

UNCONVENTIONAL

WISDOM

A PROFILE OF THE GRADUATES
OF EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

By Michael Webb and Lia Mayka



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE



EARLY COLLEGE
HIGH SCHOOL
INITIATIVE

MARCH 2011

ABOUT JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

Jobs for the Future develops, implements, and promotes new education and workforce strategies that help communities, states, and the nation compete in a global economy. In 200 communities in 41 states, JFF improves the pathways leading from high school to college to family-sustaining careers. JFF manages the Early College High School Initiative.

ABOUT THE EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL INITIATIVE

Early college high school is a bold approach, based on the principle that academic rigor, combined with the opportunity to save time and money, is a powerful motivator for students to work hard and meet serious intellectual challenges. Early college high schools blend high school and college in a rigorous yet supportive program, compressing the time it takes to complete a high school diploma and the first two years of college.

Since 2002, the partner organizations of the Early College High School Initiative have started or redesigned 230 schools in 28 states and the District of Columbia. The schools are designed so that low-income youth, first-generation college goers, English language learners, students of color, and other young people underrepresented in higher education can simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an Associate's degree or up to two years of credit toward a Bachelor's degree—tuition free. All the schools include the high school grades (grades 9-12); some incorporate middle grades as well (grades 6-12 or 7-12).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Michael Webb, associate vice president at Jobs for the Future, leads the Early College High School Initiative's capacity-building work. This includes supporting the network of 13 early college intermediary organizations and managing the initiative's Student Information System, a secure, confidential collection of data about students attending early college schools throughout the United States.

Dr. Webb has spent most of his career working to improve public education. He has taught college, high school, and adult education. Before joining JFF, he served as vice president of New Visions for Public Schools where he helped lead the effort to create small schools in New York City. As director of education at the National Urban League, he was a voice for community involvement in mathematics and science education reform. He has also served on city and state commissions to reform education for students underserved by the public school system.

Dr. Webb received a B.A. in English/ethnic studies from St. John Fisher College, an M.A. from San Francisco State University, and an Ed.D. from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Lia Mayka is a fourth-year student at Northeastern University in Boston, where she majors in sociology. She completed an internship in the Student Information System at Jobs for the Future, focused on developing a database on early college students and an analysis of student outcomes. She has also worked on a number of research projects, including at Social Impact Research, the independent research department of Root Cause in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She has traveled, worked, studied, and volunteered in several Latin American countries.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of not only the 13 intermediary organizations that have helped to establish more than 220 early college schools but also the schools themselves.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
WHO ATTENDS EARLY COLLEGE SCHOOLS?	3
A LOOK AT SCHOOLS WITH FOUR-YEAR GRADUATING COHORTS	4
A LOOK AT FOUR-YEAR COHORT GRADUATES	6
CONCLUSION	11
ENDNOTES	12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For many young people, early college high schools are opening the door to higher education and better-paying careers. The 230 early college schools serve more than 50,000 students in 28 states, targeting groups that are underrepresented in higher education. These students and the schools they attend are refuting the conventional wisdom that such young people cannot complete high school on time and be prepared for success in college.

This report examines characteristics of the 2007, 2008, and 2009 early college graduating classes. It focuses on early college schools and programs that have been open for four or more years, including some schools that are “conversions” (i.e., they were open before becoming early colleges and underwent restructuring to implement an early college design). Students have had the opportunity to enroll in these early college schools for at least four years, from ninth through twelfth grade. The students in each graduating year are referred to as four-year graduating cohorts.

Key findings include:

- > Almost all early college graduates earn some college credits.
- > In 2009, 24 percent of graduates who were enrolled in their early college school for four years earned an Associate’s degree or two years of college credit. Forty-four percent earned at least a year of college credit.
- > During the 2009 school year, 70 percent of the students enrolled in early college schools were students of color, and 59 percent were classified as eligible for free and reduced lunch. Nearly half will be the first in their family to attend college.
- > Nearly three-fourths of early college schools partner with two-year colleges; the others partner with four-year institutions. Several schools partner with both.

- > A substantial number of college courses taken by early college graduates were in core academic areas. Fine-grained data were available for 24 schools. At the vast majority of these schools, graduates took an average of more than one-fifth of their college classes from among the core academic areas of math, science, social studies, and English.
- > 73 percent of all early college four-year cohort graduates for which National Student Clearinghouse data were available enrolled in college the next year. This compares favorably to U.S. government estimates of the proportion of recent high school graduates enrolled in college, which range from 63 to 69 percent. What makes the enrollment figures especially noteworthy is that most early college students are from groups with even lower national college going rates.

Unconventional Wisdom draws on two sources of data:

- > *The Integrated Survey*: JFF administers the survey each year to all schools in the Early College High School Initiative. More than 95 percent of schools in the initiative complete the survey. It includes self-reported, current-year information on enrollment, school design, and student performance.
- > *The Early College High School Initiative Student Information System*: This is a data warehouse and reporting system managed by JFF. It includes official student-level data for more than half of the schools in the Early College High School Initiative. It also includes postsecondary enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

Year	Graduates	Number of Schools	Percent of Graduates Earning College Credits	Percent of Graduates Earning More than One Year of College Credit	Percent of Graduates Earning AA or at least Two Years of College Credit
2007	905	18	80%	36%	10%
2008	2,258	37	88%	40%	11%
2009	2,995	64	91%	44%	24%

Source: 2007-2009 Integrated Surveys

INTRODUCTION

An early college graduate ponders his schedule for his junior year in college. He notes that the credits he earned as an early college student and was able to transfer to the university will enable him to earn a Bachelor's degree in just three years.

