| June 2018 | Implementation Supports of the Early College Expansion Partnership |

SERVE Center

IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORTS OF THE EARLY COLLEGE EXPANSION PARTNERSHIP

Prepared by:

Dr. Julie Edmunds

Dr. Karla Lewis

Dr. Bryan Hutchins

SERVE Center at UNCG

Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein

University of Denver

Contact:

Dr. Julie Edmunds, Program Director

336-574-8727

jedmunds@serve.org

Background Information about the SERVE Center

The SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) is a university-based research, development, dissemination, evaluation, and technical assistance center. Its mission is to support and promote teaching and learning excellence in the education community.

Since its inception in 1990, SERVE has been awarded over $200 million in contracts and grants. It has successfully managed 14 major awards including four consecutive contracts for the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Southeast (REL-SE) funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the US Department of Education (USED) and four awards from USED for the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE). In addition, past SERVE awards include a five-year Technology Grant for Coordinating Teaching and Learning in Migrant Communities, three consecutive contracts as the Eisenhower Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education for the Southeast, and two consecutive Regional Technology in Education Consortium grants.

At the national level, SERVE operates the National Center for Homeless Education (NCHE), USED's technical assistance and information dissemination center in the area of homeless education. NCHE uses state-of-the-art technology for web communication and online professional development and for supporting state coordinators of homeless education, local program coordinators, educators, parents, and advocates in all 50 states and in 15,000 school districts.

In addition to national-level NCHE activities, SERVE currently conducts research studies and evaluations under grants and contracts with federal, state, and local education agencies. Examples of SERVE's grant-funded research work include three federally funded studies of the impact of Early College high schools. Contract work includes evaluations of five Investing in Innovation (i3) projects, the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Magnet Program in North Carolina, the Guilford County Schools teacher incentive program (Mission Possible), the USED-funded Bridges to Early Learning Project in South Carolina, and North Carolina's Race to the Top Initiative. The *Guiding Principles for Evaluators* (American Evaluation Association, 2004) and the *What Works Clearinghouse Standards* (Institution of Education Sciences, March, 2014) guide the evaluation work performed at the SERVE Center.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORTS OF THE EARLY COLLEGE EXPANSION PARTNERSHIP

Section I: Introduction and Overview

The changing U.S. economy means that jobs that pay a living wage are more likely to require some form of postsecondary education (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Yet, concerns remain that too few students are successfully earning postsecondary credentials. In response to these concerns, educators and policymakers have been exploring a variety of efforts at the high school level to increase students' likelihood of enrolling and succeeding in postsecondary education. One of the most successful of these models has been the Early College.

As originally conceptualized, Early Colleges were small schools focused purposefully on college readiness for all students. Frequently located on college campuses, Early Colleges targeted students who might face challenges in postsecondary education, including students who were the first in their family to go to college, low-income students, English Language Learners, or students who are members of racial or ethnic groups underrepresented in college. Early Colleges served students starting in 9th grade and the goal was to have students graduate in four or five years with a high school diploma and a postsecondary credential (an associate degree) or two years of transferable college credit. Supported by an initial investment by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the small Early College model expanded across the country.

This model has been the subject of three rigorous longitudinal experimental studies funded by the U.S. Department of Education and led by SERVE Center at UNCG and an experimental study conducted by the American Institutes of Research. These studies found that the Early College model had positive impacts on a variety of outcomes, including staying in school, progressing in college-preparatory courses, graduating from high school, and enrolling in and graduating from college (Berger et al., 2013; Edmunds, Bernstein, Unlu, Glennie, & Smith, 2013; Edmunds et al., 2012; Edmunds et al., 2017; Edmunds, Willse, Arshavsky, & Dallas, 2013).

Although the model has been successful, practitioners have been concerned about the extent to which a model composed of small schools on college campuses could be expanded to serve large numbers of students. As a result, there have been increasing efforts to explore the possibility of transforming regular comprehensive high schools into Early Colleges. The Early College Expansion Partnership (ECEP) is one of the first large-scale efforts to apply Early College strategies in comprehensive high schools.

Supported by a $15 million grant from U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation (i3) program, ECEP was designed to increase the number of students graduating from high school prepared for enrollment and success in postsecondary education. The project sought to

blend high school and college by applying strategies from the successful Early College high school model to 14 middle schools, 12 high schools, and two 6th-12th-grade schools in three districts in two states: Colorado and Texas.

ECEP implemented an adapted version of the Early College model. Key adaptations from the original design included the following:

- ECEP implemented the model in existing comprehensive high schools. In the schools included in the experimental studies, the model has only been implemented in small schools, almost all of which were new and most of which were on college campuses.

- Original Early Colleges were schools of choice to which a student had to apply. All schools engaged in some level of screening of applicants. In addition, most schools had substantial control over hiring of staff. This was not the case with the traditional high schools implementing ECEP.

ECEP was a collaborative effort, involving Jobs for the Future (JFF), Educate Texas, and the school districts of Denver, Colorado, and Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) and Brownsville Independent School District, both in the Rio Grande Valley area of Texas. The program provided a set of services that supported implementation of a whole-school reform model emphasizing the creation of a college-preparatory school environment. The services provided included: (1) technical assistance to districts around strategic planning, alignment of resources, and the creation of postsecondary partnerships; (2) on-site leadership coaching for school administrative teams around the ECEP Design Elements; (3) an online Community of Practice organized by JFF; (4) on-site instructional coaching with an emphasis on a core set of instructional practices; and (5) an i3 Cabinet or district-level coordinating body to guide the work. As a result of these services, each school was expected to implement four Early College Design Elements. These Early College Design Elements, as articulated by JFF, are as follows: (1) a College Ready Academic Program, (2) a College Headstart, (3) Wraparound Student Supports, and (4) School-Level Organizational Practices that support implementation. A primary emphasis of the program was increasing the number of students who participated in college-credit-bearing courses while in high school. Figure 1 is the ECEP logic model, which graphically represents the program's implementation supports ("Key Components") as well as the anticipated school-level and student-level outcomes.

Figure 1. ECEP Logic Model
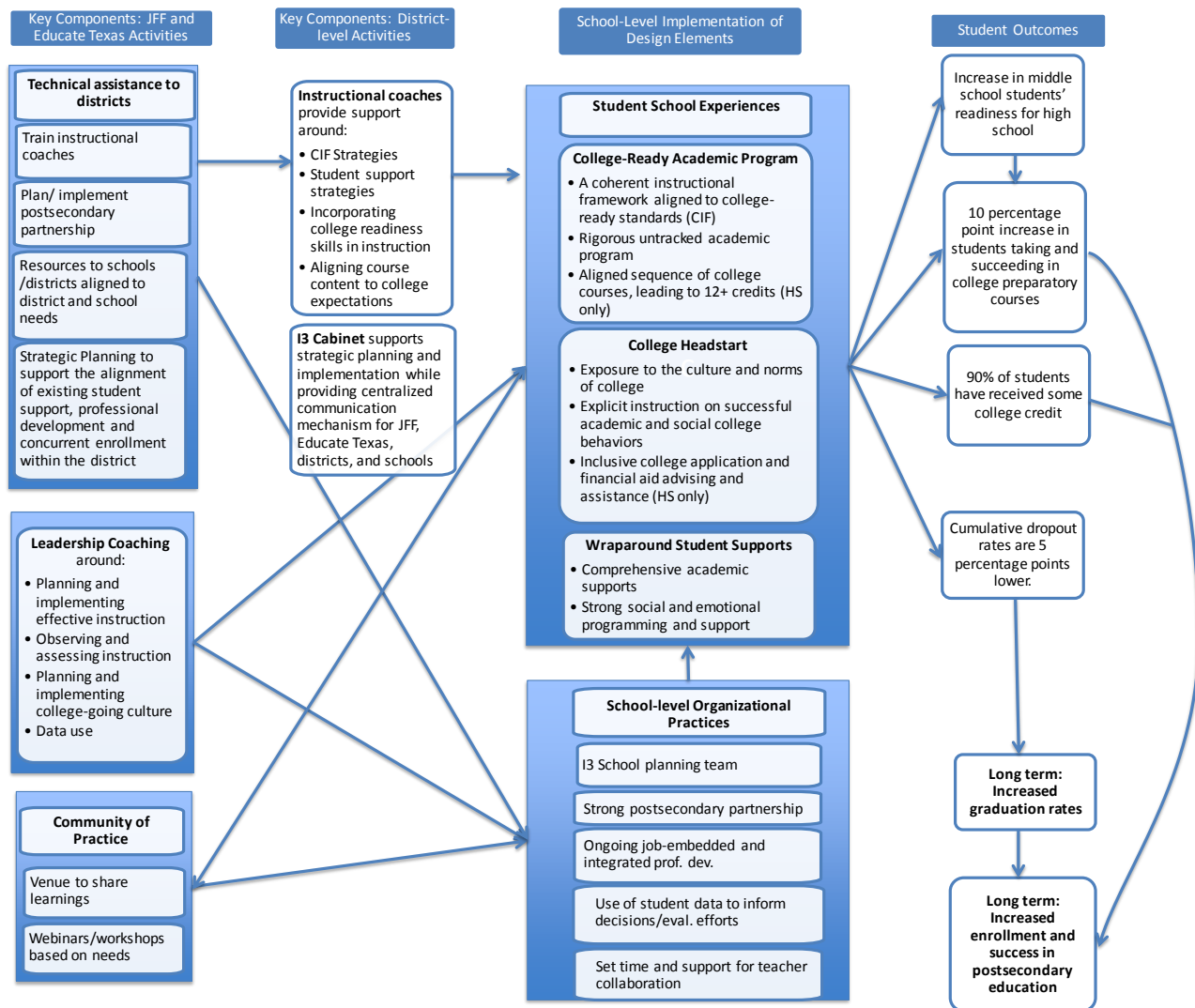
This report presents findings relative to implementation of the activities designed to support the model (the first two columns in the logic model). Findings relative to the program impacts (the last two columns of the logic model) are included in a separate report entitled *Transforming Comprehensive High Schools into Early Colleges: The Impacts of the Early College Expansion Project.* The next section of the report describes the district context in which the program was operating, documenting changes that occurred over the life of the grant.

Sections III-VII describe implementation of the five "buckets" of implementation supports: (1) technical assistance to districts, (2) leadership coaching, (3) the Community of Practice, (4) instructional coaching, and (5) the i3 Cabinet. Each section begins with an overarching description of the common activities occurring across the three districts. This broader description is followed by district-specific write-ups that describe how the supports were

adapted for the specific district context. Each section also includes a measure of the Fidelity of Implementation for that activity. Finally, each section concludes with a description of lessons learned, specific to that activity. The descriptions of program activities and the assessment of Fidelity of Implementation draw on data from annual interviews with project and district staff, observations of project activities, and project tracking data entered into a monitoring tool created by JFF.

Section VIII of this report includes a discussion around the extent to which the different supports will be able to be sustained after the grant ends. The final section of the report provides a synthesis of lessons learned from this work and includes participants' recommendations around how to replicate this work in other settings.

Section II: District Context

ECEP was implemented in three districts, two in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and one in Denver, Colorado. Each district had a different context that affected implementation. This section describes the three different districts and provides an overview of how the project was structured within that district. Further, because paying for dual enrollment courses—as required by the Early College model—can be potentially expensive, we also describe how each district supported these costs.

Denver, Colorado

District Characteristics

Denver is a large, urban district with approximately 87,000 students, 72% of whom qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The community is very diverse; 58% of students are Hispanic, 14% are African-American, 21% are white, and 3% are Asian. Approximately one-third of students are identified as English Language Learners. Recently, on-time graduation rates experienced a substantial improvement, however, at the start of the project, the on-time graduation rate, was still very low at 58.8% (Denver Public Schools, 2013). The school board identified an specific set of goals related to postsecondary readiness, which included: (1) increasing the number of students enrolled in AP and dual credit classes, (2) improving students' ACT scores, and (3) increasing the high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment rate (Denver Board of Education, 2009). As a result, Denver engaged in concerted efforts to increase students' options for dual enrollment and the ECEP program was seen as a way of accelerating Denver's work in this area.

State and Local Policies

Denver was one of the districts participating in the state-initiated ASCENT program, which gave qualifying students a fifth year of high school during which they could attend one year of community college for free. Students' eligibility for the program was determined in their senior year and required that they (1) complete and pass 12 credit hours of concurrent enrollment college coursework prior to the end of their senior year, (2) have a 2.75 grade point average, (3) be college-ready as determined by SAT/ACT/ACCUPLACER, and (4) submit a one-page essay response and letter of support from a school and/or community leader.

In addition to the ASCENT program, Colorado also created a statewide Early College program in which targeted funds for state-designated Early College High Schools were provided. With those supplemental funds, students could stay in high school for an additional three years as long as they were taking college courses on a college campus. Schools had to apply to be an Early College and had to meet certain criteria in order to be officially designated an Early College High School. The first school in Denver to receive this designation was their existing

Early College. Subsequently, in Year 4 of the project, seven Denver schools applied for Early College designation, five of which were i3 schools. Three of these i3 schools had successful applications and received state designation. As of the end of the current project, district staff indicated plans to scale up Early College designation efforts each year (adding approximately 5 schools each year for the next two years).

Also in Year 4 of ECEP, there were additional statewide changes that impacted the district. Colorado enacted new graduation requirements and the district also made adjustments; beginning in the 2017-18 school year, students had to demonstrate competency in both English and math before they could graduate. The state also started requiring students to take the PSAT in 10th grade and the SAT in 11th grade as a measure of college readiness. Finally, the School Performance Framework was also revised, requiring high schools to be graded on their college and career readiness annually and over time.

There were also local policies that impacted ECEP implementation. In Year 3 of the project, the Denver 2020 Strategic Plan was rolled out by the Board of Education which included a goal relative to college and career readiness. Seven of the i3 schools also had a Youth Career Connect grant; through this award, DPS planned to focus on providing students with STEM pathways that included paid internships or job shadowing opportunities. In addition, beginning in the 2016-17 school year, the district began the process of changing the approach to concurrent enrollment developmental education courses. By 2019-20, developmental education courses will no longer be offered by DPS's largest community college partners. That said, developmental education may still be offered to students who have not met "college-ready" benchmarks, not passed 11th-grade coursework, and have not maintained a 2.75 unweighted cumulative GPA.

Finally, on November 8, 2016, Denver voters approved bond and mill levy measures that would add considerable funding to several educational initiatives. Included in the package was an $8 million investment in college and career readiness opportunities; more specifically,

> [This investment] would provide an opportunity for all students to take one 3-credit hour dual enrollment course, expand student participation by 4,500 students in career pathway programs and over 13,000 in work-based learning opportunities, and provide transportation assistance for low income high school students to access opportunities, such as high-quality schools and internships.[1]

The mill levy also funded concurrent enrollment liaisons; a role that originated with ECEP.

