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# TECHNICAL BRIEF

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## CAN WE HELP OUR DROP-OUTS? Suggestions on Dual Credit Methodology with Emphasis on Early and Middle College

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From the perspective of far too many of Mississippi's young people, high school is boring and its purpose is unclear. Far too many high school students are simply not engaged by high school level course work because they don't feel the coursework is relevant to their world. Some report that their high school coursework does little or nothing toward helping them to find a "real world job" after graduation. Far too many students end up dropping out of school because they feel they are just "going through the motions" in high school. They may become labeled as "not trying" or "not paying attention" in class when the reality is they simply are "bored" due to the lack of rigor and relevance of classes they are required to take.

Much has been written about the failure of many American high schools to adequately prepare a large percentage of young people for college, work, and citizenship. Research indicates that on the national level only 70% of students complete high school; of those, only 53% enter college directly from high school; of those only 35% eventually earn a degree.<sup>1</sup> Far too few youth make it all the way through to a bachelor's degree. Too many high school students drop-out before they realize that a high school diploma and at least some college credit are absolutely essential for full participation in today's economy.

A recent report by the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (CFHC) recommends expansion of early college and dual-enrollment initiatives as ways to expand college participation and persistence. A prominent chancellor described the 12th grade as a "vast wasteland" rather than a time to ensure competence in the community of working adults or a college community or both. CFHC endorsed the expansion of early college or dual-enrollment programs, as well as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adelman, C. (2006, February). *The Toolbox Revisited, Paths to degree completion from high school through college*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

<sup>2</sup> Final Report of the Secretary's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, "*A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*," retrieved January 12, 2007 from <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports.html>

## Thoughts on Early and Middle College Methodologies

**A four-year college graduate earns 70 percent more than a high school graduate does.** Even one year of postsecondary education increases lifetime earnings. The unemployment rate for high school dropouts is four times the rate for college graduates. The statistics are even more alarming for minority and low-income students. Only 18 percent of African-Americans and 10 percent of Hispanics complete a four-year college degree by age 29, compared with 34 percent of whites. Also, upper-income students are seven times more likely than low-income students to earn a Bachelor's degree by age 24.<sup>3</sup>

A more recent evolution of dual-enrollment programming is the development of early and middle college high schools. The Early College High School (EC) and Middle College High School (MC) concepts focus on early entry into college courses in order to expand underrepresented students access to postsecondary education. Although the research is limited, outcomes for these dual secondary credit options are generally positive, indicating that students who participate in these programs receive some benefit and that many actually find the early college option a favored alternative to the regular high school experience.

In Mississippi, drop-out prevention legislation passed in 2006 has prompted school districts to seek alternative educational programming to increase retention and graduation of high school students. New alternative education programs are being jointly designed and operated by community colleges, community-based organizations, and school districts seeking to address and diminish Mississippi's approximate 40% cohort high school dropout rate. ECs and MCs as alternative educational options are worth considering. As these and other alternative options emerge across the state, the Legislature must maintain its focus on ensuring a methodology exists which promotes a student's success in high school, college, and in the workforce. While public school districts experiment with a myriad of options, educational funding should tilt to the methodology which seems most fundamentally sound. As a matter of policy, EC and MC options seem to garner the praise. In Mississippi, the EC and MC High School options are methodologies that districts may consider.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, along with the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, have provided funding to establish over 150 Early College High School Initiatives by 2008. These EC Initiatives draw on lessons learned from the experiences of dual-enrollment programs, middle colleges, small schools, studies of time wasted in the senior year, and existing examples of institutions combining high school and college. These initiatives share the following characteristics:

- Students earn college credit toward an associate or baccalaureate degree while in high school;
- Mastery and competence are rewarded with enrollment in college level courses;
- The years to a postsecondary degree are compressed; and
- The middle grades are included or there is outreach to middle grade students to promote academic preparation and awareness of college enrollment as an option.

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<sup>3</sup> National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPE). 2006. *Measuring Up 2004, State Report Card on Higher Education, Mississippi*. Available at <http://measuringup.highereducation.org/docs/statereports/MS04.pdf>

## **Benefits of Further Research and Development of Dual Credit and Early College and Middle College High School Options:**

- Make higher education more accessible, affordable, and attractive by bridging the divide between high school and college;
- Provide needed guidance and support from adults through the first two years of college;
- Facilitate the transition of motivated students to higher education; and
- Demonstrate new ways of integrating levels of schooling to better serve the intellectual and developmental needs of young people.

