

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 2020-21, ECHS campuses were supported by \$13,121,904 in Dallas ISD general operating funds. This was a decrease of 8.2 percent compared to 2019-20 (\$14,292,375) and 10.5 percent increase over 2018-19 (\$11,871,142).

Table 1: 2020-21 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
2020-21 Second Planning Year	
Sunset Collegiate Academy	Mountain View Campus

Source: ECHS program documents and ECHS website accessed 07/01/21.

The 25 ECHSs include seven traditional ECHSs and 18 Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH). Pathways offered by White and Wilmer-Hutchins

Fine Arts Collegiate Academies in 2019-20 (planning year) were rolled into their respective P-TECH programs. An addition Criminal Justice Collegiate Academy with 69 students was in their planning year in 2020-21. 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 program. Historical program data presented in this report may differ from past reports as ECHS information was based on end-of-year (May or June) student enrollment rather than Public Education Information Management System (October) enrollment to better reflect year-long ECHS student enrollment and graduation data.

In 2020-21, Dallas ISD modified the district school calendar and changed from a six-week schedule to a nine-week schedule. Additionally, at-home learning was implemented districtwide for the first four weeks, which began on September 8, 2020. On October 22, 2020, the district announced that campuses would provide in-person and virtual learning throughout the rest of the school year, and parents could then choose for their children to participate in either in-person or virtual instruction. In-person and virtual instruction included both synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. The district also continued to follow and implement the Center for Disease Control (CDC) as well as state and local COVID-19 safety protocols. ECHS students were further impacted by the closure of all Dallas College campuses and the move to asynchronous online learning. Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) testing at Dallas College was suspended and TSI requirements were waived through the Spring 2021 semester. As a result of these impacts, ECHS staff did not set any program goals for 2020-21. Due to these COVID-19 pandemic related changes, the scope of the evaluation was limited to available data. Some of the data trends displayed below could have been negatively impacted by COVID.

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.

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. In past years, students attended grade nine and grade 10 dual credit classes at their high school campuses while students in grades 11 and 12 attended classes on a partner campus of the Dallas College, formally known as Dallas County Community College District. The Dallas ISD provided transportation to partner community college campuses at no charge. In 2020-21 Dallas College closed all campuses and moved to asynchronous online learning due to COVID-19.

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 2020-21, ECHS campuses accepted between 61 to 128 grade nine students.

Summer Bridge and Summer Hub Programs. 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. According to program information and summary data provided by program staff, the Summer Bridge program for the 2020-21 cohort ran for 11 days from June 3 through June 18, 2020. Attendance was not mandatory. There were 1,517 incoming ECHS students who attended at least one day of the Summer Bridge Program (64% of all incoming grade nine ECHS students). Additional support was provided to students who took Summer I and II dual credit courses at Dallas College via the Summer Hub program. Summer Hub I ran from June 4 to July 1, 2020 while Summer Hub II ran from July 6 to August 6, 2020. Seventy-one percent of the 2,221 students who took classes during Summer Hub I participated in Summer Hub I. Similarly, 751 out of the 809 students (93%) who enrolled in Dallas College during Summer Hub II took participated in the program.

Pathways and Industry Partners. P-TECH students select a pathway in grade nine to guide them towards a specialized field. Industry partners offer students mentoring and internship opportunities to gain relevant hands-on learning experiences in their chosen field to prepare them to enter the workforce career ready. According to program staff, 416 students participated in mostly virtual internships.

What were the demographic characteristics of ECHS students?

