

Increasing Equity through Early College Student Supports:

Middle College National Consortium Practices

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Acknowledgments

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About NCREST

This report was prepared by the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) at Teachers College, Columbia University. NCREST has been involved in research and development projects related to Middle and Early College High Schools for over two decades. We have worked with a range of schools and intermediary organizations, but the majority of our work in this area has been carried out in association with the Middle College National Consortium.

NCREST is particularly known for our collaborative work with school systems, districts, school networks, and non-profit organizations. Our work to make research a meaningful contributor to practice is best expressed in our role as a research partner with several school development organizations. At NCREST, we assert that research can become relevant, which we take to mean actionable, when a trusting, respectful, and credible practitioner-researcher partnership is in place.

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Introduction to the Middle College National Consortium

College course-taking programs for high school students – including dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and Middle and Early Colleges¹ – continue to grow across the country. They allow school districts to offer high quality curricular options and help their students attain college readiness, while local colleges can increase student enrollment and create pipelines for prospective students. For students, these programs provide opportunities to take college courses during their high school years, earn college credit, and experience a college campus environment, typically at no-cost to their families. Further, students participating in these programs are more likely to experience better outcomes in further education and in life.²

However, traditionally underserved students are not well represented in these college course-taking programs. According to recent research, Black and Hispanic students, along with students with disabilities and English Language Learners, are “severely underrepresented” in dual enrollment programs.³ Some of this may be due to students’ lack of academic readiness or maturity to handle both high school and college courses, but it may also be due to a lack of mechanisms and practices that support the readiness and success of students who may benefit the most from such programs.

Early College is a type of dual enrollment program in which students participate in a structured academic plan that incorporates high school and college coursework, along with extensive academic and social supports. Students in these programs typically spend their days on a college campus in the latter years of high school, if not earlier on. Originally, Early Colleges were mainly small schools and grew to prominence in the 2000s with the help and backing from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the *Early College Initiative*. Since then, this small school model has evolved to include high school programs that serve participating students from one high school or a group of schools in one district.

About the Middle College National Consortium

Early College designs were, in part, informed by the small school model developed in Middle Colleges associated with the Middle College National Consortium (MCNC) to address dropout prevention among high school students. During the 1980s, with support from the Ford Foundation, the MCNC created a cluster of six small schools located on community college campuses in five states. These schools developed as replication sites based on the model of LaGuardia Middle College High School in Long Island City, Queens, New York. In addition to the blended academic program, students received extensive academic and social supports. This handful of schools became the foundation of MCNC, a membership organization of Middle and Early College schools led by Dr. Cecilia Cunningham, former principal of LaGuardia Middle College High School.

1 Middle Colleges and Early Colleges are schools and programs where students take a blend of high school and college classes with extensive support. Middle Colleges have traditionally focused more explicitly on serving traditionally underserved students.

2 See <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/EvidenceSnapshot/671>

3 See <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/easyblog/schools-dual-enrollment-ap.html>

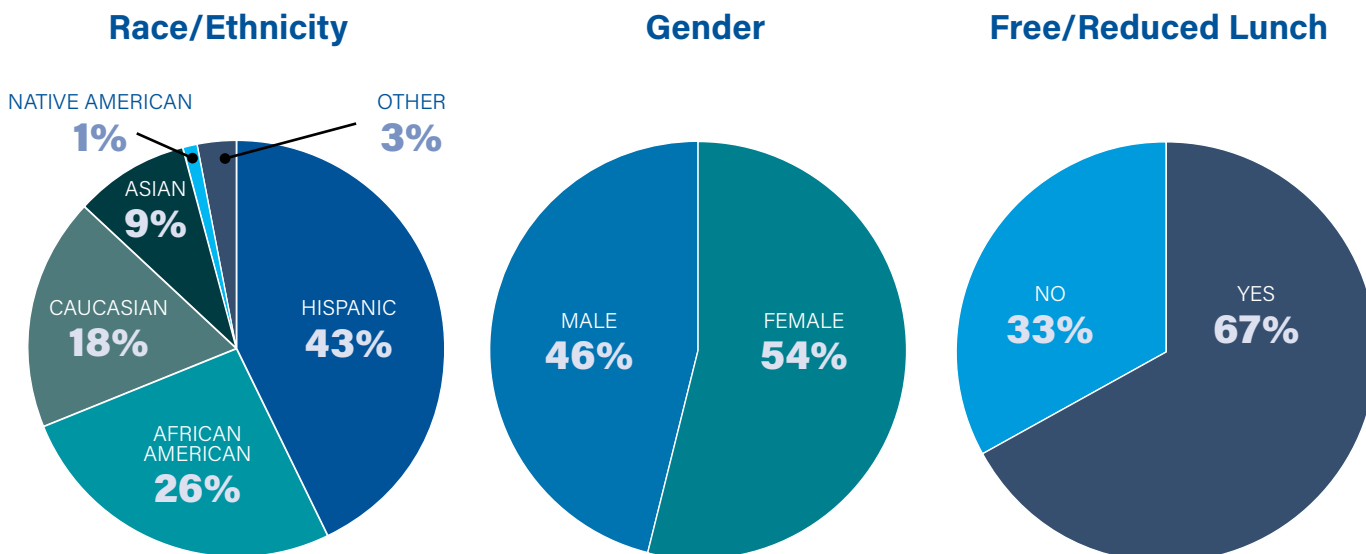
Today, MCNC is a practitioner-led organization of more than 40 schools with the majority located on or near college campuses. The MCNC schools aim to serve traditionally underserved students who might not otherwise have attended college, and prepare them for college readiness and success by providing early access to college course-taking during high school. MCNC schools are designed to reflect the best practices of the small schools reform movement such as small school size, student-centered teaching, inquiry-based learning, multiple forms of assessment, school-wide support structures for students, democratic school governance, and ongoing meaningful professional development.⁴ Their schools are guided by a set of four design principles: a college focused academic program, comprehensive student support, strong college partnerships, and a culture of continuous improvement.