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[1] DPS website, http://bond.dpsk12.org//wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-Mill-Levy-Ready-for-College-and-Career.pdf

Structure of the Grant

To identify schools for participation in ECEP, Denver requested applications from schools. They selected nine high schools based on their demographics (i.e., whether they served targeted populations) and their readiness to participate in the program (i.e., extent to which they had the systems in place for dual enrollment). For each selected high school, the project also served the middle school most associated with it.[2] According to the initial project director, Denver's goal was to have all its high schools structured as Early College high schools.

Denver's ECEP was a partnership between the district and JFF. The district had a director of Early College, housed in the district's Office of College and Career Readiness. She directly supervised three instructional coaches supported by the district. The director also worked closely with the Director of College Access, who supervised two Early College liaison positions that were supported by the grant. The liaisons were expected to work in the nine i3 schools to get systems in place for concurrent enrollment.

Each district was expected to create an i3 Cabinet to coordinate the work (see Section VII for more information). The i3 Cabinet for Denver fit within the Postsecondary Readiness team within the district, rather than being a standalone committee. The Postsecondary Readiness team consisted of instructional superintendents, the assistant superintendent, and selected executive directors and held monthly meetings. The meetings were expanded once per quarter to include up to 90 additional participants, such as personnel from different post-secondary readiness offices representing programs such as Career Connect, the CTE initiative.

There were also separate concurrent enrollment advisory groups, which included college partners, college liaisons, and high school counselors. These groups focused on systems, structures, and problem-solving (e.g., streamlining the paperwork around taking the Accuplacer exam).

Denver supported three Early College instructional coaches who worked directly with staff in the schools. These coaches visited teachers and were also expected to work with the school-based instructional coaches who were already in place. JFF provided an additional external instructional coach who provided professional development and supported the district coaches. JFF also provided a leadership coach; in DPS, she was called the implementation and accountability coach.

Because Denver had a previously established concurrent enrollment program, postsecondary partnerships were already in place along with college liaisons to help manage those relationships. In fall 2015, the college liaison job description was rewritten to focus specifically

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[2] Denver is a fully choice district so traditional middle-high school feeder patterns do not exist.

on the goals of ECEP and new hires were made in 2016. These individuals reported to the concurrent-enrollment manager, and they were responsible for increasing the number of students taking college courses, managing the "flow of information" between DPS and the various partnering Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), and arranging placement testing and assisted with registration issues.

Personnel Changes

Over the course of the grant, Denver experienced substantial turnover in the personnel implementing the project. By Year 2, apart from the project lead/Early College director, there was 100% turnover among the district staff who worked directly with ECEP. Everyone from the assistant superintendent to the executive director of the Office of College and Career Readiness (OCCR) to the Director of College Access Initiatives left the district. There was also turnover at the school level; four i3 schools experienced a change in leadership. DPS also replaced three schools that were initially participating in the grant with three different schools (one middle school and one middle and high school located on the same campus) that were considered more prepared to take advantage of ECEP.

In Year 3, Denver continued to experience changes in personnel and accompanying changes in priorities. The superintendent took a six-month leave of absence. In addition, one of the college liaisons became the concurrent enrollment project manager. That left one full-time college liaison and she was not funded by the i3 grant; therefore, the i3 schools were being served by the concurrent enrollment project manager. Principal turnover also continued, with at least four schools changing principals that year.

As the project continued into Year 4, there were continued changes at the school/campus- and district-levels regarding personnel and organizational structure. At the school/campus-level, there was one new middle school principal and four new high school principals. At the district-level, the superintendent returned from a six-month leave during the summer of 2016. In addition, one of the district's instructional coaches returned to the classroom. The most traumatic occurrence regarding personnel, however, was the unexpected death of the project lead, which occurred as the result of a car accident in August 2016.

After the project lead's passing, some of her responsibilities shifted to one of the instructional coaches, but primary supervision of the project rested with the Executive Director of the Office of College and Career Readiness. In late fall 2016, the position was posted as "Early College Expansion Project Manager-College and Career Readiness Manager" and the instructional coach who had been acting as project lead was hired. By the end of the project, the district had created an Early College Department and hired a new Executive Director. The new department was intended to serve all state-designated Early Colleges and potential Early Colleges (in

addition to the i3 schools). That office now rests underneath the new Division of Secondary Education that serves all middle and high schools.

Paying for College Courses

The funding model in Denver varied depending on whether the instructor was a high school teacher serving as an adjunct for the college versus a full-time college instructor. For cases in which the high school instructor was serving as an adjunct for the college, the state paid the tuition to the higher education institution, which then turned the funds back over to the school district (in accordance with any locally negotiated agreements). For example, community colleges reimbursed tuition at the rate of 105%; however, this was not required. Alternatively, when a student attended a class on a college campus, the district was responsible for the tuition (of note, one of the primary postsecondary partners in the project waived tuition and fees for concurrent enrollment students through 12th grade). For students who were participating in the fifth year ASCENT program or the new seven-year Early College option, the district was responsible for paying that tuition because the schools continued to receive funding from the state for those students, now attending full-time on the college campus. Going forward, the mill levy is expected to cover a substantial portion of the tuition costs.

Brownsville, Texas

District Characteristics

Brownsville, Texas, a district of approximately 50,000 students, borders directly on Mexico. The district is approximately 99% Hispanic with 30% designated as English Language Learners. Brownsville is among the poorest cities in the country with an estimated 96% of its students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. Despite its challenges, Brownsville received the 2008 Broad Prize, a $2 million award given to urban districts that improve student achievement and reduce achievement gaps. In 2012, before the ECEP project began, Brownsville's overall cumulative pass rates for the Texas exit exam were very close to the state average, as was its four-year graduation average. That said, Brownsville scored substantially lower than the state average in other assorted measures of college readiness (e.g., the percentage of students completing advanced placement (AP)/dual credit courses, percentage of students passing the AP exams, and the percentage of students graduating college-ready). Brownsville had an Early College high school since 2008, but there was a desire to expand opportunities to more students and create more schools. The assistant superintendent noted that the district's participation in ECEP was driven by the need to do more with rigor and to increase their college-going culture.

State and Local Policies

Texas has a history of being a supportive environment for Early Colleges. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website, their Early College High School model began in 2006, and the

number of schools with the Early College designation has increased annually. In Texas, Early College high schools are "required to serve students who are at risk of dropping out of school, provide an associate's degree or up to 60 hours toward a baccalaureate degree, waive tuition, fees, or required textbooks, comply with all assurances in the application, and adhere to the ECHS Blueprint" (the ECHS Blueprint is a document developed by the TEA to provide Early Colleges with implementation guidance). For a district to operate an Early College, it must apply to the TEA for designation and then reapply each year. The application period is opened each fall, with the TEA sharing information about the application protocol, including deadlines. "Full" (new applicant schools) and "abbreviated" (schools that have previously applied and been designated) applications are typically due in late fall and the results are shared in the spring. Applicant schools are categorized as "Fully Designated," "Provisionally Designated," or "Denied."

Over the years, Texas has continued to enact legislation that supported Early Colleges and provided additional guidance around their implementation. House Bill 5 (passed in 2013) changed the state's graduation requirements and also included policies around CTE pathways, partnerships with institutions of higher education, and graduation plans for all students. The Bill required districts to (1) develop college-preparatory courses in English language arts and mathematics in partnership with at least one institution of higher education (college/university) and (2) develop a course for 12th-grade students who had not met the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) requirements or exemptions. In Year 3 of the project, another legislative change occurred in Texas that benefited both PSJA and Brownsville; the cap was lifted on dual enrollment, meaning any high school student in any grade was eligible to enroll in dual credit courses.

As ECEP was ending, the TEA announced a new ECHS Blueprint, which includes increased expectations for students, to be implemented starting in the 2018-19 academic year. For example, the new Blueprint requires that Early Colleges designated provisionally must have at least 80% of their students completing at least one college-level math and at least one college-level English course and must have 50% of their students earning at least 15 college credits by graduation. The district staff saw these new standards as very challenging and indicated that the changes will likely have an impact on the way in which Early College is implemented in Brownsville.

As a result of the Early College work, there were also two district-level policy changes in Brownsville that provided fiscal support for the Early College work. In November 2016, the school board passed a $1,500 per semester stipend incentive for teaching dual credit courses. In addition, the school board also provided funding flexibility around AP and TSI testing costs.

Structure of the Grant

Brownsville identified three high schools, with their six feeder middle schools, to be served by ECEP. According to the district representative, these three high schools had the highest baseline dual enrollment and the assumption was that they had an infrastructure in place upon which the grant could build. The district also committed its own resources to provide similar services to the other schools in the district, so that all schools would move in a similar direction. By Year 2, all the district's high schools had been officially designated as wall-to-wall Early College High Schools by the state of Texas.

Overall management of the ECEP project was coordinated by the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, a role served by the same individual throughout the life of the project. She also received project management support from additional personnel as described below.

Brownsville established an i3 Cabinet, or central organizing structure, to govern the work. Its initial membership included the superintendent, the area superintendents, representatives from advanced academics, college readiness, the research and data department, the Texas Literacy Initiative, curriculum and instruction, guidance and counseling, special education and bilingual education. Over the course of the ECEP project, membership expanded to include principals, ECHS directors, and postsecondary partners.

Brownsville initially had six external instructional coaches provided by Educate Texas. There were also three district-based instructional coaches that were each assigned to a school cluster (i.e., the high school and its feeder middle schools). Over the life of the grant, the number of external coaches dropped as part of a plan to shift coaching responsibility to the district. More details on the i3 Cabinet and the instructional coaching are provided later in the report.

Brownsville also used some of its grant funds to create a new position—Transition Counselor—in each high school. The role of the Transition Counselor was to promote a college-going culture in the school and to assist students with the college selection and application process. The district also created the role of the lead teacher/dual credit staff person to oversee maintenance of the postsecondary partnerships, monitor TSI testing, and assist the Director of Advanced Academics with other dual enrollment needs.

The college with which Brownsville was primarily partnering underwent a reorganization at the beginning of the grant, with the two-year and four-year programs separating into their own individual institutions. The two-year institution, which was the primary partner for the college courses, had to undergo accreditation as a result of this split. This change caused delays and initial challenges in implementing the program; however, the district also formed partnerships with other colleges in the area and identified online options for students to take college credit courses. In the Year 3, the two-year college attained accreditation.

Personnel Changes

Throughout the life of the ECEP grant, the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction (the primary district contact) remained the same, but there were several other leadership changes at both the Central Office and at the school-/campus-level. The superintendent at the outset of Year 1, who introduced the grant to the district, left in Year 2 and an interim superintendent was appointed. Also in Year 2, one high school experienced a complete turnover of their leadership team. In Year 3, the interim superintendent was made permanent. As the district changed leadership, an additional change at the Central Office and school level included the Brownsville ECHS Project Director becoming a principal. In turn, responsibility over the Early College work shifted to the Director of Advanced Academics.

Brownsville's organizational structure also changed; the area superintendents were no longer arranged in clusters (i.e., a high school and its feeder middle schools). They were shifted to area superintendents for each grade span, with two area superintendents having elementary and middle schools alike. In Year 4, there were no district-level changes, however, at the school-/campus-level, there were two new middle school principals as well as new assistant principals and Early College High School Directors.

Paying for College Courses

Brownsville was responsible for paying for tuition, fees, textbooks, and adjunct instructors, although tuition for their primary community college partner was a nominal $5 per student per course. These costs were paid from the district's annual budget. As an additional resource, Texas Southmost College, Brownsville's primary postsecondary partner, committed to utilizing the same textbooks for three years so that the district did not have to pay for new books each year students took courses from that partner; the same agreement was not in place, however, with one of Brownsville's other primary postsecondary partners.

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo District, Texas

District Characteristics

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) is a district of 32,000 students, located in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Its population is approximately 99% Hispanic with an estimated 89% qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch. Additionally, 41% of the students are considered English Language Learners. Under the leadership of the superintendent, PSJA had set out to make itself into a district-wide Early College, even prior to the i3 grant. The district's motto is College[3]—College Ready, College Connected, and College Completed. Prior to the i3 grant, PSJA had established a strong Early College presence as the key approach to dealing with low graduation rates and low student achievement. District programs that predated the i3 included one stand-alone Early College with a STEM focus (another Early College focusing on teen mothers was established after the grant began), one school-wide Early College in a traditional high school, three Early

College schools-within-schools and two dropout programs with an Early College focus. As a result of their efforts, the four-year graduation rate increased from 62% for the class of 2007 to 90% for the class of 2012. The district's success at increasing graduation rates has been featured nationally including an article in the New York Times and a story on PBS News Hour. JFF created a monograph describing PSJA's efforts to launch the Early College approach district-wide (Le, 2012).

State and Local Policies

As noted previously, Texas' policies have been very supportive for Early Colleges in the past and PSJA has been able to take advantage of this.

The PSJA superintendent and Board of Education also enacted other local policies that supported the ECEP initiative. In Year 2, the district supported instructional efforts like *The Fundamental 5* and *Teach like a Champion*. In Year 3, all the 9th-grade classes went "wall-to-wall" Early College; thus, all PSJA high schools had an Early College component. The district also established an early alert system. In Year 4, PSJA was awarded two ECHS Demonstration Site Grants by the Texas Education Agency and Education Service Center Region 13.

Also in Year 4, PSJA received and implemented a Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant, which supported implementation of new principal and teacher evaluation measures. In addition to teacher evaluation work, the district was also implementing the Safe and Civil Schools approach (a project funded by the National Institute of Justice/Department of Justice).

Structure of the Grant

The i3 grant was intended to expand the Early College model into the two remaining high schools in the district that did not have an Early College focus. The grant also served the four feeder middle schools for these high schools.

The PSJA superintendent was the overall leader of ECEP, but he tasked a district-level coordinator with the responsibility of managing the project. They created an i3 Cabinet, or district-level entity that was responsible for coordinating the ECEP efforts within the district. Membership in the i3 Cabinet included key district individuals (e.g., the superintendent; the district coordinator; district administrators in charge of high schools, middle schools, career and technical education, college readiness, public relations; the head of instructional coaching; and a representative from the college partner). The i3 Cabinet also had a set of action groups focusing on topics such as professional development, data, budgeting, rigor, and curriculum and instruction. These action groups included district staff with expertise and responsibilities in these areas.

In terms of the services provided, Educate Texas (EdTX) hired and trained a set of four instructional coaches. These coaches were considered external and worked directly with

teachers. They also provided support to the instructional coaches who had been hired by the district. Each school had at least one school-based instructional coach. Leadership coaching was provided by JFF. More detail on the coaching is provided in a separate section below.

