



Moving toward the ideal...

Practices that embody the ECHS Core Principles

Notes from the WW Early College Network Winter 2009 Convening
February 26-27, 2009

The winter 2009 convening of the WW Early College Network in San Francisco addressed the theme of sustainability – the ability to support, maintain, and promote each early college through funding, culture-building, reflective collaboration, and enacting the core principles of the Early College High School Initiative. A primary goal of the convening was for participants to reflect on what it really means to be an early college and identify the ideal school practices that embody the core principles.

During the convening, participants from WW early college sites formed five groups to develop a set of ideal beliefs and activities for each core principle, using their collective experience and accumulated understanding of what works in early college schools. Each group focused on early college schools' structures and policies as well as individuals' roles and responsibilities. Most groups also spent time deconstructing the core principle in order to better understand its purpose and what it might look like in practice.

This summary provides an accounting of the conversations around each core principle at the convening. It is important to note that this summary does not reflect collective agreement on the ideal practices for each core principal. It does, however, provide insight into the range of issues WW early colleges must address and uncovers the challenges of putting the core principles into practice. This summary offers initial ideas for how schools can be sustained by implementing and regularly revisiting the core principles of the Early College High School Initiative.

Core Principal 1

Early college schools are committed to serving students under-represented in higher education.

The conversation for the group focused on core principal #1 initially centered around admissions. Participants agreed that this core principle is actualized by ensuring the enrollment of students of color in early colleges. The group took it a step further to solidify its commitment to enrolling students of color by stressing the idea that high achieving students of color should not be excluded from early colleges. The fact remains that although high achieving students of color may already be planning to attend college, their persistence in higher education remains far below that of their white peers, and therefore, early colleges should include them in their target population. The group discussed how clearly articulating this commitment in the school's admissions policies is critical. In general, admissions policies can both promote or hinder this core principle.

The conversation then shifted to a more literal interpretation of the core principle. Specifically, one participant asked what it means to be "*committed to serving...*" Can the commitment be seen in more ways than in admission policies? The group then offered ways in which an early college could demonstrate its commitment to under-represented students.

- Meetings and outreach to parents
- In-take interviews with students
- Involving the school’s social worker more frequently
- Using advisory to address relevant issues for students who are underrepresented in higher education
- Special services for students with special needs
- Newsletters
- Academic advisement
- Data driven decision making at admission point and on an ongoing basis
- Maintaining advisory groups
- College readiness summer boot camp seminar
- AVID training

One group member synthesized this part of the conversation by noting that the group was really looking at ways in which support activities could be designed to serve this student population. He suggested expanding core principle #1 to move beyond just admission by modifying the language to include, “serving on an ongoing basis.”

At this point in the conversation, another participant reminded the group of core principle #4 and its focus on support. He didn’t want the group to think of core principle #1 as the student support core principle. So the group then tried to think of ways that it could serve students under-represented in higher education without stealing the thunder of core principle #4 but also moving beyond just admission.

The group then discussed how the early college must use data for college readiness as opposed to just typical uses of data for diagnostic purposes. In this vein, the group felt a school could perpetually demonstrate its commitment to this student population.

Additionally, the group wrestled with the notion of early colleges as neighborhood schools. Not all WW early colleges are neighborhood schools (one example is University High School of Science and Engineering), but by serving the neighborhoods, the schools can demonstrate their commitment to an under-served population.

Core Principal 2

Early college schools are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success.

The partnerships represented in this group discussion on core principle #2 began by sharing the state of their own school, college, and community partners. Partnership work is complex and challenging because more than one entity is responsible for educating students. The group consensus was that their partnerships did not have enough cross-system structures in place to address governance and faculty-related issues. The group thought that greater trust between K-12 and higher education partners was needed, and specifically that college partners needed to trust the policies and practices established by K-12 partners. The group also identified a real need to figure out roles and structures when multiple colleges are involved. Even though all WW early colleges have a four-year college partner, some include community college partners as well and some include more than one four-year partner. When there is more than one college partner offering college courses, how many transcripts does each student have? When a community college is involved, what is the role of each college partner and to what extent do four-year colleges then offer college courses?