Encountering the rigor, depth, and intensity of college work at an earlier age inspires all kinds of students to work hard and stretch themselves intellectually: average, under-achieving, and well-prepared high school students. Over the last decade, policymakers have sought to improve the transition to postsecondary education in a variety of ways:

- By beginning college awareness and academic preparation as early as middle school;
- By setting higher standards for high school graduation; and
- By ensuring that each student has an adult to provide advice and guidance.

Early College and Middle College High School options are showing evidence of improving high school graduation rates and better preparing students for family supporting careers by:

- Changing the structure of the high school years;
- Compressing the number of years to a college degree; and
- Removing financial and other barriers to college.

Students, parents, educators and community partners must all share the common vision that student success does not culminate at high school, rather all students should be afforded the opportunity to pursue and succeed in postsecondary education. We all must value and view education for its own sake and for the career choices it puts before young people. Mississippi must commit the resources to research, plan, develop, and implement exemplary dual secondary and postsecondary educational options for students to realize their career goals. To be successful, all of these programs must share the common vision of excellence, with partners working together to establish clear expectations for admission and for the standards and quality of work required in order for students to begin college level courses, gain college credit, and demonstrate mastery.

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## Understanding Early and Middle College Concepts

**Middle College High Schools (MCHS)** focus on middle achieving students and has the potential to prepare students traditionally not seen as college bound to enter postsecondary education. Middle college programming encompasses the majority of a students' high school experience because of the intensity of the curriculum. Middle college programs provide students with academic preparation, exposure to rigorous coursework through multiple college level courses, and the ability to earn college credit. The extra support services and enhanced rigor, student/teacher ratios, and relationships help encourage high school students to pursue postsecondary education and training. The participants receive rigorous academic instruction and support services and participate in activities that help them prepare for the social, behavioral and academic demands of college while completing their high school diploma.

**Early College High Schools (ECHS)** offer students, who have a passion or aptitude for a particular subject, the opportunity to take college level courses in the subject area while enrolled in high school and allows students to receive dual credit toward a college degree and a high school diploma. The opportunity to take higher level coursework while completing requirements for a high school diploma allows participants to progress at a more rapid and individualized pace. While taking the more rigorous coursework offered through college level classes, students simultaneously earn high school credit and complete their high school diploma.



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**Middle College and Early College High Schools** offer students options beyond the traditional high school setting, and for most participants these options are indicating success through higher retention and completion rates. Some of similar advantages of Early College and Middle College High School include the following:

- Students begin to feel like they're already in college, helping them imagine lives as college students and professionals by taking college level courses located on college campuses.
- Students may achieve two years of college credit at the same time they are earning a high school diploma (within four to five years of entering 9th grade). With 60 credit hours of college behind them, low-income students then only require financial aid to cover the last two years of a college degree.
- Students have the advantage of college level experience and the understanding and close guidance of teachers and professors who are certified in their fields and have achieved mastery of their academic disciplines.
- Colleges and high schools combine their resources and facilities to offer laboratories, extracurricular facilities such as theaters, academic support centers, information resources/libraries, and advanced technology.
- Participants receive rigorous academic instruction and support services and participate in activities that help them prepare for the social, behavioral and academic demands of college while completing their high school diploma.
- Students may complete the requirements and earn their high school diploma while they simultaneously may complete up to 60 college credits and/or an associates degree. -

## Legislative Considerations

Due to recent increases in participation in dual credit opportunities in the State over the past decade, there is a need for targeted research to examine the impact of the emerging dual credit opportunities on a range of student outcomes, including: credits earned during high school, performance on high school tests, high school graduation rates, college-going rates, college remediation, college grades, retention in college, degree and job market attainment, as well as other areas of study. With the previous emphasis of dual credit programs focusing primarily on serving high-achieving students, and with the increase in development of dual credit programming geared toward increasing participation of low-performing students, first generation college students, and underrepresented minorities, the need for extensive research is paramount to further capitalize on these educational investments across the state. Particularly, we urge that attention be turned to Early and Middle College High School options.

