
High School Students' Participation and Performance in College Coursework: 2005-06 MCNC Early College Students

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Introduction

Early College (EC) is an initiative funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates, aimed at increasing access to higher education for underserved students. Launched in 2002, the Early College initiative focuses on the development of small schools in which high school students earn both a high school diploma and transferable college credits upon graduating from high school.

The Middle College National Consortium (MCNC) is one of 11 intermediary organizations awarded funds by the Gates Foundation to establish Early College schools. The MCNC is a school-practitioner network of more than 30 middle colleges (high schools located on college campuses) committed to a set of shared beliefs and instructional practices regarding the successful schooling of underserved high school students.

In 2002, the MCNC developed two of the first Early Colleges. During the 2005-06 school year, the MCNC oversaw the development of 13 Early Colleges and is charged with developing a total of 30 such schools. For the past five years, NCREST has provided research and evaluation support to the MCNC and its Early Colleges.

MCNC Early Colleges include both redesign and new, startup schools. Redesigns are existing high schools restructured into ECs while startups are newly created EC schools. Like new, startup schools that typically open with a 9th grade cohort, some redesign schools phased in Early College starting with each new 9th grade cohort while other redesigns aimed to implement Early College at all current grade levels.

According to the NCREST 2005-06 student survey data on MCNC EC students, approximately 78% of

HIGHLIGHTS & FACTS

2005-06 MCNC Early Colleges

- 13 operating schools (9 redesigns, 4 new)
- 7 states represented (NY, CA, MI, TN, SC, CO, KY)
- 3,606 students served

2005-06 MCNC Early College Students

College Participation

- 53% of all students were enrolled in college courses
- 35% of 9th graders were enrolled in college courses
- 67% of 11th graders were enrolled in college courses

College Course Enrollments & Credits

- 17,286 = Total number of cumulative course enrollments
- 35,159 = Total number of cumulative earned credits
- 9th graders accumulated an average of 10 credits
- 10th graders accumulated an average of 15 credits
- 11th graders accumulated an average of 20 credits
- 12th graders accumulated an average of 25 credits

College Performance

- 93% course pass rate
- 2.76 average cumulative college GPA

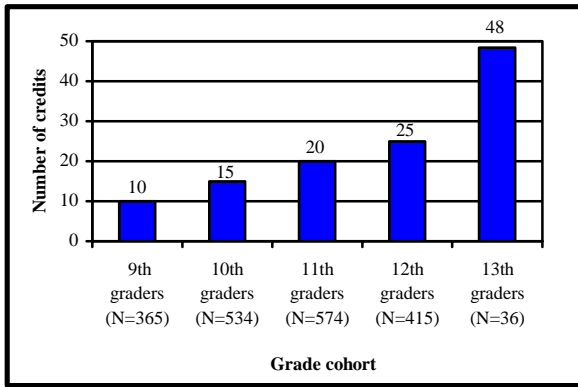
the students were from racial/ethnic minority groups, 46% spoke only English at home, and 62% reported being eligible for free or reduced lunch.

This brief provides a summary of data on college course-taking among high school students at Early Colleges sponsored by the Middle College National Consortium. This brief is based on descriptive findings from NCREST's college transcript study. There were 3,606 MCNC EC students during the 2005-06 school year. Schools submitted transcript data for students who had taken college courses; data for 1,924 students were included in the study.

How many college credits do students earn?

By the end of the 2005-06 school year (including the summer semester), MCNC Early College students as a whole had accumulated a total of 35,159 college credits. Figure 1 shows that, on average, MCNC students in the later grades have accumulated more college credits than students in the earlier high school grades. This suggests that students will gradually earn more college credits as they progress through high school.

Figure 1: Average credits accumulated by grade level



MCNC EC schools are diverse in their approach to enrolling students in college classes. Data from school rosters and college transcripts showed that 11 of the 13 MCNC Early Colleges had over 50% of their 11th graders enrolled in college courses.

Figure 2 shows the range of college credits that an average 11th grader had accumulated in each school. This figure suggests that Early College students at the majority of the schools will most likely complete one or two semesters of college credit by the end of 11th grade.

How many students take college courses?