This student is part of a major national effort to address one of the great educational challenges today: The importance of a college education for success in the 21st century is widely acknowledged, yet the college completion rates for low-income students, first-generation college goers, and students of color are a source of national concern. For every 100 low and moderate-income students who start high school, only 21 will graduate from college.¹ Nearly half of our nation's African-American students and nearly 40 percent of Latino students attend high schools in which graduation from high school is not the norm.²

In 2002, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, and the W.K Kellogg Foundation, eight organizations launched the Early College High School Initiative specifically to raise college completion rates. Seven of the organizations have launched schools; the eighth, Jobs for the Future, has served as the initiative's network convener, guide, and policy arm.

The goal of the initiative is to help young people perceived as unlikely to attend or succeed in college. Early college high schools do so by engaging students in a rigorous curriculum that aligns and integrates high school and college work, and by providing them with robust supports to ensure they can meet the challenge of that curriculum. Students graduate from early college schools with one to two years of college credit or an Associate's degree—tuition free.

The initiative has grown to include 13 school development organizations. More than 210 early college schools now serve nearly 50,000 students in 24 states. Within the next five years, the initiative projects that early college schools will enroll 100,000 students.

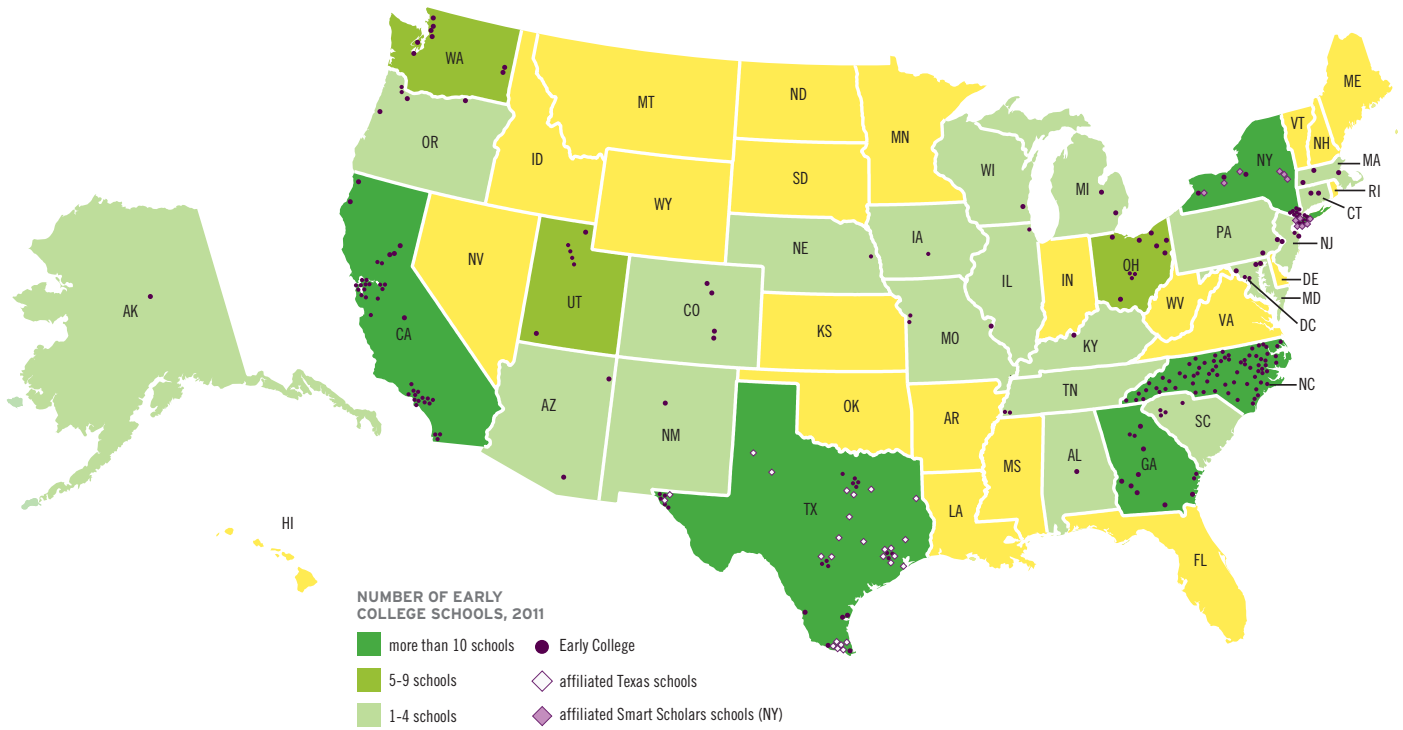
This report examines characteristics of the 2007, 2008, and 2009 early college graduating classes.³ It draws on two sources of data:

- > *The Integrated Survey*: JFF administers the survey each year to all schools in the Early College High School Initiative. More than 95 percent of schools in the initiative complete the survey. It includes self-reported, current-year information on enrollment, school design, and student performance.⁴

> *The Early College High School Initiative Student Information System:* This is a data warehouse and reporting system managed by JFF.⁵ It includes official student-level data for more than half of the schools in the Early College High School Initiative. It also includes postsecondary enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

Based on these data sources, early college schools have demonstrated the potential to increase college participation among student groups that are underrepresented in higher education. Almost all graduates earn some college credits, and one-quarter earn an Associate’s degree or two years of college credit. In 2009, 24 percent of graduates who were enrolled in their early college school for four years earned an Associate’s degree or two years of college credit. Forty-four percent earned at least a year of college credit.