## Research Can Lead to Answers

It appears from early results that the few states that are engaged in the EC and MC concepts are achieving their goals: reducing dropouts, reinvigorating and challenging students to stay in school, providing better career prep for high school aged students, and removing financial barriers to a better education. An analysis of what Mississippi districts are doing *now*, the extent of the accomplishments through the current methodologies, and the shaping and development of a statewide focus on the methodologies that produce success can pave the way for solid legislative decisions. Suggestions include:

- Where are dual credit courses currently being taught in Mississippi? In the high school, on a college campus, etc. How many are offered? How many students are participating? What do participant success indicators demonstrate?
- What services, resources, facilities are being utilized? Laboratory and arts facilities, academic support centers, information resources/libraries, technology, etc.?
- Do teachers, professors, and school staff have regular times to discuss student work, and is there continual assessment of individual student progress toward performance expectations?



- How many and to what degree do dually enrolled students formulate an academic plan, commit to it, and assume growing responsibility for their own learning?
- Are students demonstrating adequate academic progress through multiple measures of performance, such as standardized tests, performance assessments, portfolios, and real world tasks? Who? What? When? Where? How Many? Under what circumstances?

## Conclusion and Indications for Additional Research

In Mississippi, more than **62%** of next year's budget will go to education; nearly **50%** of that budget will be spent on K-12 alone. Districts across the state are charged with providing a quality education for every student designed to culminate in a high school diploma. Yet, **at this date and time only 61% of the state's high school freshmen are graduating.** Curtailing the immense drop-out rate is absolutely essential to Mississippi's economic survival. No Mississippian wants to stay on the bottom of national educational accountability measures nor does any Mississippian delight in the realization that **only 6 out of every 10 freshmen students are graduating with a high school diploma.**

It is time for public schools, community colleges, universities, businesses, and other community partners to sincerely work together to acutely address the issues and to devise whatever policies are required to ensure that Mississippi students are also offered the opportunity to succeed in high school and in college. Strategies must be based upon sound educational practices and research. Part of Mississippi's plan must be the establishment of policies and acceptable time frames for all students to reach standards, as well as establishing opportunities for second chances for students who are not making adequate progress.

Dual secondary and postsecondary credit options encourage us to unify and re-conceptualize the academic work from ninth through fourteenth grades, rather than the current 9<sup>th</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup> then on to postsecondary structure. Early research available on early and middle colleges suggest that this will increase the number of young people who attain an associate's degree or two years of college credit and the opportunity to attain a bachelor's degree. Dual secondary and postsecondary credit options have the potential to save money for families and taxpayers and to better prepare students for entry into high-skill careers by changing the structure of the high school years and compressing the number of years to an associate's degree and/or bachelor's degree.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

### LaNell Kellum

LaNell Kellum is a Senior Research Associate at the John C. Stennis Institute of Government, Mississippi State University (MSU). She is currently pursuing the Ph.D. in Community College Leadership at MSU where she also received her Masters and Bachelor's degrees in Education. LaNell has twenty plus years of professional work experience in project and grant development, administration, teaching, and business management in Mississippi and Oklahoma. As an administrator for Rogers State College in Oklahoma, she helped acquire and manage federal education and workforce development grants ranging from \$250,000 to \$4.5 million. While serving as a research specialist for the Mississippi State University Research and Curriculum Unit, she developed state curriculum frameworks, designed and conducted professional development for teachers and administrators, and chaired state work teams to acquire \$22 million in federal education and workforce development funds for the Mississippi Department of Education. As grant specialist for the Columbus School District, LaNell acquired and managed \$4.5 million in reading, technology, and special state grants; directed McKellar Technology Center, the recipient of the Mississippi Tech Prep Exemplary Site Award for 2004; and served as principal of Columbus High School, directing the educational programming for 1,400+ students while managing 105 teachers and staff.

A goal-oriented individual with strong leadership capabilities, LaNell is a detail-directed problem solver with proven ability to work in unison with staff, volunteers, and diverse constituencies to direct complex projects from concept to fully operational status. She is a competent researcher, interviewer, and facilitator.

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