Department of Research and Evaluation

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Early College High School Program Summary Report, 2019–2020

The Early College High School (ECHS) Program enrolls historically underserved students, targeting at-risk and economically disadvantaged students. It creates the opportunity for students to earn a high school diploma and 60 college hours, which leads to an associate's degree. The program provides dual-credit (DC) course opportunities at no cost to students. High school students may enroll in DC courses and earn academic credits recognized by the high school and by higher education institutions. In addition, the program provides academic and social support services to help students succeed academically and complete high school, to increase college readiness, and to reduce barriers to college access (https://tea.texas.gov/academics/college-career-and-military-prep/early-college-high-school-ECHS).

Students from backgrounds under-represented in postsecondary institutions (e.g., ethnic minorities, students with low socioeconomic status, students at risk, English learners, and students with a learning disability) were recruited to enroll in the program. In 2019–2020, ECHS operated in seven high schools (i.e., Akins, Crockett, Eastside Memorial, LBJ, Navarro, Northeast, and Travis) and was implemented in partnership with Austin Community College (ACC). More information about ECHS is provided in the side-bar on page 2.

This report describes demographic characteristics and academic outcomes of the students served and provides general recommendations for future program implementation.

It is important to note that Austin Independent School District (AISD) campus closures due to COVID-19 affected implementation of educational programs across the district. Among several changes, return to classes after spring break was delayed. This compressed the remaining time students had to complete their course work in the spring semester. In addition, instruction was implemented exclusively online after spring break. Consequently, it is possible that these changes affected students' outcomes.
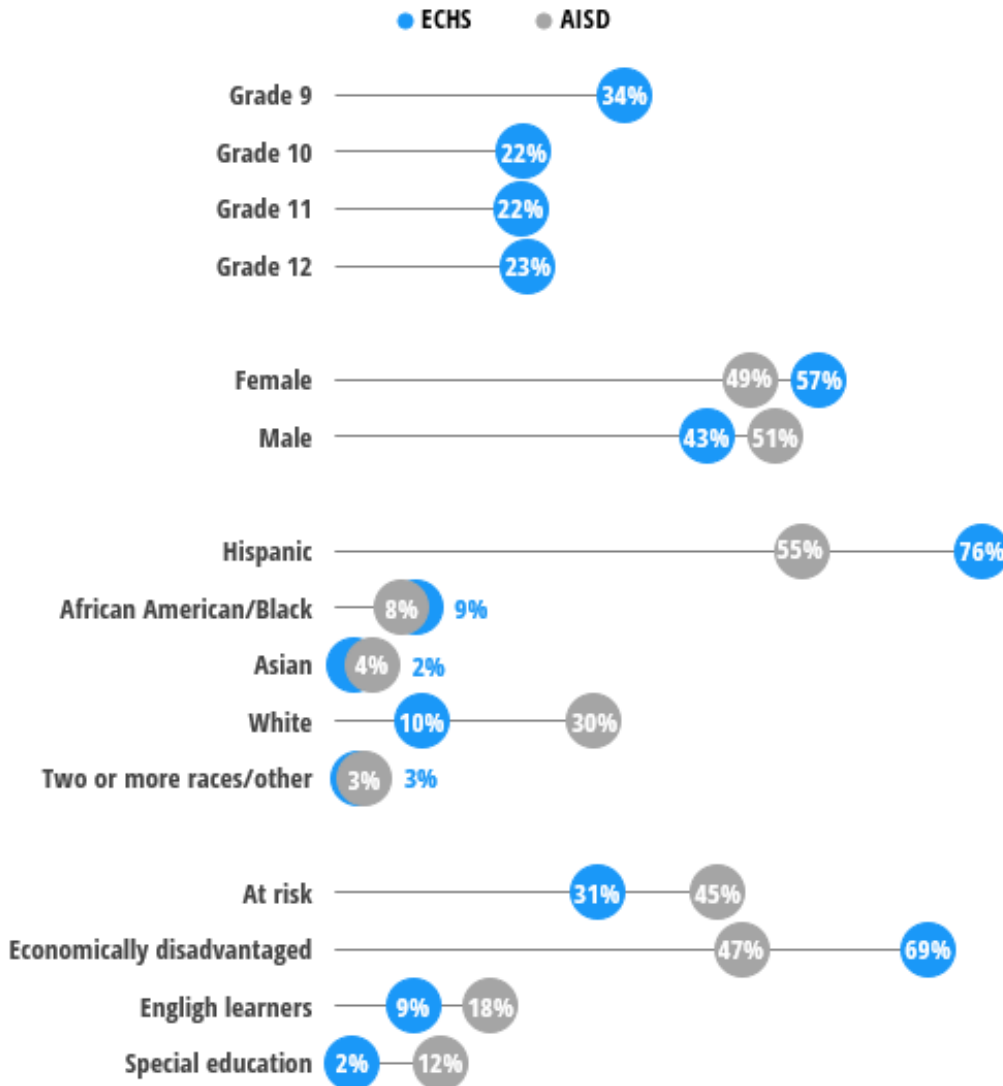
DEMOGRAPHICS

