

**Massachusetts Department of Higher Education
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**



**Early College Program Designation Process and Criteria
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Early College—A Vision for Massachusetts

The Promise of Early College

At first glance, the concept of early college is a simple one—a model that includes free standing schools as well as programs within a school, both of which accelerate pathway oriented, well supported college level course taking in high school. Through deep and strategic partnerships between high schools and institutions of higher education, early college programs enable high school students to earn a significant number of college credits on an intentional pathway in a rigorous, highly supportive environment. Early college allows high school students to take college credit bearing courses, as part of a holistic supportive model to ensure student success and seamless progression to higher education. This model offers sea change in the integration and alignment of high school with college.

Early college programs are designed to blend elements of high school and college to provide students with the opportunity to experience and complete college level academic coursework on a clearly articulated pathway and simultaneously gain exposure to a variety of career opportunities. Early college programs also reduce the time and expense of earning a college credential while increasing the likelihood of completion.

While the structure demands significant investment in redesign and alignment, early college is a model that has delivered strong outcomes, creating opportunities for students to go farther and higher than before by helping them develop the courage and knowhow to think differently about their education; while it benefits *all* students, this model has proven to be especially powerful for first generation college students and low income students. For many, early college captures the promise of an early introduction to college course taking, and allows young people who may not have seen themselves going to college the opportunity to rethink what college means, to see themselves as college students, and to build a longer term vision for their career and their lives.

Like many innovations, early college has its roots in Massachusetts—the first known model of early college was developed by Elizabeth Blodgett Hall, who founded Simon’s Rock (later Bard College at Simon’s Rock) in Great Barrington, Massachusetts in 1966. In 1974, La Guardia Community College launched a “middle college high school” to serve at risk students. Both models influenced the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to launch the Early College High School Initiative in partnership with Massachusetts based nonprofit Jobs for the Future. From there, early college grew at larger scale within the public sphere. The learning from these many years of experience with early college models demonstrated that students who had traditionally experienced barriers to higher education were able to thrive in an early college environment.¹

Through the Gates initiative and many others throughout the country, early college has become one of the most successful ways to rethink high school, college, and the pathway through and to both, facilitating growth and development for tens of thousands of students.

This description of the impact of early college is not hyperbolic, but proven.² In a national randomized control study by the American Institutes for Research, students who attended early

¹ American Institutes for Research, *Early College, Continued Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study*, January 2014.

² Early college students are far more likely to earn a college degree by high school graduation—30% of early college students earn an Associate’s degree vs. very few students nationally. Early college

college were 5% more likely to graduate from high school, 10% more likely to be enrolled in college within two years of their high school graduation, and 22% more likely to obtain an associate's degree or greater within two years of their high school graduation.³

Early college has demonstrated that when students are given the opportunity to work towards taking and completing college level coursework without regard to assumptions made based on their prior academic performance or their personal background, those students are often able to thrive and achieve academic success in an environment that supports them to surpass their previous achievement and attainment trajectories.

Early College in Massachusetts

Given this, in January 2016, the Boards of Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Education signaled a desire to prioritize the exploration of early college as a policy priority that could have significant impact on improving outcomes at core to the mission of both bodies. This effort was conceived to achieve the promise made to our students and to the commonwealth—to ensure that students graduate high school prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and go on to attain valuable postsecondary credentials and degrees. The boards are also charged with ensuring that the promise of higher education is available and accessible to all students, and that those students understand their educational alternatives and implications by being prepared to make informed choices about their careers and their futures.

Ultimately, based on outcomes achieved by early college in other states as well as some successful examples in Massachusetts, both boards anticipated that early college might be a way to provide students a model proven to increase high school graduation rates, college going rates, persistence in higher education, and completion of associate's and bachelor's degrees. In a time when there is a drastic gap between the number of Bachelor's degrees awarded in Massachusetts and the demand of our economy for those with Bachelor's degrees⁴, the promise of early college is not only of potentially great benefit to individuals who thrive both within and beyond high school and postsecondary education, but it also symbiotically serves to ensure the economic health and prosperity of the Commonwealth.

