
Helping High School Students Succeed In College Classes

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High school students in dual credit (college-level) courses around the country are often those who are the most academically advanced. However, those enrolled in Middle College-Early College (MC-EC) High Schools are taking and passing college courses in great numbers, in spite of membership in groups that may be considered educationally “at risk.” This research project gathered information on characteristics, attitudes, skills, and activities of MC-EC students who succeed in dual credit or college classes. High schools can use this information to align their practices with those associated with student success in challenging, college-level coursework.

Background

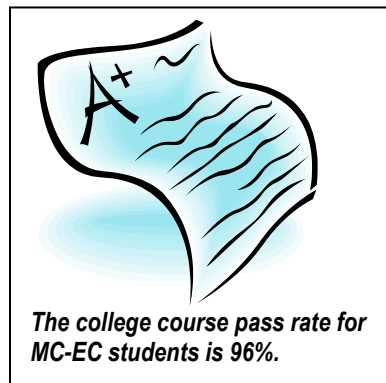
The Middle College National Consortium (MCNC) consists of a network of high schools across the nation, situated on community college campuses, which provide under-performing youth with access to college. Since the establishment of the first middle college high school, founded in 1974 at LaGuardia Community College in New York, the MCNC has worked to replicate the original school in other cities around the U.S. The Consortium supports these small schools in implementing six design principles that lay the foundation for an excellent high school education and a smooth transition to college. Students typically enroll in both high school and college classes.

Building on this history, the MCNC, with support from the Gates, Ford, and Carnegie Foundations, has taken this initiative to the next level. The Middle-College Early-College (MC-EC) High Schools blur the border between high school and the community college to create “blended institutions” that offer a dual degree program. Taking a mixture of high school and college courses, students work to attain both a high school diploma and associates degree in four to five years. Students are actively supported and

guided as they experience themselves as college-level learners. The schools are committed to working with students who have not traditionally thought of themselves as “college material,” and involve families and communities in the process.

In the 2004-05 academic year, 13 MC-EC schools were open. Data collected showed that, of students in the Early College program at these schools, 64% took one or more college classes during the year. Of these, 96% passed their classes. The students were:

- 59% female
- 80% non-white
- 43% speakers of English as a second language.



Studying Student Success

Even though many high school students are participating in college classes around the country, little research has been done to learn about the characteristics, attitudes, skills, and activities that are associated with success in college. The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST), based at Teachers College, Columbia University, conducted a study for the MCNC on this topic in the Spring of 2005.

A sample of 165 eleventh grade students (during 2004-05) was selected from five MC-EC high schools. Their Fall 2004 college transcripts were analyzed and their performance was compared to their responses on a student survey administered in Fall 2004. Some key findings included:

Student characteristics and college performance

For each student in the study, college grade point averages (GPAs) and the number of college credits earned were computed and used as indicators of performance in college. Interestingly, performance in college:

- Did not differ by racial or ethnic group.
- Was the same for both males and females.
- Did not depend on whether there was a mother or father in the home.
- Was the same whether students were born in or out of the United States.
- Did not differ for students eligible for free lunch from those who were not.

In sum, students from all backgrounds, including those sometimes classified as “at risk” were performing well in their college classes. In addition, students who did *not* do as well were no more likely to be poorer or from certain racial/ethnic groups.

Student activities and college performance

Schools often wonder whether there are in- or out-of-school activities that are associated with better performance. In relation to their performance in college, students in the study who spent more time studying and those who attended after school clubs had higher college GPAs. Students who played more sports had lower GPAs, as did students who worked long hours. There was no relationship between the college performance of the high school students studied and time spent: 1) with friends, 2) doing housework or babysitting, or 3) going to after-school programs.



Students were asked about several in-school activities as well. High school students with higher college GPAs were more likely to have:

- Participated in internships or co-ops.
- Done community service.
- Planned their courses through graduation with the help of a counselor.
- Selected a possible career.
- Had a mentor.
- Attended a summer class or workshop.

