

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An Early College High School (ECHS) is a high school that blends high school and college level coursework to provide traditionally underserved students the opportunity to earn an associate degree or up to 60 hours of tuition-free college credit by the time of high school graduation. The Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) was among the first Texas school districts to establish an ECHS in 2006 and has grown to 25 ECHSs (Table 1). In 2019-20, ECHS campuses were supported by \$14,292,375 in Dallas ISD general operating funds. This was an increase of 20 percent over 2018-19 (\$11,871,142) and 37 percent over 2017-18 (\$10,458,764).

Table 1: 2019-20 Dallas ISD Early College High Schools

Early College High Schools	Dallas College Campus
Traditional Early College High Schools (ECHS)	
Trinidad Garza	Mountain View Campus
Kathlyn Joe Gilliam	Cedar Valley Campus
Dr. Wright L. Lassiter Jr.	El Centro Campus
North Lake	North Lake Campus
W.W. Samuell	Eastfield Campus
Skyline	Cedar Valley Campus
H. Grady Spruce	Eastfield Campus
Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH)	
Bryan Adams	Eastfield Campus
W. H. Adamson	El Centro Campus
David W. Carter	Cedar Valley Campus
Dr. Emmett J. Conrad	Richland Campus
Hillcrest	Richland Campus
Thomas Jefferson	Brookhaven Campus
Justin F. Kimball	Mountain View Campus
Lincoln	El Centro Campus
James Madison	El Centro Campus
Moisés E. Molina	Mountain View Campus
North Dallas	Brookhaven Campus
L.G. Pinkston	El Centro Campus
Franklin D. Roosevelt	El Centro Campus
Seagoville	Eastfield Campus
South Oak Cliff	Mountain View Campus
Sunset	Mountain View Campus
W.T. White	Brookhaven Campus
Wilmer-Hutchins	North Lake Campus
2019-20 Planning Year	
W.T. White Fine Arts CA	Brookhaven Campus
Wilmer-Hutchins Fine Arts CA	Cedar Valley Campus

Source: ECHS program documents and ECHS website accessed 01/08/20.

The 25 ECHSs include seven traditional Early College High Schools (ECHS) and 18 Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH). Two additional Fine Arts ECHS are in their planning year. The ECHS program at the Dallas ISD is coordinated by the Early College Programs division within the Postsecondary Partnerships and Programs department.

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION/Limitations

The purpose of this evaluation was to examine the implementation of the ECHS programs based on outlined program goals. On Friday, March 13, 2020, in alignment with federal recommendations, the Governor of Texas issued a disaster proclamation certifying that the novel coronavirus COVID-19 posed an imminent threat of disaster for all counties in the state of Texas. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dallas ISD transitioned students to at-home learning on March 23 following Spring Break (March 16 – 20) until the end of the school year. Additionally, the Governor used his statutory authority under Texas Government Code, §418.016 to suspend annual academic assessment requirements for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year cancelling remaining planned administrations of *STAAR EOCs*. Furthermore, national administration of college readiness assessments, such as the *ACT* and *SAT*, were canceled. Due to these COVID-19 pandemic related changes, the scope of the evaluation was limited to available data.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS/OUTCOMES

What were the components of the ECHS program?

TEA Requirements. For schools to be designated by TEA as early college high schools, they must meet the criteria articulated in the ECHS and P-TECH Blueprints.¹

Dallas ISD ECHS Structure. Four of the 25 ECHSs are “stand alone” campuses and solely educate ECHS students (Garza, Gilliam, Lassiter, and North Lake Collegiate Academy). The remaining 21 schools operate as a “school within a school” to provide a sense of cohesiveness for students within the comprehensive high school. Students are accepted into ECHS programs as freshmen and matriculate as a cohort as they progress through high school. Students attend grade nine and grade 10 dual credit classes at their high school campuses while students in grades 11 and 12 attend classes on a partner campus of the

¹ Blueprints can be accessed at <https://tea.texas.gov/echhs> and <https://tea.texas.gov/ptech>

Dallas College, formally known as Dallas County Community College District. The Dallas ISD provides transportation to partner community college campuses at no charge.