With respect to community partners, community involvement was not strong in the group members’ partnerships. The group noted that the meaning of community could vary greatly. For example, a school

with a regional draw would have a different definition of community than would a local neighborhood school. Multiple community entities could be connected to the school, but which ones should be involved in order to have an active community partnership. And are parents considered community partners? How is the relationship with parents navigated by early college partners?

The group also noted differences in decision-making processes for the different partners. For example, one group member asked what was the best way to solicit input from community partners when solid planning is needed in a timely manner for higher education approval?

The conversation then shifted into managing the multiple partners in the partnership. This role was typically assigned to the school principal and the college liaison. Actions that these two individuals could take to engage and manage the partnership include:

- Find a leverage point within the partner institution for support
- Advocacy, for example by engaging postsecondary students
- Create less of a pedagogical disconnect between high school and college, such as the role of study hall, changing general education into a better bridge, etc.
- Encourage and support credit-earning by early college students, because students who earn more credits through the college partner are more likely to attend that college after graduating high school.
- Provide support to first-year college students (post-matriculation, after graduating high school) and notify the receiving college about the entering early college student; however, colleges don't necessarily have the resources to provide "unique" support.
- Deep commitments from across the institution of higher education partner are unlikely. A range of levels of engagement is more feasible and more manageable. A few college folks who are very committed can then draw in other colleagues.

The last part of this group's conversation focused on the different roles that partners play with respect to accountability, a critical element of their joint responsibility for student success. For one of the partnerships included in this group, the college liaison collects data from the college, and the partners together pay attention to students' grades in both high school and college courses. The college faculty who teach courses to early college students also monitor the data. At the same time, the high school's counseling team works closely with early college students who are taking college courses to monitor their academic readiness for those courses and their progression. Both the school and the college partners are responsible when a crisis occurs on the college campus.

Core Principle 3

Early college schools and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program so all students earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion.

In the first part of the conversation on core principle #3, the group noted that a description of what students should know, believe, and be able to do as a result of the integrated academic program described in this principle was missing. The group believed that earning college credits is important in defining early college; however, the group also felt that college readiness to succeed in college was most critical. That is, earning college credits in high school in and of itself will not ensure that a student will be successful in college after high school, which the group identified as the goal of early college.

The group then described the features of an academic program which will ensure that goal: success in college after high school. These features included:

- A high school and college-level curriculum that is aligned and integrated
- A learning environment that enables students to be successful in the curriculum

- A redefinition of “early” college to include not only “early” credits earned by taking college courses in high school but also a variety of other “early” educational experiences that prepare students for college success
- A high school and college education that builds on prior knowledge but does not repeat content
- An education in which students learn to think in the disciplines as experts do (i.e., how historians think, how scientists think, etc.)
- A talent development approach to education in which students develop a passion for learning and find a career path

Next the group began detailing the structures, roles, and actions needed by school and college partners to effectively implement these features of core principle #3. The list that follows is incomplete but gives an idea of the group’s thinking about how early college partners should work together in order to create an integrated academic program focused on college readiness and success.

- School, college, and community partners provide students with a set of college readiness educational experiences
 - Exposure activities that make the dream of college a real possibility, an option within reach for students
 - Residential opportunities (ex: Southwest Early College summer orientation at University of Missouri-Kansas City)
 - Activities that developmentally introduce students to college (ex: STAR/Brooklyn College’s transition plan)
 - Auditing highly-engaging college courses
 - Enrolling in college credit-bearing courses. The opportunity to earn college credits was seen as very important to parents’ and students’ perceptions of the education offered at an early college school.
- Partners (college and school administrators, faculty, teachers, and intermediary staff) together continuously review data about the school, the students, the local district, and the college’s undergraduates.
- College and school partners work together on curriculum alignment activities. Some advice on this work:
 - Be selective – don’t try to do all subjects all at once
 - Start small and build from there – adding subject areas, adding grade levels over time
 - Recognize that alignment takes time

Core Principle 4

Early College schools engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion.

