LESSON 3:
Build a 'Both/And' Team

Launching and Sustaining Early College Pathways at Charlestown High School

AT A GLANCE

Launching a successful early college program requires a dedicated team that can both create a vision for the program and keep that program running through day-to-day challenges, ensuring its success. This report shares lessons from C-Town Pathways about how to build a "both/and" team that can ensure the success of the partnership between institutions and, even more important, ensure student success.

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About JFF

JFF is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. For nearly 40 years, JFF has led the way in designing innovative and scalable solutions that create access to economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

About the Series

Three Big Lessons in Six Years is both a reflection on the past and a look ahead to the future at Charlestown High School and other early college programs across the country. The purpose of this series is to document essential design elements, operational structures, and critical support for students to be successful. It also presents an authentic view of the troubleshooting required to overcome key initial challenges.

The lessons—*[Set a Vision to Guide the Future](#)*, *[Build a Framework That Allows for Structure and Flexibility](#)*, and *[Build a 'Both/And' Team](#)*—represent three integral parts of C-Town Pathways' journey. It has evolved from a small pilot to a formal, replicable approach that defines and distinguishes CHS within the district—and laid the foundation for a future school redesign process. The lessons also highlight both philosophical and practical questions and, most important, solutions that have since provided the school's staff with nuanced understanding, confidence, and convictions about how to best support students through an early college model.

The three resources in the series can be read as standalone deep dives into key elements of C-Town's model and operations, with a focus on transferable lessons. We see these resources as helpful to practitioners, especially school leaders who are interested in early college pathways and program staff who provide advising and work-based learning support. We also see these documents as useful to both private and public funders as they consider key elements of quality and success when investing in grantees.

In documenting the clarity that comes with hindsight, but also the inevitability of learning as you go, our hope is that educators feel empowered to take informed risks while avoiding some of the growing pains and challenges CHS experienced along the way.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The successful launch of an early college program depends on the dedication and abilities of the staff involved. Many roles across the education sector are categorized in one of two ways: strategy or on-the-ground implementation. However, to meet the logistical, programmatic, and strategic demands of early college programs, it is critical to eliminate the "either/or" mentality when staffing and instead build a "both/and" team. This kind of team can both create a vision for the program and keep that program running through day-to-day challenges, ensuring the success of the partnership between institutions and ensure student success.

The first six years of C-Town Pathways—a partnership between Charlestown High School (CHS) and the nearby Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), supported by JFF—clearly demonstrated that a successful early college model requires a dedicated team that can both create a vision for the program as well as keep that program running through day-to-day challenges, ensuring its success. Building this type of both/and team requires three major considerations:

1. Building a dedicated staff whose sole focus is the early college program

2. Designing a structure to account for key needs unique to early college programming, including work-based learning and dual enrollment

3. Planning for continued growth

Creation of a Dedicated Team

Launching an early college pathway may initially require leaders to leverage or repurpose existing staff to take on new responsibilities. Trying to maximize efficiency and funding by having staff take on early college work in addition to their support of the general population can make sense in the short term. But the early college model has a unique set of advising and administrative demands that becomes increasingly complex and time consuming as students progress through the pathways and enrollment grows. Early college initiatives also require a close partnership and alignment with at least one postsecondary institution, as well as an intimate understanding of how students can leverage college credit to make informed choices about college and future careers. Regular school staff may not have the context to understand these issues or the capacity to address them, so as an early college program grows, so should its dedicated staff.

With full-time staff ready to provide specific support for early college students, C-Town Pathways is aligned to programs of study at its partner institution, BHCC, as well as labor market information for the Boston metropolitan area. Not only do the initiative's dedicated team members have the capacity to address specific programmatic challenges and work one-on-one with students, but they also have the time and space to regularly collaborate with each other and strategically plan for the future.