The majority of the MCNC schools serve less than 500 students. Most enroll students in grades 9-12 with some offering a fifth-year option which allows students to earn additional college credits at no cost. The majority of schools (85%) partner with a two-year postsecondary institution while some partner with four-year colleges. Across the MCNC schools, 82% of the students served are non-white, with Hispanic students (43%) making up the largest racial minority group, followed by African American students (26%). Over two-thirds (67%) of the students receive free or reduced lunch; a slight majority are female (54%).

MCNC Design Principles

- 1. College-Focused Academic Program:** Schools implement comprehensive, standards-based curricula that provide a bridge to postsecondary studies and incorporate both high school and college coursework.
- 2. Comprehensive Student Support:** Supports are offered to all students to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs in high school and in the transition to college.
- 3. Dynamic High School and College Partnerships:** High schools and colleges take joint responsibility for students' educational success and establish structures that permit high school students to take college courses.
- 4. Culture of Continuous Improvement:** High schools and colleges engage in evidence-based discussions and practices to continuously improve students experiences and outcomes.

Students Served Across MCNC Schools



Source: Middle College National Consortium, 2020-21.

⁴ Read more about the Middle College National Consortium at <https://mcnc.us/mission/>

Comprehensive Student Support and MCNC Schools

The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) at Teachers College, Columbia University first engaged in continuous improvement research on Early Colleges in 2002 as a partner of the Middle College National Consortium (MCNC) through the national *Early College Initiative*. Once the initial Gates Foundation funding ended, many MCNC schools continued with data collection activities using their own funds.

Guided by the four MCNC design principles (see page 2), NCREST led the “MCNC Data Project” from 2002 through 2017 which involved a range of 15-20 schools in a given year. In collaboration with the MCNC participating schools, NCREST obtained and analyzed data on the designs and features of the Early College schools (survey of administrators), students’ college course-taking and performance (analysis of college coursework data), and students’

academic and social experiences (graduating student survey). Through this project, NCREST worked with the MCNC and its schools to build data capacity and encourage data-informed decision making. Special projects were also implemented in which NCREST conducted interviews to learn about prevailing MCNC practices in math education, student supports, and a variety of other topics.

MCNC Comprehensive Student Support

Comprehensive student support is one of the four MCNC design principles. MCNC schools aim to support students – academically, socially, and emotionally – through flexible and innovative structures that enable student success. The figure below shows the student supports offered by most or all MCNC Early Colleges.

Student Supports Offered by MCNC Schools



Source: NCREST. MCNC Early College Profile Survey, 2016-17.

⁵ Advisories are regular sessions in which teachers meet with and advise small groups of students, usually staying with the same group throughout students' high school years.

MCNC Early College students report feeling supported by their teachers, counselors, and administrators. More than 90% percent of graduating students across the MCNC Data Project sites surveyed in 2017 indicated that they had one or more adults at their schools who supported them in the following ways:

- *Care about how well I am doing in school* (97%)
- *Discussed whether I am meeting the requirements for graduation* (95%)
- *Gave extra help with school work if needed* (93%)
- *Helped me plan for college or a career* (93%)

There was also a high degree of college readiness among students. Ninety percent or more of the MCNC graduating students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt ready for college in the following ways:

- *I am confident in my ability to handle college courses on my own* (94%)
- *I feel like I have a clear understanding of what college is like* (93%)
- *It's easy for me to imagine myself as a college student* (90%)

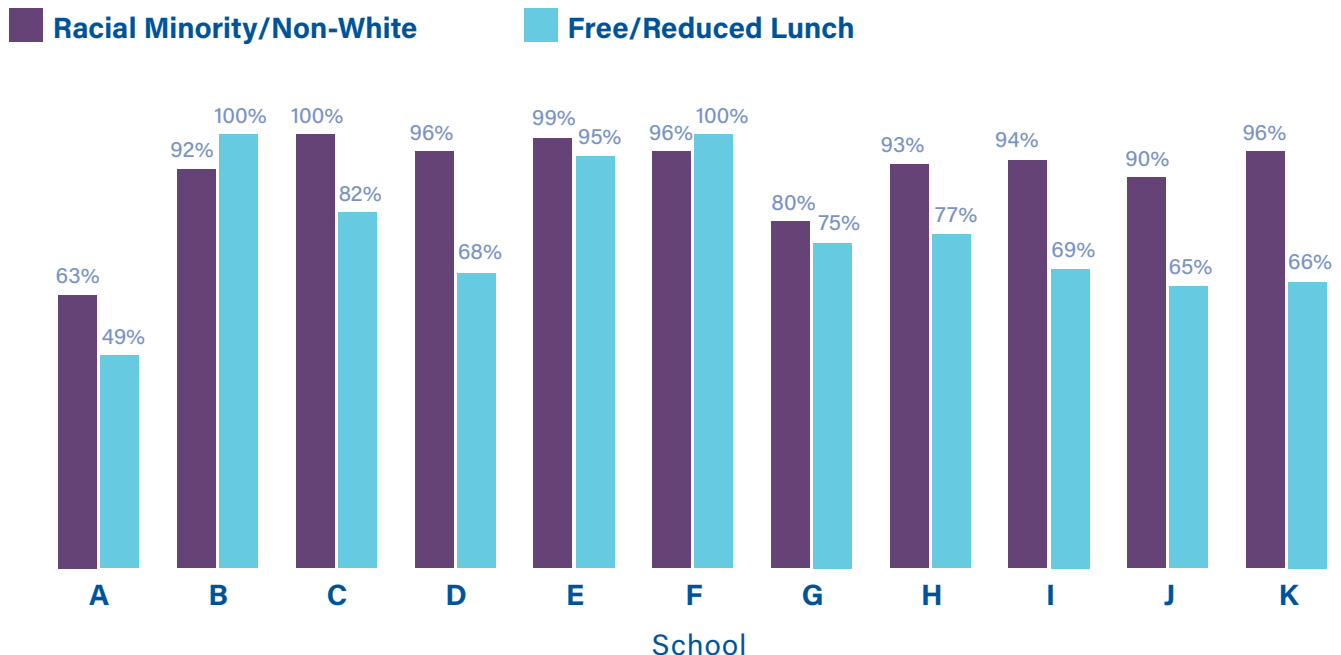
Profile of MCNC Study Schools

To better understand the structures and means by which MCNC schools support traditionally underserved students to be successful, we identified 11 “MCNC study schools” among the MCNC Data Project sites that served a high percentage of racial minority/non-white students and/or a high percentage of free or reduced lunch students *and* had high school graduates earning a substantial number of college credits and successful outcomes in their coursework (see Appendix A for a full list of school names). Once these MCNC study schools were identified, we analyzed their student support practices as detailed on the *MCNC Self-Assessment Tool* (see Appendix B). We also conducted interviews with a sub-set of principals to learn more about how they support students.

