Early College for All: Efforts to Scale up Early Colleges in Multiple Settings

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Background and Context: Given the positive impacts of the small, stand-alone early college model and the desire to provide those benefits to more students, organizations have begun efforts to scale up the early college model in a variety of settings. These efforts have been supported by the federal government, particularly by the Investing in Innovation (i3) program, which has supported four separate grants. This paper focuses on projects supported by three of those i3 grants, two of which seek to validate the early college model with comprehensive high schools. One of the grants is a Scale Up grant that is working in five states.

Purpose and Goals: This paper will describe current efforts to take the early college model and apply it in multiple settings. It will describe programs being supported by three i3 grants, focusing on the commonalities of these three efforts. The specific questions addressed by this paper include:
1. How are providers conceptualizing the scaling up of the early college model?
2. What adaptations are expected as the model is being scaled up?
3. What are early lessons learned from the scale-up efforts?

Setting: The three i3 grants are supporting work in 7 states: Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas.

Sample: This paper will describe efforts to implement early college strategies in a total of 54 high schools and 12 middle schools in Colorado, Illinois, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Texas. Efforts in the remaining two states (Indiana and South Carolina) are focused on developing organizational capacity to support early college work in those states.

Intervention: While the specific characteristics of the early college intervention vary among the three projects, there is substantial commonality. All of the early college efforts have as their centerpiece the effort to expand access to college courses for high school students. As part of this work, the interventions also focus on ensuring students are taking the high school courses needed for college, on changing instruction, and on expanding supports for students. The models require strong partnerships between the postsecondary institutions and the high schools/school districts. There is also an emphasis on changing instruction in a way that will prepare students for postsecondary education. Finally, the models believe that school staff need to work collaboratively to engage in ongoing learning. The grantees support the school-level implementation of these Early College Model Components through school-based coaching, professional development, district-based technical assistance, and support for postsecondary partnerships. Figure 1 presents a graphic representation of the commonalities of the early college model as being implemented in these different scale-up efforts.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Research Design: This paper is intended to provide an understanding of the context of the various efforts at scaling up. As such, it is descriptive in nature. The lessons learned include results from interviews conducted with project and school staff across the first two projects to be implemented. The final paper in this symposium will present early results from a quasi-experimental analysis of one of these efforts.

Results: The results are organized according to the three research questions.

<u>Conceptualizing Scaling Up.</u> Efforts to scale up the early college work can be conceptualized as utilizing one of several primary approaches:

1. *Scaling up the small, stand-alone early college to new communities*. The small stand-alone early colleges are schools of choice located on college campuses. This is the model that has been examined using lottery-based experimental studies, as described in the first two papers. The i3 Scale Up grant includes efforts to implement this specific model in Mississippi. The first new early college in Mississippi was started in the fall of 2015. This approach reflects the traditional conceptualization of scaling up as taking an effective intervention and essentially replicating it in different schools or districts thereby serving more students (McDonald, Keesler, Kauffman, & Schneider, 2006).
2. *Applying the early college model to comprehensive high schools*. The two Validation grants and part of the Scale-up grant are applying the strategies from the early college to comprehensive high schools in Colorado, Illinois, North Carolina and Texas. In this particular scale-up approach, the model is not located on the college campus and is not a school of choice. This approach also reflects the idea of scaling up to serve more students but it is less around replication and focuses more on what researchers call "mutual adaptation" or the need to adapt a model for a different setting (Coburn, 2003; McDonald, et al., 2006; Stringfield & Datnow, 1998). It does, however, bring up questions on the extent to which the setting is a core component of the intervention. Given that comprehensive high schools are not located on college campuses and are not new schools of choice, this approach to scaling up has resulted in the need to make specific adaptations to the model as described in more depth below.
3. *"Scaling down" to lower levels*. In one of the Validation grants, the early college effort is being conceptualized as including middle schools. In the Scale-Up grant, the effort is considered as including all schools within a district, including the middle and elementary schools. In these districts, scaling up might include the establishment of a small stand-alone early college, implementation of the early college in comprehensive high schools, and then implementation of certain components of the early college model in lower level schools. One of the providers has called this "scaling down." It can also be conceptualized as scaling more deeply within a district (Coburn, 2003). Needless to say, this approach also requires a reconsideration of what it means to be an early college.

These first three approaches focus on the school model itself. There is a fourth conceptualization of scaling up that is *"Scaling up organizational capacity."* This approach involves developing the capacity of other organizations to do the work of supporting early colleges in other states or locations. There is much less literature on this approach to scaling up, although recent work on charter school management organizations provides some insight (Farrell, Nayfack, Smith, & Wohlstetter, 2014; Farrell, Wohlstetter, & Smith, 2012). This approach is being used in the i3 Scale-Up project where the grantee is working with non-profit organizations in four states (Illinois, Indiana, Mississippi and South Carolina).