However, the solidification of dedicated staff was the result of a learning process during the early years of the program. When the first CHS early college pathway launched in 2015 with startup funding from global software company SAP, there were no staff specifically designated to teach, advise, or support pathways students. The core planning team was comprised of guidance counselors and STEM teachers who split their time between pathways students and the general school population. They shared an enthusiasm for creating a new program that could have a huge impact on students' postsecondary and career outcomes. And they had a willingness to continue their work with students while making time to strategize, plan, and tackle the new logistical and administrative challenges that came with launching this new program at their school. In reflecting on what drew them to the role, one staff member said that the early college pathways "allow for a lot of innovation and new ways of interacting, especially with the community college partner." They also enjoyed the frequent opportunities to "think outside the box" and come up with new approaches to keeping students engaged.

C-Town staff members' passion, comfort with a startup mentality, and ability to provide strategic insight and on-the-ground effort were critical assets for the program before it finalized the right staffing structure. However, it soon became clear that the program's sustainability—and students' success—would require that these qualities be formally integrated into the job descriptions of a team of dedicated staff.

Intentional Role Development

Since C-Town launched in 2015, its team has iteratively developed and refined a list of critical early college staff roles. As outlined in *Lesson 1: Set a Vision to Guide the Future*, CHS sought to develop a pathways program that aligns with its foundational values of equity and access as well as the needs of its students. Using this vision to develop clear roles for pathways staff has allowed C-Town to grow in a way that complements its goals for the program, rather than having to realign priorities based on the skills of current staff. Identifying specific responsibilities and customizing job descriptions as early college programs grow are crucial steps in building an effectively staffed early college team.

Today, C-Town Pathways has a team of six dedicated staff members who meet regularly to run both the operational and strategic aspects of the program, with guidance from the school's principal.

C-Town Pathways Team

Critical Early College Roles	Description
Pathways Coordinator	• Oversee advising for pathways students • Support state-level designation process and requirements • Drive strategic vision and implementation of student supports • Oversee BHCC partnerships and communication • Lead small advisory group
Dual Enrollment (and Family) Coordinator	• Support students in selecting and enrolling in dual enrollment courses • Work closely with BHCC staff on coordination and academic support for students in dual enrollment courses • Work with families to communicate benefits of early college pathways • Lead small advisory group
Work-Based Learning Coordinator	• Oversee all prep and programming for pathways work-based learning and career exploration experiences • Design and implement the job shadow program in which students visit industry-specific workplaces • Lead small advisory group
Instructors	• Teach grade 9 exploration courses • Lead small advisory groups • Engage in regular conversations with leadership on day-to-day matters as well as overall visioning

These roles were not identified during the planning stages prior to launching early college pathways as much as they were iterated in response to the developing C-Town program. Below are some of the key lessons CHS learned from this process.

Given the critical importance of cross-sector partnerships to the success of the C-Town model, roles focused on building and managing partnerships are essential.

The first two dedicated staff roles at C-Town were a pathways coordinator and a work-based learning coordinator, soon followed by a dual enrollment coordinator who works across CHS and BHCC.

After the pilot year, CHS was able to leverage grant funds to transition the high school's guidance counselor to a full-time pathways coordinator position. In addition to one-on-one student advising in their capacity as a CHS guidance counselor, the pathways coordinator oversees planning and continuous improvement cycles for all three pathways, driving strategy and student outcomes, and manages external partnerships. The introduction of a versatile pathways coordinator marked a fundamental improvement in C-Town's commitment to the value of a both/and team, even as the program lacked additional dedicated staff during the early stages.

The current job description of the pathways coordinator highlights three key functions:

- Deepen and grow partnerships and programming to better prepare students for college and careers

- Ensure the appropriate program infrastructure and systems are in place to support collaboration and alignment between the high school and postsecondary institutions across Boston and Massachusetts

- Establish a community of local cross-sector support and professional learning invested in improving college and career outcomes for students.

Additionally, their "essential responsibilities" are divided into four categories:

- Program leadership and development

- Early college pathways coordination

- Marketing and recruitment

- Data collection and measurement

As these categories suggest, the pathways coordinator plays a crucial leadership role that encompasses implementation, oversight, and vision setting. This role also enhances program operations by taking in new information as the program evolves and using that to inform strategy conversations with the school's headmaster and the rest of the pathways team.