PSJA also created the role of college liaison/transition counselor; these staff members worked as college advisors. They examined students' TSI scores and determined the best college courses for students. They were also in charge of students' degree plans.

Because PSJA was already focused on Early Colleges, it had well-established postsecondary partnerships in place, particularly with South Texas College.

Personnel Changes

Although the superintendent remained throughout the grant, there were numerous other leadership changes at both the Central Office and school-/campus-level. In Year 2, the district hired a new deputy superintendent who became the primary point of contact for the i3 work. He was supported by a new College Readiness Director, who guided the work related specifically to college coursetaking. In the following year, PSJA hired a new director of instructional coaches and director of counseling. In Year 4, the director of college readiness and the director of counseling were reclassified to become the administrator for counseling and college readiness, a single senior-staff position. There was also continuous leadership turnover at the school-/campus-level; changes in principals, deans of instruction, instructional coaches and/or whole leadership teams.

Paying for College Courses

PSJA established an agreement with its primary postsecondary partner (South Texas College), who agreed to waive tuition for courses taught either by district-funded adjunct faculty or on the college campus. The college would then be reimbursed for the tuition expenses from the state in two years, when their state funding is allocated based on the number of students taking courses. However, although the tuition is still waived, if the college sent an instructor to the high school, the district was required to pay for the instructor. The district also paid for textbooks, fees, and transportation for students out of their annual budget.

As described in this section, the district context influenced the implementation of the ECEP project, both in terms of providing support (e.g., via state and/or local policies) and presenting challenges (e.g., staff turnover). The next sections of the report present the implementation supports that were in place for each district.

Section III: Technical Assistance to Districts

Overview

One of the ECEP Key Components was technical assistance provided to aid districts in implementing the model. In Denver, JFF was the primary support provider for technical assistance. While JFF also provided some assistance to the Texas districts, EdTX was the primary technical support provider for Brownsville and PSJA. As shown in the logic model, there were four main activities that fell within the domain of technical assistance to districts: (1) assistance in strategic planning, (2) training of district-based instructional coaches, (3) assistance in implementing postsecondary partnerships, and (4) resources to school and districts.

In the early stages of the ECEP grant, the technical assistance activities were conceptualized as follows:

- Strategic planning would include supporting the alignment of existing district programs around student support, professional development, and concurrent enrollment with the ECEP initiative.

- Training and professional development of district instructional coaches would be led primarily by JFF in Denver and EdTX in Brownsville and PSJA. In Denver, JFF would train instructional coaches that were hired by the district and would provide ongoing consultation. In Brownsville and PSJA, EdTX would do the same and partner with the district instructional coaches in any meetings they facilitated.

- Although the districts had existing postsecondary partnerships, JFF and EdTX would help districts formalize and strengthen those relationships.

- JFF's Early College High School design work would form the basis of the resources and materials provided to the districts and school teams.

Each of the technical assistance activities is described in more depth below.

Strategic Planning

JFF and EdTX provided technical assistance around strategic planning for the grant. All three districts developed plans to implement the ECEP grant and undertook efforts to align this work with other district initiatives. While some districts worked on an i3-specific strategic plan, others worked on a plan that would become a part of their district's overall strategic plan.

Denver

Given the plethora of initiatives present in the district, the initial district project director and JFF staff first worked on aligning the ECEP initiative with Denver's ongoing work. The project director spoke about the importance of alignment to:

> …maximize our resources around people, time, and money…. I think what a lot of districts do is that they'll tend to have a grant and then it's another layer of another thing. Because we have a lot of things going on in the district and I have been a principal before, I understand the importance of alignment and so my mantra has been how do we complement the work rather than compete with the work.

Towards this effort, the project director met with representatives from multiple, ongoing district initiatives and attempted to align the work whenever there was a natural fit. For example, the district was implementing a revised teacher evaluation system in response to new state requirements. The district project director and JFF staff created a crosswalk between the teacher evaluation system and the ECEP instructional strategies; it showed schools how the ECEP grant helped them meet the teacher evaluation requirements. They completed similar crosswalks for other core initiatives in the district, including their work with English Language Learners and another i3 grant on Collaborative Strategic Reading. One of the core goals of the alignment work was to ensure that everyone was using the same language and reduce confusion among teachers.

South Texas

The technical assistance around strategic planning initially differed in Brownsville versus PSJA. When the grant began, PSJA's strategic plan already included a focus on Early College and college readiness and the superintendent had communicated that vision with their stakeholders. Although Brownsville had already developed a district vision around college readiness, which was guiding much of their work, further alignment was still needed. For example, while they had received a literacy grant that included a coaching component, the coaches in that initiative used slightly different terminology from the ECEP coaches. EdTX assisted the district in developing common terminology that could be used by coaches across both grants. In Year 2, the strategic planning discussions occurred during the i3 Cabinet meetings. During those meetings, there were data discussions, strategic plan drafts were shared, and there were opportunities to modify the plans as needed.

Over the duration of the grant, both JFF and EdTX staff continued to communicate with the districts about the ECEP grant's outcomes, alignment between the i3 grant and the district/schools strategic plans, data sharing, and data analysis. Starting in Year 3, those meetings began to include the topic of sustainability and how the district could continue the work after the end of the grant funding.

Training District-Based Instructional Coaches

Each of the three districts hired instructional coaches to work with their teachers around implementation of the Common Instructional Framework (CIF), the instructional practices targeted in the ECEP model. Part of the technical assistance provided was training and support

for those district-based coaches. This training was structured slightly differently in Denver and in the two Texas districts.

Denver

In Denver, JFF provided an instructional coach who worked with the district-based instructional coaches to develop their expertise and help them frame their work. The JFF coach met with the district-based instructional coaches (as a team and individually) at least once a month face-to-face and communicated with them on an ongoing basis via email and text. When on site, she attended the training sessions the district-based instructional coaches provided to the schools and/or other district coaches (e.g., instructional support personnel teams, teacher effectiveness coaches, building facilitators), provided feedback on the sessions the district-based instructional coaches prepared for the college partners, and visited schools with the district-based instructional coaches and JFF implementation and accountability coach. The JFF instructional coach and the JFF implementation and accountability coach also developed sessions for the district-led i3 principal professional development sessions. She also provided leadership coaching, as needed. During Years 3 and 4, she also worked with the district-based instructional coaches to pilot and implement the JFF Middle School Curriculum (see the resources section).

South Texas

In Brownsville and PSJA, the EdTX project lead and external instructional coaches provided training and support for the full-time internal/campus-based instructional coaches who worked directly with teachers. They met collectively at least once a month—in sessions called "Step-Back Meetings"—for ongoing professional development and organizational updates. The EdTX project lead and instructional coaches developed the agenda and facilitated the meetings. In addition, the internal/campus-based instructional coaches also received individual coaching from the EdTX instructional coaches.

In Year 4, the Step-Back Meetings differed between Brownsville and PSJA. In Brownsville, EdTX continued guiding the monthly meetings. In PSJA, however, EdTX only assisted the instructional coaching department with the monthly Step-Back Meetings; PSJA district staff developed and delivered their own PD.

Postsecondary Partnerships

Technical assistance was expected to be provided around the strengthening and formalizing of postsecondary partnerships. Both JFF and EdTX worked with the districts on improving and, in some cases, establishing new postsecondary partnerships. For example, EdTX assisted Brownsville with an issue that arose with their existing college partner regarding accreditation. EdTX facilitated meetings between the community college and the district, worked on MOUs between both entities, and provided the district with options identifying other postsecondary partnerships (i.e., Texas A&M University-Kingsville). In Denver, colleges eventually reached out

to the district and inquired about expanding their partnerships. For example, Metropolitan State University of Denver had experienced success with Denver students in an English course and wanted to pilot the course as a year-long class.

As the ECEP grant progressed, JFF and EdTX continued preparing district leaders for meetings with their community college partners, but they also supported the districts in a variety of ways. JFF staff worked directly with the DPS project lead and other district leaders on the infrastructure needed to support existing and new college relationships; they did not directly work with the IHEs. EdTX worked directly with the college partners in South Texas as they built a data dashboard that provided the district with high school student data regarding how these students were performing in their college classes.

An early lesson learned was the need for professional development or support for faculty members. Many faculty were not prepared to teach college courses to high school students and needed additional support in that area. Similarly, the ECEP grant expanded the need for high school adjunct faculty and, in turn, those teachers also needed support teaching college courses to high school students. With assistance from JFF and EdTX, all three ECEP districts collaborated with their college partners and provided professional development for full-time and adjunct faculty. The college partners also provided training to the adjunct faculty around college expectations, grading, and resources. The districts provided training to the full-time faculty members on the project's instructional strategies (the CIF).

In the early implementation stages, JFF and EdTX stressed the importance of paying attention to students' postsecondary outcomes, including increased graduation rates and enrollment and success in postsecondary education. Reviewing these data led all three districts to work on building college and career pathways ensuring students earned a degree or certificate; the JFF and EdTX staff provided support in the development of these pathways. Additionally, Denver eventually reduced its reliance on developmental courses so their students would be ready for college courses. As the ECEP grant was ending, there were key personnel in all three districts, including college liaisons, who continued to serve as a bridge between the districts/schools and their college partners.

Providing Resources

The fourth component of technical assistance was the provision of resources to participating districts. JFF and EdTX provided extensive resources to the districts (e.g., resource booklets on the CIF, expanding Early College, and implementing instructional rounds in schools). The JFF resources shared included *Initiating, Developing, And Demonstrating The Common Instructional Framework: For Instructional Coaches and Administrators* (May 2013), *The Common Instructional Framework: Rubrics and Guides for Teachers* (September 2012 & May 2013), *Launching Early College Districtwide: Pharr-San Juan-Alamo's "College for All" Strategy* (March

2012), and *Initiating, Developing, And Demonstrating Rounds: A Guidebook for Teachers, Coaches, and Instructional Leaders in Schools Using the Early College Design Common Instructional Framework* (October 2012). The partners also developed specific tools to assist the districts; for example, in Denver, JFF developed a School Assessment Tool and a Roll-Out Decision-Making Tool to guide their conversations and decisions around implementation. The EdTX and Brownsville instructional coaches created a booklet that included a crosswalk between ECEP and TLI, a description of the CIF strategies, and protocols for each strategy. EdTX also provided resources to PSJA and Brownsville as they developed their data dashboards. As the Community of Practice webinars became more established, the schools and district partners also began sharing their tools and materials when they facilitated sessions.

JFF College and Career Readiness Middle School Curriculum

During Year 3, JFF developed an additional resource related to the goals of the grant. JFF's *College and Career Readiness Middle School Curriculum Modules* focused on (1) teaching content and skills associated with college and career readiness and (2) using the CIF strategies. The curriculum serves Grades 6-8 and includes 28 lesson plans designed for use during a 30-45-minute period. The lesson plans are grouped into five units of study:

1. Getting Started (beginning of the school year)

2. School Skills (common knowledge and behaviors of successful students)

3. Motivation (characteristics of resilient, intrinsically-motivated learners)

4. Goals (making plans and measuring progress), and

5. Pathways (career and postsecondary options)

The curriculum also includes resources that enable teachers to extend a lesson and provides guidance on how to work through the curriculum with an advisory team (the recommended implementation model). Throughout the development process, Denver staff reviewed various components of the curriculum and provided feedback to JFF. The feedback received primarily included the need for more attention to English Language Learners; those revisions were addressed in finalizing the curriculum.

During spring 2016, the curriculum was piloted in one DPS middle school. The JFF external instructional coach and DPS instructional coaches worked closely with the school's leadership with regard to implementation. The middle school implemented the curriculum twice a month during their advisory period. However, these efforts resulted in pushback from teachers because the lessons were structured with set content. Early feedback from teachers indicated that they needed more preparation in terms of adapting the curriculum for their classroom setting. DPS acted upon that feedback and held a two-day summer professional development

session in summer 2016, during which school teams worked with instructional coaches to revise the lessons.

At the end of the grant, middle schools were continuing to implement the curriculum and district staff were building on the curriculum to develop a more comprehensive 6th-12th grade advisory curriculum. The district staff noted that an advisory curriculum has to be completely planned ("turn-key") so that teachers do not have to plan for an additional class.

Summary of Implementation

Over the course of the grant, EdTX and JFF expanded their thinking around technical assistance. EdTX and JFF staff members provided a substantial amount of technical assistance to non-coaching district staff including sessions on the Early College High School Design and workshops on institutional data sharing. In addition, while the role/position of the college liaison was not originally envisioned as part of the program, once those individuals were put into place, they also needed additional support.

The technical assistance work was not only about building human capacity; it was also about changing organizational structures. JFF and EdTX began their work with district staff, but gradually the responsibility for some of the work shifted to other entities (e.g., schools, i3 Cabinet, and/or the Community of Practice). For example, while JFF and EdTX may have primarily provided the initial resources, districts began to share the tools they developed through the online Community of Practice.

The organizational structure at some district offices also changed to allow for continued support of the Early College work. For example, DPS created an Early College Department staffed with the ECEP district instructional coaches that not only supported the i3 schools, but all schools applying for Colorado Early College designation. In Brownsville, the Advanced Academics Department took ownership of ECEP, more specifically, the coursetaking, TSI testing, and relationship-building with the college partners.

Table 1 presents an overview of the technical assistance and how that changed over time.

Table 1. Changes Across Project Years

Indicators	Year 1 2013-14	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
Strategic Planning	• JFF and EdTX focused on alignment with other district initiatives	• In Brownsville and PSJA, strategic planning discussions became a part of the i3 Cabinet meetings	• JFF and EdTX continued to have conversations with the districts about the grant's outcomes, alignment between the i3 grant and the districts'/schools' strategic plans, data sharing, data analysis, and sustainability	• DPS schools used JFF template to complete sustainability plan • EdTX provided sustainability proposal to Brownsville and PSJA
Training of District-Based Instructional Coaches	• JFF instructional coach worked with district instructional coaches in Denver • EdTX staff provided training and support through monthly "Step-Back" Meetings	• JFF and EdTX staff continue support to instructional coaches • EdTX and JFF staff provided technical assistance to non-coaching district staff	• JFF coaches developed sessions for the district-led i3 principal PD in Denver • JFF instructional coach worked with the district instructional coaches to **pilot** the JFF Middle School Curriculum	• JFF instructional coach worked with the district instructional coaches to **implement** the JFF Middle School Curriculum • PSJA developed their own PD for campus-based instructional coaches
Postsecondary Partnerships	• JFF and EdTX worked with the districts on improving their postsecondary partnerships • EdTX helped Brownsville develop a formal MOU with its partner	• EdTX facilitated meetings with colleges and identified another postsecondary partner for Brownsville • DPS began training IHE partners on CIF	• Brownsville and PSJA formalized partnerships with additional colleges • DPS approached by college for an expanded partnership	
Resources	• JFF provided all the resources	• EdTX provided data dashboard resources to Brownsville and PSJA	• Districts and schools began sharing resources via their COP presentations • JFF developed the JFF Middle School Curriculum and it was piloted in DPS	• DPS held a 2-day training on the JFF Middle School Curriculum (schools adapted the lesson plans)

Fidelity of Implementation

Fidelity of Implementation (FOI) was assessed for the implementation of technical assistance annually for Years 2-4. It consisted of four indicators: (1) assistance in strategic planning, (2) training of district-based instructional coaches, (3) establishment of postsecondary partnerships, and (4) provision of resources to the districts. The records used to assess FOI were based on the project leads' and JFF and EdTX instructional coaches' entries in an online project tracking tool developed by JFF. During Years 2-3, FOI for training of district-based instructional coaches was met when the districts received 17-22 days of training annually. In Year 4, the FOI definition changed; the minimum range of days was reduced to 8-12 days. FOI for the other three indicators remained the same and was simply an indication of whether the action had occurred. Table 2 below summarizes FOI for Years 2-4.