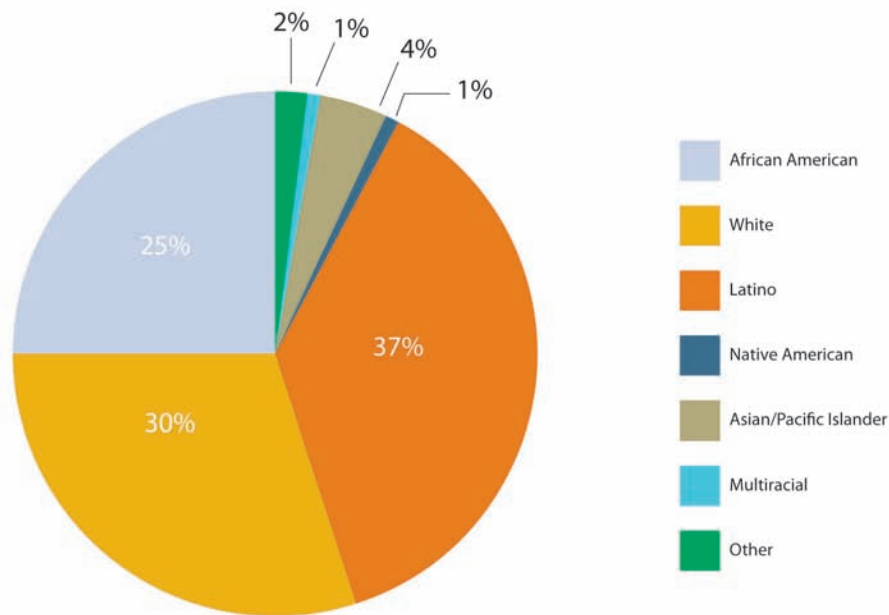
Location of Early College High Schools



WHO ATTENDS EARLY COLLEGE SCHOOLS?

Early college schools target groups of students that are underrepresented in higher education (see *Figure 1*). During the 2009-10 school year, 70 percent of the 46,493 young people enrolled in early college schools were students of color, and 59 percent were classified as eligible for free and reduced lunch. Nearly half will be the first in their family to attend college.⁶

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity of Students Enrolled in Early College, 2009-10 School Year



Source: 2009-2010 Integrated Surveys
N=46,493 students

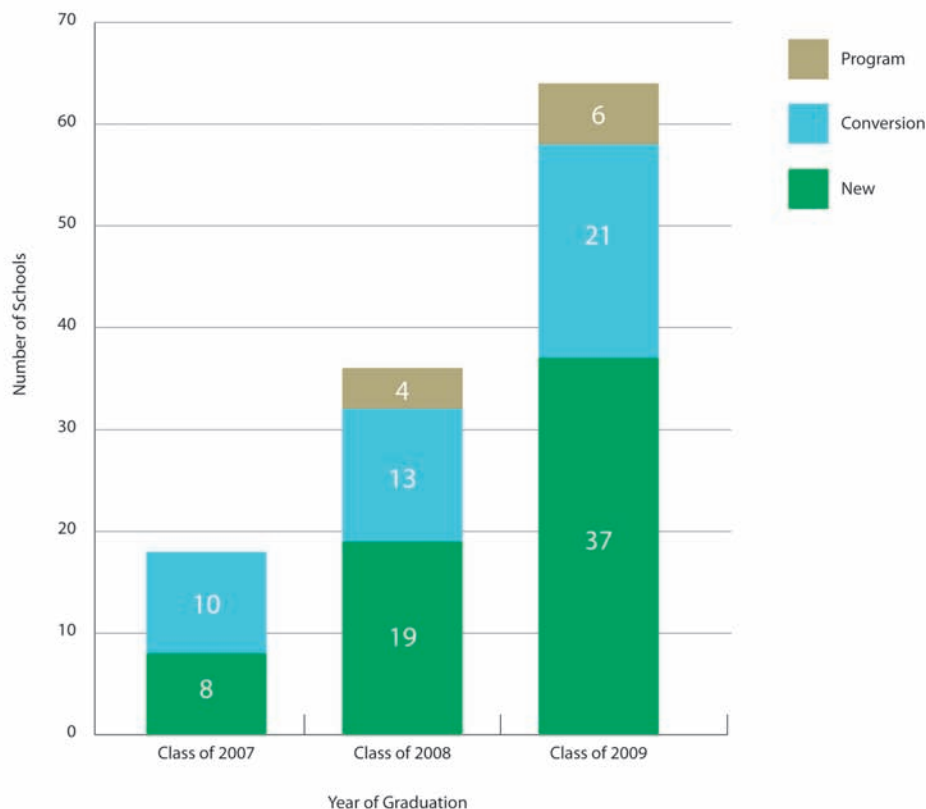
A LOOK AT SCHOOLS WITH FOUR-YEAR GRADUATING COHORTS

This report focuses on early college schools and programs that have been open for four or more years, including some schools that are “conversions” (i.e., they were open before becoming early colleges and underwent restructuring to implement an early college design). Students have had the opportunity to enroll in these early college schools for at least four years, from ninth through twelfth grade. The students in each graduating year are referred to as four-year graduating cohorts.⁷

Out of 10,965 students graduating from an early college in 2007, 2008, or 2009, 6,158 (approximately 56 percent) were graduates of schools with at least one four-year cohort. The sample consists of students enrolled for four years because that is the amount of time required for students to acquire the skills and proficiencies for college success and to take a significant number of college courses. Early college schools enroll a large percentage of students who require significant academic and personal support in order to master the skills and competencies they need to succeed in challenging college courses.