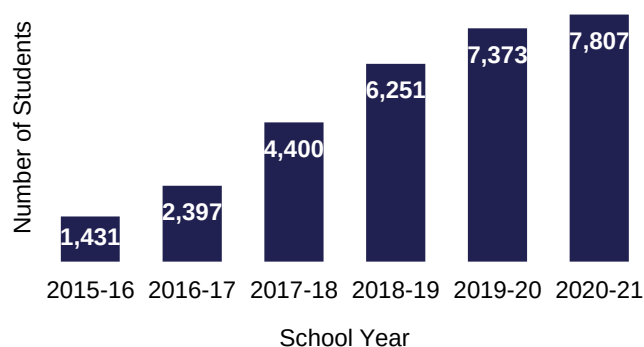
During the 2020-21 school year, a total of 7,807 students were enrolled in an ECHS. The ethnic composition of district ECHS students was similar (percentages were within three percentage points) to Dallas ISD high school students. In contrast, a slightly higher percentage of ECHS students were economically disadvantaged (86%) than for overall Dallas ISD high school students (82%). There were more female ECHS students (58%) than male ECHS students (42%) unlike the district (50% male and female). A smaller percentage of ECHS students received special education services (3%) compared to all district high school students (9%). More ECHS students (24%) were Talented and Gifted (TAG) eligible than district high school students (17%). Fifty-four percent of ECHS students were at risk, lower than for all district high school students (63%).

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 (80% vs 74%). Second, a higher percentage of traditional ECHS students were TAG eligible (31% vs 21%). Third, a smaller percentage of traditional ECHS students were at-risk of dropping out of school (45% vs 57%).

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 2,397 in 2016-17 to 7,807 students in 2020-21 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: 2015-16 to 2020-21 Student Enrollment in Early College High School Programs



Source: End-of-year demographic files dated 06/05/17 (2016-17), 06/04/18 (2017-18), 05/28/19 (2018-19), 05/29/20 (2019-20), and 06/07/21 (2020-21).

Thirty percent of students ($n=2,366$) were enrolled in grade nine, 29 percent in grade 10 ($n=2,281$), 22 percent in grade 11 ($n=1,720$), and 18 percent in grade 12 ($n=1,440$).

Attendance Rates. The average attendance rate for district ECHS students was 11 percentage points higher than

non-ECHS students (94.0% versus 83%). Students enrolled in traditional ECHSs had an average attendance rate of 96.5 percent, while students at P-TECHs had an average attendance rate of 93.1 percent.

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 11 percentage points (90% versus 79%), the three-year retention rate difference was eight percentage points (72% versus 64%), and the four-year retention rate difference was nine percentage points (62% versus 53%). Traditional ECHS students had a higher retention rate than P-TECH students for all cohorts. The retention rate difference for the 2019-20 cohort was six percentage points, for the 2018-19 cohort five percentage points, and for the 2017-18 cohort 16 percentage points.

Graduation Rates. The average four-year graduation rate for the 2017-18 ECHS cohort was 60 percent; 10 percentage points higher than Dallas ISD comprehensive high school students. For this cohort, the graduation rate of traditional ECHS students was 15 percentage points higher than that of P-Tech students (72% versus 57%). However, P-Tech students who were enrolled in the program for four consecutive years had a slightly higher graduation rate than those of traditional ECHS students (97% vs 96%). Overall, the graduation rate for continuously enrolled students differed by 13 percentage points between ECHS students (97%) and comprehensive high school students (84%). Graduation rates across all Dallas ISD students remained stable between the 2016-17 and 2017-18 cohorts (56% respectively), while the graduation rate of continuously enrolled students decreased from 90 percent to 86 percent.

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

SAT. Of the 3,160 ECHS students enrolled in grade 11 (2018-19 cohort) and grade 12 (2017-18 cohort), 37 percent met the TSI SAT benchmark on ERW (480), and 18 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 30 to 23 percentage points). In comparison, 12 percent of non-ECHS students enrolled in comprehensive high schools containing the ECHS program met the TSI SAT benchmark for ERW, and five percent did so for mathematics.

ACT. Overall, of the 1,440 ECHS students in grade 12 (2017-18 cohort), seven percent met the TSI ACT benchmark on Mathematics and eight percent met the benchmark on English. Traditional ECHS students met TSI ACT benchmarks at a higher rate than P-TECH students (difference of 13 percentage points for mathematics and English each). In comparison, one 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 1,440 grade 12 ECHS students enrolled in 2020-21, 98 percent met TSIA benchmarks or qualified for an exemption for reading and writing, and 87 percent met TSIA benchmarks for mathematics. Overall, ECHS students outperformed non-ECHS students by 74 (writing and reading) to 77 (mathematics) percentage points.