Exploring MCNC Support Practices in this Report

This report highlights comprehensive student supports provided across MCNC schools that serve traditionally underserved students who graduate high school with successful college course-taking outcomes. We address practices related to planning for success in college, succeeding in college courses, social and emotional supports, and planning for college and careers. These practices are likely to be of interest to other Early Colleges as well as dual enrollment programs that seek to increase equitable access and success for students.

MCNC Study Schools: Student Demographic Profile, 2016-17

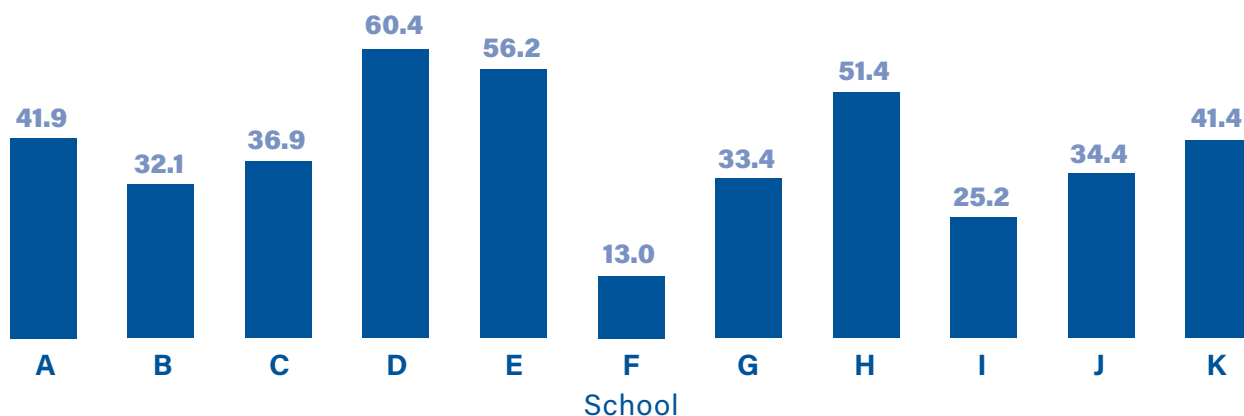


Note: Letter codes were randomly assigned to schools and are shown in place of school names.

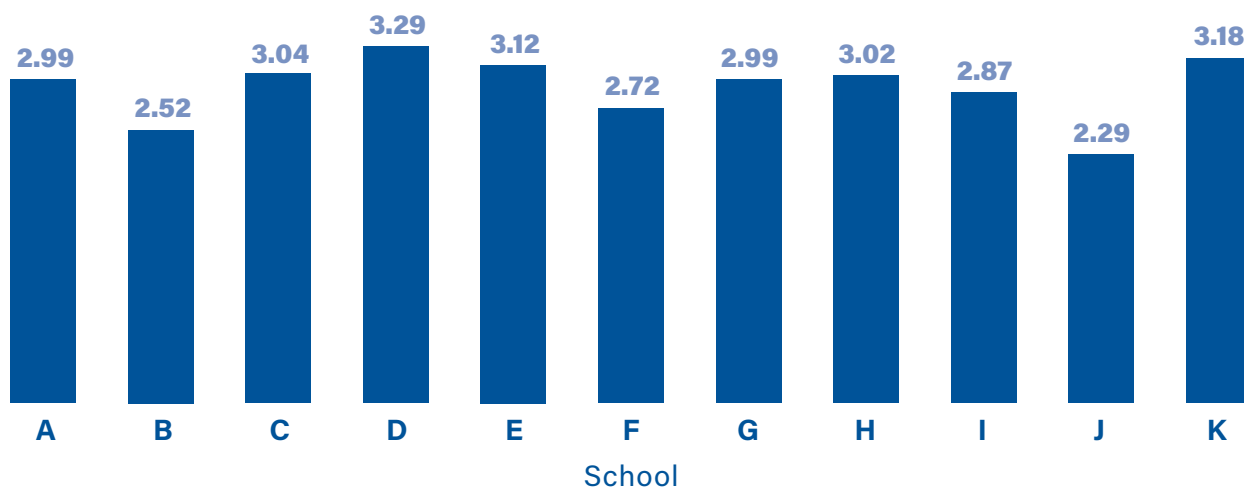
Source: NCREST. MCNC Early College Profile Survey, 2016-17.

MCNC Study Schools: College Credits and Grades Earned by High School Graduates, 2016-17