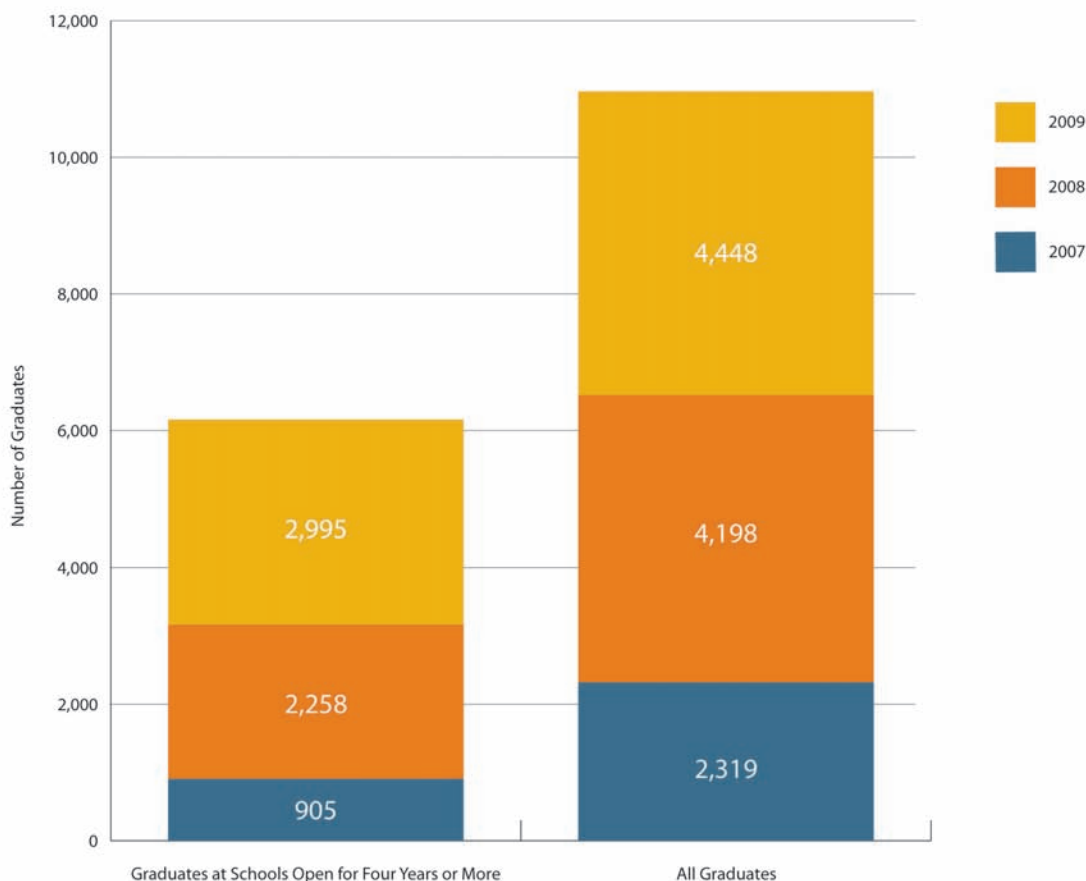
Figure 2 shows the origins of the 64 early college schools with at least one four-year graduating cohort. Of these, 37 started as new schools, 21 were conversions, and 6 started as programs in existing schools.

Figure 2. How Early Colleges Came Into Existence, by Graduating Class Year



Source: 2007-2009 Integrated Surveys
This figure includes the 64 schools with at least one four year graduating cohort on the 2009-10 school year.

Figure 3. Number of Graduates, 2007-2009



Source: 2007-2009 Integrated surveys

The number of early college programs is low compared to that for new schools or conversions. One factor that may help to explain this is the strong preference of the initiative's school development organizations that early colleges be autonomous schools that can control their own budgets, curricula, student services, and staffing.

All early colleges are new. The initiative's first three schools opened in 2002 and graduated their first four-year student cohorts in 2006. Two of these schools were conversions. Since 2007, the number of schools with four-year student graduating cohorts has expanded rapidly. The 905 graduates in 2007 had attended 18 schools for four or more years. Two years later, in 2009, 64 schools had at least one four-year graduating cohort (see *Figure 3*).

Between 2007 and 2009, the number of four-year cohort graduates increased approximately 200 percent. During the same period, graduates from newer schools without a four-year graduating cohort increased by 330 percent. One reason for this difference is that conversion schools have tended to be larger than start-ups. Also, most conversion schools have begun with grades 11 and 12—and thus students who were closer to graduating—while new schools were more likely to start with grade 9 or earlier. More than 20 percent of start-up schools began with middle grades.