Table 2. Summary of Technical Assistance to Districts Fidelity of Implementation

Key Component	Definition of High Implementation	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
Technical Assistance to Districts		**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**
Strategic Planning	Strategic Planning and alignment of existing initiatives implemented	Yes	Yes	Yes
JFF & EdTX Training of Instructional Coaches	**Year 1-3** - 75% or more of coaches in a district receive 17-22 training days per year **Year 4** - 75% or more of coaches in a district receive 8-12 training days per year	Yes	Yes	Yes
Plan/Implement Postsecondary Partnership	Postsecondary Partnerships in place	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provide Resources	Resources provided to districts	Yes	Yes	Yes

Lessons Learned

Over the course of the grant, the project staff learned several lessons regarding the provision of technical assistance to the districts: (1) the importance of aligning ECEP with other district initiatives, (2) the need to build higher education capacity to deliver college credit courses, and (3) the need for additional resources.

ECEP was implemented in districts that had multiple initiatives occurring simultaneously. As such, across all three districts, district staff prioritized aligning ECEP with other initiatives already in place. Alignment with other district efforts was considered to be particularly important by those in DPS. As previously reported, DPS project staff sought to align the CIF and other strategies with the local teacher evaluation framework. We also learned that strong alignment with state initiatives assisted with the implementation process. For example, Texas's statewide Early College designation process reinforced and accelerated the ECEP work

occurring in the Texas districts. Being designated as an Early College in Texas not only resulted in schools being able to provide expanded access to college courses, but it also required that schools engaged in a certain set of activities, many of which were consistent with the goals of ECEP.

Another lesson learned was that the development of postsecondary partnerships needed to include consideration of how the partner would meet the capacity challenges posed due to rapid expansion of the number of students taking college courses. Some postsecondary partners were not prepared for this quick growth and could not meet the demand. In addition, training needed to happen within both entities (the district and the college partner); college instructors needed training on instructional practices and high school teachers serving as adjunct faculty needed to understand college expectations. As the grant progressed, the partners and districts had to build those support systems. ECEP also brought to light the difficulty of sharing data both within and across organizations.

A final lesson learned was that it would have been helpful to have more instructional resources to share with district staff and coaches at the outset. Although JFF had some initial documents relative to the CIF, the district and school/campus-based instructional coaches needed additional protocols and tools they could immediately use. Everyone eventually developed their own materials, but the instructional coaches shared that having something at the beginning of the project would have also been helpful.

Section IV: Leadership Coaching

Overview

ECEP was expected to provide leadership coaching to school administrators around (1) creating a college-going culture; (2) planning, implementing, and monitoring effective instruction, and (3) data use. Over the course of the grant, the leadership coaching concept evolved. At the start of the project, JFF created a document that detailed the ECEP Logic Model Components, which included how FOI was defined and outlined the specific services that would be provided and the targeted participants. The document articulated that the role of leadership coaches "is to help the school principal and school planning team plan, implement, and manage effective instruction, postsecondary partnership, and the school's college-going culture." The expectation was that the JFF leadership coaches would observe instruction and review data with school leadership. They would also help middle and high school principals create a school planning team that included their postsecondary partner; and when that team was developed, coach them as well. The level of expected implementation was two days of leadership coaching monthly. In Year 1, the JFF coaches met with the principals once a month for approximately 2-4 hours at a time.

Initially, JFF held sole responsibility for the leadership coaching activities; but formative feedback provided during the first year indicated that school leadership was extremely important for the success of the project and that the coaching provided was useful but not sufficient. Given fiscal constraints that restricted the number of days of leadership coaching, it was recommended that the ECEP partners consider other ways of increasing the attention paid to principals. In recognition of the need for expanded support for school leaders, trainings were provided for the ECEP leadership teams in all three districts. While the leadership coaching for principals remained within the purview of JFF, EdTX and the DPS District Lead began providing additional leadership capacity-building work. In Year 3, EdTX created a new coaching position, the CIF Implementation Facilitator; a coach who would assist principals implementing the CIF.

As the project entered its final year, the targeted numbers of coaching consultations (substantive exchanges including in-person, by phone, and via email) were reduced from 17-22 to 8-12. Due to the high rate of turnover, however, the leadership coaches did spend additional time at those schools where leadership had transitioned. The coaching focus continued to be on developing the leadership skills of the principals, assistant principals, and Early College High School Directors. Coaching in Year 4 also addressed sustainability. While only the JFF implementation and accountability coach in Denver expected a formal written plan, all districts received sustainability coaching.

District-Specific Implementation

The sections below describe how leadership coaching changed over the course of the project across the different districts.

Denver

In Denver, the role of the JFF leadership coach was restructured to play more of a monitoring role, examining the FOI of the grant. This was at the request of the district because principals already had district leadership coaches assigned to them. In the first half of Year 1, the leadership coach focused on understanding the schools and doing tours, summarizing observations for the principals. During ensuing visits, the leadership coach and principal discussed the district's postsecondary readiness goals; subsequent walk-throughs were then centered on collecting and analyzing evidence of college readiness. The leadership coach commented that she often tried to embed some leadership coaching into her reports and conversations with the principals; for example, if the school was struggling with attendance, she would provide sample strategies to address that specific issue.

In Year 2, the JFF leadership coach position was renamed the implementation and accountability coach. She began rotating the schools she worked with, seeing about half of the schools each month, allowing for longer visits at each school. During these visits, the coach led strategic discussions with school leaders focused on the grant's student outcomes and conducted classroom walkthroughs. More specifically, the coach and school leadership examined data related to the concurrent enrollment numbers, college course pass rates, coursetaking patterns, and the dropout rate. The Denver coach summarized her observations and debriefed with the ECEP District Lead before the end of her visits. In addition, she stayed in contact with the JFF external instructional coach and they discussed their respective visits and any needs observed.

Also, during Year 2, DPS began providing additional leadership support. The DPS District Lead provided additional coaching to new principals of ECEP schools because they had come into the grant mid-stream. In addition, the Office of College and Career Readiness created quarterly principal/leadership professional development days, entitled "Early College Leadership Professional Development;" these days involved the DPS District Lead, school leadership teams and the JFF implementation and accountability coach.

In Year 3, the JFF implementation and accountability coach continued to meet with the principals to identify the extent to which the school was attaining the targeted student outcomes, but she also started discussing sustainability. As she described in an interview that year:

> Tomorrow they're going to be given three questions that they have to answer…: What three things do you have in place that are working and will lead to sustainability? What

two things are you working on that with a little tweaking will lead to sustainability? And if you're not there yet, where do you need support and from whom?

She assigned the principals homework that formed the basis of the next visit's conversation, provided resources on sustainability via email, and remained available via email and phone. During her visits to the district, she also continued meeting with the district-based instructional coaches, the concurrent enrollment project manager and the Denver project lead.

During Year 3, Denver continued building their internal support system for principals; they created the position of Differentiated Roles teacher leaders. These teacher leaders taught part-time and coached and evaluated part-time, assisting the school leader in conducting the LEAP (Leading Effective Academic Practice) assessment of teachers' practices. In addition, the district continued to provide quarterly professional development days for school leadership. Also during this year, the project lead conducted visioning work with the principals, and the district took selected principals to the PSJA Early College Conference.

In Year 4, the JFF implementation and accountability coach continued to support school principals by monitoring the progress of grant-related activities and supporting the development of school-level sustainability plans. The coach also continued to have strategic discussions with school leaders focused on student outcomes. Due to the sudden death of the initial district project lead, the quarterly principal/leadership PD days did not occur in fall 2016. However, one session was held in spring 2017 and the JFF leadership and instructional coach both assisted with the day-long professional development. In addition, the district supported principals with the Colorado Early College designation applications and brought principals and school teams for an additional learning tour to South Texas in spring 2017.

South Texas

In Brownsville and PSJA, there were two JFF leadership coaches and they visited their respective districts once every month. During this time, they had approximately 2-2.5-hour face-to-face visits with each principal. With each school leader, they started their work with a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. This was intended to have the principal examine the entire school, capitalize on strengths, and identify possible problem areas. The coaching sessions were usually one-on-one with the principal, although one coach also brought in assistant principals or assessment team members, as appropriate. The coaches described their job as capacity-building; that is, their role was to build the schools' capacity to plan, teach, assess, learn, and work in teams. During the sessions, the coaches usually focused on different types of data and asked questions that would help the principals develop solutions aligned with the needs identified in the data. They also communicated with the principals via e-mail throughout the month. After each visit, the leadership coaches debriefed with district leadership and shared any trends they observed. As the school year went on, some of their

focus began shifting towards developing principals' leadership skills. While the leadership coach set the agenda, the principal "drove" the meeting, at times taking the lead over certain portions. The principals' recommendations also impacted the next meeting's agenda.

Like Denver, both Brownsville and PSJA supplemented the coaching with additional professional development planned specifically for their Early College and i3 leadership teams. Brownsville held a training session with all their Early College principals and directors that focused on their state's Early College designation applications. Similarly, PSJA hosted a three-day leadership residency in June 2014 for the principals from the i3 schools and their other Early Colleges, with a focus on how to be an instructional leader. JFF trainers participated in the residency and provided sessions on the CIF.

The EdTX project lead also began coaching the Early College high school directors. These were leadership positions required in any Texas schools that had been designated as Early Colleges. However, these directors were not initially included as part of the grant proposal and thus, were not targeted to receive any support from the leadership coaches.

In Year 3, the JFF leadership coaches continued to visit monthly and remained in contact with principals throughout the month. The coaches usually left the principals with homework assignments and also made themselves available via email and phone in between visits. When possible, the coaches debriefed with district leadership and shared the topics covered during the visit. In addition to continuing to meet with principals, in Year 3, leadership coaches began to expand their work to begin offering support to the school leadership teams (when agreed upon with the principal). In PSJA, the conversations with school leadership focused on academic data and leading change. In Brownsville, the coach utilized a thematic approach, and the conversations focused on improving student achievement. The Brownsville coach also tried to incorporate the Texas Principal Evaluation & Support System, the new principal evaluation system, into the professional development.

Because the JFF coaches were limited in the amount of on-site time they could spend with principals, EdTX created a supplemental position for principal support around instruction, the role of a "CIF Implementation Facilitator". As a former instructional coach, the individual hired to be the CIF Implementation Facilitator was already familiar with the leadership in the different schools. She began her work in the winter of 2015 with a goal of providing a "deep dive" around the CIF. She also conducted walkthroughs of classrooms with administrators and modeled the evaluation process; for example, what questions to ask, what student behaviors to look for, and how to offer feedback to teachers. In addition, the EdTX District Lead continued to provide coaching to the Early College High School Directors and assistant principals.

Also during Year 4, an increasing number of leadership development opportunities were made available. Principals were included in the i3 Cabinet and became active participants in the

workgroups/subcommittees. Further, PSJA instituted a Principals' Academy and Brownsville included i3-focused sessions during their August 2015 multi-day district-wide leadership professional development.

During Year 4, the JFF leadership coaches and the EdTX CIF Implementation Facilitator worked independently with the school administrators to align the walkthrough rubrics and other CIF materials to state-mandated observation activities, highlighting commonalities among the instruments. The JFF leadership coaches and the EdTX CIF Implementation Facilitator reported little contact or intentional coordination of activities with each other and indicated that they were not supposed to be on the campus at the same time. Project management believed that this separation was necessary for several reasons: (1) they hoped to respect the time of the principals and their leadership team, (2) they saw the role of the CIF facilitator as different than the role of the leadership coach, and (3) they saw the separation as allowing the JFF leadership coaches to maintain the trust and confidentially that they had developed with the principals and their leadership teams. On the other hand, the coaches themselves noted that they would have liked to have coordinated their efforts more.

Summary of Implementation

At the outset of the project, the purpose of leadership coaching was to guide the principals to develop their own personal leadership skills and help support the implementation of CIF strategies and college coursetaking in their schools. As the project matured, the professional development focus evolved toward greater utilization of state accountability data, data trends, and the use of data to inform administrative actions. The leadership coaches used results from state testing to develop coaching session agendas around the use of data to inform the work of the leadership teams.

Eventually, the principals began to take more ownership of their coaching meeting agendas (e.g., the topics to be covered and when members of their leadership teams would be involved). They also advocated for more support; as such, the districts, JFF, and EdTX provided additional leadership development opportunities.

Essentially, the leadership coaches worked on building principals' capacity for sustaining the grant activities. There was also significant attention paid to the leadership teams and their role in sustainability. When the leadership team met with the coaches, they were not only learning more about CIF, but, like the principal, they were also being trained to become instructional leaders. The coaches had the same conversations around data and coursetaking with the school leadership teams as they did with the principals. In some instances, these other school leaders were also coached by the instructional coaches to better understand the coaching cycle and what to look for during walkthroughs.

A key lesson learned was the importance of leadership at all levels. School-level leadership reinforced the importance of ECEP with school staff. However, it took more than one staff person per district to provide meaningful support for principals and their leadership teams. The table below summarizes the evolution of leadership coaching over the life of the grant.