Most of the 1,053 high school students who participated in ECHS were Hispanic and/or economically disadvantaged, which met the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) criteria for ECHS implementation. Some student groups were represented at higher rates in the ECHS Program than what was observed in the AISD student body overall. More specifically, 76% of the students were Hispanic, 9% were African American, and 69% were economically disadvantaged (Figure 1). However, English learners, students with disabilities, and students classified as at risk were underrepresented among ECHS students. Lastly, 34% of ECHS students were in 9th grade, 22% were in 10th grade, 22% were in 11th grade, and 23% were in 12th grade.

Student demographics disaggregated by campus can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1.

A total of 1,053 high school students participated in the ECHS Program in 2019–2020.

● ECHS ● AISD

	ECHS	AISD
Grade 9	34%	
Grade 10	22%	
Grade 11	22%	
Grade 12	23%	
Female	57%	49%
Male	51%	43%
Hispanic	76%	55%
African American/Black	9%	8%
Asian	4%	2%
White	10%	30%
Two or more races/other	3%	3%
At risk	31%	45%
Economically disadvantaged	69%	47%
Engligh learners	9%	18%
Special education	2%	12%

Source. 2019–2020 AISD student enrollment records
Note. A total of 22,591 students enrolled in high school in 2019–2020

COLLEGE READY ASSESSMENTS

TEA required that a certain percentage of ECHS students (35% for provisional campuses and 40% for designated campuses) or higher meet college readiness (CR) criteria in all Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessments. As a district, AISD met that requirement because 48% of ECHS students met CR criteria in all three subjects. In addition, AISD surpassed the TEA's requirements for CR in reading (65% and 70% for provisional and designated campuses, respectively) and in writing (75% and 80% for provisional and designated campuses, respectively; Figure 2). However, a higher percentage of ECHS students met CR criteria in the TSI reading (91%) and writing (94%) assessments than in the math assessment (50%).

As students progressed through high school, they were more likely to meet CR criteria in

Methods

ECHS Student Recruitment

The TEA's blueprint for ECHS implementation recommends that schools recruit and enroll higher percentages of students from minority groups that are under represented in postsecondary institutions, compared with the percentages of these groups observed at the district level.

TSI Assessment Reporting

The TEA's blueprint for the ECHS Program requires that TSI assessments be provided to students accepted into ECHS as early as possible to assess college readiness, thus allowing students to begin college courses and allowing program staff to design individual instructional support plans for the students.

Students can take the TSI assessments multiple times until they meet CR criteria for each subject. This document reports students' highest TSI scores (across school years).

math. Disaggregation of TSI results by grade level revealed that similarly high percentages of ECHS students in 10th, 11th , and 12th grade met CR criteria in reading and writing (Table 1), whereas the percentage of students who met CR criteria in math gradually increased from 9th grade (19%) to 12th grade (81%). It is important to note that the TSI assessment was originally created for 11th grade and up. Therefore, it is likely that students entering ECHS in 9th grade may not have taken the associated course work yet.

Disaggregation of CR results by school of enrollment indicated all campuses met the TEA's requirements in reading and writing (Appendix B). In addition, all designated ECHS campuses met the TEA's requirements for CR across all three subject areas.

Figure 2.

