Achieving Equity in College in High School Programs

Practitioner-Informed Policy Design Commitments and Principles

Policy Leadership Trust—October 2019

Call To Action

Today's economy is changing rapidly. The percentage of jobs requiring postsecondary education and training is expected to reach a new high of 65 percent by next year. Yet the nation is not on track to meet this demand. While it's true that a growing number of high school graduates are going directly to college, far too many of those students do not complete their courses of study.[1] This is particularly true for first-generation college students and those from low-income and underserved communities. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds face

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many barriers that hurt their chances of persisting to credential attainment; they may struggle to cover costs, navigate college, or even feel a sense of belonging.

College in high school programs— including dual- and concurrent-enrollment offerings, as well as early college high schools—can alleviate these challenges by supporting students' transitions to college and making credential attainment more affordable and efficient.[2] College in high school programs give students the opportunity to earn credits in a more structured, supportive environment. They can provide students who may not have believed college was possible the confidence that they can complete a college course. And by making early progress toward their credential, students can save both time and money. An ample body of research suggests that, when designed and implemented well, college in high school programs are associated with increases in college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates.[3]

But these benefits can only be realized when programs are designed carefully, with equity in mind. While the popularity of college in high school programs is growing, there remain significant equity gaps in terms of access to rigorous, high-quality offerings. It is therefore essential for policymakers to take great care as they craft policies supporting or expanding these programs. They should draw on lessons from early adopters and heed the insights of practitioners charged with implementation of such programs.

JFF's Policy Leadership Trust has culled the expertise and experiences of practitioners in 16 states to offer policy design recommendations for states and localities that are new to the college in high school concept, or are looking to expand these programs. The Trust's five key principles can help guide policy decisions around pathways, quality and rigor, navigation and supports, funding, and data. The group also offers examples of potential policy levers that policymakers may consider in order to fulfill the intent of each principle.
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KEY COMMITMENTS FOR POLICY DESIGN

Why it's important to take equity into account when designing college in high school programs

A Commitment to Equity

Underserved students have the most to gain from thoughtfully designed college in high school programs. Research shows that African American, Latinx, and low-income students benefit from engaging in these programs.[4,5] However, despite this compelling evidence of impact and the growing popularity of such programs, there remain significant equity gaps in terms of access and success. According to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), which looked at participation in dual-enrollment programs in the 2015-16 school year, enrollment by African American and Latinx students was significantly lower than enrollment by white students.[6]

College in high school programs must be designed and implemented in a way that closes equity gaps. Policymakers should support college in high school programs that are purposefully inclusive, and they should ensure that policies do not present barriers to access, affordability, or success for underserved students.

Equitable access and outcomes are key themes across all of the Policy Leadership Trust's guiding principles, which are presented here.

Policy Design Principles For College In High School Programs

1. Pathways:

College in high school programs should be designed around thoughtful, structured, and aligned pathways that lead to equitable outcomes for students, including persistence into college, seamless transfer into desired programs of study, on-time attainment of postsecondary credentials of value, and successful entry into the workforce.

Participation in college in high school programs should not result in random acts of course-taking that are a waste of time and resources for students, institutions, and taxpayers. Instead, policymakers should ensure that high schools and colleges work together to determine the most essential courses to offer and then package those courses into a variety of fields of study for students to choose among. In order to meet students' varied interests and needs, efforts should be made to offer a range of career-focused and academic pathways that lead to postsecondary credentials of value at two-year and four-year institutions. Policymakers should also ensure that career-focused and academic pathways are available to all students, regardless of region (rural or urban) or students'

socioeconomic status. To shorten the amount of time it takes to earn a degree, states should support and enforce transfer and articulation agreements or other approaches that stipulate that credits students accumulate through college in high school pathways will be applied to the degree requirements of relevant programs of study, rather than being counted as electives. Investments should be made in robust navigational supports and advising systems to guide students in their course-taking decisions and transitions to college.

2. Quality and Rigor:

College in high school programs should be authentic college experiences that, no matter the setting, are equivalent to college courses in terms of curriculum, materials, rigor, assessments, and instructor credentials.

Currently, college in high school courses are delivered in a variety of settings. They are also taught by qualified high school or college instructors. Regardless of how instruction is delivered, the measures used to determine the quality of college in high school courses should be the same measures used to determine quality of traditional college course offerings.