Student Applications. Online applications are accepted from interested eighth grade students (incoming freshman) from November through the end of January every school year. Applicants are asked to select their top three choices among the district's ECHSs. Students are required to write briefly about their strengths, what they enjoy learning, and how attending high school at an ECHS would help them to reach their academic goals. All students who apply are invited for an interview. Acceptance letters are sent to applicants in February. The district has a recruitment and enrollment goal of approximately 60 to 125 students per campus per year. In 2019-20, ECHS campuses accepted between 65 to 133 grade nine students.

Summer Bridge Program. The goal of this two-week long program is to orient incoming grade nine students to academic behaviors and skills needed for dual credit achievement and to prepare students to meet TSIA requirements. The summer bridge program for the 2019-20 cohort ran for 10 days from June 5 through June 20, 2019. Attendance was not mandatory. There were 2,287 incoming ECHS students who attended at least one day of the Summer Bridge Program (87% of all incoming grade nine ECHS students).

Pathways and Industry Partners. P-TECH students select a pathway in grade nine to guide them towards a specialized field. Industry partners offer students essential mentoring and internship opportunities to gain relevant hands on learning experiences in their chosen field to prepare them to enter the workforce career ready.

What were the demographic characteristics of ECHS students?

During the 2019-20 school year, a total of 7,692 students were enrolled in an ECHS. The ethnic composition of district ECHS students was similar to Dallas ISD high school students; 73 percent of ECHS students were Hispanic, and 24 percent were African American (72% and 21%, respectively, for all district high school students). In contrast, a higher percentage of ECHS students were economically disadvantaged (83%) than overall Dallas ISD high school students (77%). There were more female ECHS students (57%) than male ECHS students (43%), unlike the district (50% male and 50% female). A smaller percentage of ECHS students received special education services (3%) compared to all district high school students (9%). More ECHS students (22%) were Talented and Gifted (TAG) eligible than district high school students (16%). Fifty-six percent of ECHS students were considered at risk, slightly lower than all high school students (60%).

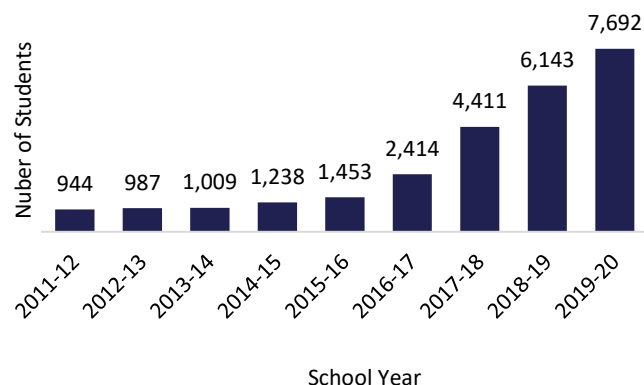
Traditional ECHS students were comparable to P-TECH students except in three aspects. First, a higher percentage

of Hispanic students enrolled in traditional ECHSs than P-TECHs (79% vs 71%). Second, a higher percentage of traditional ECHS students was TAG eligible (30% vs 20%). Third, a smaller percentage of traditional ECHS students was considered at risk of dropping out of school (47% vs 58%).

What were the student enrollment characteristics?

With the opening of additional ECHSs and higher enrollment numbers at existing schools, enrollment numbers have grown significantly over the past five years from 1,453 in 2015-16 to 7,692 students in 2019-20 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: 2011-12 to 2019-20 Student Enrollment in Early College High School Programs



Source: PEIMS demographic files dated 10/30/11 (2011-12), 10/29/12 (2012-13), 10/28/13 (2013-14), 10/31/14 (2014-15), 10/30/15 (2015-16), 10/31/16 (2016-17), 10/30/17 (2017-18), 10/26/18 (2018-19), and 10/28/19 (2019-20).

Thirty-four percent of students ($n=2,639$) were enrolled in grade nine, 29 percent in grade 10 ($n=2,212$), 25 percent in grade 11 ($n=1,907$), and 12 percent in grade 12 ($n=934$).

Attendance Rates. The average attendance rate for district ECHS students was 6.5 percentage points higher than non-ECHS students (96.3% versus 89.8%). Students enrolled in traditional ECHSs had an average attendance rate of 97.5 percent, while students at P-TECHs had an average attendance rate of 95.9 percent. The attendance rate difference between ECHS and non-ECHS students increased by 1.5 percentage points from 2018-19 (5 percentage points) to 2019-20 (6.5 percentage points).