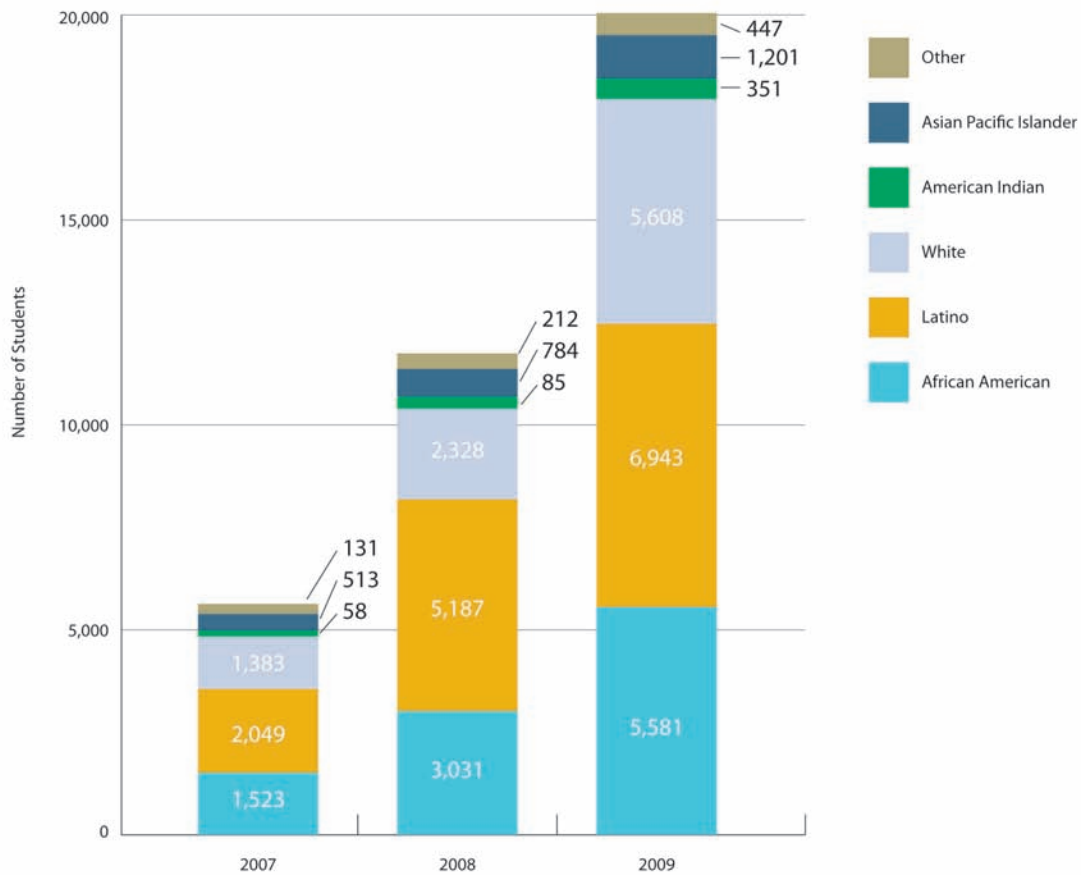
Several early college schools with at least one four-year graduating cohort have graduated as many as four cohorts. Each year, there have been increases in the percent of graduates earning college credits, earning more than one year's worth of college credits, and earning an Associate's degree or two years of college.

A LOOK AT FOUR-YEAR COHORT GRADUATES

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STUDENTS

Consistent with the goals of the Early College High School Initiative, over the three school years, 2007-2009, an average of nearly three-fourths of all students at the 64 four-year graduating cohort schools were students of color (see *Figure 4*). Sixty percent of students also qualified for free or reduced price lunch.

Figure 4. Race/Ethnicity of Students Enrolled in Early College, 2009-10 School Year

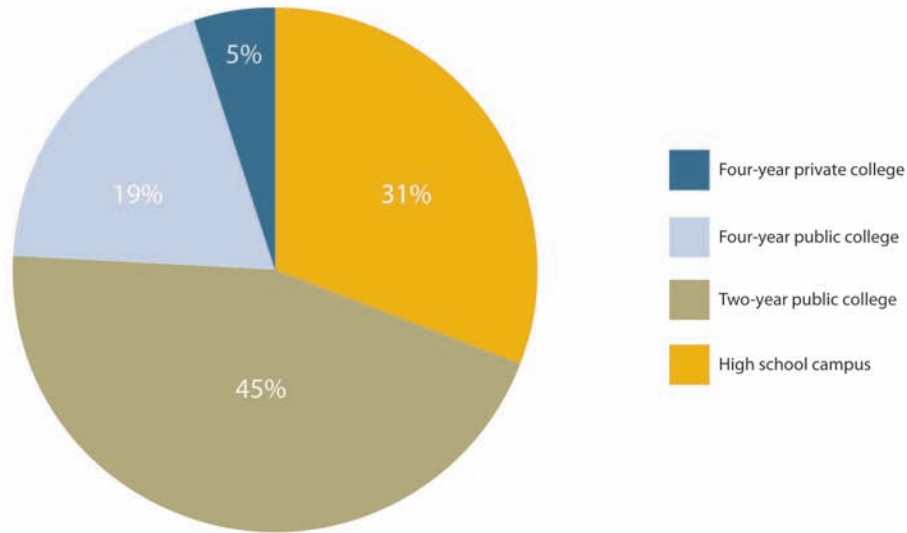


Source: 2007-2009 Integrated Surveys

WHERE EARLY COLLEGES ARE LOCATED

Overall, more than half of all early college schools are located on a college campus. The most common location for the early college schools in this graduation profile is a two-year college campus, followed by a high school campus (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Where Early College Schools Are Located, 2009