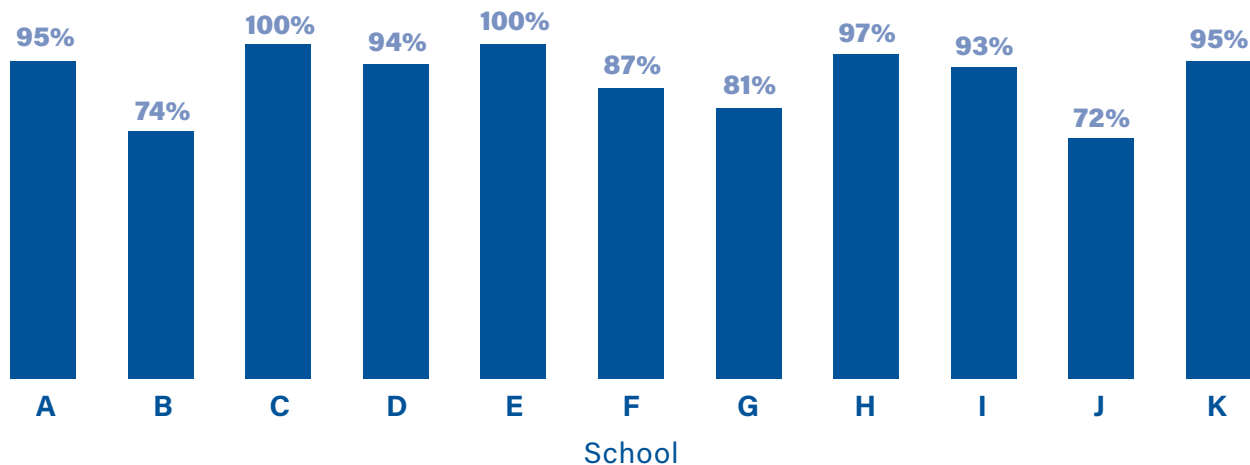
Mean College Credits Earned



Mean College GPA Earned



Percentage of College Course Grades Resulting in a C-grade or Higher



Note: Letter codes were randomly assigned to schools and are shown in place of school names.

Source: NCREST. MCNC College Coursework Study, 2016-17.

MCNC Student Support Practice #1: Preparing for Success in College

[The best part of my Early College experience] has been the help to the college road. It has been extremely helpful and useful; it makes going to college a guaranteed thing. Overall, the opportunities have been the best part of this high school.

– MCNC school student

MCNC Early Colleges are committed to serving students who might not otherwise have had the opportunity to attend college. Many of them need extra help to be academically successful in college courses, as considerable numbers did not receive adequate preparation in the early grades. The 11 MCNC schools in our study use several strategies to help students become fully prepared to undertake college classes.

Among the most prominent of these are: 1) helping students to develop a college-going identity, providing boot camps and summer bridges, 3) math and English support and alignment, and 4) supporting students as they develop an academic plan.

Developing a College-Going Identity

Early Colleges create opportunities for students to experience themselves as college students starting early in their high school years. Ten of the 11 MCNC schools in our study are located on college campuses so that students experience “the power of place,” according to MCNC director, Dr. Cecilia Cunningham. Several principals emphasized the importance of creating a college-going culture and environment in the school both visually as well as through their instruction.

Across the schools, students spend time at the college in classes, taking advantage of campus resources, or eating lunch in the student center. According to the principal at Dr. Richard A. Vladovic Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy, “You are a college student from the minute you step on our campus You have two student ID numbers; you have one from [the college] and you have one from us.” The principal of Mott Middle College emphasized the importance of working with students on their “mindset.” At Mott Middle College and several other MCNC schools, students are referred to as “scholars” and are encouraged to think of themselves as college students as well as high school students.

Boot Camps and Summer Bridges

Several of the MCNC Early Colleges in our study offer students extra academic support in the form of summer bridges or boot camps. Typically, these focus on boosting students’ skills in English and math while also providing instruction in college readiness skills such as notetaking, time management, and research methods. They may also include activities designed to broaden students’ horizons or provide opportunities for fun.

At Buffalo Middle Early College, summer enrichment programs are mandatory for students and operate for

four weeks on a full-time schedule. The main aim of the enrichment is to ensure that all students are on-track to meet college course-taking goals. The summer programs follow the completion of ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades, and faculty and staff from the school and the college partners both provide instruction. In their first summer, students engage in literacy and math curricula and complete the mandated physical education requirements for the year. In addition, some cohorts of students take a College Success Skills class offered by one of the college partners. In later summers, they continue to participate in math and literacy experiences and enroll in college level history courses that fulfill their final high school social studies requirements. Meals, college courses, support with skills development, and extracurricular activities are provided at no-cost to students. Funding for these summer programs is provided through a New York State *Smart Scholars* grant.

At Dr. Richard A. Vladovic Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy, new, incoming students take part in a two to three week full-day summer program. The goal is to “familiarize and acclimate incoming students to the expectations and rigors of being a dual-enrolled student,” according to the school principal. Students take math and English, plus an AVID and leadership course which focuses on introductory college skills. This is also a time when students begin building a mutually supportive, results-oriented community.

Math and English Support and Alignment

Students often enter MCNC Early Colleges needing extra work on their academic skills. The most important of these are English and math, for two reasons. First, most students will not be permitted to take college courses unless they pass the college placement test showing that they are proficient in English and math. Second, these two subjects are foundational—success in most college courses depends on having strong skills in these core areas.

MCNC Early Colleges often work to make sure that the high school curriculum is aligned with what students will need to know to be successful in college. To this end, high school teachers and college faculty often collaborate to discuss ways to strengthen the high school curriculum, while also meeting state standards

in math and English. In addition, some of the Early Colleges offer extra classroom time focused on math and English. For example, at Genesee Early College, the principal shared that each ninth grade and tenth grade has a four-hour block each week where students work on improving their skills in research and writing.

Working with Students on an Academic Plan

Early College students – and their parents – need to understand the blend of high school and college classes offered. All MCNC Early Colleges develop an academic plan that lays out the high school and college courses that students will take as well as the milestones that they need to achieve each year to be on track to graduate from high school with a significant number of college credits earned. Typically, students all take the same set of courses in the early years. In the later years, they have more opportunities to choose courses based on their interests and future plans and they will be mixed in with other regularly enrolled students. In some cases, students will aim to earn an associate degree upon graduation from high school.

Counselors typically make sure that students’ schedules are structured at a level appropriate for their level of maturity and academic ability. Students often start by taking one or two courses in the early grades and build up to taking most or all college courses by the twelfth grade. In addition, counselors help students to take on a reasonable workload. According to the principal at International High School, “We want [them to take] some courses that are difficult. We want some courses that are easy. You want to give them a taste of success. And then, at the same time, Math 115 and the biology or the chemistry classes – those are hard classes.”

MCNC Early College counselors and advisors work closely with students to help them to clarify their goals – and think about how they fit with the courses available to them. They also help students to understand what is required to be successful in the rigorous high school and college academic program offered in Early Colleges. The academic plan is revisited regularly to support students in case they encounter academic or other difficulties with the planned coursework. See Appendix C for a sample academic plan for Santa Ana Middle College.