Student Retention Rates. Overall, retention rates were higher for ECHS students than comprehensive high school students enrolled in campuses offering the ECHS program. The two-year retention rate difference was eight percentage points (84% versus 76%), the three-year retention rate difference was nine percentage points (73% versus 64%), and the four-year retention rate difference was 21 percentage points (66% versus 45%). Traditional ECHS students had a higher retention rate than P-TECH students for all cohorts. The retention rate difference for the 2018-19 cohort was five percentage points, for the 2017-18 cohort

seven percentage points, and for the 2016-17 cohort 15 percentage points.

Graduation Rates. The average four-year graduation rate for the 2016-17 ECHS cohort was 65 percent; 13 percentage points higher than Dallas ISD comprehensive high school students. For this cohort, the graduation rate of traditional ECHS students was 14 percentage points higher than that of P-Tech students (75% versus 61%). However, there was no difference between traditional ECHS and P-Tech students in the graduation rate of students who were enrolled in the program for four consecutive years. Overall, the graduation rate for continuously enrolled students differed by 10 percentage points between ECHS students (99%) and comprehensive high school students (89%). The graduation rate for the 2016-17 cohort was lower than that of the 2015-16 cohort across all student groups. The graduation rate of continuously enrolled students remained stable between both groups.

What were the academic performances of ECHS students on post-secondary readiness assessments?

SAT. Of the 2,841 ECHS students enrolled in grade 11 (2017-18 cohort) and grade 12 (2016-17 cohort), 41 percent met the TSI SAT benchmark on ERW (480), and 21 percent met the TSI SAT benchmark on mathematics (530). Traditional ECHS students met TSI SAT benchmarks at a higher rate than P-TECH students (difference of 29 to 32 percentage points). In comparison, 19 percent of non-ECHS students enrolled in comprehensive high schools containing the ECHS program met the TSI SAT benchmark for ERW, and eight percent did so for mathematics.

ACT. Overall, of the 934 ECHS students in grade 12 (2016-17 cohort), 11 percent met the TSI ACT benchmarks on English and Mathematics. Traditional ECHS students met TSI ACT benchmarks at a higher rate than P-TECH students (difference of 15 percentage points for mathematics and English each). In comparison, three percent of non-ECHS students enrolled in comprehensive high schools containing ECHS programs met the TSI ACT benchmark for English and mathematics each.

TSIA. Meeting TSIA benchmarks, or qualifying for an exemption, indicates that students are ready for college-level course work in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. Of the 934 grade 12 ECHS students enrolled in 2019-20, 98 percent met TSIA benchmarks or qualified for an exemption for reading and writing, and 95 percent met TSIA benchmarks for mathematics, thereby exceeding the program goal of 70 percent for each subtest. Overall, ECHS students outperformed non-ECHS students by 70 (writing and reading) to 74 (mathematics) percentage points.

Did Early College High School students earn the targeted number of dual credit hours for each grade level?

One of the program goals was that 70 percent of ECHS students will have earned three credit hours by the end of grade nine, 12 credit hours by the end of grade 10, 30 credit hours by the end of grade 11, and 60 credit hours by the end of grade 12. However, enrollment files did not provide data on cumulative dual credit hours earned by students. Therefore, this evaluation report provides the number and percentage of students who met the expected number of dual credit hours at each grade level in 2019-20. Overall, 55 percent (n=4,226) earned the expected number of dual credit hours at each grade level.

How many industry-based certifications or educational certificates were earned by ECHS students?

Overall, 554 ECHS students (grades 11 and 12) completed 841 educational certificates while enrolled at Dallas College. Students completed between one to four certificates with an average of 1.5 certificates per student. P-Tech students accounted for 88 percent of ECHS students who completed a certificate and 92 percent of the 841 completed certificates.

In addition, 419 ECHS students earned a total of 434 industry-based certifications in 2019-20, including 382 certifications listed in the A-F accountability system. All but two students who attempted and passed industry-based certifications in 2019-20 were P-Tech students. Fewer ECHS students attained industry-based certifications in 2019-20 than in past years (2017-18, n=966, 2018-19, n=633) even though ECHS enrollment numbers increased from previous years.

How many ECHS graduates earned an associate degree or 60 college credit hours?