This is critical to ensuring that college in high school programs maintain their reputation and fidelity as college courses. Policymakers should consider how to make certain that postsecondary institutions are the entities that govern program quality, program and course development, and student learning outcomes. Policymakers should also consider whether to adopt standards of quality and rigor aligned with the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) or to create incentives that encourage programs to seek NACEP accreditation, in contexts that make sense.

3. Navigation and Supports:

All high school students—especially those who are underresourced and from historically underserved communities— should receive early and sustained advising and academic supports that help them prepare for and engage in college in high school programs, and progress to and complete college.

Students need holistic career exploration, navigational, and wraparound supports to access and successfully complete college courses and persist through attainment of postsecondary credentials that have value in the labor market. Navigation and

student supports should span across K-12 and postsecondary institutions and be continuous throughout students' pathways toward postsecondary credentials. Evidence-based approaches should be employed in efforts to assess whether students are academically ready to take college-level courses (among other things, those approaches should use multiple measures of assessment) and in efforts to remediate any academic deficiencies.

4. Funding:

College in high school programs should have sustainable, consistent funding structures to ensure that cost is not a barrier for students, and that public secondary and postsecondary partners receive the resources they need to support high-quality programs.

It is critical for practitioners and policymakers to take a careful look at college in high school financing models to ensure they are consistent, reliable, and capable of maintaining and supporting the expansion of high-quality college programs and ensuring equitable access and success. Ideal financing models would make course tuition free for students and provide extra supports for low-income and underserved students (covering,

for example, mandatory fees and the cost of books and transportation), while providing stable and sufficient sources of funding for K-12 and postsecondary partners. Currently, the costs that high school students must pay to participate in college courses vary by state, district, and model. Policymakers should also consider the fact that state and local context plays a major role in whether or not it is feasible for states or institutions to fully cover costs associated with tuition, books, transportation, or other things.

5. Data:

States should create or connect data systems and protocols that define, count, and provide insight into the outcomes of high school students in college in high school programs, so that policymakers can determine whether intended outcomes are being met, particularly for underserved students.

K-12 and postsecondary practitioners should co-design data systems and protocols that track college in high school outcomes. This can ensure that there's

buy-in among both parties and that the metrics are applicable across systems. Both federal and state governments have roles to play in the development of robust data systems that both track student progress in education and into the workforce and hold institutions accountable for student outcomes. One key challenge policymakers need to consider when developing data systems is that there are many different types of college in high school programs and structures, so it can be a challenge to determine which models and approaches are effective.

Proposed Policy Levers To Achieve Equity In College In High School Programs

This section provides a list of potential policy levers that policymakers can use to fulfill the intent of each principle discussed above. This is not an exhaustive list. Other policy levers and strategies should be explored.

The policy levers are grouped around a core set of policy functions that are listed and defined here:

Enabling policies: Incentives to encourage innovation and foster stronger collaboration across systems to accelerate implementation of evidence-based approaches.

Funding mechanisms: Financial resources, incentives, and tax policy changes that inject much-needed investments into the implementation of evidence-based approaches.

Implementation guidelines: Guidance from policymakers on how practitioners or institutions should consider implementing proven policy-based approaches.

Governance reforms: Measures and incentives that catalyze transformational changes in the structure and operations of institutions and systems.

Directives: High-level mandates that set clear expectations and deadlines for the courses of action that practitioners and partners should take.

Capacity-building supports: Professional development opportunities and technical assistance to help practitioners improve their work.

Here's a look at how various policy levers can be used to carry out each principle.

1. Pathways:

Policy can support college in high school pathways through funding, implementation guidelines, governance, and directives.

Funding:

▸ Support the creation of college in high school programs that incorporate thoughtfully structured career- and academic-focused pathways.

▸ Leverage federal funding streams— such as those available through the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act— to support career-focused college in high school programs that lead to credentials of value.

▸ Support online programs that provide broader access to college in high school programs.

Implementation Guidelines:

▸ Provide a framework on the key tenets of thoughtfully structured pathways.

Governance:

▸ Bring together K-12, postsecondary, and employer leaders to support stronger connections and partnerships.

Directives:

▸ Ensure that college in high school programs are aligned with high school graduation and postsecondary pathways, and with the expectations of in-demand industries.