MCNC Student Support Practice #2: Succeeding in College Courses

“The best part of my Early College experience was the people you meet that help you prepare for your future and want you to succeed. I feel as though I am ready and excited for college. My school really made me believe in my abilities.”

– MCNC school student

Early College students begin college classes while still in high school and may not have clear ideas about what is entailed or how to manage their coursework and integrate it with other life demands. MCNC Early Colleges have developed several strategies to help students succeed in college, especially as they are starting out. Those described here include: 1) seminar, 2) formal tutoring, 3) college success courses, 4) early warning and intervention systems, and 5) course structures..

Seminar

Many early colleges offer some version of “seminar,” a course or series of structured sessions in which students learn how to be effective college students. Seminar may be closely tied to individual college courses students

are taking or it may have a more general focus. Students typically receive academic support as well as social and emotional support. In some cases, students are also assisted with the process of applying to colleges after high school graduation and obtaining financial aid as part of seminar.

Most schools follow lesson plans developed by teachers and/or counselors. The frequency of these sessions varies from school to school, but they are generally held one to four times a week. Participating students may or may not earn college credit for seminar courses. For schools that do offer credits, the credits earned range from 0.5 to 3.0 credits. As an example, seminar at LaGuardia Middle College is structured to address students’ varying needs over their years of school attendance.

Seminar at LaGuardia Middle College

Level 1 topics: Students taking college courses for the first time	Level 2 topics: Students with some college course experience	Level 3 topics: Students enrolled 75-100% of the school day in college courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College procedures and expectations: enrollment, facilities, resources, communicating with professors Note-taking and active listening Learning management systems: Blackboard and E-portfolio Time-management and stress management Peer study groups Learning circles and learning styles Writing revision processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Succeeding in college: course selection, majors, degrees, types of colleges, transcripts and GPA Financial aid and scholarships SAT/PSAT timeline Academic programs available at LAGCC/CUNY Associate degree decisions Planning for the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post-secondary planning Decisions on Associates degree, Bachelor’s degree, and Graduate degrees Special programs (HEOP and SEEK) Review of progress records Types of colleges and college resources (writing center, math center) Financial aid

Formal Tutoring

Tutoring is often available to students who may need help to be successful in their college classes. This may be offered through the college, the high school, or both. In some cases, regular teachers and faculty members are available to help students with their assignments; in other cases, students attend college tutoring centers. In recent years, online tutoring has increased in popularity as students were often less able to attend in-person sessions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tutoring may be optional or may be required for students who are earning below a certain grade in a given course.

At Buffalo Middle Early College, an academic and tutoring lab sponsored by the one of the college partners provides a designated space for the Early College students. According to the principal, former high school alumni serve as tutors so students can see someone who has “already been through their situation, and understands exactly what it feels like to be in high school but taking college classes.” The tutoring time is embedded into their class schedule and there is a daily sign-in requirement at the support center, which also serves to hold students accountable for the high school daily attendance mandate.

College Success Courses

Most MCNC Early Colleges have students take a credit-bearing college success class offered by the partnering college (often called College 101 or College Success Skills) in their early high school years. This allows them to experience the excitement of earning college credit while also gaining needed knowledge and skills. These courses often incorporate opportunities to reflect on personal and career goals and learn about how they align with college majors.

Early Warning and Intervention

Many colleges use early warning systems that allow faculty to request help for students who are struggling, but MCNC Early Colleges take extra steps to stay in touch with how students are doing in their college classes. This can be done through formal channels

using college-provided tools such as Starfish⁷ or can be carried out on a more informal basis as when high school staff are in touch with college faculty to get updates on Early College student progress. Dr. Richard A. Vladovic Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy has a counselor whose sole job is monitoring students’ progress in their college courses, especially to make sure that they don’t withdraw from classes without getting sound advice from a knowledgeable adult.

Course Structures

In addition, students may benefit from the way schools structure their participation in college courses. Several approaches are in use in MCNC schools including stretch classes, having courses that combine high school and college material, and deploying extra staff.

In some cases, schools have arranged schedules so that students have more time to master difficult material than would be possible in a typical college class. A college course may be taught across two semesters rather than one. Or students may attend the college course two or three days a week and then review the material with a high school teacher on additional days during the week. In other cases, creative approaches are developed based on the staff and resources available. For example, at International High School, where students are English Language Learners, the eleventh and twelfth grade social studies teachers are approved to be adjunct instructors of Global Politics at the college. According to the principal, “There is a full year, ‘a stretch,’ where an instructor is able to take the college course curriculum and spread it out [over the school year], sprinkle in also the content for high school; he’s able to weave these together so that students have more time.”

Some MCNC Early Colleges have also invested in extra staff for academic support. This may be especially helpful when the Early College serves students with special needs. For example, at Buffalo Middle Early College, a special education teacher is assigned to each grade level as a co-teacher. Also, a special educator serves as one of the college liaisons and attends English and math college classes with students to be able to better provide assistance.

7 For information about Starfish, see <https://eab.com/products/starfish/>

MCNC Student Support Practice #3: Social and Emotional Supports

“[The best part of my Early College experience] has been meeting a group of people who care about their education as much as I do and care and support each other through failure and victory.”

– MCNC school student

MCNC Early Colleges commit to making sure that every student is known and cared for by the adults in these small schools. As the principal at Dr. Richard A. Vladovic Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy stated, “Student-staff relationships are the foundation of our school-wide success.” The Mott Middle College principal also emphasized: “It is our responsibility as educators to completely envelope our students with full support. Graduating from high school is not the finish line... our teachers, counselors and staff are also coaches and secondary parents supporting them academically and emotionally to go beyond that first finish line.”

Widespread across MCNC Early Colleges are social support practices such as: 1) the teacher as counselor model, 2) advisory, 3) social emotional learning, 4) help from specialized professionals, and 5) family engagement.