Table 3. Changes in implementation of Leadership Coaching over time

School District	Year 1 2013-14	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
DPS	• JFF leadership coach focused on trying to understand each school and evidence of college readiness • DPS already had leadership coaches and thus requested that coach focus on FOI monitoring • Coach visited each school every month	• JFF coach renamed implementation and accountability coach • Focused on school data and worked with schools on developing student recordkeeping systems • Visited half the schools every month • DPS created principal PD days • DPS lead provided additional coaching to new ECEP principals	• Denver coach began discussing sustainability with principals • DPS created Differentiated Roles teacher leaders • Principals attended PSJA College for All Conference	• Leadership coaching consultations were reduced • JFF external instructional coach also worked with school principals • Schools completed sustainability plan • DPS supported principals with Colorado EC designation applications
South Texas	• JFF leadership coaches conducted SWOT analysis and examined student achievement data • Coaches visited all schools monthly for 2-2.5 hours	• EdTX project lead also worked with high school Early College Directors • Principals began driving meeting agenda	• EdTX added the role of CIF Implementation Facilitator • JFF leadership coaches used assignments to guide meetings • JFF leadership coaches shared documentation with EdTX project lead and CIF Implementation Facilitator • All principals included in i3 Cabinet and workgroups/ subcommittees	• Leadership coaching consultations were reduced • Additional time devoted to new ECEP principals • JFF leadership coaches and CIF Implementation Facilitator worked independently
Brownsville		• District-led Early College Designation Training Session	• District included i3 sessions at district-wide Leadership PD • JFF LC used thematic approach and examined new Texas principal evaluation system	

School District	Year 1 2013-14	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
PSJA		• District hosted 3-day leadership residency	• District developed Principal's Academy • JFF leadership coach focused on examining student data	

Fidelity of Implementation

Measured annually for Years 2-4, FOI for leadership coaching was assessed by counting the number of coaching consultations middle and high school principals received. The target was 17-22 coaching consultations (substantive exchanges including in-person, by phone, and via email) during Years 2 and 3 and 8-12 coaching consultations for Year 4.

As previously noted, principals were initially supported by only a JFF leadership coach who visited monthly for a week and provided support in between on-site visits. Beginning in Year 2, in addition to principals, school leadership teams also received extra support from their districts. Therefore, leadership coaching was redefined as including any direct support provided specifically for school leadership and those professional development experiences are included in our totals.

The data used to measure FOI came from the leadership coaches' entries in the JFF Reporting Tool. According to project records, for the 2014-15 school year (Year 2), participation in leadership coaching averaged 18 coaching consultation exchanges across all three districts. All nine schools in Brownsville received 17 or more coaching consultations. Five of six schools in PSJA received 17 or more coaching consultations. Thirteen of fifteen schools in DPS received 17 or more coaching consultations. In total, only three schools did not attain full implementation.

From 2015-17 (Years 3 and 4), each school attained full implementation. For the 2015-16 school year, each school in PSJA, Brownsville, and DPS received 17 or more days of leadership coaching; across all three districts, participation in leadership coaching averaged 23 coaching consultation exchanges. During the 2016-17 school year, the coaching consultations were reduced and the FOI goal changed to a minimum required 8-12 substantive coaching consultations. All the schools received 8 or more substantive consultations; across all three districts, participation in leadership coaching averaged 18 substantive contacts. Table 4 shows the targeted and the actual number of consultations for Years 2-4 and the extent to which FOI was meet each year.

Table 4. Fidelity of Implementation, Leadership Coaching, 2014-17

FOI Data	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
# of Schools[a]	29	29	29
Average Targeted Coaching Consultations	17-22	17-22	8-12
Average # of Coaching Consultations	18	23	18
Range of Participation (lowest to highest # of consultations)	15-19	17-33	8-30
Range of % of Consultations Received	88%-111%	100%-194%	100%-375%
% of Schools Meeting FOI	90% (3 districts)	100%	100%

[a]Two schools are 6th-12th-grade schools. One of these schools has a single principal and the other school has two principals, one for the middle school grades and one for the high school grades. Each principal is expected to receive the targeted number of days of coaching.

Lessons Learned

One of the key lessons learned from the ECEP project was the importance of school leadership. As stated by one project staff member after Year 1,

> [The number one lesson learned was] importance of leadership, the need to set the right tone. You [need to] have the proper leaders with the skill set that is needed, somebody that can speak and present and sell, can convince, can motivate, can encourage…that knows instruction. Leadership matters…[at] all levels.

Principals are the gatekeepers to the school and if they did not understand the vision and goals of the grant, it would be difficult for the instructional coaches and others to gain entry and provide services.

Just as staff noted the importance of working with school leadership, they also noted that it was important to work with broader school leadership teams, which all three districts ended up doing. For example, in Texas, a project staff member worked with department heads in the high school because they had influence and authority and were critical partners in implementing and sustaining the initiative. EdTX also helped the school-based Professional Learning Communities with lesson planning and worked with teachers beyond just individual instructional coaching. The Denver instructional coaches ended up working with the instructional support personnel teams, teacher effectiveness coaches, Differentiated Roles teacher leaders, and building facilitators, even though these types of personnel were not included in the initial leadership development activities.

Section V: Community of Practice

Community of Practice Implementation

To provide a venue for collaboration and communication among the ECEP partner districts and schools, JFF created an online Community of Practice (COP) as one of its key project activities. The first year of the ECEP project was spent planning the COP. JFF identified the needs and audience for the COP, investigated possible platforms, and drafted an RFP for vendors to design the online system.

During Year 2, an online system was put in place with access granted to JFF staff (including the instructional and leadership coaches), partnership organizations, and i3-participating districts. The COP included areas where individuals could "ask an expert" or dialogue over various topics ("Forums"). In addition, the intent was that community members would be able to view articles, reports, and past webinars. By the end of Year 2, there were only a limited number of resources available on the COP; it included two policy reports and information about the evaluation design. In its "Tools" section, JFF posted other resources that were primarily related to policy development, needs assessment, and toolkits for use by postsecondary institutions. During spring 2015, additional resources were added, including a toolkit and a newsletter related to the CIF; these resources provided model practices and tools for practitioners. During that same spring, JFF also offered webinars that focused on the instructional coaches' experiences (around CIF implementation) and lessons learned.

In addition to creating an online system, the FOI measures indicated an expectation the offerings of the COP would be guided by a plan. JFF staff distributed a needs assessment survey during the spring of 2015 and the results of that survey were used to develop the 2015-16 COP Implementation Plan. In addition to expanding the professional development offerings, the plan identified five key activities for 2015-16: (1) implementation guidance for LEAs, (2) establishment of a COP Core Planning Team, (3) establishment of a Participant Planning Team, (4) development of a monthly newsletter, and (5) development of an online conference. As of summer 2015, an online network planning group had been identified and an annual plan was established for peer learning.

In the original conceptualization of the operation of the COP, JFF expected that each partnering district would develop their own page and highlight events and resources relevant for their stakeholders. This structure was ultimately seen as too unwieldy and so the COP was redesigned and a new website/portal was launched in fall 2015. The redesigned version of the COP included an overall planning team that organized the webinars and assisted the assigned presenters. This new structure gave everyone the opportunity to upload information; in addition, everyone was able to utilize all the information provided, regardless of the district in which they were employed. The redesigned COP included sections such as resources, webinars,

forum, or Ask the Expert, as well as a suggestion box. The new portal was shared via webinar and each i3 district (including ECEP and other projects) had an opportunity to explore the portal and provide feedback on the system. One webinar, in particular, showcased the redesigned portal and asked participants for feedback on the system, and another webinar trained administrators how to use the portal. These two webinars, as well as a webinar on the JFF Reporting Tool, were the held in fall 2015. As an example of the COP, Figure 2 below presents the Resources page of the COP.

Figure 2. Community of Practice Resources Page
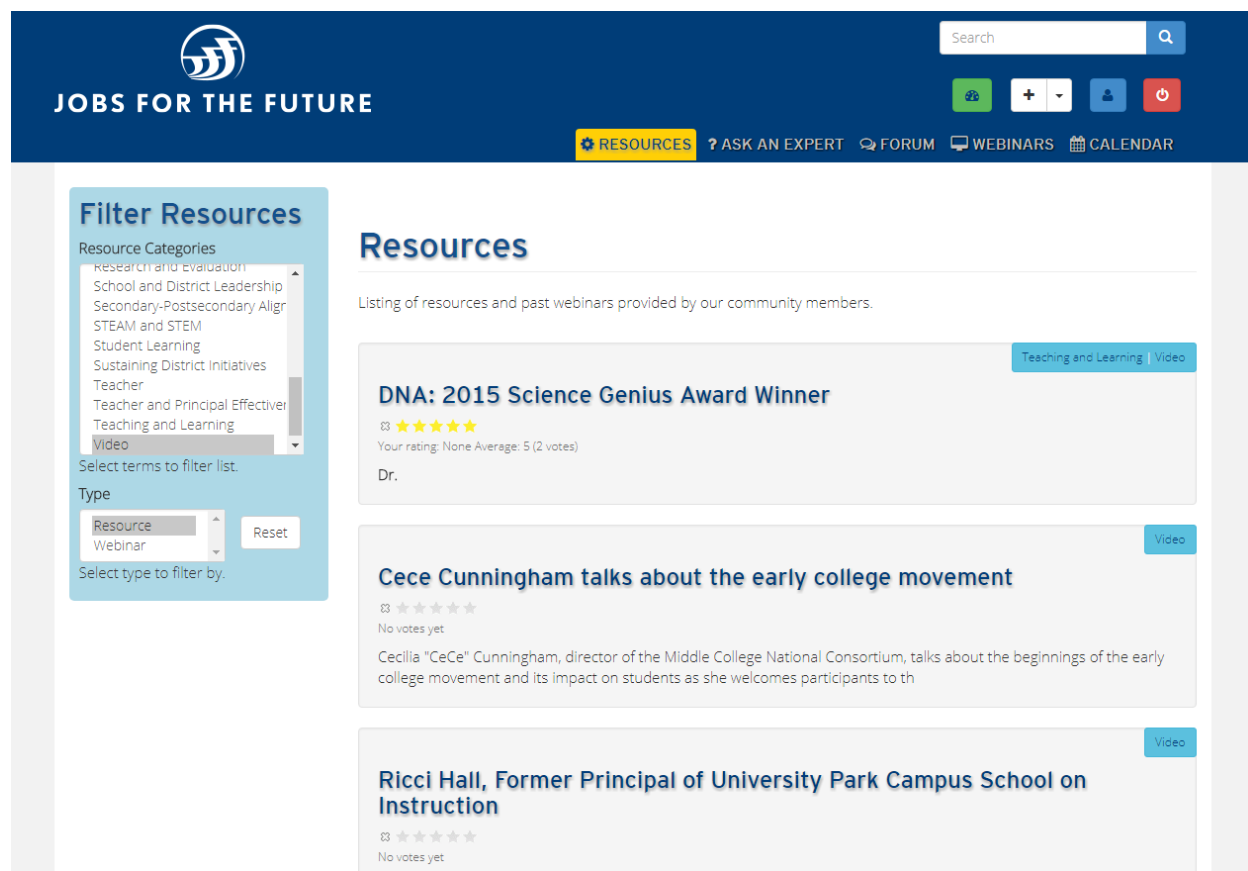
In Year 3, participation in the COP was expanded to additional i3 projects in which JFF was a partner—the STEM Early College Expansion Project, with districts in Connecticut and Michigan, and the College and Career Readiness Expansion Partnership, with districts in Ohio. These projects were also seeking to implement Early College principles in comprehensive high schools; expanding the COP was intended to lead to cross-fertilization of ideas among the different districts.

In Year 4 of implementation, webinars were hosted by project and district staff members across all three i3 projects. By the end of the ECEP project, a total of 33 webinars had been hosted on

numerous topics such as research-based interventions for Algebra success, cooperative learning, and progress monitoring. These webinars were posted on the COP.

Although the COP was up and running, maximizing its potential and creating awareness of the resource among ECEP participants was a challenge. For example, in fall 2016, to assess participants' needs and identify topics for webinars, JFF distributed a survey to potential users across the three i3 projects. The first question asked if they were familiar with the COP website and 36% of respondents (22/61) stated that they were not. This was also expressed during interviews conducted in fall 2016 when a number of district- and school-level participants stated that they were unfamiliar with the COP.

Other participants indicated that, while they were aware of the COP, it was not a regularly visited website for them. Most participants mentioned using CIF-related videos on the Teaching Channel instead, and one instructional coach also mentioned using Edutopia because they offered videos from University Park (a model Early College in Massachusetts, where the CIF was first developed).

An examination of the COP at the end of the project showed that, in addition to the archived webinars, there was a growing collection of resources on topics such as coaching, the CIF, presentation skills, research and evaluation, and sustainability, among others. There was very little activity, however, on the two other interactive components of the site; the "Ask an expert?" portal (only two questions had been posed) and the Discussion Forum (which included a total of 4 posts). Table 5 summarizes the changes in implementation that occurred over the course of the grant.

Table 5. Changes in Implementation of the COP across Project Years

Year 1 2013-14	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
Identified need and audience, developed technical specifications, drafted RFP for vendors	Put initial system in place, added limited number of online resources	Administered needs assessment survey, developed online learning plan, moved from structure with district-specific sections to structure for all participants, started bringing members of other i3 projects into the online community, added resources, conducted webinars to introduce the COP	Administered additional needs assessment survey, conducted webinars on a variety of topics, added resources

Fidelity of Implementation

FOI was assessed annually for Years 2-4 for the COP. It consisted of two indicators: (1) establishment of an online network planning group and annual plan, and (2) provision of online professional development aligned with the annual plan. Table 6 below summarizes FOI for Years 2-4.

Table 6. FOI for the Community of Practice, Years 2-4

Indicator	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
Online planning group and annual plan	COP in place in 14-15; planning group for use in place by summer of 2015	In place for 15-16	In place for 16-17
Provision of online professional development	NA	Webinars delivered in 15-16	Webinars delivered in 16-17

Lessons Learned

Initially, the COP was conceptualized as something that would be managed by the districts themselves, however, this level of commitment proved to be too much, and JFF moved to take primary responsibility for posting content and organizing webinars. This modification suggests that it may be best if a single organization takes initial responsibility for ensuring an online community is up and running prior to "handing it over" to the users to manage.

One of the challenges faced by the COP, as with many online communities, was making potential participants aware of its availability and getting them to engage. A learning community is only successful if individuals actively participate, contribute resources, and engage in dialogue with each other. Over the first three years of the grant, there were limited resources available on the COP, which meant that there was little reason for people to access it. As the amount of resources has increased, staff noted the need to pay more attention to marketing to ensure that more people are aware of the materials offered on the site.

Section VI: Instructional Coaching

Overview

ECEP was expected to provide instructional coaching services to teachers across all participating schools within the three districts. The original goal of the instructional coaching was to train teachers, particularly those who teach the core subjects, to utilize the CIF in their lessons. Although the role of the instructional coaches varied by district, in general, this support to teachers was in the form of coaching cycles (pre-conference, observation, de-brief), leading or assisting with school/district professional development, and/or assisting teachers on an as-needed basis. Across all activities the purpose of the coaching was to build the instructional capacity in each school and move the i3 work forward with all school-level stakeholders.

