive the postsecondary degree?
 - Or should the focus be on **success** in subsequent postsecondary endeavors, with less emphasis on the number of years it takes?

- **The middle grades are included or there is outreach to middle-grade students to promote academic preparation and awareness of the ECHS option.**
 - Should all schools be expected to offer middle-grade preparation activities?
 - Should new ECHSs be required to integrate or work with middle grades from the start?

- **The ECHSs demonstrate the attributes of highly effective high schools.**
 - Should the Core Principle now be defined by the new 3R's or by a combination of the 3R's with the originally defined attributes?
 - Are there any further specifications that could be made to the 3R's that would be applicable to the range of ECHSs?

Developing a new understanding of the ECHSI Core Principles, based on the realities of the initiative at this time, should help both the experienced and new participants share the ECHS vision. As one foundation representative stated, understanding “how [to] become a systemic program ... and what is needed to make it work” can help the foundation realize its mission to improve graduation rates and ultimately to prepare students better for life.

Modeling the ECHSI

The 2006–07 academic year is a critical year for the ECHSI. ECHSI participants and observers have been waiting for outcomes. They want to know: Is the ECHS model viable and effective in helping underserved students become successful college-goers? One way to demonstrate the potential for ECHSs is to identify a few mature (at least relatively mature) ECHSs to serve as demonstration sites for both implementation and outcomes.

The ECHSI participants have been fortunate to have access to University Park Campus School, in Worcester, Mass., as an exemplar, where ECHS developers can see a full-blown and proven rigorous secondary school program for disadvantaged students in action. However, University Park is *not* an ECHS and is not part of the ECHSI.

JFF is working to develop demonstration sites around the country and also helping to build professional development capacity around literacy and college readiness. THSP is developing an ECHS in Texas that will serve as a demonstration site there. FCCC plans to establish four demonstration sites that will be a resource for all ECHSs in the state of California. Thus far, however, none of these sites is available to participants or observers.

The ECHSI needs its own exemplars—and soon. New ECHSs that will develop over the next 2–3 years need to be able to spend time at and learn from at least two or three ECHSs that have figured out such issues as the strong local partnership, the blended curriculum and instruction, the excellent support systems for students, and the outcomes to show that students are succeeding while in the ECHS and beyond. Also, these models can contribute to a common interpretation of the Core Principles and lead to greater consistency of vision and implementation within the initiative.

There is some activity within the ECHSI to identify and promote ECHSs that can provide the opportunities described above. When these schools are found, their stories should be publicized widely to demonstrate that the ECHS concept can work.

Next Steps for the ECHSI Evaluation

In 2006–07, most of the data collection activities will continue, including ECHS site visits and intermediary interviews. The evaluation team will also be analyzing SIS and school-survey data collected by JFF. As the evaluation encourages the ECHSI participants to think in terms of the progress of the initiative overall, the evaluation team has also taken that perspective in planning future work. Although many of the data collection activities will continue, the team will also be adding two new activities to supplement these data: a student survey and a policy analysis.

Piloted in 2005–06, the student survey will provide a glimpse into ECHS students' experiences. In particular, the survey will measure many of the hypothesized intermediate outcomes, such as academic engagement and identity. The survey will also measure students' assessment of many of the core ECHS attributes, including the 3Rs, high expectations, college-going culture, and safety and orderliness.

JFF has led the ECHSI in examining the relevant policy contexts. To supplement this work, starting in 2006–07, AIR/SRI will add a small examination of key policy issues (e.g., dual-enrollment funding, transportation) in several states with significant numbers of ECHSs. The exact states and methods involved will be developed in 2006–07 in consultation with JFF staff, so that this work may complement, rather than compete with, JFF's ongoing activities and analyses.

Summary

As the findings in this report indicate, the ECHSI has forged ahead in addressing the complex challenges common to starting new high schools and unique to schools crossing the secondary-postsecondary divide. As the participants move ahead, questions for consideration include: What does an ideal ECHS look like? Are there existing examples of model ECHSs? What are the successful ways that ECHSs have created a blended institution, in both instructional and structural characteristics? The evaluation will report on the answers to these and many other questions as we continue to track this innovative initiative.

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