A dedicated work-based learning coordinator was the second hire the school made. This staff member supports targeted career development activities like resume building and work-based learning experiences, including job shadows and internships. This role also includes cultivating

relationships with local employers to design and coordinate experiences that lead to longstanding partnerships and commitments to host students at their companies. CHS's current work-based learning coordinator previously worked in a similar role but was employed by a nonprofit partner and served the entire school population. Once the district hired her to join the C-Town Pathways team full time, she had the capacity to develop more programming that closely aligned with the courses and sectors in which early college students were involved. For example, she created an annual six-week job shadow program that allows early college students to visit a different workplace aligned to their pathway's industry focus each week and make direct connections between classroom learning and future careers.

This staff member also helps tailor programming to students' career interests. In recent years, she has observed that C-Town Pathways attracts both students who are focused on one particular career or industry as well as students who are using the early college experience to explore a range of careers. She has therefore focused on creating more cross-pathway and cross-disciplinary career exploration activities like connecting students in the Business pathway to a law firm that specializes in real estate. Having both the capacity and authority to identify different student profiles and match career exploration activities to specific student interests has been critical to supporting student retention and engagement in the pathways.

> **"It's important to have someone whose brainpower is focused on mutually shared systems at the college and high school to track progress and improve communication."** *—CHS staff member*

CHS's third and most recent hire was a full-time dual enrollment coordinator. Even with the right staff in place, misalignment between K-12 and postsecondary schedules, policies, and calendars present evergreen challenges. Dedicated personnel can not only mitigate these challenges but also provide real-time support to students, such as when they need to reschedule an exam or withdraw from a class. As one C-Town Pathways staff member says, "It's important to have someone whose brainpower is focused on the mutually shared systems at the college and high school to track progress and improve communication."

> **"I think a lot about how we authentically communicate to families—make it purposeful, useful. We should be learning from families because it's a two-way street and they know their children."** *–CHS staff member*

In addition to supporting students navigating BHCC courses, the dual enrollment coordinator ensures families are engaged and informed. Because of her nuanced understanding of the student experience, the coordinator is well positioned to communicate the benefits and the requirements of early college to families. As she says, this helps include them in an ecosystem of support surrounding students: "I think a lot about how we authentically communicate to families–make it purposeful, useful. We should be learning from families because it's a two-way street and they know their children."

Instructors play a dual role in supporting students' academic outcomes. In addition to their responsibilities as teachers, instructors also provide important strategic guidance that shapes the overall direction of the program.

CHS instructors are also key drivers in the program's overall strategy and assist in high-level decisions about how to create and expand pathways that align BHCC courses with credential paths to take students into high-wage careers. The early college instructors on the CHS staff epitomize this quality of being a both/and team, which is so essential to program success. Additionally, alongside C-Town guidance staff, each pathways instructor leads a weekly advisory with students.

At C-Town Pathways, instructors teach the grade 9 exploration courses and intentionally integrate content and topics that will prepare students for dual enrollment courses. As described in *Lesson 2: Build a Framework That Allows for Structure and Flexibility*, BHCC instructors typically come to the CHS campus to teach the dual enrollment courses students take in grade 10. However, it is also possible for high school instructors with the relevant credentials to receive status as an adjunct professor from the partnering community college and teach both high school and dual enrollment courses. Schools interested in pursuing this approach will need to be mindful of any restrictions posed by unions at either institution.

Staff must collaborate to provide student supports, advising at all points along the pathway.

While building out a strong team is an important step in building a strong early college program, the end goal remains student success. When CHS surveyed its early college students, nearly all respondents indicated their interactions with pathways staff were helpful. C-Town staff members are the main source of academic and career advising for early college students, demonstrating the value of working collaboratively, developing a shared understanding of pathway goals and offerings, and continually refreshing their knowledge of occupations tied to each pathway. Students also reported that the financial benefit of early college was a primary factor in choosing to pursue pathways at CHS. These student-identified priorities demonstrate that agile responses to student needs and tailored messaging clearly resonate with students.

Early in the implementation of early college pathways, advising staff and instructors realized they needed time to connect as a team to address concerns about individual students, brainstorm solutions, and discuss what was going well and what needed to change at a programmatic level. As one staff member emphasized, "No early college role can be done in isolation." Consequently, what began as ad hoc meetings and an informal community of practice has evolved into a formalized meeting and communications structure through which pathways staff are both empowered and expected to analyze student data, identify key metrics and benchmarks, and develop and drive strategy for early college programming overall.