▸ Ensure that college in high school credits earned through community colleges transfer to four-year institutions as programmatic credit.

2. Quality and Rigor:

Policy can support the quality and rigor of college in high school programs through funding, directives, governance, and capacity building.

Funding:

▸ Invest in appropriate professional development for faculty members who will be teaching college courses to high school students.

Directives:

▸ Ensure that college in high school programs are aligned with higher education standards.

Governance:

▸ Convene a cross-sector statewide taskforce to examine, align, and promote college in high school programs as potential solutions to credential attainment and workforce needs.

- Convene a cross-sector faculty group to examine, align, and promote college in high school programs.

- Integrate accountability provisions to create incentives that encourage K-12 systems and institutions of higher education to work together toward a common set of student outcomes.

Capacity Building:

- Encourage K-12 teacher preparation programs to include coursework for aspiring high school teachers who are interested in teaching college in high school programs.

3. Navigation and Supports:

Policy can support college navigation and completion through funding, governance, and directives.

Funding:

- Provide adequate and sustained funding that supports counselors, advisors, and the other educators and support staffers necessary to effectively assist students to and through college programs.

- Support college in high school program models, such as early college high schools, that include on-ramps to prepare students for college coursework.

Governance:

- Bring together high schools and colleges serving low-income and minority communities in order to strengthen their partnerships and ensure equitable access to college in high school programs.

Directives:

- Ensure that multiple measures are used to determine college readiness, depending on the state and/or local context.

4. Funding:

Policy can support sustainable and consistent college in high school funding structures through increased and focused funding and implementation guidelines.

Funding:

- Account for institutional need for program development and sustainability, as well as the needs of low-income students and families who may need assistance covering program costs.

- Develop a separate appropriation in the state budget for college in high school programs.

Implementation Guidelines:

▸ Provide college in high school funding guidelines that districts, community colleges, and four-year institutions follow to promote financial sustainability for all partners.

▸ Provide guidance on how K-12 and higher education partners can leverage and utilize existing federal, state, and local funds to support college in high school.

5. Data:

Policy can support college in high school data systems through funding, capacity building, and directives.

Funding:

▸ Invest in an integrated data infrastructure system that connects and tracks outcomes data across education and workforce sectors.

▸ Invest in capacity and analysis support to demonstrate an up-front commitment to data and continuous improvement.

▸ Invest in research opportunities that track and publicly report on student outcomes across a variety of college in high school programs and delivery methods.

Capacity Building:

▸ Provide professional development opportunities to K-12 and higher education practitioners on how to analyze data and use it for program improvement.

Directives:

▸ Ensure that data is disaggregated by subgroups and made publicly available in an easy-to-understand format.

▸ Require high schools and colleges to develop goals on closing equity gaps in college in high school programs. In particular, the goals should focus on increasing opportunities and success among low-income and underserved student groups. Ensure that institutions track and publicly report their progress toward achieving their goals.

DISCLAIMER

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ENDNOTES

1. "College Enrollment Rates," National Center for Education Statistics, last updated February 2019, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cpb.asp.

2. As used in this document, the phrase "college in high school programs" is a broad term that includes all programs where high school students can enroll in college or university courses, including dual-enrollment and concurrent-enrollment programs, as well as early college high schools.

3. For summaries of the major studies and evidence of success, see "Research on Dual and Concurrent Enrollment Student Outcomes," National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, http://www.nacep.org/resource-center/ and *Reinventing High Schools for Postsecondary Success* (Boston, MA: JFF, 2012), http://earlycollegeconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ECDS_Brochure_080613_ELECTRONIC.pdf.

4. Ben Struhl and Joel Vargas, *Taking College Courses in High School: A Strategy for College Readiness: The College Outcomes of Dual Enrollment in Texas* (Boston, MA: JFF, October 2012), https://jfforg-prod-prime.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/TakingCollegeCourses_101712.pdf.

5. Brian P. An, "The Impact of Dual Enrollment on College Degree Attainment: Do Low-SES Students Benefit?" (doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 2009) https://www.issuelab.org/resources/15260/15260.pdf.

6. John Fink, Participation in Dual Enrollment and AP Courses by Race and Gender, Analysis of Data from U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, 2015-16 School Year https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/easyblog/access-dual-enrollment-advanced-placement-race-gender.html.

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