Teacher as Counselor

Teachers who sign on to teach at MCNC Early Colleges often find that teaching is not their only responsibility. In many cases, the initial hiring process includes discussions on the importance of teachers providing both academic and social support to students. Partly because these are small schools, adults are asked to play multiple roles. At Mott Middle College, the principal shared, “The entire staff views themselves as quasi advisors-counselors first, and their role as teacher or administrator is second. From the time there’s any interaction, from the information night to graduation, families are viewed as [having] ‘scholars’ who need help to fulfill their potential.” The Buffalo Middle Early College principal emphasized, “Teachers are doing advisory classes. They’re doing their regular classes. They’re dealing with a population that needs a lot of counseling and they’re putting on a lot of hats throughout the day because [there can be] a lot of drama, a lot of emotional stuff going on.”

Advisory

Most MCNC Early Colleges have an advisory class that meets one or more times a week. Frequently, students will be with the same advisory teacher for their entire high school career so that deep relationships can be developed. In some schools, the time in advisory is relatively unstructured and used as an opportunity to talk about whatever is on students' minds. In other settings, there is a curriculum in place to make sure that the time is used to cover certain topics.

The advisory teacher is often a primary source of support for students—someone who they can turn to for any problem that arises. At Mott Middle College, students are often heterogeneously grouped across grades and race, and the advisory (called Focus) groups meet twice a week as part of the school schedule. The curriculum was developed by the school staff and administrators, and all teachers lead a Focus group. Students remain with the same teacher through high school. The principal shared, “The Focus teacher knows them for the course of those five years in a way [that goes beyond the] academic environment. And so we always say, ‘They’re your advocate.’ And so we also tell other teachers, ‘If you’ve got a problem with a particular student, go to their Focus teacher and have those conversations first.’”

Social Emotional Learning

MCNC Early Colleges put differing amounts of emphasis on social emotional learning (SEL) and address it in different ways. At International High School, where most students are recent arrivals from other countries, they recently paused their regular curriculum when they first returned from remote learning associated with the COVID 19 pandemic. The full school participated in a two-week SEL unit to re-build their culture. The principal shared, “You can’t expect kids to learn right without making them feel safe, making them feel heard, making them feel like a part of the community.”

Other schools have a specialized curriculum, such as the one offered to tenth and twelfth graders at Dr. Richard A. Vladovic Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy called Erica’s Lighthouse that covers coping strategies and tools. At International High School, a group of staff have gone through training offered by *Ramapo for Children* on restorative justice practices.⁸ They conduct “circles” with students as needed. In addition, advisory sessions and seminar classes may incorporate SEL topics.

Help from Specialized Professionals

In a few Early Colleges, leaders have decided to invest resources in specialized staff who can help students through challenges. These can be special education teachers, social workers, or guidance counselors. At Dr. Richard A. Vladovic Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy, the principal has found it very helpful to have a psychiatric social worker on staff to help students cope. She shared: “There’s so many things that are going on with them at home and everywhere else, and then they’re trying to be really successful, and they’re kind of in this high stress environment. So, I really pushed for us to have a [psychiatric social worker] – it was something that the school supported as a whole.”

In some cases, the college is able to assign staff to guide or counsel Early College students and some offer assistance with housing, food, and other basic needs when these are available to traditional college students. At Mott Middle College, there are two full-time professional counselors to handle crisis intervention and personal counseling, and at Buffalo Middle Early College, a formerly part-time social worker was budgeted to work full-time to support students.

Family Engagement

MCNC Early Colleges believe that engaging students’ families early on is a key part of supporting students. At Santa Ana Middle College, in ninth grade, students’ families have the opportunity to tour the college campus so they can feel “welcomed” and “walk through what their child is going through,” according to the school principal. Available student support resources are highlighted, such as the math center and language lab. The principal shared, “this allows parents to know these places exist and know where students can go to get support for their college classes.” This helps to address any concerns families may have about students taking college courses and being on a college campus.

In addition, many of the Early Colleges offer workshops just for the parents. At LaGuardia Middle College, parents have the opportunity to participate in workshops that help them (not their children) apply to college or further their college or work skills. Many of the schools have food assistance programs aimed at helping families of students in need. In addition, several long-standing principals at these schools mentioned educating generations of families – children of parents that had attended the school, as well as siblings and cousins.

8 See <https://ramapoforchildren.org/services-programs/training/restorative-practices/>

MCNC Student Support Practice #4: Planning for College and Careers

“[The best part of my Early College experience] was we got to see what college is like, how expensive it is, how to plan for it and why we should take our education seriously before we are let out on our own and that is something that, I think, every student should be able to experience.

– MCNC school student

Most MCNC Early College students plan to attend college after graduating from high school, either to attain their bachelor's degree (or beyond) or to complete their associate degree. Some will continue at the college where they have taken their Early College courses while others will transfer to another college. However, there are also students who will enter the job market after graduating from Early College. Schools have different approaches to making sure students are ready for life after graduation, including: 1) career exploration, 2) help with applying to and transferring credits to other colleges, and 3) internships and service learning.

Career Exploration

MCNC Early Colleges provide students with opportunities to think about their career options while in high school. In a few cases, such as at Buffalo Middle Early College, students are asked to pick a career-focused major that will allow them to begin preparing for a future career while in high school. The school offers students several career pathway options including business administration, criminal justice, building and trades, and office technology, as well as general studies with a career goal in mind. Most students select one of these, beginning in the spring of eleventh grade. In other schools, students work with counselors to identify career goals and align their coursework with them.

In addition, students are often able to take career-technical education (CTE) courses through which they become more familiar with career options. For example, at Santa Ana Middle College, several CTE pathways and courses are offered such as video production, motion by design, and video game coding to engage students through gaming and technology interests.

Applying and Transferring to College

As in traditional high schools, MCNC Early College counselors and teachers (through seminar and advisory periods) work closely with students on the college selection and application process as well as on completing financial aid forms. Early College counselors and teachers must be especially attentive to the ways that students' college credits will transfer after graduation. In some cases, schools have worked with individual four-year colleges to make sure that their students take college courses that will readily transfer and/or rely on courses specified in articulation agreements that may already be in place. Depending on the state, high school students may be able to take an established set of college courses that will transfer as a package, or they may complete a transferable associate degree.