"No early college role can be done in isolation." –*CHS staff member*

A good example of the value of both/and roles within the pathways team is the development of a vertical alignment process that has identified target learning outcomes and competencies students should master. Such competencies include effectively using professional communication (in person and online) and fundamental academic skills (academic stamina). Using this list, the entire pathways team then mapped a series of assessments, like an "oral presentation with Google slides" or an "independent long-term project" to these skills. By identifying valued skills and competencies and figuring out how to measure student progress, the staff is able to align the career-focused learning taking place in pathways courses to broader academic goals and student learning priorities.

Moreover, this type of formalized collaboration allows staff to identify teachable moments within the early college experience that reinforce the socio-emotional and developmental benefits, regardless of their individual purview. For instance, the dual enrollment coordinator remarked that she often talks about "not named skills" that students can apply to many situations such as navigating the BHCC campus, approaching a professor, or accessing a free meal card so they can get breakfast after class. For C-Town, having a dedicated team has not only been instrumental in helping the program run smoothly but in creating a structure that optimizes staff commitment to supporting students, so they get the most out of their experience.

C-Town Pathways Vertical Alignment Working Draft

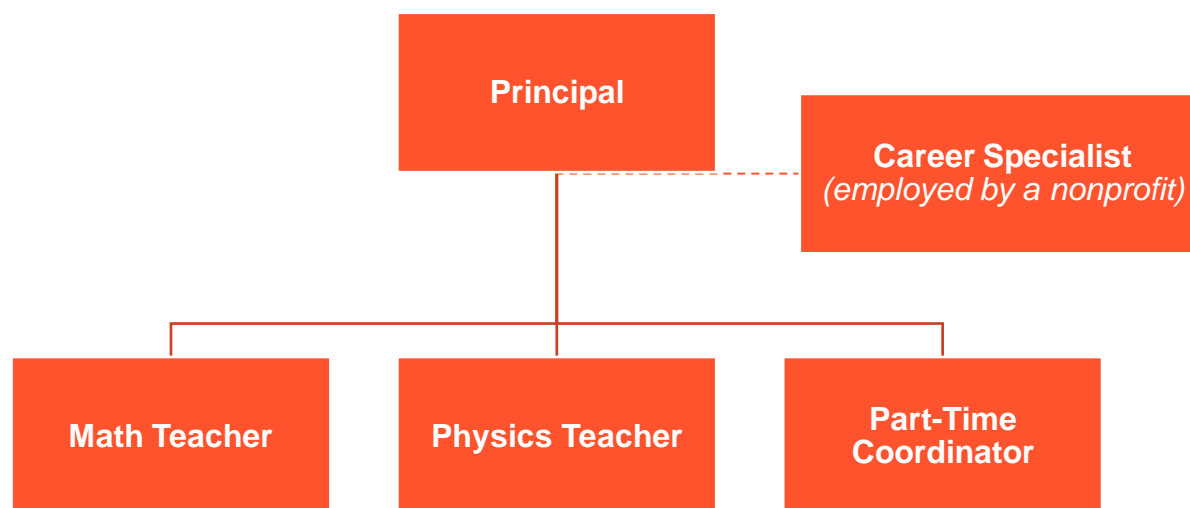| Lower School Essential Assessments	Prioritized Standards, Skills, and Concepts Students will be able to:

Independent long-term project
 	
● Students can successfully complete a long-term project
 	
Collaborative project
 	
● Students can support a team in achieving a goal
 	
Authentic Communication Event
 	
● Students can communicate effectively with professionals
 	
Oral Presentation with Google Slides
 	
● Students can effectively present information to an audience using Google Slides
 	
Test
 	
● Students can earn at least a B on a test by utilizing effective note-taking, reading, and studying strategies
	1. **Effectively use Professional Communication (in-person and online)**
	   a. With teacher and professors
	   b. In classroom setting (presentations,
	   c. With employers/outside professionals
	   d. Give and receive
	