The number of MCNC Early College students in college courses has increased every year of the initiative. While in 2003-04, 717 were enrolled in one or more college courses, two years later (2005-06) a total of 1,924 were enrolled. Figure 3 shows the number of EC students enrolled in each grade level and the number of these who were enrolled in college courses.

Figure 3: Number of MCNC Early College students

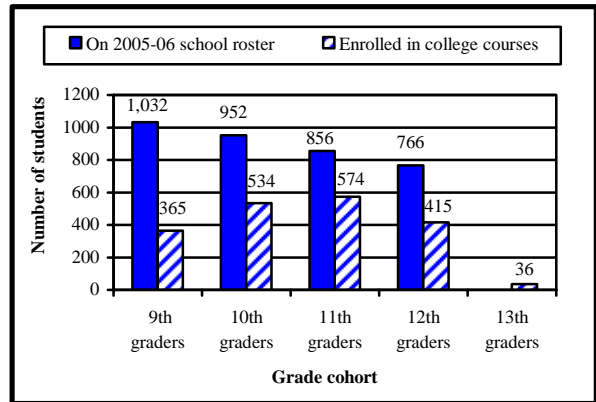
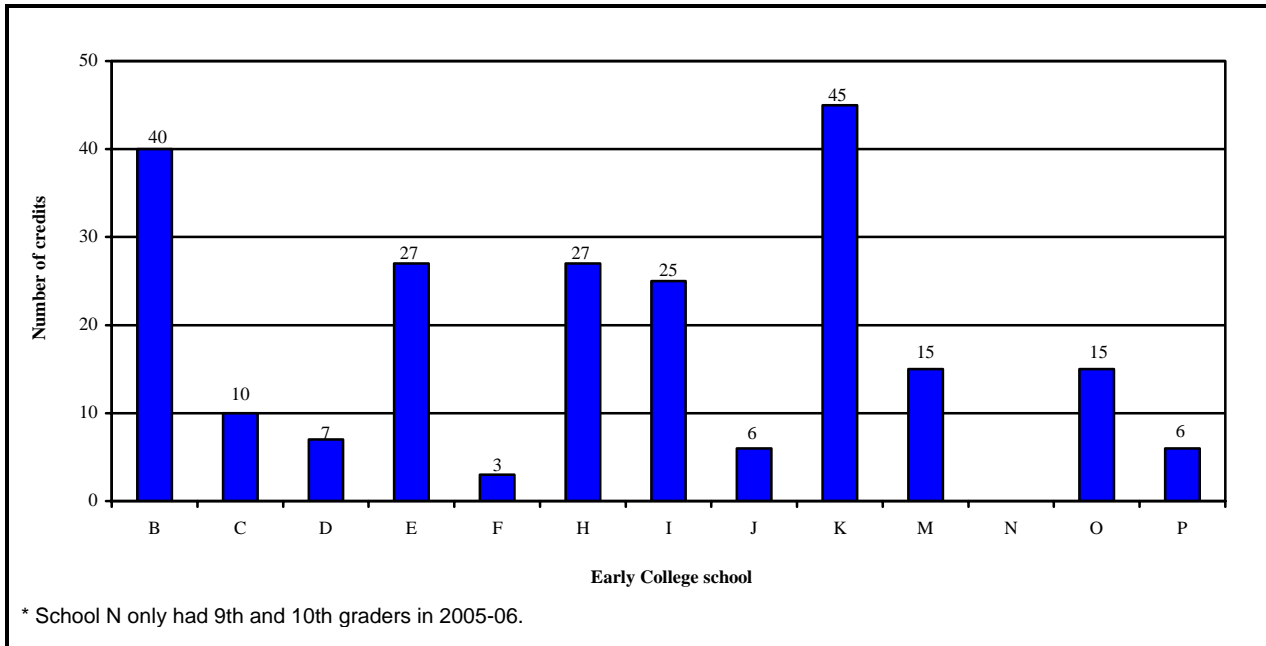