A larger percentage of ECHS students met CR criteria in the TSI reading assessment than in the TSI math assessment.
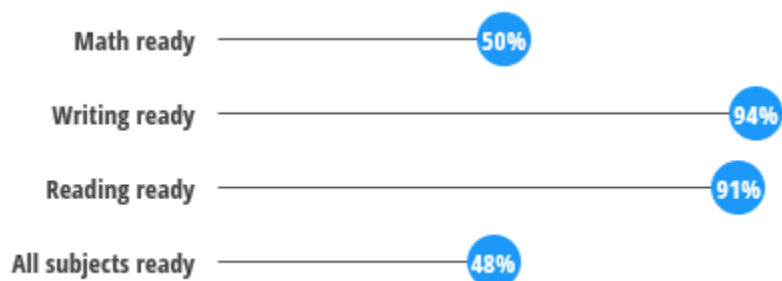
Source. 2019–2020 AISD student records

Table 1.

Percentage of Students Who Met CR Criteria in the TSI Math, Reading, and/or Writing

	Met college criteria			
	Math	**Reading**	**Writing**	**All three subjects**
9th (*n* = 356)	19%	81%	91%	17%
10th (*n* = 232)	56%	97%	96%	55%
11th (*n* = 228)	61%	96%	98%	60%
12th (*n* = 237)	81%	96%	95%	78%

Source. 2019–2020 AISD student records

DC COURSES

Overall, a large percentage of ECHS students (78%) earned DCs in 2019–2020 (Table 2). In addition, 96% of ECHS 11th graders and 97% of ECHS 12th graders earned at least one DC in high school. Across grade levels, ECHS students earned 3,129 credits for their DC courses in a span of 4 years, from 2015–2016 through 2019–2020 (Table 3).

TEA required that by 11th grade, 80% of students in provisional ECHS programs, and 90% of students in designated ECHS programs must have taken at least one math and one English DC course. In 2019–2020, 75% of the 11th-grade ECHS students took an English DC course, and 9% took a math DC course. Disaggregating DC outcomes by school of enrollment, regardless of program implementation level, none of the ECHS campuses met the TEA's requirements for English DC course participation (Appendix B).

Table 2.
Percentage of ECHS Students Who Earned DC in 2019–2020 and Throughout High School

	All high school grade levels
	ECHS (n = 1,053)
Percentage of students who earned dual credit in 2020	78%
Percentage of students who earned dual credit anytime in high school	92%
Sum of dual credits earned anytime in high school	3,129

Source. 2019–2020 AISD student enrollment records

Table 3.
DCs Earned by ECHS Students in High School

Grade level	Credits earned in high school	% Students who earned DC
9th (n = 356)	175.5	83%
10th (n = 232)	628.5	97%
11th (n = 228)	1,019	96%
12th (n = 237)	1,245	97%
Total credits	3,129	

Source. 2019–2020 AISD student records

COORDINATORS' THOUGHTS ON DC COMPLETION AFTER CAMPUS CLOSURES

ECHS coordinators worked closely with students to plan their academic path in the program; coordinate academic and social support; and help them identify, enroll in, and be successful in DC courses. Therefore, to assess whether the COVID-19 pandemic affected implementation of the ECHS Program, coordinators were asked to provide their thoughts on how work with their students proceeded after campus closures. Coordinators provided feedback biweekly during focus group sessions held from early April until the end of the semester and via an electronic survey.

Program coordinators reported successes amidst programmatic changes brought about by campus closures due to COVID-19. Coordinators indicated that students had the opportunity to learn collaboratively and to develop relationships as they worked through their courses. In addition, ECHS coordinators were appreciative of the help their students received from Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) facilitators and Austin Partners In Education (APIE) college readiness staff, and of the understanding and resourceful approaches some teachers and professors took to reach their students.

However, coordinators also reported difficulties after campuses closed down. The majority of such difficulties seemed to be related to technology. For example, coordinators mentioned faulty or insufficient Wi-Fi hotspots and classwork software not running on students' laptops. In addition, they mentioned that communication with some DC professors was problematic and that they did not receive timely feedback on the ECHS students' performance. Lastly, coordinators also indicated they had difficulties communicating with some of the students, which made it difficult to keep the same level of support as they provided before campus closures.

In addition, ECHS coordinators indicated that the impact of classes moving completely online was mixed. They reported some students seemed to have an easier time attending DC classes and learning the material online than in class. In fact, several ECHS students indicated they wanted to take more DC classes in the summer because those would be online. On the other hand, coordinators also reported that many other students had a harder time completing their DC courses in the online format, which may have been aggravated by the difficulties coordinators experienced reaching and supporting these students via email or text messages.

POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES

Preliminary AISD graduation data for 2019–2020 indicated positive outcomes for ECHS participants. Of the 237 ECHS students in 12th grade, 98% graduated and 30% earned an associate's degree. The TEA required that ECHS students' graduation rate match or surpass the statewide graduation rate. ECHS students' graduation rate was higher than AISD's graduation rate (92.3% in 2019) and the statewide graduation rate (90% in 2019).

Disaggregating postsecondary outcomes by ECHS campus revealed that all designated ECHS schools matched or surpassed the district and the statewide graduation rates (Appendix B). In addition, the TEA required that at least 30% of the graduating ECHS students in designated campuses either receive an associate's degree or earn an industry certification. All designated campuses met or surpassed these requirements (Appendix B); in fact, 82% of Navarro's ECHS 12th graders earned an industry certification.

In addition, 16% of the 1,053 ECHS students and 43% of the ECHS students in 12th grade received industry certifications. Such certifications are developed by industry leaders to reflect the needs of real-world career expectations and to distinguish individuals with certifications from their peers when applying for jobs. Overall, ECHS students earned a total of 176 certifications across multiple school years from 2016–2017 to the present. The largest group of certifications earned were in the fields of health science (28%), auto mechanics (15%), and construction technology (15%) (Table 4).

Table 4.

Certifications Earned by ECHS Students in High School.

Certification field	Percentage
Health science	28%
Automotive mechanics	15%
Construction technology	15%
Business management	11%
Audio visual	10%
Other	12%

Source. 2019–2020 AISD student records

CONCLUSIONS

The ECHS Program operated as open-enrollment high schools across the district. Students least likely to attend college had an opportunity to receive both a high school diploma and either an associate's degree or at least 60 credit hours toward a baccalaureate.

In 2019–2020, the academic outcomes of ECHS implementation were positive. The program provided students from

lower socio economic backgrounds and minority students the opportunity and support to earn an associate's degree and industry certifications while working toward and receiving their high school diploma.

More specifically, a total of 1,053 AISD high school students participated in the program in 2019–2020. In addition, all ECHS campuses surpassed the TEA's requirements for CR in reading and writing, and the majority of campuses met the TEA's requirements for CR in all three subjects simultaneously. Similarly, all designated ECHS campuses met the TEA's postsecondary outcome requirements. Overall, 98% of seniors graduated, 30% earned an associate's degree, and 43% received an industry certification.

Despite several positive evaluation results, all ECHS campus had difficulties meeting the TEA's requirements for CR criteria in math and for completion of math and English DC courses. Meeting CR criteria in math and English was a pre requisite for students to enroll in DC courses in those subjects. Consequently, the low percentages of ECHS students completing math DC courses may have been related to the low percentage of students who met CR criteria in math. In addition, campus closures in the spring semester due to COVID-19 may have had an impact on students' ability to complete their DC courses. ECHS coordinators indicated that after campuses closed down and classes moved online, students encountered several technology-related issues with their computers and Wi-Fi connections. In addition, coordinators reported having difficulties reaching some of their ECHS students and receiving feedback from DC professors.

ECHS BACKGROUND

AISD expects that all students will graduate ready for college, career, and life in a globally competitive economy and is committed to providing all students with quality college and career preparation. In this effort, AISD has created a series of college and career readiness support services and programs. ECHS is one of such programs. ECHS provides students with the opportunity to take DC courses and simultaneously earn a high school diploma and 60 college hours, which leads to an associate's degree.

The TEA has developed a designation process for ECHS. This process ensures that districts and colleges operating ECHS campuses maintain the integrity of the program and continue to target and serve students who might not otherwise attend college (for more information, see the TEA website, https://tea.texas.gov/academics/college-career-and-military-prep/early-college-high-school-echs).

The ECHS Program operates as a high school within high schools, and the TEA recognizes three levels of ECHS implementation: provisional, designated, and distinguished. Each level requires that ECHS high schools demonstrate they can implement all design elements and increasingly stringent outcomes-based measure (OBMs) criteria. OBMs are data indicators related to access, achievement, and attainment (e.g., the percentage of ethnic minorities enrolled in the program, the percentage of students who have met CR criteria in the TSI assessments, the percentage of students in 12th grade who graduate from high school).

The provisional title is used for new ECHSs. The early college title is used for schools that have been able to maintain their provisional status and have met the designated early college OBMs. The distinguished title is used for schools that have been designated early colleges for at least 5 years and have met the distinguished early college OBMs.