Adaptations of the model. As noted above, the different approaches to scaling up require adaptations to the model, in particular when the model is implemented in comprehensive high schools or is being implemented with lower grades. Key adaptations of the Early College Model Components include:

- *College-Aligned Program of Study*. In the original early college model, all students are expected to take college courses with the goal of completing two years of college courses by the end of their high school experience. In the comprehensive high school model, the expectation has shifted to giving a majority of students some college experience. For example, one project has an expectation that 90% of students will receive some college credit (this could include vocational credits) by the time they graduate from high school while another project expects at least 50% of the students to gain 21 college credits. Asking students to take college credits is, of course, not appropriate for elementary or middle school students so the emphasis in those grades shifts more to ensuring that students have the academic preparation necessary for success in college courses.
- *College-Ready Focus*. This Model Component can be implemented across settings, although it requires a much more substantial shift in culture for existing comprehensive high schools than for new stand-alone early colleges that are purposefully created with this focus (Author, 2012). Most of the aspects of this Model Component can also be completed at middle and elementary schools, with the exception of explicit assistance with college applications.
- *College-Ready Instruction*. All three i3 projects are attempting to have teachers in all settings incorporate similar instructional strategies. In the project that includes a focus on middle schools, coaches are working with teachers on the same strategies. The work with elementary schools is just beginning and it is unclear how the instructional strategies will play out in that setting.
- *Wrap-around Student Supports*. Although this Model Component should be able to be implemented across all settings, it is generally less of an emphasis in the comprehensive high school as they initially start work on the other three Model Components above. In contrast, the stand-alone early colleges have emphasized student supports, particularly staff-student relationships, from the very beginning.
- *Organizational supports*. The specific organizational supports that are part of the model can be implemented in any setting as well, although the small environment of the stand-alone early college can make it easier to utilize certain practices such as collaboration. In the existing schools, many of these organizational structures (such as Professional Learning Communities) are in place; the challenge has been in repurposing them to align with the goals of the early college.

Early lessons learned. One of the primary lessons learned by project and school staff was the importance of early and frequent communication about the goals of the project. Existing high schools did not always see the early college model as requiring a comprehensive re-envisioning of much of their school; many initially saw it as simply adding some dual enrollment courses. It has taken time for the principals and schools to understand the changes they are trying to make.

Many of the other lessons learned by the projects centered on the need for specific implementation supports. For example, each of the scale up projects did not start with identifying a college liaison as

an important aspect of the project. Yet, the first two projects later identified it as extremely helpful because it meant that there was a person dedicated to building the relationship with the institution of higher education and scheduling students for college classes, tasks that would otherwise be covered by already overworked counselors.

Another lesson learned was on the important of working with leadership at both the district and school levels. One project worked substantially with school leaders but spent little time with the district; they learned the importance of building capacity at the district-level. Another project worked primarily with leadership at the district level and gave little support to the school-building level leadership; they learned that there needed to be a higher level of coaching and support for the principals and leadership teams.

Conclusions: These three i3 projects seeking to scale up early college are interesting examples of different approaches that can be taken to expand students' access to a particular intervention. Each of these projects is being evaluated with rigorous research designs that will determine the extent to which the positive impacts shown for the small stand-alone early college model will be replicated with the adaptations being implemented.

Appendix A: References

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Appendix B: Figures

Figure 1: Cross-Project Early College Logic Model

Implementation Support

Technical Assistance and Support to Districts and Schools

Technical assistance/ Support to districts

School-based instructional coaching

Workshops and conferences

School leadership coaching

Tools and resources

Online community

Support for College Credit Courses

Assistance in developing postsecondary partnerships

Facilitation of funding for college courses

College liaison

Early College Model Components

Student School Experiences

College-Aligned Program of Study
• College preparatory curriculum
• Opportunities to earn college credit (up to two years' worth)

College-Ready Focus
• Exposure to college culture and norms
• Explicit instruction on college behaviors
• Assistance with college applications/financial assistance

College-Ready Instruction
• A coherent instructional framework aligned to college-ready standards

Wraparound Student Supports
• Comprehensive academic and affective supports
• Strong student-staff relationships

Organizational Practices

Staff collaboration

Ongoing and job-embedded professional learning

School and district leadership

Strong postsecondary partnership

Intermediate Student Outcomes

Increased college prep coursetaking and success (both courses and level)

Improved attendance

Increased college coursetaking (including AP and dual credit)

Long-term Student Outcomes

Decreased dropouts

Increased graduation rates

Increased enrollment and success in postsecondary education