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

Although, all ECHS goals were suspended for 2020-21 by ECHS staff, the percentage of students who met 2019-20 goals were tracked to provide comprehensive achievement data to program staff. To recall, one of the 2019-20 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. Overall, 3,917 out of 7,807 ECHS students (50%) earned the expected number of dual credit hours.

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

Overall, 270 ECHS students (grades 11 and 12) completed 367 educational certificates while enrolled at Dallas College. Students completed between one to four certificates with an average of 1.4 certificates per student. P-Tech students accounted for 84 percent of ECHS students who completed a certificate and 87 percent of the 367 completed certificates.

In addition, 259 ECHS students earned a total of 342 industry-based certifications in 2020-21, including 152 certifications listed in the A-F accountability system. All but five students who attempted and passed industry-based certifications in 2020-21 were P-Tech students.

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

Of the 1,424 ECHS students who graduated in 2020-21, 1,013 students (71%) earned an associate degree or 60 dual credit hours. Of the ECHS students who met the goal, 90 percent ($n=909$) met the goal by earning an associate degree while 10 percent ($n=104$) met the goal by earning 60 or more dual credit hours. Seventy-one percent ($n=720$) of students who met the goal were P-Tech students, while 29 percent ($n=293$) were traditional ECHS students. In 2020-21, more Associate of Science degrees were awarded to ECHS students ($n=463$, 51%) than Associate of Applied Science ($n=292$, 32%), Associate of Arts ($n=109$, 12%), or Associates of Arts in Teaching ($n=45$, 5%) degrees.

What were the college enrollment rates for ECHS students?

According to the 2020-21 NSC data file, 55 percent of 2019-20 ECHS graduates and 30 percent of non-ECHS graduates enrolled in college within one year of graduation. Of these students, more ECHS students (94%) enrolled in a four-year university than non-ECHS students (71%). Similarly, a significantly lower percentage of ECHS students (6%) enrolled in a two-year or less college than non-ECHS students (29%).

Table 2: 2019-20 Percentages for Students Enrolled in College within One Year of Graduating High School

Grad Yr	ECHS Graduates			Non-ECHS Graduates		
	Graduated	Enrolled		Graduated	Enrolled	
	N	n	%	N	N	%
2019-20	869	476	55	7,164	2,170	30
Two Yr		40	6		625	29
Four-Yr		446	94		1,545	71

Source: Dallas ISD graduation file, 10/14/20. Demographic file, 05/29/20 (2019-20). NSC file, 06/15/21.

Note: Grad Yr = graduation year.

What were student perceptions of the ECHS programs?

An online survey invitation was emailed to 1,453 ECHS grade 12 students to collect their perceptions on the ECHS program. Overall, 446 students responded to the survey request. From those, 393 students completed the survey for a 27 percent response rate. Although the number of responses exceeded the minimum required sample size to analyze the survey, it did not provide opportunity to analyze individual schools. Overall, 95 percent of seniors indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the educational opportunities the Dallas ISD provided. Seniors indicated that their high schools prepared them well (i.e. good or excellent) across all life skill areas from critical thinking, communications, and teamwork to conflict resolution. However, seniors also indicated that high schools could better prepared them for the job seeking and interviewing process. Most seniors (77%) indicated that they planned to attend college directly after graduating from the Dallas ISD, followed by joining the workforce (13%).

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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 if there are steps to replicate with other ECHSs.

Continue to support ECHS campuses in monitoring dual-credit course completions. Overall, 50 percent of ECHS students met the targeted cumulative number of dual credit hours by the end of each 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 (grade 11 and 12) earned 367 educational certificates while taking dual credit classes at Dallas College. In addition, ECHS students earned 342 industry-based certifications during the 2020-21 school year. However, the number of ECHS students who earned education certificates and industry-based certifications has dropped over the past year by 51 percent and 40 percent, respectively. 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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