APPENDIX A

ECHS Student Demographics per High School Campus

Demographics	District	TEA requirements	Akins
		Implementation level	
		Provisional designation	
	(*n* = 22,591)		(*n* = 155)
Male	51%	No more than 10% under district	40%
African American	8%	No more than 10% under district	5%
Hispanic	55%	No more than 10% under district	74%
At risk	45%	Incoming 9th graders no more than 20% under district	50%
9th grade *n* count	(*n* = 6,632)		(*n* = 145)
Economically disadvantaged	47%	No more than 10% under district	64%
English learner	18%	Not taken into account	11.61
Special education	12%	Not taken into account	4.52

Demographics	District	TEA requirements	Crockett	Eastside	LBJ	Navarro	Northeast	Travis
		Implementation level						
		ECHS designation						
	(*n* = 22,591)		(*n* = 252)	(*n* = 57)	(*n* = 139)	(*n* = 113)	(*n* = 180)	(*n* = 154)
Male	51%	No more than 5% under district	38%	40%	54%	58%	42%	38%
African American	8%	No more than 5% under district	6%	2%	30%	6%	10%	5%
Hispanic	55%	No more than 5% under district	67%	95%	67%	84%	82%	81%
At risk	45%	Incoming 9th graders no more than 15% under district	15%	67%	55%	43%	38%	53%
9th grade *n* count	(*n* = 6,632)		(*n* = 97)	(*n* = 12)	(*n* = 22)	(*n* = 7)	(*n* = 37)	(*n* = 36)
Economically disadvantaged	47%	No more than 5% under district	52%	84%	65%	78%	89%	71%
English learner	18%	Not taken into account	1%	12%	10%	10%	13%	12%
Special education	12%	Not taken into account	2%	4%	%	2%	1%	2%

Source. 2019–2020 AISD student enrollment records

APPENDIX B

College Readiness, DC Participation, and Postsecondary Outcomes per High School Campus

	Implementation level								
	Provisional designation		**ECHS designation**						
CR	TEA requirements	**Akins**	TEA requirements	**Crockett**	**Eastside**	**LBJ**	**Navarro**	**Northeast**	**Travis**
		(*n* = 155)		(*n* = 252)	(*n* = 57)	(*n* = 139)	(*n* = 113)	(*n* = 180)	(*n* = 154)
Meet CR on TSI reading	65%	77%	70%	92%	100%	96%	93%	97%	90%
Meet CR on TSI writing	75%	94%	80%	92%	98%	95%	92%	97%	96%
Meet CR on TSI math	50%	21%	60%	53%	53%	53%	76%	53%	51%
Meet CR in all three subjects	35%	20%	40%	51%	53%	51%	69%	52%	49%
DC	TEA requirements	**Akins**	TEA requirements	Crockett	Eastside	LBJ	Navarro	Northeast	Travis
11th grade *n* count		(<10)		(*n* = 40)	(*n* = 12)	(*n* = 36)	(*n* = 34)	(*n* = 61)	(*n* = 40)
Any subject DC by end of 11th grade	NA	69%	NA	100%	97%	99%	97%	98%	83%
At least one math DC by end of 11th grade	NA	NA	NA	8%	0	0	4%	4%	8%
At least one English DC by end of 11th grade	80%	NA	90%	13%	24%	28%	28%	22%	17%
Graduation	TEA requirements	**Akins**	TEA requirements	**Crockett**	**Eastside**	**LBJ**	**Navarro**	**Northeast**	**Travis**
12th grade *n* count		(*n* = <10)		(*n* = 27)	(*n* = 20)	(*n* = 68)	(*n* = 44)	(*n* = 43)	(*n* = 33)
Graduated from high school	NA	–	Matches statewide rate	100%	70%	96%	93%	100%	100%
Postsecondary outcomes	TEA requirements	**Akins**	TEA requirements	**Crockett**	**Eastside**	**LBJ**	**Navarro**	**Northeast**	**Travis**
12th grade *n* count		(*n* = <10)		(*n* = 27)	(*n* = 20)	(*n* = 68)	(*n* = 44)	(*n* = 43)	(*n* = 33)
Earned associate's degree	NA	–	NA	30%	20%	34%	7%	33%	61%
Earned certification	NA	–	NA	7%	10%	49%	82%	30%	42%
Earned associate's degree or certification	NA	–	30% of graduates	37%	30%	62%	86%	53%	67%

Source. 2019–2020 AISD student records