	2. **Time Management**
	   a. Meet deadlines
	   b. Manage long term assignments (be proactive and plan appropriately)
	   c. Balance multiple commitments (CHS, BHCC, social, family)
	
	3. **Accountability**
	   a. Consistent Attendance and Punctuality
	   b. Being responsible for assignment completion (make-up work)
	   c. Tools for learning
	   d. Routine maintenance (checking emails/online learning platform)
	   e. Making and keeping appointments
	   f. Applying Feedback
	
	4. **Community and Collaboration**
	   a. Group work (roles)
	   b. Community of Learners (Peer Support and protect the flow)
	      i. Whole group discussion (lecture setting)
	      ii. Active listening
	      iii. Appropriate participation
	      iv. Supportive Language
	
	5. **Perseverance/Resourcefulness/Independence/Problem Solving**
	   a. Demonstrating stamina despite struggle
	   b. Locates and utilizes support resources
	   c. Identifies areas of struggle and knows when to ask for help
	   d. Identify problems and ideates multiple solutions
	   e. Design Thinking/brainstorming
	
	6. **Fundamental Academic Skills (academic stamina)**
	   a. Study skills
	   b. Note taking skills
	   c. Writing skills
	   d. Test taking skills
	   e. Computer Skills (Google, Microsoft)
	   f. Reading text (interpretation, analysis, synthesis)

Plan for Continued Growth

When CHS began its early college program, it started with a vision of helping students earn industry-aligned college credit, leading to increased postsecondary attendance and credential attainment rates. As that vision became a reality, it became clear just how much work was needed to succeed. The CHS team learned it needed to consistently prioritize both thoughtful conversations about the strategic vision for the program as well as the day-to-day needs of staff and students. As conversations grew to include topics like funding, data, and staffing, it was essential to ensure that dedicated staff could perform both these roles, to align future funding opportunities with the program's non-negotiables.

Early college staff who embody a both/and mentality can play a role in applying for external grants to add to the team's capacity. Although increased enrollment may not automatically result in budget increases, philanthropy can serve as a helpful bridge, providing temporary and targeted personnel support for schools that are in the process of building out a team of dedicated staff. Matching funds from a grant won by the C-Town team provided the opportunity to bring on its dual enrollment coordinator, highlighting the unique opportunities that can come from staff members who are able to identify high-level needs in their program and have the capacity to address those through grant applications.
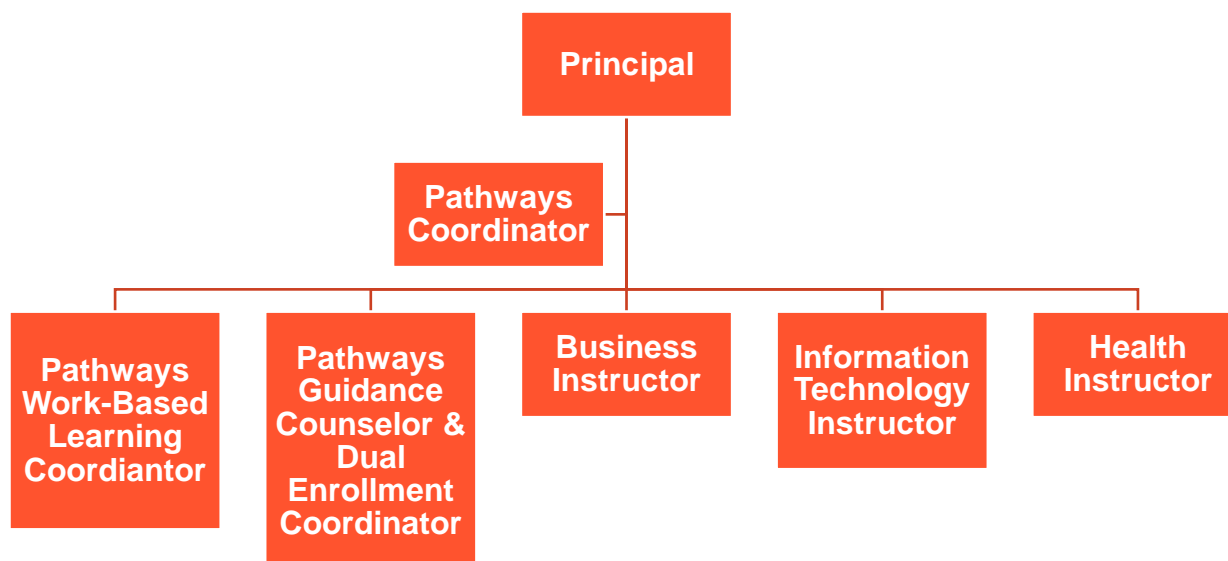
CHS early college staff members' comfort with pivoting from ground-level student support to high-level strategic planning also allows the program to pursue unique funding and capacity-building opportunities. In addition to receiving technical assistance from JFF through the Linde Family Foundation, CHS is part of the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation learning community, in which it partners with JFF to receive targeted support to strengthen its early college program both internally and in partnership with BHCC. C-Town Pathways team members also regularly pursue funding opportunities on their own, bringing in consultants to refine and strengthen specific elements and working with employers, like SAP and Liberty Mutual, that have made long-term commitments to providing opportunities for career exploration. The funding C-Town received from SAP was particularly critical in creating the pathways coordinator position, providing the program with its first and most fundamental dedicated early college staff member.

