

# RESEARCH

## COLLEGE IN HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS – WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS



**College in high school programs – which are referred to by many terms in states across the country – promote partnerships between secondary school systems and institutions of higher education that provide high school students with intentionally designed, rigorous, and authentic postsecondary experiences leading to officially transcribed and transferable college credit towards a recognized postsecondary degree or credential.**

These programs are distinct from credit by exam programs such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, as they are authentic college courses through which students will always receive transcribed postsecondary credit if they pass the course.

There are a large number of research studies at both the national and state level reinforcing these positive outcomes for students. The existing research shows that:

- Students who participate in college in high school programs are more likely to graduate high school, enroll in college, persist in college, and complete a college degree or credential.
- Low-income and underrepresented students in higher education experience the biggest positive impacts on their ability to access and complete college by getting a jumpstart on taking college classes in high school, particularly in early college high schools.
- College in high school programs, and especially early colleges, show a strong return on investment in those states who have examined the long-term impact.

### SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH SHOWS IMPROVED STUDENT POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES

There is strong evidence that college in high school programs like dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and early college high school improve college transitions, persistence, and completion, especially for students traditionally underrepresented in higher education. The data come from peer-reviewed studies using randomized control and quasi-experimental research designs, as well as multi-institution and statewide regression correlation studies from a dozen states.

Collectively, these studies show positive, statistically significant effects when high school students complete college courses, even after controlling for prior academic achievement and demographic variables. Most of these studies aggregate analyses across all forms of dual enrollment, regardless of the location, delivery method, or instructor type.



*“Our results suggest that dual-credit is a promising strategy for increasing the likelihood of students accessing, persisting through, and completing a degree in postsecondary, and is possibly even more impactful than advanced coursework.”*

*[Access full study.](#)*

## MORE STUDENTS ACCESS AND COMPLETE COLLEGE

In 2017, the [What Works Clearinghouse \(WWC\)](#) reviewed dozens of dual enrollment studies against their strict criteria and found a medium-to-large evidence base that shows positive impacts on **high school graduation, college enrollment, persistence in college, and completion of college** from participating in dual enrollment. Early college high schools also have a compelling amount of research data, including a long-running quasi-experimental study by the [American Institutes for Research](#) that shows statistically significant improvements in college access and success for early college students.

In addition to the national studies, recent state-specific studies in [Colorado](#), [Kentucky](#), [Massachusetts](#), [Texas](#), and [North Carolina](#) also demonstrate the significant positive impacts of college in high school programs for students in those states.



*“Early College students were more likely than their peers to go to college and earn a degree. Within 6 years after expected high school graduation, Early College students were significantly more likely than control students to enroll in college (84% vs 77%) and to enroll in 2-year colleges (66% vs 47%).” [Access full study.](#)*

## IMPACT ON LOW-INCOME AND UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

Research has shown that a wide variety of students benefit from participating in college in high school programs, ranging from academically advanced students, to students who are middle-achieving academically, as well youth who may be disconnected from the formal education system entirely.

A growing [body of research](#) shows that college in high school programs have the biggest impact on students of color and low-income students, including a dual enrollment [study](#) released in the summer of 2020 and data from [Massachusetts'](#) early college high schools. There is also evidence that these programs are effective tools for improving college access and success for students whose achievement might fall short of traditional college readiness measures.



*“We found a significant effect of dual enrollment on 2-year and 4-year college enrollment, degree attainment, and early labor market earnings 6 years after high school, with stronger effects for students who are traditionally underrepresented.” [Access full study.](#)*

In addition, the early college high school model has demonstrated effectiveness in serving students at risk of not completing postsecondary education through the intentional design and implementation of curricula and support services. In particular, there are [many examples](#) around the country of early college programs that are designed as a high school completion intervention for students who previously dropped out of high school or who are otherwise unable to graduate.

## RETURN ON INVESTMENT

There is also a growing body of evidence from states across the country that college in high school programs save money for the students who participate in them, but also for the states that make investments in expanding access to these programs, particularly for low income students.

Recent studies show:

- An examination of early college high schools by the [American Institutes for Research](#) found that the cost-benefit ratio for early college was 15:1. Their analysis shows that a public investment of \$3,819 per student in covering the costs of offering the student tuition-free early college courses resulted in over \$57,000 in benefits to both the student in the form of lifetime earnings and to the public through increased tax revenue.
- An analysis of Texas's dual credit system from the [American Institutes for Research](#) found that "each dollar invested in dual credit returned \$1.18 from students spending less time in college and entering the workforce earlier. Long-term monetary benefits (e.g. tax revenues) associated with a greater number of college graduates were almost five times the estimated cost of dual credit."
- The [SERVE Center](#) found that early college students in North Carolina generated an average lifetime benefit to society that was \$23,000 higher than students who did not attend early college. They calculated the increased lifetime benefit to society was \$92 million for each graduating class of early college students.
- The [Bridge of Southern New Mexico](#) concluded that for New Mexico, every \$1 of investment in dual credit resulted in an \$11 benefit for New Mexico families in increased income and reduced student loan debt, up to \$3 in benefits for higher education funding in the state through reduced need for student remediation, and increased lifetime state tax contributions.
- The [Massachusetts Early College Initiative](#) projects that in 2021 students will realize an overall savings in tuition and fees of \$5.4 million.
- The [University of Denver](#) concluded that students who had access to Concurrent Enrollment in the state of Colorado had higher workforce earnings (approximately 10 percent higher) after five years than students who did not have access to Concurrent Enrollment.
- [Indiana's Commission on Higher Education](#) found that earning college credit in high school saved Indiana students roughly \$82 million in potential tuition costs in 2018. Additionally, dual credit helped save the state of Indiana approximately \$78 million in appropriations. Combined, students and the State of Indiana can realize about \$160 million in savings from the impact of dual credit each year.