Student attitudes and college performance

Certain student attitudes were associated with higher college GPAs. These included:

- Enjoying school.
- Feeling successful in school.
- Feeling a sense of belonging.

- Feeling able to accomplish personal goals.

Just as interesting were the attitudes *not* associated with higher college GPAs among high school students. These included: 1) perceiving math and writing as easy, 2) seeing themselves as real college students, 3) confidence about being able to pay for college, and 4) wanting a career that requires college.

School related skills and college performance

Two skills were associated with both higher college GPAs and numbers of college credits earned-- ability to use the library and ability to take good notes. In addition, a number of other skills were associated with higher college GPAs. These included the ability to: 1) plan schoolwork, 2) get homework done on time, and 3) arrange a place to study without distractions.

Some (self-reported) school-related skills were *not* associated with college success. These included: 1) participating in class, 2) writing good papers, 3) ability to pay attention, and 4) ability to motivate oneself.

Implications for schools

These findings have some important implications for school administrators, teachers, and counselors who are helping students undertake academically challenging courses:

- 1) First, and most importantly, this research reveals that students who receive support in undertaking challenging (in this case, college-level) courses can perform well regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, place of birth, and socio-economic status.

- 2) Students who play sports or work longer hours are at higher risk for doing poorly in challenging courses. They may need extra support and guidance.
- 3) Students who engage in educational enrichment activities such as internships, community service, and summer courses do better in challenging courses. This may be because these activities add relevance to the educational experience, involve closer relationships with helpful adults, or for other reasons. Schools can provide or facilitate these opportunities for students.
- 4) Students who reported that they planned for the future were more successful in their challenging courses. Schools can help students to focus on their future by assisting them with career planning and the development of long-term educational plans.
- 5) Students who expressed confidence in their ability to use the library and to take notes were especially likely to be successful in challenging courses. These skills are relatively easy to teach.
- 6) A sense of belonging is associated with greater success in challenging courses. Schools can help students develop a sense of belonging by creating a school culture where all students are known and valued.

The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, & Teaching (NCREST) is a research and development organization at Teachers College, Columbia University. NCREST is co-directed by Jacqueline Anness and Thomas Hatch.

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ABOUT THE STUDENTS STUDIED (N= 165)

	Black	White	Latino	Asian	Other
Male	16	5	19	9	8
Female	30	7	38	18	8

College GPA	% of students		Credits earned	% of students
1- 1.99	9%		1-9	31%
2- 2.99	33%		10-19	5%
3- 3.99	50%		20-29	8%
4- 4.99	9%		30-39	26%
			40+	30%

CORRELATIONS WITH COLLEGE GPA AND CREDITS EARNED

Note: Only statistically significant ($p < .05$) correlations are shown.

School-based Activities	GPA	# of credits
Participated in an internship or co-op	.27	.45
Did community service	.31	.47
Did a project that took 2+ weeks to complete	--	--
Worked with a counselor to plan courses through graduation	.24	.34
Selected a possible career	.26	.33
Attended a summer class or workshop	.22	--
Had a mentor	.25	--

Out-of-school Activities	GPA	# of credits
Studying	.26	.28
Playing sports	-.23	--
Spending time with friends	--	--
Working*	--	--
Doing housework or babysitting	--	--
Going to after school clubs	.20	--
Doing after school programs	--	--

*Students were also asked about the number of hours per week worked. Hours of work was negatively correlated (-.39) with credits earned.

School-related Skills	GPA	# of credits
Finish homework on time	.25	---
Study when there are other interesting things to do	.19	---
Plan school work	.30	---
Participate in class discussions	---	---
Take notes on class instruction	.23	.19
Remember information presented in class and in textbooks	.17	---
Concentrate on school subjects	.26	---
Arrange place to study without distractions	---	.17
Use the library to get information for class assignments	.30	.29
Write well enough for college level work	--	--
Math skills good enough for college level work	--	.16