Furthermore, both boards recognized that in order to successfully promote early college and better support students more broadly, it would be imperative to break down the traditional silos of K-12 education as distinct from postsecondary education, both at a statewide and a local level. Doing so would help bridge the chasm students often experience between their completion of high school and the educational opportunities available to them afterwards. The boards recognized that to most effectively support our students, Massachusetts would need to think differently and more broadly about the continuum of education and eliminate structural and cultural barriers to postsecondary education, particularly the barriers faced by students traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

students are also more likely to earn substantial college credit in high school (94% v. 10% nationally). These students are more likely to enroll in college immediately after high school (71% vs. 54%), and return to college for a second year (86% v. 72%). Jobs for the Future, *Early College Expansion: Propelling Students to Postsecondary Success at a School Near You, Executive Summary*, 2014.

³ American Institutes for Research, *Early College, Continued Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study*, January 2014.

⁴ Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, *The Degree Gap: Honing In on College Access, Affordability & Completion in Massachusetts*, June 2016.

Within this context, the Barr Foundation generously partnered with the Commonwealth to sponsor an independent report to explore the landscape of early college statewide and nationally, and to determine the potential to expand early college opportunities in Massachusetts. For this task, Barr engaged Parthenon-EY to conduct a review with the support of a steering committee of state leaders and a working group of department staff and leaders in public K-12 and higher education. In December 2016, Parthenon produced a report entitled, “Breaking Down Silos to Put Students on the Path to Success.”⁵

That report confirmed the thinking of the educational leadership in the state: that early college is a promising model which could be a critically important way to narrow educational opportunity gaps across groups of students; that aligning state policy goals with the promotion of early college could have a deeply meaningful impact on scaling improved outcomes in postsecondary completion; and that existing early college programs within community colleges and high schools in Massachusetts were a powerful base from which to build a broader statewide early college initiative.

The report highlighted previous work in early college, and identified critically important elements to the success of early college. Distilling in depth evaluative research in this space, the report articulated the most important elements of early college based on evaluation of and expert opinion on early college over the last decade. At core, the report found that early college works by increasing the expectations and progression of academic performance while simultaneously providing academic and social supports to make that possible.

The report identified, these are principles essential to successful early college design and those principles have become the framework for the designation criteria. They are:

1. Equitable Access
2. Guided Academic Pathways
3. Enhanced Student Support
4. Relevant Connection to Career
5. Deep Partnerships

Following on these findings, in January 2017, the Boards of Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education jointly launched an Early College Initiative, intended to support the expansion of early college in Massachusetts and establish an Early College Program Designation. At that time, both boards jointly approved the five guiding principles for Early College Programs, based on findings in the research described above. The Boards also created an Early College Joint Committee, a five person joint committee of both boards, which includes the Chair of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Chair of the Board of Higher Education, one additional member from each board, and the Secretary of Education. The Commissioners of Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Education serve as non-voting members of the committee as well. The ECJC was charged with developing this early college designation process for the Commonwealth and catalyzing the successful growth of high quality early college programs in Massachusetts. The ECJC will also issue final approval for all Massachusetts Early College program designations.

Designation Process

The goal of this designation process is to ensure that as early college expands within Massachusetts, the effort will benefit from successful local and national models. This effort also

⁵ Parthenon-EY, *Breaking down silos to put students on the path to success: The promise early college in Massachusetts*, December 2016.

aims to simultaneously promote innovation in the development of early college programs and to establish clear, coherent, and unifying expectation as to the most effective structure for early college. Furthermore, the intention of this designation process will be to support collaboration among early college programs across the state and to facilitate collaboration between them.

As such, in order to receive designation as a Massachusetts early college program, applicants must demonstrate, with evidence, a capability to effectively implement the guiding principles. Embedded within this framework are the tactical components of a Massachusetts high quality career pathway more broadly: advising, work-based learning, postsecondary linkages, integrated instruction, credential attainment, and alignment with labor market data.

The designation process and opportunity is designed to encourage the growth of the early college model, and to support policies such that more students might benefit from the opportunity to participate in early college. Furthermore, the early college designation process is intended to be the mechanism by which the Commonwealth directs and prioritizes state level financial investment in this field.

More broadly, the Early College Initiative will prioritize alleviating the barriers to success of early college in Massachusetts. As articulated in the Parthenon report, these strategies include increasing awareness of early college, developing a community of practice, supporting the alignment of high school curricula to existing postsecondary pathways, designing appropriate staffing, and funding supports for scaling up programs as well as sustainable funding for students.