Some schools, such as Dr. Richard A. Vladovic Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy and LaGuardia Middle College, integrate the college application process into seminar. This allows for an organized process in which all students participate and which may include a parent engagement dimension. It also establishes matriculation to college after graduation as the norm.

Internships and Service Learning

Internships are not a widespread practice in MCNC Early Colleges. In many cases, students are already hard-pressed to complete both a high school and college curriculum. However, some of the schools are committed to providing students with experiential and hands-on learning opportunities. Santa Ana Middle College offers work-based learning for the upper grade students, and students participate in internships through this. Participating students work on resumes, cover letters, communication, and the interview process. Then, the students engage in internships during the spring which help them to learn in a professional setting. Their students have done internships at a school to experience teaching, medical clinics to explore medical fields, and one student was connected with an author because she was interested in learning about writing. Student receive high school credit for the internship as an elective course.

At Mott Middle College and Genesee Early College and other Early Colleges in Michigan, students are able to earn a MEMCA certificate⁹ which includes opportunities to learn while undertaking community service, participation in career exploration activities, or both. Michigan also encourages the establishment of Early College programs within career technical education centers where hands-on learning is standard practice.

⁹ See FAQs from Michigan, page 2:

https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/CTE/cte_emc/EMC-Tool-Kit/EMC_FAQs.pdf?rev=e38ea8d4ddfb4485a0069e6fa9983b4f

Implementing Comprehensive Student Support Practices

“[The best part of my Early College experience] was being able to have a weight lifted off my shoulders regarding money and obtaining college credits. I wouldn't have been able to go to college without this opportunity.

– MCNC school student

The MCNC Early College support practices highlighted in this report are associated with *MCNC Design Principle #2: Comprehensive Academic and Socio-emotional Supports*. However, to undertake the support practices discussed here – particularly in serving historically underrepresented students – school leaders also must work to create a set of conditions that facilitate their development and implementation. These include establishing a strong academic program (MCNC design principle 1), forming a close relationship with the college partner (design principle 3), and building a culture of continuous improvement (design principle 4). In addition, there are several overall conditions that can facilitate the implementation of effective student supports in Early Colleges.

A Strong Academic Program

Working with both districts and college partners, Early Colleges develop an academic program that is rigorous and allows students to complete both high school graduation requirements and substantial college coursework.¹⁰ The academic program should allow students to master progressively more complex knowledge and skills, allowing them to build toward the day when they can independently succeed in college courses.

Academic programs must also ensure that there is clarity about how credits will be earned and which courses will count toward high school graduation requirements, will earn college credit, or both. These are often reflected in the academic plans. According to the MCNC director, “The academic plan is for every student... students need a launching pad like the academic plan so that it’s concrete and real, completing a set of requirements to push them into the next phase of their life.”

¹⁰ For a useful description of the MCNC academic program, see: https://www.dexterschools.org/uploaded/board_of_education/meeting_packets/April-May-June_2019/Supplemental_Info_on_EMC.pdf

The College Partnership

Ideally, both the school and college benefit from the partnership around the Early College. The school can provide rich learning experiences to students, while the college fulfills its community service mission and attracts future matriculants.

The two entities, often with the participation of the local school district, work out: 1) who can award credits and graduate students, 2) how the finances will work, 3) what information/data will be shared, 4) who will be responsible for providing student supports, 5) what meetings are needed, etc. The agreement is typically formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding that spells out the details of the relationship. Further, a strong partnership is often facilitated by the presence of a skilled college liaison, the person assigned by the college to manage the partnership with the school.

It is helpful when leaders publicly demonstrate how much the partnership means to them. One MCNC school principal reflected on how the college president shows his support: “We both spoke at each other's graduations. He comes and speaks at our high school graduation. These are his students, right?”

Culture of Continuous Improvement

Early Colleges are more likely to provide strong student supports if they engage in intentional practices leading to continuous improvement. As Early College students take both high school and college classes, data must be available and shared that reflects their progress in both institutions. In addition, there need to be opportunities for teachers and staff to reflect on the data, identify any areas of concern, and make decisions about corrections of course.

In addition, teachers and other staff need opportunities for growth. Annual MCNC conferences are offered in which learning and collaboration take place. Other conferences can also serve this purpose. In addition, many schools and colleges set up their own systems for learning to take place.

Conditions that Enable a System of Strong Supports

School leaders interviewed for this report identified several conditions that enable the creation of a strong system of student supports.

- Leaders benefit from guidance from organizations with experience in structuring student support systems such as the MCNC. They also need support from their district leaders who can help them to obtain needed training and resources.
- Having the right staff is a precondition for providing the kinds of supports that make a real difference to students. Effective Early Colleges work to make sure that their faculty are strong teachers as well as individuals who can give students ongoing love and support. Other staff are expected to also play a role in student supports. School job descriptions should specify the kinds of knowledge, beliefs and skills needed to be effective in an Early College.
- When possible, effective schools invest in people who can provide extra help such as tutors, special education teachers, social workers, and mental health counselors. This is especially important when students face poverty and other life challenges.
- Teachers and staff benefit from opportunities to learn from those who have created strong systems of student support. Peer learning opportunities can include visits to other schools, participation in webinars, or attendance at conferences.

Early Colleges and many other dual enrollment programs are committed to serving students who might not otherwise have opportunities to enroll in college. To optimize their chances for success, high-quality and effective support systems are needed. The practices shared here were developed by MCNC Early Colleges and have been refined through careful trial and error over time. They can be widely replicated by other schools and programs, allowing ever more students to have the benefits of an Early College experience and the life success associated with it.