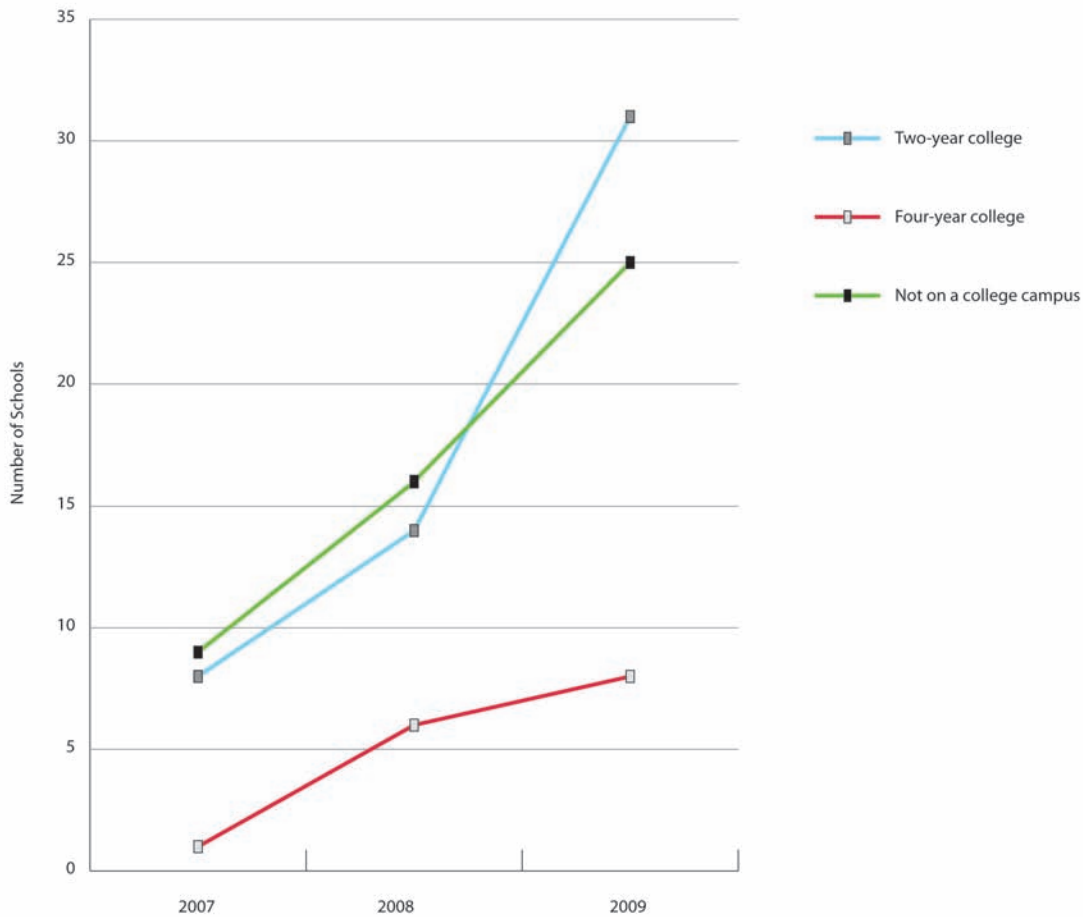
Source: Integrated Survey, 2009-10
N=64 schools

WHERE STUDENTS TAKE COLLEGE CLASSES

Postsecondary institutions of various types are key players in the design and day-to-day operation of early college high schools. Nearly three-fourths of early college schools partner with two-year colleges. The others partner with four-year institutions. Several partner with both.

One of the ongoing contributions of the postsecondary partners is as the location for classes, whether specially designed for early college students or by giving the students access to the regular college classes. In the 2008 school year, 62 percent of early college schools offered college classes primarily on two-year college campuses. One school offered college courses through distance learning. Figure 6 shows where college courses were offered over a three-year period at schools with four-year graduating cohorts.

Figure 6. Where Early Colleges Offer College Courses, 2007-2009



Source: 2007-2009 Integrated Surveys

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED BY GRADUATES

Since 2007, the number of four-year cohort graduates has increased significantly, as has the percent of graduates earning college credits and the number who have earned two years or more of college credit (see *Table 1*). Nearly all early college graduates earn some college credits, and an

Table 1: Four-Year Cohort Graduates, 2007-2009

Year	Graduates	Number of Schools	Percent of Graduates Earning College Credits	Percent of Graduates Earning More than One Year of College Credit	Percent of Graduates Earning AA or at least Two Years of College Credit
2007	905	18	80%	36%	10%
2008	2,258	37	88%	40%	11%
2009	2,995	64	91%	44%	24%

Source: 2007-2009 Integrated Surveys

impressive number—one-quarter—earn an Associate’s degree or two years worth of college credit. The credits earned by early college students reduce the amount of college tuition their families will have to pay.

According to college transcripts included in the Student Information System, a substantial number of the college courses taken by early college students were in core academic areas. At the 24 schools for which four-year cohort data were available, graduates of 18 schools took an average of more than one-fifth of their college classes from among the core academic areas of math, science, social studies, and English.