Figure 2: Average number of credits accumulated for 11th graders by school

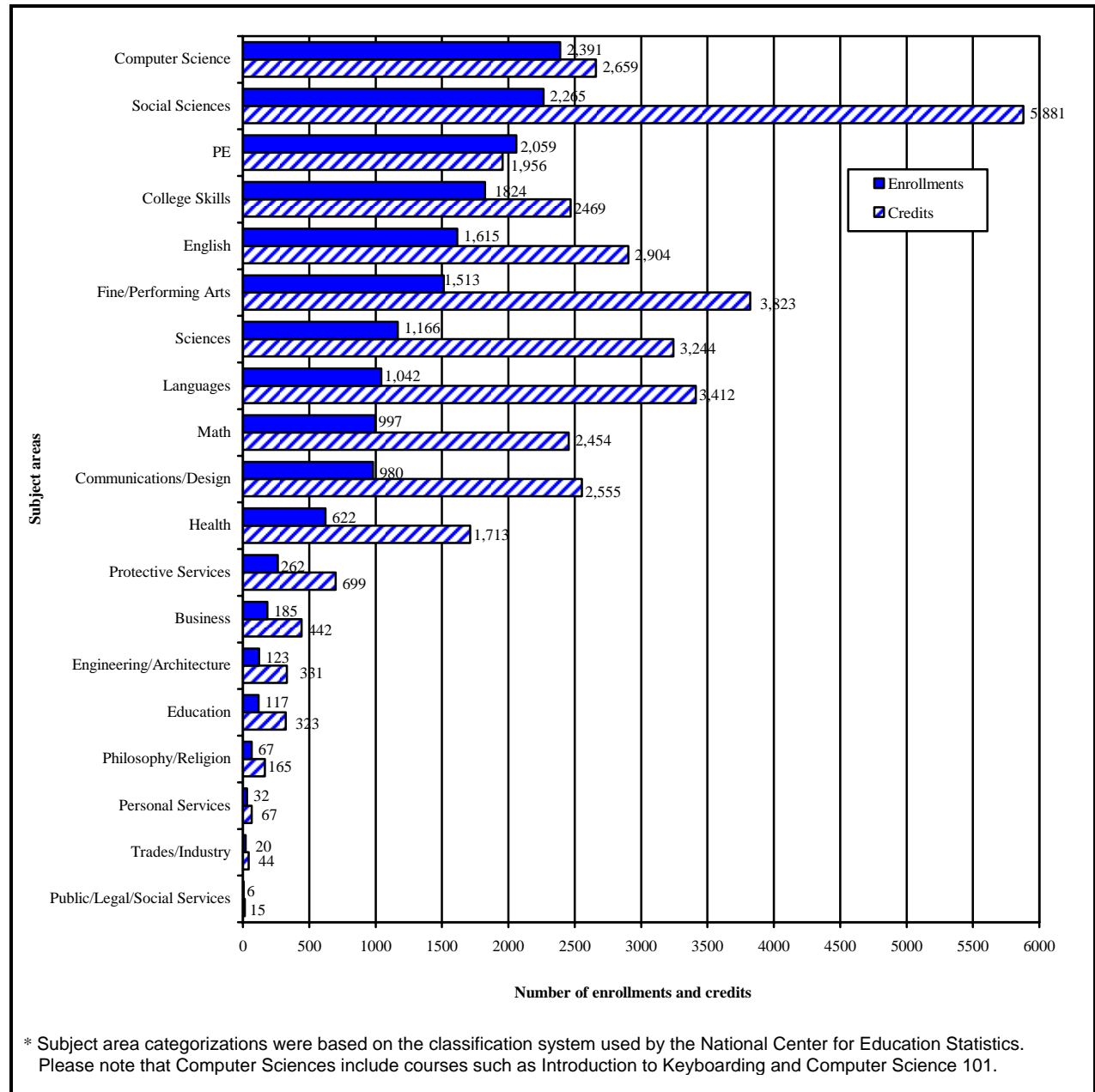


What types of courses do students take?

Students were enrolled in college courses across a wide range of subject areas, in both academic and career-technical fields. Figure 4 shows that the highest number of courses enrollments was in Computer Science, followed by Social Sciences, Physical Education (PE), and College Skills. When considering college credits earned, however, students accumulated the largest number of credits in Social Sciences, Fine/Performing Arts, Languages and Sciences.