These funding opportunities afforded C-Town the opportunity to build a team that expanded along with the program over the past six years. While it may seem daunting to imagine running an early college program with only one or two staff members, these roles and functions can be combined naturally while relying on bridge support from philanthropy or waiting for increased student numbers to give rise to additional funding.

C-Town Pathways Team Organizational Chart 2015

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                    ┌──────────────┐
                    │  Principal   │- - - - ┌──────────────────────────┐
                    └──────┬───────┘        │   Career Specialist      │
                           │                │ (employed by a nonprofit)│
         ┌─────────────────┼─────────────────┐└──────────────────────────┘
  ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
  │ Math Teacher │ │Physics Teacher│ │  Part-Time   │
  │              │ │              │ │ Coordinator  │
  └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘
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C-Town Pathways Team Organizational Chart 2021

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                    │  Principal   │
                    └──────┬───────┘
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        ┌──────────┐       │
        │ Pathways │       │
        │Coordinator│      │
        └──────────┘       │
   ┌──────┬──────┬─────────┼─────────┬──────────┐
┌────────┐┌────────┐┌────────┐┌──────────┐┌────────┐
│Pathways││Pathways││Business││Information││ Health │
│Work-Based││Guidance││Instructor││Technology││Instructor│
│Learning││Counselor &││        ││Instructor││        │
│Coordiantor││Dual    │└────────┘└──────────┘└────────┘
└────────┘│Enrollment│
         │Coordinator│
         └────────┘
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C-Town Pathways is now using data to support continuous improvement and growth and considering how to further develop its staffing model to support this critical work. Looking to the future, C-Town and other early college program leaders may consider hiring a full-time staff member to manage the data-sharing agreement between the high school and postsecondary institution(s). Ideally, this position would reflect a both/and approach and be responsible for include higher level functions such as creating new data collection structures or modifying

existing methods to increase efficiency, ensuring that both institutions have easy access to the same information on their students. Whether or not a program has the capacity to hire a dedicated data specialist, all early college programs should track student data thoughtfully, and analyze retention and completion patterns and trends in postsecondary transitions following high school. While CHS has not yet hired a dedicated staff member to focus on early college pathways data, it is continuing to leverage the flexibility and expertise of its current staff to make data-informed decisions.

Conclusion

The staff that run an early college program are critical to the success of the partnership between institutions and, even more important, to student success. A team of passionate, dedicated staff members can take many forms, but regardless of the specific roles created, it is important to cultivate an attitude that the work encompasses all levels of program support. As the CHS program has grown over the past six years, it has reaped the benefits of an increased focus on the success of early college students through the hard work of staff members who are able to switch between focusing on the day-to-day details of managing the program and big-picture strategy building. Because staff spends each day working directly with students and contributing to the larger visioning conversations with the team, CHS's early college program has grown to support roughly 125 students through three thoughtfully crafted pathways. None of this success would be possible without its both/and team.