Case Study

Horizon High School's Early College Transformation

Horizon High School, a Title I school with a thriving International Baccalaureate (IB) program, had historically offered college credit through Advanced Placement (AP), IB, and limited dual enrollment courses in core academic areas. However, data revealed disparities in access, as most participants had transitioned into high school from the middle school gifted program. Seeking to expand opportunities and align with workforce needs, school leaders established advisory boards to identify high-demand, high-wage careers in the community. The results led to an academy model redesign focusing on health science, computer science, and manufacturing. This shift increased career-focused dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment options in collaboration with the local community college.

High school teachers and college faculty collaborated to align early pathway courses in meta-major degrees to existing high school classes. High school administrators implemented strategies to remove enrollment barriers, including aligning high school course titles with college courses, applying an honors designation, and adopting multiple placement measures. In addition to refining course pairings in core academic areas, high school teachers and college faculty reviewed the career and technical education curriculum and identified clusters of college courses that complemented it. Next, they took an inventory of the embedded industry-recognized credentials and processed opportunities for students to earn college credit for credentials at no cost. To improve credential participation, local businesses covered the cost of exam fees. Work-based experiences expanded through industry partnerships, satisfying requirements for capstone courses.

The school recognized a unique challenge with sustaining college-qualified high school science teachers. To address the situation, the high school and college collaborated to develop a summer bridge program. During the summer months, students self-selected to complete a foundational chemistry course that was taught on the college campus by dual enrollment teachers using course-based undergraduate research methodologies.

To help students make greater progress in specialized fields, juniors who selected any one of the three programs of focus in their education plan were invited to take additional college courses during the school year. These courses were taught by college faculty at either the high school or college campus, and transportation support was provided with bus vouchers. These efforts have resulted in more equitable access, increased credit attainment from an average of five to twelve credits per graduate, and a more diverse group of students engaging in early college pathways. There has been a steady increase in the number of students earning college credit for composition and college mathematics, as well as satisfying requirements for industry credentials applied to college certificates of completion.