Early in the project, instructional coaches worked to promote the ECEP goals, build relationships with teachers and administrators, and to understand the needs of the individual schools and districts. As the project matured, the role of the coaches and the frequency of their visits to the schools changed. To build capacity to carry on the work of implementing CIF strategies in the classroom, instructional coaches began working more closely with school leaders, particularly teacher departmental leaders, to lead instructional monitoring efforts that were consistent with the CIF. Helping school leaders build the capacity to provide internal instructional monitoring consistent with the CIF was seen as important to sustaining the work if districts were unable or unwilling to continue instructional coaching in the absence of grant funding.

District-Specific Implementation

The sections below provide a summary of how instructional coaching changed over the course of the project across the different districts.

Denver

During the first three years of the project, the grant supported three district-wide instructional coaches; one coach returned to the classroom in Year 4. In addition, JFF provided an external instructional coach to support the work of the three district coaches as part of JFF's technical assistance to the districts. One issue identified in the Year 1 of the project was that, due to strong union contracts that govern teacher evaluations, instructional coaches had to adhere to certain restrictions such as observation and/or coaching sessions that could not last more than 30 minutes unless the teacher requested the coaching. Each school within the district also had internal instructional coaches supported by other funds so a goal of the first year was to have ECEP-funded district coaches coordinate with school-based coaches to align efforts around improving instruction. As part of this work, the ECEP project director convened school-based

instructional support personnel team meetings whereby instructional coaches met periodically with the principal to plan and coordinate their work.

In terms of the coaching roll-out, each school could decide how to utilize instructional coaches. The majority of schools preferred to engage in a school-wide roll-out, but some schools decided to focus on one particular grade or on teachers of core subjects. In Year 2, the three coaches worked with participating schools and their instructional support teams to plan and coordinate PD and one-on-one coaching. Instructional coaches also focused their time on coaching high school-based adjunct instructors who were teaching dual credit courses.

In Year 3, the instructional coaches continued to provide one-on-one coaching and PD sessions. During this year, coaches also provided one-on-one or group coaching to the Differentiated Roles teacher leaders and adjunct faculty. The instructional coaches also implemented a train-the-trainer model whereby schools became increasingly responsible for their professional development planning. In addition, instead of each coach being assigned to a school, all coaches shared responsibility for all schools. These district-based coaches met with the JFF external instructional coach for PD once a month, and in the schools, continued to provide one-on-one coaching, observations, and walkthroughs using the Early College rubric.

In Year 4, the Denver coaching program was in transition. Of the three district instructional coaches, one returned to the classroom at the beginning of the year and, although another coach was brought onboard in the spring, there was an extensive onboarding process to prepare the new coach. Also, because of the unexpected passing of the project lead, the remaining two district coaches had to assume, for an extended period of time, many of the project management responsibilities that had been under the purview of the project lead. These responsibilities included helping some of the schools complete applications for the Colorado Early College designation, supporting implementation of the JFF Middle School Curriculum, and assisting schools with their sustainability plans. The unexpected passing of the project lead also led to an unplanned suspension of coaching to the 15 program schools for most of the fall 2016 semester as the district coped with the loss of one of its senior staff members.

Given the more limited availability of the two coaches in Year 4, they focused their efforts on continuing to support a train-the-trainer model to help senior teacher leaders disseminate the CIF strategies. The professional development and coaching centered on aligning the application of the CIF strategies into lessons and using the JFF CIF Student Rubric as evidence of fidelity to the CIF model. This extended to coaching around lesson plans that embedded strategies being used in several of the i3 schools. The coaches also continued efforts to demonstrate to teachers how the CIF strategies were aligned to other district and state initiatives. In late spring 2017, a third instructional coach was hired; however, this individual was only able to participate in a limited way as she was learning the position.

South Texas

Because there was overlap in the services provided to both South Texas districts, we begin this section with an overview of findings that were common to both districts followed by a summary of changes that were more unique to PSJA and Brownsville. In both of the Texas districts, EdTX provided external instructional coaches that both worked with teachers directly themselves and also worked with the instructional coaches hired by the districts to develop their expertise. The coaches structured their work with the teachers using a coaching cycle, which included a pre-conference, observation, and de-brief. The coaches also worked with principals to create buy-in for the process; they also provided professional development to the campus and worked with teachers during their planning time.

In Years 1 and 2, EdTX provided ten instructional coaches across the two districts. The number of external coaches was purposefully reduced in Years 3 and 4 as part of a planned transfer of coaching responsibility to the districts. Starting in Year 3, EdTX supplemented the instructional coaching with a specialist who focused on providing professional development, as well as a CIF Implementation Facilitator who worked with principals around instruction (described under the leadership coaching section). The PD Specialist position was designed to reduce the burden of the instructional coaches in trying to provide school-wide professional development. The PD Specialist was expected to accomplish three deliverables every month: a monthly newsletter, webinar, and a PD activity at each of the i3 schools.

Brownsville

In Year 1, EdTX provided six instructional coaches who worked with three district-based coaches. These instructional coaches served 15 teachers who were identified by the principal. While they did work with teachers to implement the CIF through individual coaching and group PD in the first year, the coaches reported that much of their focus was on building relationships with teachers and creating buy-in from the principals.

In Year 2, EdTX continued to provide six coaches who worked with teachers and internal instructional coaches within Brownsville. In addition, Brownsville had three district-based coaches, a TLI coach, and 58 additional coaches in the system with whom the ECEP coaches had to interface.

In Year 3, as part of their planned phase out, EdTX provided three external coaches to Brownsville who each worked with two cohorts of 16 teachers (11th-grade teachers in core subjects and dual enrollment teachers)—a new cohort each semester. This year also posed some challenges for the internal coaching in Brownsville. Two of the internal coaches left and their positions were not filled during the 2016 fall semester, leaving only one internal coach available to coach at two middle schools and leaving four middle schools underserved. Finally,

the work of the coaches was supplemented by the PD specialist who planned and implemented PD across the participating district schools.

In Year 4 of the project, the two EdTX external coaches emphasized sustaining the work past the grant funding period. The external coaches worked primarily on assisting department heads in providing CIF instruction to their department's teachers. These coaches also supported the three internal instructional coaches and worked with district and school administrators to ensure sustainable practices were in place as the grant came to an end. In addition to the external coaches, the district also received services from the EdTX PD specialist who coordinated PD sessions for program schools.

PSJA

In Year 1 of the project, EdTX provided four external instructional coaches that worked both directly with the teachers and also with six school-based coaches who were hired by the district and placed within each school. In this first year, principals were also being prepared to serve as internal coaches (this resulted in some concern from the instructional coaches because principals' observational role has historically been evaluative in nature, running counter to the non-evaluative aspect of the coaching process). Each coach (both internal and external) worked with an estimated 15 teachers, seeing each teacher an estimated two times a month or 18-20 days a year. The instructional coaches worked with teachers around implementation of the CIF through individual coaching and by providing group professional development.

In Year 2, PSJA had four external coaches from EdTX and six district-based coaches who had been trained in the first year and were able to work directly with teachers themselves. Principals were no longer considered to be instructional coaches. The coaches continued to conduct coaching cycles with individual teachers and provide professional development to teams within the schools.

In Year 3, there was a reduction in the number of external coaches. EdTX provided the equivalent of two full-time instructional coaches. Two instructional coaches were part-time; one served two middle schools and one high school. One instructional coach was full-time and served one high school and two middle schools. The EdTX external instructional coaches continued to meet with the district-supported instructional coaches.

In Year 4, instructional coaches continued to coordinate with internal, school-based coaches, but the focus of that year was on sustaining the work past the grant funding period. In PSJA, there was one external EdTX coach for the two i3 high schools and four middle schools in the district. This coach worked with 27 department heads and two district high school instructional coaches. In the final year, the work of the external coach focused on the department heads and coaching them to coach teachers within their departments after the grant ended.

Also in Year 4, there were no middle school internal instructional coaches, and the high school internal instructional coaches took on additional responsibilities around teacher evaluations as their positions were funded by multiple grants. One of the coaches that we interviewed suggested that serving as a coach and evaluator created some problems with teachers as the coaching was meant to be non-evaluative but was being offered by those who had evaluation responsibilities. In addition to the role of the coaches, the district continued to use the services of a PD Specialist who coordinated PD sessions for program schools.

Table 7 provides a summary of major activities of instructional coaches, including changes across time. Because the coaching looked different across districts, the table is broken out by district.

Table 7. Changes in Implementation of Instructional Coaching across Project Years

District	Year 1 2013-14	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
DPS	• 2 district-wide coaches; each school has coaches funded by other projects • District coaches coordinated efforts of school-based coaches to align efforts • Instructional Support personnel teams created so that all coaches could meet with principal at some point to plan their work • Roll-out of coaching scope and focus determined by each school • Union agreements restricted some aspects of instructional coaching • JFF provided one external coach to support the two district ECEP coaches	• 3 district-wide coaches continued to work with school instructional support teams • Focused efforts on working with adjunct high school faculty teaching dual enrollment course	• 3 district-wide coaches continued to provide coaching to adjunct faculty, but also began providing coaching to Differentiated Roles teacher leaders • Implemented train-the-trainer model to build capacity for providing instructional coaching • District coaches continued to meet monthly with JFF external instructional coach for continued PD	• Focus of coaching on train-the-trainer with lead teachers to promote sustainability. • One district coach returned to the classroom, one became the project lead after the original project lead passed away unexpectedly; one full time district coach remaining • Continued focus on demonstrating the alignment between CIF strategies and other district/state initiatives

District	Year 1 2013-14	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
South Texas	• Coaches participated in observation cycles and provide professional development • School principals determined who coaches work with	• Coaches continued observations and professional development • Coordinates work with other district- and school-based instructional coaches	• CIF Implementation Facilitator hired to work with principals around instruction • PD Specialist hired by EdTX to reduce load on instructional coaches to provide PD	• Focus of coaching on sustainability • District continued to use PD Specialist to coordinate and provide professional development to teachers
Brownsville	• 6 EdTX instructional coaches served 15 teachers per school; 3 district-based coaches serving 5 teachers per school • Work with principals to create leadership buy-in	• 6 EdTX instructional coaches and three district-based coaches	• 3 EdTX coaches worked with a cohort of core subject and adjunct teachers using a semester system where two cohorts were trained each semester • 1 district-based coach; 2 internal instructional coaches left the district so no services were provided two 4 middle schools during this semester	• 2 EdTX external coaches • 3 internal coaches
PSJA	• 4 EdTX instructional coaches served 15 teachers per school twice a month • 6 campus-based coaches • Principals trained to be instructional coaches. Concern that they would be seen as more evaluative	• 4 EdTX instructional coaches and 6 campus-based coaches • Coordinated work with other school-based instructional coaches • School principals dictated coaches' scope of work	• 3 EdTX instructional coaches (2 of which worked part-time) and 2 campus-based coaches	• Focus of coaching on sustainability • 1 EdTX external coach and two campus-based coaches • Internal school-based instructional coaches took on more evaluation tasks, which some perceived as creating conflict with coaching responsibilities (that were supposed to be evaluation free)

Fidelity of Implementation

As part of the grant, ECEP partners were required to provide schools with external instructional coaching support with sufficient frequency to meet the goals of the project. FOI relative to

instructional coaching was determined by the number of coaching days provided to the schools. Each school was targeted to receive 17-22 days of instructional coaching over the course of the year. Table 8 shows the target number of coaching days and the actual number of coaching days for the three years assessed in this project.

In Year 2 of the project, Denver schools received an average of 20 days of coaching, and Texas schools received an average of 71 days of coaching. Most coaches were working with more than one school; Denver coaches worked with up to four schools. In addition, for all schools, the number of days each coach spent in a given school was driven by (1) access to the principal, (2) the school's needs, and (3) the teacher's needs and schedule. All Brownsville and PSJA schools exceeded the targeted days of participation and thus, met FOI at the district-level. Five schools in Denver did not reach the targeted days of participation. Only 66% of the Denver schools met the targeted number of days, therefore FOI was not met in that year.

In Year 3, all the schools exceeded the targeted number of days of participation and thus, met FOI. According to project records, Brownsville schools received an average of 57 days and PSJA schools received an average of 61 days of coaching. DPS schools received an average of 45 days of coaching.

During Year 4, the FOI goal was 8-15 coaching days per school; this includes both external and internal/district/campus-based coaching. Brownsville schools received an average of 70 days and Denver and PSJA schools received an average of 36 days of coaching. All schools exceeded the targeted days of participation and thus, met FOI.

Table 8. Fidelity of Implementation, Instructional Coaching, by Year

FOI Data	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
# of Schools[a]	30	30	30
Average Targeted Coaching Consultations	17-22	17-22	8-15
Average # of Coaching Consultations	54	52	47
Range of Participation (lowest to highest # of consultations)	10-86	21-149	9-179
Range of % of Consultations Received	58%-505%	123%-876%	112%-2237%
% of Schools Meeting FOI	83% of schools (2 districts)	100% of schools (3 districts)	100% of schools (3 districts)

[a]Two schools are combination 6th-12th-grade schools.

Lessons Learned

Over the course of the project, our findings indicated that instructional coaching was an integral part of promoting and sustaining the work, particularly among classroom teachers. We found efforts to promote CIF strategies in the classroom were strengthened with increased coach availability, particularly for one-on-one work with teachers. Several project participants

mentioned that there needed to be an appropriate ratio of coaches to schools, with the specific recommendation of one coach for each school. As the FOI results showed, there was substantial variability in the amount of coaching received with some schools receiving a much higher level of coaching than the initial targeted amounts. This suggests that the original planned levels of 17-22 days per school per year are likely not sufficient to result in the desired instructional change.

Also in regard to the role of the instructional coaches, we found that when instructional coaches were tasked with multiple responsibilities beyond coaching, particularly when coaches were asked to serve in an evaluative role, there was concern that these additional (and sometimes conflicting) responsibilities diminished the impact that these coaches may have had in bringing about instructional change.

Participants also reported that aligning and embedding CIF strategies, practices, and protocols within existent local and state initiatives decreased the perception that ECEP created additional burdens for teachers. This was particularly true for schools in Denver, which were involved in multiple district and state initiatives. This alignment work was also seen as an important tool for promoting sustainability through institutionalization of the CIF strategies within school and district practices, particularly in districts with significant leadership and teacher turnover.

One of our most consistent findings was that the effectiveness of instructional coaches was linked to support that they received from school leaders. The work of the instructional coaches was enhanced when coaches coordinated with, and received the support of, school leadership teams. Coordination allowed external coaches to work more efficiently and effectively with internal coaches, school administrators, and teachers. Strong support from school leadership indicated to their personnel that this project was important and that making instructional changes in the classroom was a priority.