The types of courses in which students enrolled varied with their grade level. Students in the earlier grades were more likely to be enrolled in the Fine/Performing Arts and PE courses for their first college course experiences. Upper grade enrollments were more likely to occur in English, Social Science, and Math courses. Some schools enrolled groups of high school students into college courses while others permitted students to enroll individually in college courses.

Figure 4: Number of cumulative course enrollments and credits earned by subject area

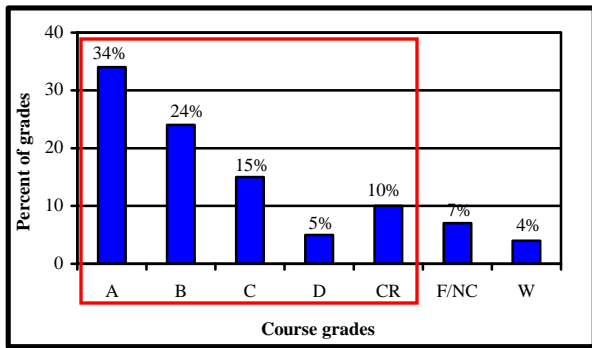


How do EC students perform in college?

MCNC Early College students averaged a cumulative 2.76 GPA and a 93% course pass rate. All schools had an 80% or higher average pass rate. Typically, W (Withdrawal) and IN (Incomplete) grades are not included in course pass rate calculations.

The distribution of all college course grades is shown in Figure 5. Of all course enrollments taken by 2005-06 EC students, 89% resulted in an A, B, C, D, or CR (Credit) grade; successful grades are shown in the red box. The remaining course enrollments resulted in 7% F or NC (No Credit) grades and 4% withdrawal grades.

Figure 5: Distribution of college course grades



The average college GPA for each grade level cohort is shown in Figure 6. There was a slight decline in GPAs overall as students moved to the next grade and took progressively more challenging college courses.

Figure 6: Average cumulative GPA by grade cohort

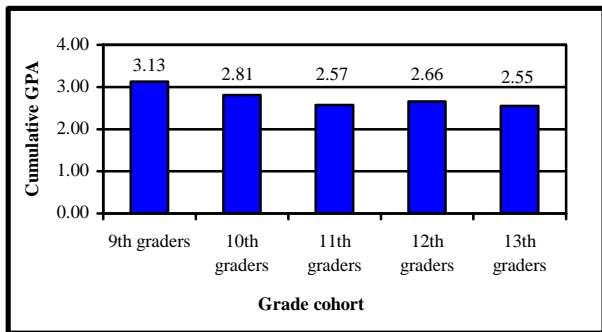
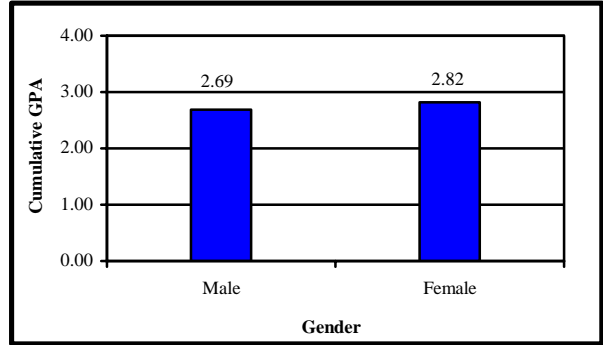


Figure 7 shows the average college GPA for males and females. Like their counterparts in colleges across the United States, female students earned slightly higher GPAs.

Figure 7: Average cumulative GPA by gender



Conclusion

Early Colleges were launched with the goal of increasing access to higher education for underserved, non-traditional, first-time college going students. The Middle College National Consortium and its partnering schools have demonstrated success in facilitating students' access to college courses and thus increasing the numbers of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds who participate in higher education. Additionally, these students take college courses in a wide variety of subject areas, earn a substantial number of college credits, and perform successfully in these often challenging courses.

As Early College programs continue to grow and develop, these data from Middle College National Consortium schools indicate that a wide range of high school students can earn college credits within the context of schools that provide the conditions and support students need to succeed in college classes.

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The Middle College National Consortium Early College project is housed at the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST). NCREST is a research and development organization at Teachers College, Columbia University and is co-directed by Jackie Ancess and Tom Hatch.

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