The group concluded that although “comprehensive support” in early colleges is delivered in diverse ways, the characteristics of implementation of this principle share several universals. Students are supported with instruction/experiences that foster:

- Academic rigor
- Social-emotional development
- Health in body and mind
- Goal orientation
- Intrinsic motivation
- College and career success

This student support is evidenced by:

- High expectations for each student in public and transparent ways
- College-going culture is celebrated—exhibited in displays/décor

- Students being known as individuals; including personalized interactions between students and all staff members and demonstrations of student-to-student respect
- Democratic decision-making that builds community involvement
- Student empowerment versus student dependence
- Modeling for students the navigation of “the new, the unfamiliar, and the uncomfortable” in order to teach them to engage in endeavors that they may not have been exposed to before.

Views from the Field

Eastern University Academy

- Students should be guided toward “edupreneurialism” –engaged in active/experiential learning
- Students are involved in decision-making and become “guides” and transfer knowledge by training new guides through student to student interactions
- Teachers should see themselves as generalists/advisors “first”
 - faculty designs thematic, integrated curriculum
 - and academic specialists “second”
- School culture is philosophy/mission-driven
- Test pressure should be balanced
- Learning experiences take place outside the classroom routinely-Internships
- Professional development includes common planning time

Paramount Bard Academy

- Learning objectives are best when public
- Open-door classroom visitation is positive
- Teachers are leaders
- Teacher motivation should be obvious
- “Kids understanding what they are there for” is key
- School environment is friendly and respectful

Friendship Collegiate Academy

- Advisory is staff developed, daily, structured and thematic, aligned with grade cohorts/grade level activities
 - 9th grade = “Goal Orientation”
to smooth transition, students are guided to goal orientation by individual creation of “6-year plan”
 - 10th grade= “Leadership”
 - 11th grade= “Self-assessment”
 - 12th grade= “Revising Goals/Planning”
- Gender-exclusive activities are included where developmentally needed.
- Culture of experiential learning=exposure, empowerment
 - With visiting scholars, experts, practitioners, alums
 - Book talks w/authors
 - Alumni forums/presentations
 - Trips to college events
- Recruitment of faculty for
 - Utilizing expertise
 - Empowerment of faculty
 - Looping with an advisory cohort from start to graduation

Core Principal 5

Early college schools and their higher education and community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement.

Group members discussed interesting and exciting practices they noticed in their visits to WW early college sites during the winter 2009 convening, including having a humanities block, the use of an AmeriCorps teacher to assist in the evaluation of college courses, the integration of college faculty (both 4- and 2-year college faculty) at the school site, and the use of college resources (financial and provision of grad student and postdoc workers).

The conversation focused significantly on the role of the college partners in supporting the early colleges. Two of the 4-year partners represented in the group mentioned that they would provide teachers for the early college from its teacher training program. Another 4-year partner's faculty would assist the early college in developing and adapting curricula, bringing best practices into the school, providing professional development, and assisting in diagnosing students.

Participants discussed the need to figure out ways to have secondary and postsecondary faculty collaborate on professional development, including comparing syllabi and grading rubrics. A member of the group noted that in California, the Basic Skills Initiative (community college based) provides funding for professional development and that this may be a pot of money that could be tapped.

Participants also discussed some policy obstacles they face. One member noted that Title V states that community colleges can't offer basic skills and developmental classes on high school campuses. Another member noted that this isn't an obstacle since early colleges should be aiming to provide college-level courses to its students.

Another policy obstacle mentioned was age limits. One member mentioned the difficulty of catching English language learner students up in four years and that five years would be nice. However, age limits make this difficult.

Participants also discussed financial issues; which partners get what money?

One last issue that was discussed was unions. Both community college and high school unions have been putting up fights against early college in certain districts, fighting over who should teach these courses, as neither group wants to lose jobs to the other. One group member mentioned that having faculty team teach courses might be a solution.