Appendix A:

List of MCNC Study Schools

MCNC School Name	Location	School District	College Partner(s)
1. Academy of Health Sciences Principal: Daria Valentine https://www.pgcps.org/schools/academy-of-health-sciences-at-prince-georges-community-college	Largo, MD	Prince George's County Public Schools	Prince George's Community College
2. Brooklyn College Academy Principal: Shernell Thomas-Daley https://brooklyncollegeacademy.org	Brooklyn, NY	New York City Public Schools	Brooklyn College
3. Buffalo Middle Early College Principal: William Merriman https://www.buffaloschools.org/o/ps415	Buffalo, NY	Buffalo City School District	SUNY Buffalo State University; SUNY Erie Community College
4. Dr. Richard A. Vladovic Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy Principal: Desiree Douglas Montoya http://harborteacherprep.com/	Los Angeles, CA	Los Angeles Unified School District	Los Angeles Harbor College
5. Genesee Early College Principal: Robert McAllister https://gec.geneseeisid.org/	Flint, MI	Genesee Intermediate School District	University of Michigan - Flint
6. Hollis F. Price Middle College Principal: Sandra Barnes https://schools.scsk12.org/hollisfprice-hs	Memphis, TN	Memphis-Shelby County Schools	LeMoyne-Owen College
7. International High School at LaGuardia Principal: Jaclyn Valane http://www.ihsnyc.org/	Long Island City, NY	New York City Public Schools	LaGuardia Community College
8. LaGuardia Middle College High School Principal: Socrates Ortiz Jr. http://www.mchslic.org/	Long Island City, NY	New York City Public Schools	LaGuardia Community College
9. Mott Middle College Principal: Robert McAllister https://mmc.geneseeisid.org/	Flint, MI	Genesee Intermediate School District	Mott Community College
10. San Bernardino Middle College Principal: James Espinoza https://middlecollege.sbcusd.com/	San Bernardino, CA	San Bernardino City Unified School District	San Bernardino Valley College
11. Santa Ana Middle College Principal: Damon Voight http://www.sausd.us/middlecollege	Santa Ana, CA	Santa Ana Unified School District	Santa Ana College

Appendix B: Excerpt from the MCNC Self-Assessment Tool: Comprehensive Student Support

Design Principle #2: Comprehensive Student Support

Enabling students to attain high standards requires that attention be paid to students' academic and social needs. All students are known well because Early and Middle Colleges (EMCs) are student-focused. Students know that adults care. There are flexible and innovative structures to support students academically and socially.

Implementation Level: Please check the box that represents the overall implementation level of "Comprehensive Student Support."

Not Evident or Underway	Planning/ Development	Progress in Implementation	Mature Implementation	Advanced Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no support is provided to students. Adults seem largely unconcerned with students' lives outside of the classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EMC is working to improve systems of student support, both academic and personal, and planning to include such structures as House, Advisory, or Seminar*. Adults appear to be concerned with students' lives in and out of the classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The EMC has at least one professional counselor, and adults are clearly concerned with students' lives. There is a minimum of one professional counselor to develop support and guidance services. There is progress being made toward implementation of the items included in Mature Implementation, with at least three of these well established. 	<p>In order to meet students' academic, affective, and social needs, schools have the following structures and supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All EMC staff are serving as counselors or mentors. A House or Advisory system in place that meets weekly. Seminar* offered for students enrolled in college classes. Tutoring is available to students. Regular communication with parents about the progress and needs of students. At least one professional counselor provides individual and group counseling services. Students are helped to meet college expectations supported through carefully scaffolded assignments and instructions. Established map of all services available to students. 	<p>All of the items associated with Mature Implementation are in place. In addition, at least three of the following are happening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students are serving as peer mediators or mentors. College students serve as role models, mentors, or tutors. Students state that they have multiple adults they can count on to help. Students perceive Seminar* as of great value in navigating college courses. Innovative approaches are used in the provision of student supports.

* Seminar provides assistance with navigating college expectations, systems, and specific courses. It also provides students with personal and social support.

Rationale: Provide a rationale for your assessment of implementation level, including specific evidence that supports your assessment.

Note: This excerpt was taken from the *MCNC Self-Assessment Tool*, a rubric based on MCNC's four design principles, which helps schools to review and assess their progress in implementing high-quality Early and Middle Colleges. The initial version of this tool was created in 2007 by NCREST, in collaboration with the MCNC leadership, as part of the national *Early College Initiative* to guide schools toward full implementation of MCNC Early College practices and features.

Appendix C:

Academic Plan - Santa Ana Middle College

Subject Area	Grade 9 Fall	Grade 9 Spring	Grade 9 Summer	Grade 10 Fall	Grade 10 Spring	Grade 10 Summer	Grade 11 Fall	Grade 11 Spring	Grade 11 Summer	Grade 12 Fall	Grade 12 Spring
English	English 9	English 9		English 10	English 10	ENGL 101: Freshman Composition	English 11	English 11	ENGL 103: Critical Thinking & Writing OR PHIL 110: Critical Thinking	English 12	English 12
Math	Math	Math		Math	Math		Math	Math		College Math	
Science	Biology	Biology		BIOL 109: Fundamentals of Biology Lecture, Chemistry	BIOL 109/190: Fundamentals of Biology/ Fundamentals of Biology Lab, Chemistry			Physical Science OR			
Social Studies, History & Government				World History	World History		POLT 101: Introduction to American Governments, US History	ECON 120: Principles/ Macro- HISTORY, US History		Government and/or Economics	Government and/or Economics
Physical Education	PE	PE		PE	PE						
Language			Foreign Language 101		Foreign Language 102						
Electives	Fine Arts (VAPA) #1, Elective [Winter] BA 190: Microsoft PowerPoint	Fine Arts (VAPA) #2, Elective					Elective	Elective		Elective 1, Elective 2	Elective 1, Elective 2
Seminar	AVID 9	AVID 9		AVID 10	AVID 10		AVID 11	AVID 11		AVID 12	AVID 12
Other				Pathway Intro Class/AA College Class			CMST 102: Public Speaking, Pathway/AA College Class, [Winter] ENTH 101	Pathway/AA College Class		Pathway/AA College Class 1, Pathway/AA College Class 2	Pathway/AA College Class 1, Pathway/AA College Class 2, Pathway/AA College Class 3
Number of College Credits											
Total: 64	Grade 9: 13			Grade 10: 13			Grade 11: 25			Grade 12: 13	

Notes: College courses are designated in blue font.

Note: The initial version of this academic plan template was created in 2005 by NCREST, in collaboration with the MCNC leadership, as part of the national *Early College Initiative*, to help schools plan and map out how students would earn a significant number of college credits in addition to completing high school graduation requirements.