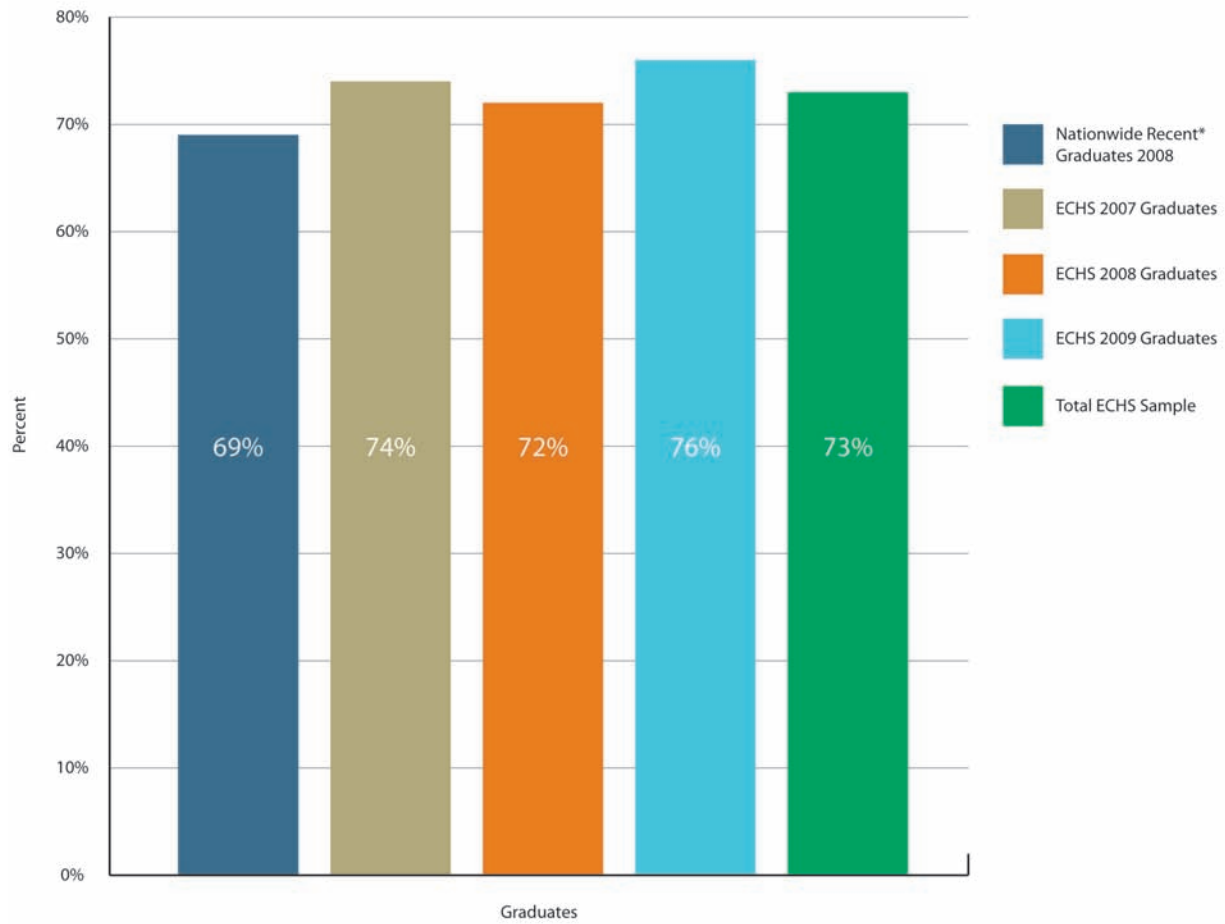
ENROLLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Drawing on results from the National Student Clearinghouse, data are emerging on what happens to four-year cohort graduates after their early college high school years.⁸ These data suggest that most early college graduates successfully transition into the next phase of their careers as college students. Thus far, the number of early college graduates is small, though the numbers of four-year early college graduates is expected to exceed 4,000 in 2011. An additional caveat is that college enrollment data for post-early college high school do not account for students who earned an Associate’s degree while enrolled in high school and who entered full-time work upon graduation. Nearly one-quarter of four-year cohort graduates in 2009 earned an Associate’s degree or two years of college.

According to U.S. Department of Labor data, 69 percent of recent high school graduates nationwide were enrolled in college in fall 2008.⁹ The National Center for Education Statistics reports a 63 percent rate for the same period.¹⁰ This compares with nearly 73 percent of all early college four-year cohort graduates for which National Student Clearinghouse data were available (see *Figure 7*). National projections for college enrollment were even higher. Based on a survey of early college schools for the 2009-10 school year, 86 percent of all early college graduates enrolled immediately in postsecondary education. Over the three years 2007-2009, National Student Clearinghouse data were available for 16 early college schools (of 37 schools with a four-year graduating cohort). In these schools, the four-year graduate enrollment rate in higher education ranged from a high of 90 percent to a low of 49 percent. The average was 73 percent of the total of 1,329 early college graduates. Although this represents only 22 percent of the total number of four-year cohort graduates from early college, these data are promising and will become more informative as more National Student Clearinghouse data become available.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2009), disparities in college enrollment persist by race and ethnicity as well. In 2008, 72 percent of recent white high school graduates were enrolled in college, 56 percent of African Americans, and 64 percent of Latinos.¹¹ At early colleges, the rate over three school years was 73 percent. The target demographic of early college schools results in a high percentage of students who are racial or ethnic minorities, first-generation college-goers, and low-income. Compared with first-time postsecondary enrollees overall, significantly larger numbers of early college students are non-white: 70 percent in early college schools.

Figure 7. Early College Graduate Cohorts Enrolling in College, by Year, Three-Year Cohort Total