Finally, we also found that the way instructional coaching with initially rolled-out had an influence on school teachers' level of buy-in toward coaching and the ECEP program in general. Specifically, several teachers and coaches that we interviewed suggested that the implementation of the instructional coaching would be improved by a more thoughtful and strategic approach regarding who receives the coaching and how the strategies are shared with teachers. In terms of strategy, one suggestion was to initially, identify and work with a cohort of teachers who are more receptive to the project and willing to participate. Early adopters of the coaching are more likely to become champions of the project and promote the project among peers if this "coalition of the willing" sees the coaching as worthwhile.

In terms of how the CIF strategies are shared with teachers, recommendations were diverse. Some of the feedback that we received suggested that teachers would be better served by focusing on one or two CIF strategies at a time, whereas others recommended that covering

multiple strategies at a time would be more efficient at promoting instructional change. Although recommendations around rolling-out CIF strategies were varied, there was considerable agreement among teachers and instructional coaches that buy-in was increased when teachers were fully informed, early in the implementation process, about the purpose of the project, the role of the instructional coach, and the goals for bringing about instructional change. For example, in the first year of the project some teachers in one district believed that they were selected for coaching as a punishment. This initial lack of clarity about the grant and the expectations for the teachers seemed to hamper relationship-building between coaches and teachers at the outset of the project.

Section VII: i3 Cabinet

District-Specific Implementation

To manage the work of ECEP, each district was required to set up a governing structure, conceptualized as an i3 Cabinet. From the beginning of the project, each of the districts implemented the i3 Cabinet differently; thus, the implementation in each district is described separately.

Denver

In Denver, the i3 work was embedded into the agenda of an already-established group focused on postsecondary readiness that consisted of the instructional superintendents, the executive directors, the associate superintendent, the director of Early College, and the director of career and college readiness. A district staff member noted that all the work of high schools was focused on postsecondary readiness, "Postsecondary readiness is really all of our secondary programming." The topic of Early College came up on an "as-needed" basis during meetings, with Early College-related items placed on the agenda by the project lead.

There were additional i3-specific meetings with the instructional superintendents and school leadership. During those meetings, they focused on the schools' vision and the i3 support structures for teachers, staff, and leaders.

The higher education partners were not included at the regular district meetings; instead the project director met with them as needed. During those meetings, the agenda topics ranged from partnerships with local businesses to adjunct professional development to the piloting of courses to pathway development. Most meetings focused on the college course prerequisites and pathway development.

Brownsville

The i3 Cabinet in Brownsville was a district-level entity that met monthly and was responsible for coordinating the ECEP efforts within the district. Its 20 members included the superintendent, the area superintendents, representatives from advanced academics, college readiness, the research and data department, the TLI, curriculum and instruction, guidance and counseling, special education and bilingual education. In the second year of project implementation, all of the high schools in Brownsville received Early College designation. As a result, membership in the Cabinet was expanded to include principals in all the high schools, even if they were not part of the i3 grant.

In Year 1, Educate Texas staff supported and often facilitated the meetings. Starting in Year 2, the district took ownership of the Cabinet meetings with district staff organizing and facilitating the meeting with input from EdTX staff. By Year 3, membership had grown and included principals, Early College high school staff, Early College high school liaisons, the TSC Early

College dual enrollment team, and staff from their other postsecondary partners: University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and Texas A&M Kingsville. The higher education partners were active participants at the Cabinet meetings.

Data served as the focal point of the meetings. The IHEs had an opportunity to share any issues they were concerned about and school leadership had dedicated time to look at their data relative to the Early College work (e.g., TSI success rates, course enrollment, course completion, student performance).

Based on work completed by PSJA (described below), EdTX developed a data dashboard for Brownsville and their partner, TSC, which could also be utilized to share student data with all 15 of the college's district partners.

PSJA

As in Brownsville, PSJA created an i3 Cabinet the met monthly. Membership in the i3 Cabinet included key district individuals—the superintendent; the district coordinator; district administrators in charge of high schools, middle schools, Career and Technical Education, College Readiness, and Public Relations; the head of the instructional coaching; and a representative from the college partner. The i3 Cabinet also had a set of "action groups," which included district staff with expertise on topics such as professional development, data, budgeting, rigor, and curriculum and instruction. Although postsecondary partners were invited to these meetings, project staff reported sporadic attendance throughout the life of the grant.

EdTX staff assisted with coordinating and facilitating the meetings throughout the first two years of the project. By Year 3, PSJA staff had taken on the responsibility of developing the agendas and conducting the meetings.

Also by Year 3, the meetings were being utilized to accomplish more critical work around implementation, with greater involvement from the principals. The Cabinet had workgroups/subcommittees focused on data, college readiness, scaling up, dual enrollment, and transforming high school into college. A district staff member indicated how the principals had been involved,

> The last year and a half [to] two years, the principals have been engaged around data for TSI, the Texas Success Initiative, college entrance exam, dual- credit, AP, students…so I think that it's been very valuable that we've engaged our i3 principals at the high school in that form and fashion, and we started also including our middle school principals to some extent and now we're going to take it to another level in making sure that we involve all four middle school principals as well.

The i3 Cabinet data subcommittee also developed and released a data dashboard with South Texas College (on which the previously mentioned Brownsville data dashboard was based). Through the data dashboard, the district was able to generate reports that included district and college data. The development came about via collaboration between district and community college leaders, including the college partners' Chief Information Technology Officer and his staff members. Both PSJA and South Texas College wanted real-time actionable data, but recognized the need for a common language. Using resources from ed.gov, they developed guidelines around the data that would be shared, arranged for staff training and created a data sharing agreement. During i3 Cabinet meetings, the dashboard was shared in real-time and school leaders could see how their students were faring in their college classes.

By the end of the project, membership in the i3 Cabinet had expanded to include all middle and high schools, even those who were not in i3. The meetings focused on sharing data (e.g., TSI success rates, course enrollment, course completion, student performance) and updates from schools and various workgroups (e.g., TSI, advising/counseling).

Table 9 documents the changes that occurred relative to the three districts' i3 Cabinets over time.

Table 9. Changes in Implementation Across Project Years

District	Year 1 2013-14	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
DPS	Never a separate ECEP-specific entity that focused only on the Early College work. Cabinet activities embedded in regular meetings, IHE partner meetings held separately			
Brownsville	Cabinet formed, EdTX staff facilitate	Expanded to include all high school principals, Brownsville staff take over facilitation role	Participation expanded to all three postsecondary partners	Cabinet meetings continued
PSJA	Cabinet formed, EdTX staff facilitate	EdTX staff continued facilitating	PSJA staff took over facilitation role, data subcommittee created college-district data dashboard	Membership expanded to all high schools and middle schools

Fidelity of Implementation

FOI for this Key Component was determined by whether or not an i3 Cabinet had been established and was functioning (documented by copies of meeting agendas and minutes). Table 10 summarizes FOI for Years 2-4.

Table 10. FOI for i3 Cabinet, Years 2-4

Indicator	Year 2 2014-15	Year 3 2015-16	Year 4 2016-17
Establishment and regular meetings of an i3 Cabinet or coordinating structure	In place in all three districts	In place in all three districts	In place in all three districts

Lessons Learned

Although the i3 Cabinet was originally conceptualized purely as a district-level coordinating mechanism, the districts recognized that it was important to involve school leadership as well. Having regular participation from postsecondary stakeholders strengthened the relationship with postsecondary partners and allowed for regular opportunities for problem-solving around issues such as students' readiness for college courses and adjunct instructors. For example, Cabinet meetings in Brownsville regularly included discussions regarding how their schools could meet capacity needs for college courses.

The meetings were also seen as more effective when they were centered on data. For example, principals were asked to bring data summarizing how their students were doing on the placement exam. In PSJA (as in Brownsville), the work of the Cabinet led to a data dashboard providing the district with information around how students were doing in college courses.

Finally, it appears that all districts felt the need for some sort of a coordinating structure. Denver, for example, established an Early College office to help administer the growing Early College work in its district.

Section VIII: Sustainability

The intent of the ECEP implementation supports was to build capacity to allow districts and schools to sustain the Early College work after the grant was completed. This section of the report provides information on each Key Component and the extent to which it is expected to be sustained after the funding ends.

Technical Assistance to Districts

Given the purpose of the technical assistance to the district—to build the districts' capacity to do the work—there was never any intention that this support would be continued after the grant was concluded. However, the technical assistance itself has had a focus on working with the districts to sustain the other implementation supports provided by the grant. In November 2016, leadership from the three participating districts met at PSJA after the Early College Conference for a three-hour meeting focused on sustainability. During this meeting, the team discussed the different levers needed for sustaining the work, including maintaining a decision-making structure such as the i3 Cabinet as well as the human capital that needs to be in place (e.g., adjunct faculty for teaching college courses, college liaisons/transition counselors, and instructional coaches).

Additional work around sustainability occurred regularly between EdTX and JFF project staff and district staff; for example, JFF staff had DPS and all participating schools complete a formal, written sustainability plan. For the two South Texas districts, EdTX set aside funds to support sustainability planning and proposed to the districts that EdTX use those funds to hire a consulting firm that could review their resources and help the district align or reallocate resources in a way that would support the grant-related activities that the districts wished to continue. Brownsville participated in this planning activity and PSJA decided to focus instead on internal planning. A district staff member discussed how the technical assistance had been helpful relative to sustaining the work, stating, "…where they've been really helpful is being thought-process partners for me...as I think about…the sustainability piece for our schools and our district."

Leadership Coaching

Under the grant, the leadership coaching was provided by JFF and it does not appear that the districts will cover the costs for individuals specifically tasked with coaching principals to continue working in their schools. However, the districts have provided additional principal support through a variety of approaches, including involving principals in i3 Cabinet meetings and providing principal-specific professional development opportunities. It is likely that these types of activities will continue when the grant concludes.

Community of Practice

The COP is a central repository of resources supported by JFF, and JFF has committed to sustaining this work after the grant ends and will support it across projects. A JFF staff member noted that they needed to work on the marketing and on broadening the content that was offered:

> After this grant we're going to continue the Community of Practice. I think one of the things that we probably need to do is get someone that can be really full-time at crafting this thing.... I think we can get the blog going...ask the expert. We think it needs to be reformulated a little...we need to integrate career pathways.... Everything that we're doing, especially from the other I3 campuses.

As the project was concluding, interviews with staff around sustainability indicated the need for a central repository to house the resources developed as part of the grant. The COP could be a natural fit for this repository.

Instructional Coaching

The goal of the instructional coaching was to support implementation of the CIF in schools. Much of the work to sustain implementation of these CIF instructional strategies began in Year 4. Instructional coaches in all three districts worked with principals, leadership teams, department heads, and teacher leaders with the goal of helping these staff members take ownership for monitoring and encouraging teachers to continue to implement CIF strategies and support activities such as instructional rounds. One of the instructional coaches that we interviewed indicated that teacher leaders were initially resistant to these efforts around sustainability with one coach saying,

> I want to say one was a little resistant last year. The external coach and myself wanted [the department head] to have that awareness of what her teachers were doing and what we were coaching them on and the reason why we were coaching. I think what we did is, we got her onboard this year by having her observe her teachers. She didn't really want to do that either, she just felt like her teachers were going to take that as, she was just kind of like, a negative thing. We didn't give her an option, we said, "You know, this is going to be good for you and your teachers to know that you're there and you're involved." When we did that, I think she was a little aware of what's happening. I think her perception was, they're doing the content area and the way it's being delivered, she thought they were doing it, but in reality, when she actually was there and seeing it, she realized that she didn't see a lot that she expected. That opened her eyes to be like, "Okay, I think I need to see all my teachers now." Now, she's coming to us...and she said, "You know, I want to see all my teachers."

Instructional coaching was deemed expensive for both Texas districts, with district leaders viewing the instructional coach position as one that would be challenging to support without additional funding. Efforts to build internal capacity among school staff around coaching was seen as an alternative strategy for continued focus on the CIF strategies and coaching in general in the face of limited resources for dedicated instructional coaches. Although Denver schools had greater capacity to offer instructional coaching beyond the grant, part of the effort in this district involved instructional coaches reinforcing connections between the CIF strategies and ongoing school, district, and state policies. These discussions around alignment between the Early College Design Elements and local and state initiatives was designed to demonstrate to school and district leaders that the goals of the program were consistent with, and most importantly, did not add to, burdens created by the various ongoing initiatives within the district.

i3 Cabinet

The i3 Cabinet was intended to be the primary organizing structure for the project, what project staff described as "a leadership-level structure to continue to set priorities around a set of instructional changes, Early College structures, career pathways." In both Texas districts, interviewees indicated that the i3 Cabinet would continue. Project staff saw the Brownsville Cabinet meetings as very active and highly likely to continue, saying, "In Brownsville, the Cabinet is functioning at an extremely high level. I'm very proud of that district. They have all of their higher ed partners there…the meetings are very discussion-based." In PSJA, a district staff member commented, "The Cabinet meetings are going to be…maintained or sustained." On the other hand, two project staff members expressed concern over whether the PSJA i3 Cabinet meetings would continue because the higher education partners had stopped attending.

In Denver, because there was never a separate entity that focused only on the Early College work, i3 was embedded in the regular district-wide leadership meetings. Given the establishment of a district office focused specifically on Early College, this entity should be able to ensure the day-to-day management of the work. District staff have also indicated plans to put a structure in place allowing for more regular interaction across the district and with postsecondary partners.

Sustainability Conclusions

Overall, the districts have indicated commitment to sustaining many of the supports that were in place, albeit with a slightly different approach. The next section synthesizes the activities completed, the lessons learned, and the sustainability efforts to create a revised model of implementation supports that can be replicated and sustained as the Early College work moves forward.

Section IX: Lessons Learned around Replication

This report has described the implementation of specific support activities that were originally conceptualized as part of the Early College Expansion Project and articulated in the original logic model (Figure 1). This concluding section revisits these implementation supports, incorporating lessons learned about these activities and insights from project staff around how they would do the work differently if they were to start over. Finally, we also revisit the logic model to provide insights that might help others who seek to replicate this work in other districts.

Implementation supports can be conceptualized at two different levels: (1) the support that a district can and should provide to help schools implement the Early College Model and (2) the support that a district needs to develop the capacity to do this work. This concluding section is organized according to those two levels of implementation supports, but first we start with an important activity that is often not incorporated into program logic models: selecting strong candidates, districts in this case, for participation.

Selection of Districts to do the Work

Although this was not an activity articulated in the logic model, selecting the right districts and schools to engage in the Early College work was critical. Literature on the effective implementation of interventions indicates that a key first step is assessing the capacity and readiness of a host setting (Durlak & Dupre, 2008; Meyers, Durlak, & Wandersman, 2012).