Of the 869 ECHS students who graduated in 2019-20, 684 students (79%) earned an associate degree or 60 dual credit hours, exceeding the ECHS program goal of 70 percent. Of the ECHS students who met the goal, 91 percent (n=623) met the goal by earning an associate degree while nine percent (n=61) met the goal by earning 60 or more dual credit hours. Fifty-eight percent (n=397) of students who met the goal were P-Tech students, while 42 percent (n=287) were traditional ECHS students. In 2019-20, more Associate of Applied Science degrees were awarded to ECHS students (n=341, 55%) than Associate of Science (n=239, 38%) or Associate of Arts (n=43, 7%) degrees. This differs from 2018-19 where nine percent (n=22) of ECHS graduates were awarded an Associate of Applied Science. Although 2019-20 was the first time the number and percentages of ECHS graduates who earned an associate degree or 60 dual credit hours were reported, the number of associate degrees awarded increased by 216

percent from 197 associate degrees in 2017-18 to 623 associate degrees in 2019-20. At the same time, the percentage of graduates who were awarded an associate degree increased from 64 percent to 72 percent.

What were the college enrollment rates for ECHS students?

According to the 2019-20 National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data file, 67 percent of 2018-19 ECHS graduates and 52 percent of non-ECHS graduates enrolled in college within one year of graduation (Table 2). Of these students, more ECHS students (93%) enrolled in a four-year university than non-ECHS students (46%). Similarly, fewer ECHS students (7%) enrolled in a two-year college than non-ECHS students (54%).

Table 2: 2018-19 Percentages for Students Enrolled in College within One Year of Graduating High School

Grad Yr	ECHS Graduates			Non-ECHS Graduates		
	Graduated	Enrolled		Graduated	Enrolled	
	<i>N</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>	%
2018-19	372	248	67	7,346	3,848	52
Two Yr		17	7		2,065	54
Four-Yr		231	93		1,783	46

Source: Dallas ISD graduation file, 09/25/19. Demographic file, 05/20/19 (2018-19). NSC file, 05/01/20.

Note: Grad Yr = graduation year.

What were student perceptions of the ECHS programs?

The graduation of the first P-TECH Cohort (2016-17) in 2019-20 marked an important milestone for the ECHS program at the Dallas ISD. An online survey invitation was emailed to 925 ECHS grade 12 students to collect their perceptions on the ECHS program. Overall, 60 students responded to the survey request. From those, 49 students completed the survey for a five percent response rate. Due to the low response rate, survey results were not representative and thus not generalizable. Therefore, survey results are not included in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings, the following recommendations are offered for stakeholders.

Continue to raise ECHS departmental goals for *TSIA*.
For 2019-20, ECHS program staff set a *TSIA* goal of 70

percent of Grade 12 ECHS students earning a passing score on the *TSIA* subtests or qualifying for an exemption. This goal was surpassed with 98 percent of Grade 12 ECHS students meeting *TSIA* criteria for reading and writing, and 85 percent meeting *TSIA* criteria for mathematics. Given the importance of the *TSIA* in determining whether students are ready for college-level course work after grade 10, ECHS program staff should consider setting achievable goals at lower grade levels.

Continue to examine successful implementations of the ECHS model. Lassiter ECHS ranked first among ECHSs in the percentage of students who met SAT and ACT benchmarks. Consider studying success stories to better understand how this was achieved and identify steps to replicate with other ECHSs.

Continue to support ECHS campuses in monitoring dual-credit course completions. Overall, 55 percent of ECHS students met the targeted number of dual credit hours by the end of each grade level. Although traditional ECHS students met the goal for grades nine and 11, P-TECH students did not meet the goal for any grade level. ECHS department staff should continue to help campuses identify students who may not meet the targeted dual credit hours by the end of the school year.

Continue to promote ECHS students' completion of educational certificates or industry-based certifications. ECHS students (grades 11 and 12) earned 841 educational certificates while taking dual credit classes at Dallas College. In addition, ECHS students earned 434 industry-based certifications during the 2019-20 school year. However, the number of ECHS students who earned industry-based certifications has dropped over the past three years from 966 students in 2017-18 to 434 students in 2019-20. Given that industry-based certifications can provide students with an advantage in finding employment, ECHS staff should, in cooperation with the Career and Technical Education Department, review causes for this trend.

Work with program evaluators to increase ECHS student participation in the annual student exit survey. Exit surveys provide unique insight into the ECHS program from students' perspective that is not otherwise available through other data sources. Feedback could help with future program development to ensure the ECHS program addresses student needs.

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