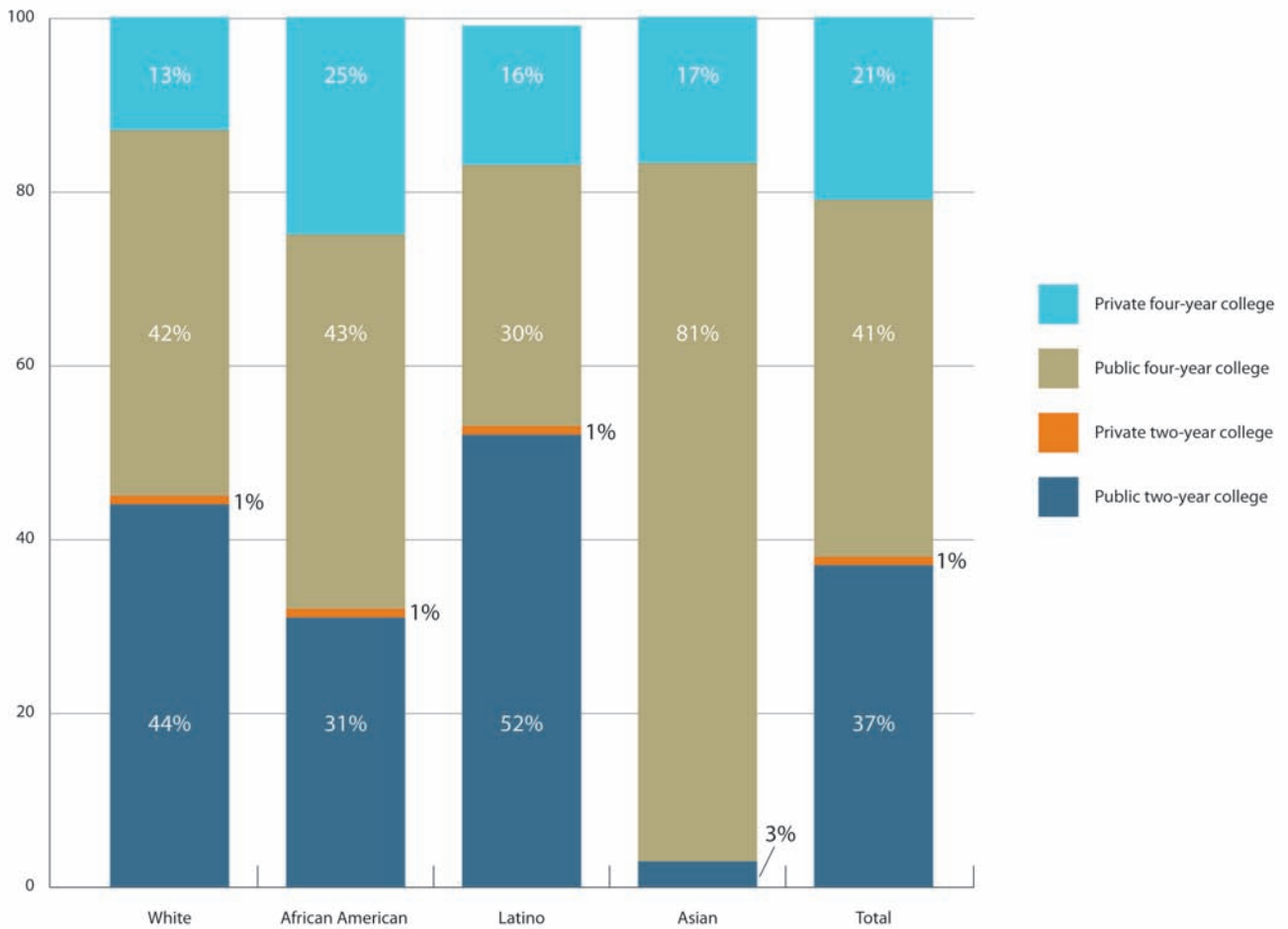


* October nationwide enrollment for recent graduates and GED earners in the preceding 12 months; source: Current population Survey, 2008. Source for early college high school enrollment: National Student Clearinghouse Report; n=118 for 2007, 700 for 2008, and 1,329 for 2009.

More than 60 percent of early college four-year cohort graduates enrolled in a four-year college (see Figure 8). This is comparable to the national average of recent graduates, as reported by the U.S Current Population Survey. Again, what makes the early college figures noteworthy is that most early college students are from groups with traditionally lower national four-year college going rates.

A significant number of early college graduates in our sample continued their education at their school's partnering college. Out of 976 graduates, 409 (42 percent) remained at the partner institution.

Figure 8. Type of Colleges in Which Early College Graduates Enroll, by Race/Ethnicity



Total includes race/ethnicities not reported separately (American Indian, Pacific Islander, multiracial, other. Data retrieved from the National Student Clearinghouse as of August 1, 2010. Chart Date: August 5, 2010 (n=976, cohorts 2007-2009)

Note: Percentage may not total 100 due to rounding.

CONCLUSION

Data for the early college four-year cohort graduates, although preliminary, are very encouraging. The Early College High School Initiative serves student populations that historically have attended and completed college in very low numbers. Yet nearly half of the four-year cohort graduates leave high school with a year of college credit under their belts. Moreover, according to National Student Clearinghouse data, 86 percent of early college graduates in 2010 enrolled in higher education the following fall. Future data will reveal how well they do in continuing their education even further.

For many young people, early college is opening the door to higher education and better-paying careers. These students and their schools are refuting the conventional wisdom that such young people cannot complete high school on time and enter college without the need for remediation.

ENDNOTES

¹ Calculated using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), which tracked the educational progress of 25,000 eight graders over 12 years, from 1988 to 2000.

² Balfanz, Robert & Nettie Legters. 2004. *Locating the Dropout Crisis—Which High Schools Produce the Nation's Dropouts? Where Are They Located? Who Attends Them?* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University.

³ Excluded are schools in the Gateway to College Network. These schools are unlike other early college schools in that students enroll in a community college during a foundation period after which they are mainstreamed into college classes. Gateway to College helps high school dropouts (ages 16-21) and students on the verge of dropping out to earn high school diplomas while also earning college credits. See: <http://www.gatewaytocollege.org>.

⁴ The survey was administered by Jobs for the Future during the 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2010-11 school years. American Institutes for Research, the national evaluators of the Early College High School Initiative, administered the survey in 2008-09 and 2009-10.

⁵ The Student Information System has been funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation since the 2006-07 school year.

⁶ Integrated Survey, 2009-10.

⁷ A small percentage of graduates elected to attend early college for an additional year, referred to as the thirteenth year, in order to complete additional work toward an Associate's degree. Most of the courses taken during the thirteenth year were college or dual-credit courses.

⁸ The National Student Clearinghouse is a source of higher education enrollment data. More than 90 percent of the nation's colleges and universities provide enrollment data to the clearinghouse. While these data are highly useful in determining college enrollment status and types of institution in which students are enrolled (e.g., four-year, two-year, public, private), limitations affect the quality of the data. For example, not all postsecondary institutions participate in the clearinghouse. Students may opt out of making their enrollment record available. And it may not be possible to access the records of students whose names have changed.

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor. 2010. "U.S. Current Population Survey." April 28.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. June 2010. "Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2007-08." June.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, "Current Population Survey, October 1970 through 2008." (This figure was prepared in August 2009.)



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

TEL 617.728.4446 FAX 617.728.4857 info@jff.org

88 Broad Street, 8th Floor, Boston, MA 02110

2000 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 5300, Washington, DC 20006

WWW.JFF.ORG