

What are these schools?

Early College High Schools are small schools serving high school students starting in grade 9. They are most frequently located on college campuses. Students are expected to graduate from these schools with a high school diploma and two years of college credit. Supported through a public-private partnership in North Carolina, Early College High Schools target students who have traditionally had lower rates of college attendance, including minority students, low-income students, and students who are the first in their family to go to college.

What is the study?

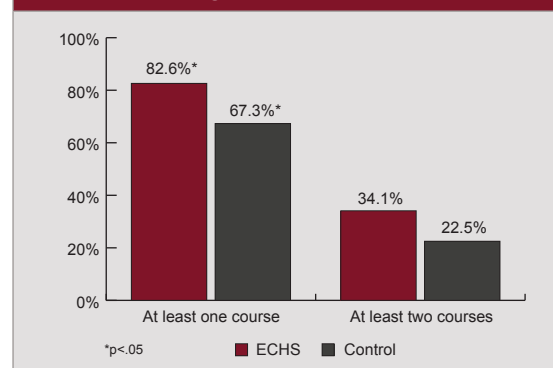
To look at how well they work, SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and its partners¹ are conducting a rigorous experimental study funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Because schools had more applicants than they had slots, participating schools used a lottery to select students into the Early College High School. Thus, this study is able to compare outcomes for students who applied and were randomly selected to attend the Early College High Schools (the treatment or ECHS group) with students who applied and were randomly selected not to attend (the control or non-ECHS group). Because students were randomly selected for the two groups as part of a lottery process, students in the two groups should have essentially the same background characteristics², including motivation. This allows us to conclude that any results are due to the effects of attending the ECHSs and not due to the selection process.

What did we learn?

Results from the first year of this study, which looks at **grade 9** performance for both treatment and control groups of students, demonstrate the following:

- **More ECHS students were on track for college.** To be on track for college, students needed to have at least taken English I and Algebra I by the end of grade 9. The study found no significant differences in overall English I success but very significant differences in math. For example,

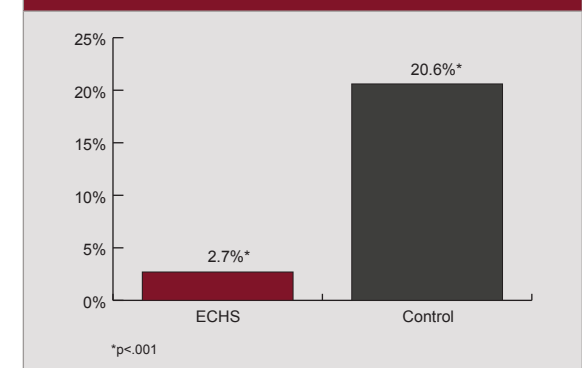
Figure 1:
Impact on College Prep Math Course Success



83% of ECHS students were on track in math, compared to 67% of students not in the ECHS. The chart shows differences between ECHS students and control students, revealing that, by the end of grade 9: (a) significantly more ECHS students had successfully completed at least one college prep math course, and (b) more ECHS students had successfully completed at least two college prep math courses (although the difference was not statistically significant).

- **There were smaller performance gaps in the ECHS for targeted populations.** By the end of grade 9, in the ECHS there was very little or no gap between the rates of minority and non-minority students in completing the core grade 9 courses of Algebra I and English I. In comparison, for the non-ECHS control group, the gap in Algebra I completion rates was 14%, and the gap in English I rates was 9%.
- **Students in the ECHS were much less likely to be suspended and were absent fewer days.** During the 9th grade year, 2.7% of the ECHS students had been suspended at least once compared to 20.6% of the control group (see Figure 2). The ECHS students had an average of 3.85 unexcused absences compared to 6.41 unexcused absences in the control group.
- **ECHS students reported higher levels of engagement.** Student motivation and engagement are associated with students'

Figure 2:
Percent Suspended in 9th Grade



staying in school. On surveys, ECHS students reported significantly higher levels of academic engagement than non-ECHS students. Non-ECHS students reported significantly higher levels of self-efficacy in English than ECHS students.

- **ECHS students experienced a more positive school environment.** On surveys, ECHS students reported higher academic expectations from their teachers, more rigorous and relevant instruction, more support, and better relationships with their teachers than the students in the control group. In interviews, ECHS students described how positive relationships and high expectations made them more successful in school.

What are we doing next?

In our study, 9th grade students in Early College High Schools had better outcomes than the same kinds of students in other schools. Moving forward, the study will look at the impact of the Early College High Schools in the upper grades and will examine outcomes for more students and more schools.

This material is based upon work supported by the Institute of Education Sciences under grant number #R305R060022. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute of Education Sciences.

Footnotes

1. Additional partners in this study include: the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina New Schools Project, Duke University, Abt Associates, and RTI International.
2. There were some slight differences in incoming math performance between the treatment and control groups. The statistics presented here do not take those differences into account nor do they account for the fact that students are clustered in schools, although we have conducted other analyses that do. More information on these differences and how we handle them can be found in our longer policy brief, and further explanation can be obtained from Dr. Julie Edmunds of the SERVE Center. Her contact information is provided at the end of this brief.