For this project, the districts were selected as part of the i3 application process and included a district that was one of the earliest and most extensive adopters of the Early College work as well as two other districts with a history of commitment to dual enrollment and interest in expanding the work. Also important was a state policy context that allowed for partnerships between districts and postsecondary institutions. Both Colorado and Texas had policies in place that were supportive of dual enrollment and that allowed for schools to be designated Early Colleges.

Another key aspect of identifying districts was ensuring that there was buy-in from the very top. All participants commented on the importance of ensuring that the superintendent (at the district-level) and the principal (at the school level) had a clear understanding of the Early College work and believed in it. The first thing one district staff member said when asked about advice for other districts: "You better have buy in from the top first…. This needs to be a district initiative." A postsecondary representative from a different district agreed,

> So if the superintendent is there, showing visible support for the program, things will fall into place a lot easier than it will be with people banging the drum from the area

superintendent and lower levels. I think top level leadership, if it's not absolutely key, it's at least very important.

This commitment and support was also seen as important for the postsecondary partner. A postsecondary partner said,

> Having committed partners, with our hearts in the right place, is also essential. I don't think that this is a business for bean counters or paper pushers, I think there has to be a passion for the work, a passion for students, to make this thing really successful. That's probably it. I would sum it all up with saying there has to be a commitment to making this succeed.

In addition to commitment to the work, a strong postsecondary partner also needed to have experience with dual credit courses and the ability to expand their capacity to serve more students.

One tool we might recommend for projects as they expand this work is a rubric that can be used to assess the readiness of a school system to engage in the Early College work. This type of rubric was not developed as part of this project, but it may be useful moving forward.

Implementation Supports for Early Colleges

When schools are implementing the Early College model, they need substantial external support, particularly when the work is conceptualized as a district-wide effort. In the original logic model, some of these supports were provided by the external partners (JFF and EdTX), but if we examine the work through the lens of sustainability, they are actually activities that the district and/or postsecondary partner can, and should, develop the capacity to undertake and continue by themselves. These supports include: (1) clarifying and communicating the vision of the Early College model, (2) aligning the Early College work with other district initiatives, (3) creating and maintaining postsecondary partnerships, (4) creating college liaison positions, (5) creating curriculum pathways, (6) developing capacity to teach college courses, (7) providing coaching and support to school leaders, (8) supporting instructional change, (9) addressing staff turnover, (10) supporting college placement testing, and (11) using data regularly to assess progress. Each of these areas is discussed in more depth below.

Clarifying and Communicating the Vision of the Early College Model

One of the lessons learned from the project was the need to be very clear from the beginning about the vision for Early College and communicate it regularly and frequently. One district staff member commented on the importance of "cohesive messaging," "…truly messaging to everyone, what was Early College, what were we truly trying to accomplish on your campus." A project staff member noted that this communication needed to happen at the beginning of the

work and with multiple audiences: "We should have been telling our story all along. I think it's also setting up better communication plans against the work."

The partners found that a coordinating *Cabinet structure* could be a very effective way of communicating and ensuring that all stakeholders heard the same message. District staff noted the importance of including all stakeholders from the beginning, including school staff, district staff, and postsecondary partners. By the end of the project, one district was moving to invite their Chief Financial Officer and Director of Human Resources so that they could understand the specific issues related to the Early College work. A district staff member noted,

> I think that's one of our strengths, actually,… the governance structure and the communication between us and our IHE partners. It has to be. I mean, if you don't have that communication then trying to implement something like this is going to be a disaster.

A postsecondary partner noted that the communication needed to be more frequent than monthly meetings:

> Another lesson learned, I think, and it's critical, you need to communicate every day. The partners need to communicate every day. You can't function if you communicate once a month at a formal meeting, or once every couple of weeks at a formal meeting. Communication is daily.

Aligning Early College Work with Other Initiatives

Districts, particularly large, urban districts, often have multiple initiatives going on. One of the early lessons learned from this project was the need to ensure that there was alignment among the different initiatives. One district spent time at the beginning identifying the overlap between the Early College work and other projects. For example, they aligned the instructional expectations of the Early College with the expectations of their teacher evaluation framework. It was seen as important to use the same language to describe similar concepts that might be being implemented under different programs. More information about the alignment work undertaken as part of the i3 grant can be found in the JFF report, Taking the Long View: Sustainability Lessons Learned from the Early College Expansion Partnership (Jobs for the Future, 2018).

Creating and Maintaining Postsecondary Partnerships

As noted earlier, strong partnerships between the district and the postsecondary institution(s) are critical to the success of the Early College model. Although partnerships can be negotiated between individual schools and postsecondary institutions, it can be more efficient to have the district negotiate on behalf of multiple schools.

The expectation in this project, and in all Early College work, is that the postsecondary partnership includes a written Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that delineates the specific responsibility of each partner, especially with regard to paying for expenses associated with college courses. In some partnerships, the college will initially cover the cost of tuition (to be reimbursed by the state at a later point) or will provide reduced tuition. Some postsecondary partners agree to cost-saving measures including keeping the same textbooks for three consecutive years or waiving fees.

These partnerships are dependent on good relationships and, as described above, regular and ongoing communication.

Creating College Liaison Positions

Although not included initially in the grant plans, all three districts ended up hiring individuals who could focus specifically on the connection between the high schools and colleges. These individuals—titled "college liaisons," "transition counselors," or "college counselors"—were tasked with responsibilities such as advising, registering students for college classes, working on pathways, etc. We have found similar roles across other Early College projects with which we have worked. Expanding access to dual enrollment courses is a complicated endeavor that requires individuals who can dedicate time; it is very challenging to add these responsibilities on top of other responsibilities people, such as counselors, may already have.

Creating Curriculum Pathways

In the early phases of the Early College work, schools often tried to provide as many college courses as possible to students without necessarily restricting the types of courses students can take. As Early College and dual enrollment activities matured, districts and postsecondary partners recognized the importance of guiding students to take courses that would lead them to some sort of postsecondary credential.

All three i3 districts have engaged in curriculum development and alignment work, focusing particularly on the creation of pathways that create an aligned set of high school and college courses that can lead to a credential or an associate degree. One of the postsecondary partners moved to require that all students taking college credits be on a specific pathway. One district is creating a centralized location for pathways that may require specialized equipment or otherwise be too expensive for individual schools to maintain.

Developing Capacity to Teach College Courses

As the number of students taking college courses greatly expanded, postsecondary partners did not always have sufficient capacity to teach those courses. As a result, districts and postsecondary partners worked together to increase the number of adjunct faculty who were available for college courses. Districts described how they modified their recruitment of high

school teachers to emphasize hiring teachers with the educational credentials that allowed them to qualify as adjunct faculty. A district staff member said,

> Human capital is always an issue, especially in this model, so we're constantly looking at that and trying to find qualified teachers that either we can hire or TSC can hire to help us with our needs as far as specific courses.

Districts also supported a grow-your-own approach by subsidizing teachers' attainment of master's credentials. In one district, the district paid a third of the cost, the college paid a third of the cost, and the teacher paid the final third. More detail on how the capacity issue was being addressed is available in a monograph from JFF entitled, *Solving the Dual Enrollment Staffing Puzzle* (Hooker, November, 2017).

Providing Coaching and Support to School Leaders

One of the earliest lessons learned in this project was the need to provide extensive support to school leaders, including the principal as well as the broader administrative team. There was external coaching provided with once monthly check-ins and the districts supplemented this with additional professional development and opportunities for the principals to come together and problem-solve. Involving the principals in the Cabinet and having additional regular meetings allowed principals to gain a better understanding of the initiative and to discuss issues they may have been facing.

Supporting Instructional Change

The Early College model is not just about expanding access to college courses, it is about ensuring that students are ready for college courses, which involves changing instruction. In the ECEP model, teachers were expected to implement the CIF, a set of student-centered practices intended to engage students in more in-depth learning. Support for instructional change was provided by a combination of external and district-based coaches who worked directly with teachers. According to coaches and project staff, an ideal ratio was having one coach for every one or two schools. We recognize, however, that this is a substantial resource commitment that would be hard for many districts to maintain. Districts utilized a variety of other approaches to support instructional change, including providing professional development and targeting coaching to new teachers who had not been exposed to the instructional strategies. As described earlier, districts also integrated the targeted instructional strategies into district-wide policies or worked to align coaching that occurred under the auspices of other projects.

Addressing Staff Turnover

One of the greatest challenges faced by districts was the turnover of staff at multiple levels, particularly at the district and school. In some cases that turnover was helpful to the project, but even then, it meant bringing someone new "up to speed," in turn, delaying the project. As

one district staff member described, they faced "the difficulties of turnover, principal turnover, staff turnover, and maintaining the momentum of the work."

Districts and postsecondary partners noted the need to address turnover in the planning of their support activities. In general, this meant involving a wider range of individuals in the various aspects of the work. One district staff member described how the people involved in the Cabinet working groups in their district:

> So now when we're really talking about building capacity, it's including other assistant principals that play a role, or bringing them in and shaping them to learn that role of the Early College director…; let's not just have that one Early College director [involved]. Because when they leave, whether it's to get promoted, or move on, then we need to be able to sustain that. And we need to make sure that everybody has the same type of information on hand…

Supporting College Placement Testing

Another early lesson learned was that students who are going to take a significant number of college courses also need to have taken, and passed, college placement exams prior to enrolling in those courses. The participating schools were primarily responsible for ensuring that students took the exam and for thinking about how to prepare students to take the exam; however, districts and postsecondary partners provided support to the schools in a variety of ways. Districts and postsecondary partners worked together to ensure that the cost of any placement exams, such as Accuplacer or the TSI, were covered. One district purchased test-preparation software that was aligned to the TSI. Postsecondary partners also provided support around scheduling the tests.

The district and postsecondary partners also explored alternative ways of assessing students' readiness. For example, one district and partner worked together to align the high school and college curricula such that the IHE partner agreed that successful completion of key high school courses indicated college readiness. A district staff person described it like this:

> We've done a lot more curricular alignment than ever was done before. Looking at our junior year curriculums and having our college partners say that, yes, these meet the rigor of our expectations, and students who pass these courses with a certain grade level, a certain grade, and a certain GPA, could go right into a 100-level class.

Using Data Regularly to Assess Progress

Districts engaged schools in discussions around data as a way to track progress toward the project's goals. In two of the districts, schools were required to come to the Cabinet meetings with data about the numbers of students taking, and passing, college readiness exams and the number of students taking, and succeeding in, college courses. Schools shared their data with

each other, which provided a measure of accountability and also led to some friendly competition in terms of improving their outcomes.

In two districts, the postsecondary partner and district worked together to link data systems so that the district could track their students' performance in college courses and more easily determine the extent to which students were making progress toward a certificate or a degree.

Implementation Supports for Districts

It is likely that most districts and postsecondary partners will not initially have the capacity to undertake the work described in the previous section. As a result, it may be necessary for an external, experienced organization to provide supports to the district to help them develop that capacity. In this project, JFF and EdTX provided that support.

The primary supports the ECEP external partners provided were: (1) assisting districts in planning and alignment of work; (2) training instructional coaches to work with teachers; (3) providing assistance in developing postsecondary partnerships; (4) providing resources, such as curriculum or tools around instructional practices; (5) delivering leadership coaching to principals; (6) providing instructional coaching directly to teachers; and (7) creating an online COP. The implementation of these support activities and the lessons learned from each have been described earlier in the report.

A lesson learned, which applies across all of the supports, was the need to consider sustainability from the very beginning. Staff noted the importance of being intentional on the front end of the work, particularly in two areas: (1) encouraging districts to think early on about how they were going to fund the work when the grant ended and (2) having the districts embed the instructional expectations into teacher performance appraisal systems.

Another lesson learned was the need to provide support for postsecondary partners. This project was focused primarily on providing supports at the district-level, but similar work was needed at the postsecondary level as well. As one of the staff members put it, "…as much work as we've done on systems at the [district], that same thing needs to happen at the higher-ed."

Revising the Logic Model

As a way of synthesizing the lessons learned and the activities undertaken by the districts to support the Early College work, we took the opportunity to revisit the original logic model. We found that the original logic model did not clearly capture all of the activities that a district needed to undertake to support this work. To encapsulate the lessons learned from the past five years about the supports that are necessary to implement Early Colleges, we have developed a revised logic model with the goal of providing guidance for Early College replication efforts in other settings. The revised logic model (Figure 3, on page 65) explains the supports that external partners should provide (Column 1) to districts and postsecondary

institutions and who would then develop the capacity to provide the implementation supports (Column 2). These services then support the schools as they implement the Early College design elements (Column 3), which are intended to lead to improved student outcomes (Column 4). We believe that this logic model serves as a summary of the work completed over the past four years, but we also anticipate that it would continue to evolve as additional organizations, districts, schools, and postsecondary institutions further develop this work.

Figure 3. Revised ECEP Logic Model

Implementation Supports: External Partners

Selection of districts/IHEs

Planning guidance to districts
- Assistance with strategic planning around early college implementation
- Alignment of early college work to existing efforts
- Guidance on allocation of resources
- Assistance in creating postsecondary partnerships

Technical assistance to IHEs

Provision of resources
- Instructional support materials
- College readiness curriculum

Capacity development
- Develop district capacity to support school leadership
- Develop district capacity to support teachers in instructional changes

Community of Practice

Implementation Supports: District-and IHE-level

District and IHE Organizational Structures

Cabinet
- District, school, and IHE representatives
- Clarifies vision and ensures communication
- Creates strategic plan
- Aligns different initiatives

Postsecondary partnerships

District and IHE Activities

Establishment of college liaisons

Support for adjunct faculty
- Revising hiring practices
- Promoting attainment of credentials necessary to be adjunct
- Professional development for adjunct faculty

Development of curriculum pathways

Support for school leadership teams
- Professional development and networking
- Coaching

Support for instructional change
- Professional development
- Coaching
- Instructional rounds

Support for college placement testing

Sharing and use of data

School-Level Implementation of Early College Design Elements

Student School Experiences

College-Ready Academic Program
- A coherent instructional framework aligned to college-ready standards (CIF)
- Rigorous untracked academic program
- Aligned sequence of college courses, leading to 12+ credits (HS only)

College Headstart
- Exposure to the culture and norms of college
- Explicit instruction on successful academic and social college behaviors
- Inclusive college application and financial aid advising and assistance (HS only)

Wraparound Student Supports
- Comprehensive academic supports
- Strong social and emotional programming and support

School-level Organizational Practices

School planning team

Strong postsecondary partnership

Ongoing job-embedded and integrated prof. dev.

Use of student data to inform decisions/eval. efforts

Set time and support for teacher collaboration

Student Outcomes

Increase in middle school students' readiness for high school

10 percentage point increase in students taking and succeeding in college preparatory courses

90% of students have received some college credit

Increased number of students remaining in school (5 percentage points higher)

Long term: Increased graduation rates

Long term: Increased enrollment and success in postsecondary education

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65

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