This first year of designation marks a new process for Massachusetts and inaugural applicants will be part of a critically important stage as the boards of Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Education seek to expand early college in Massachusetts. We expect to receive applications from existing early college programs as well as new programs, and we welcome both. We hope that both existing and new programs will see value in the Massachusetts Early College Program designation as an indicator of high quality and alignment with larger statewide goals. Designation will serve as a way to determine funding eligibility with regard to any new funding appropriated for the purposes of supporting early college in Massachusetts. Additionally, we are pleased to see that private philanthropy also values early college and we expect foundations and donors to consider the designation process as a factor in their approach to deciding which planning and implementation efforts to support.

Flexibility will allow for learning during the first years of this designation process. While each element of the designation criteria was developed with intention and purpose, we understand that parts of this process will evolve and it is likely that we will revisit and revise the criteria after we have experienced one cycle of early college designation. We intend to be part of a learning community alongside the districts, high schools and higher education institutions that develop and refine the Commonwealth's early college programs.

Early College Program Designation Overview

In order to ensure a measured and thoughtful process for Massachusetts Early College Program applicants, the designation process will be in two stages: Preliminary Designation and Final Designation.

There will be two stages of official designation by the Commonwealth for Early College programs. All programs seeking this designation must first apply for a **Preliminary Designation**. A Preliminary Designation will recognize an Early College Program for having completed sufficient planning and design in alignment with the Preliminary Criteria as framed by the Guiding Principles (as described later in this document). Receiving a Preliminary Designation will allow the applicant to apply for a Final Designation.

A **Final Designation** will require that the applicant has fulfilled essential elements of early college program design and provide sufficient evidence that the program has enrolled students as defined by the Designation Criteria, or that the applicant has developed all necessary infrastructure to begin enrolling students upon designation. An applicant may not apply for a Final Designation unless they have already received a Preliminary Designation.

In the first year of early college designation, we anticipate that both existing programs as well as new programs will apply for designation, and we will review both types of application similarly. Both new and existing programs will be asked to apply for Preliminary Designation first (in September 2017), to allow these applicants time to reflect on any aspects of the designation that require alterations to the existing program in order to come into alignment. The Final Designation application will be released in January 2018 for all applicants.

Final designations will be issued as five year performance contracts, with annual reporting obligations and a review/check-in after the first three years.

Applicant Criteria

Applicants for designation must be structured partnerships between at least one institution of higher education (IHE) and one K-12 partner, and both/all partners must apply jointly under the signature of the institutional president and the district superintendant. Applicant partners must be a Massachusetts public high school, a Massachusetts public institution of higher education, or an independent institution of higher education, provided that such an institution is based in Massachusetts and has degree granting authority in Massachusetts. Applicants may apply for a cohort program within a larger school, or an entire early college high school. The Commonwealth aims to build programming that serves larger cohorts of students in order to build strong and efficient pathways for student groups who may have been traditionally underserved in higher education. If the program serves only a small group of students, it is likely to be difficult to sustain.

Based on research, it is clear that the most effective early college models are those that are either a self-contained school, or those with a critical mass cohort size, to allow for growth and exploration of students and prioritization of program priorities within respective institutions. One aim of this initiative, therefore, is to support this larger cohort model as well as the expansion of existing programs. That said, at this stage of early college growth in Massachusetts, we appreciate that some programs are in nascent and startup stages, and in other cases, expansion is challenged by concerns about feasibility. This question of cohort size, however, remains critically important to the Early College Joint Committee, and will be an issue both the Department of Higher Education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will continue to explore in the coming year. Therefore, while there will be no minimum initial cohort size requirement for applicants, the ECJC is likely to prioritize proposals with credible initial or target critical mass and may defer approval for plans it judges unlikely to be sustainable or cost-effective due to small size.

Early College Program Designation Timeline

Following recommendation by the Early College Joint Committee and approval by the Board of Higher Education and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Department of Higher Education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will release a request for applications for Preliminary Early College Program Designation in July 2017 and will accept those applications in September 2017. The departments will then determine and issue or deny Preliminary Early College Program Designation as soon as possible thereafter.

The Department of Higher Education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will accept applications for Final Early College Designation beginning in January 2018. The departments will then recommend applicants for Final Designation for approval by the Early College Joint Committee in the spring of 2018, with the intention that new programs achieving designation would launch in the fall of 2018.

An applicant that is awarded Preliminary Designation in the fall of 2018 is expected to apply for Final Designation in January 2018. If applicants do not receive Final Designation by the Early College Joint Committee in the spring of 2018 they may reapply in the fall of 2018.

Early College Program Designation Criteria

Guiding Principle 1: Equitable Access

Designated programs should prioritize students underrepresented in higher education enrollment and completion. To facilitate this, programs should be structured to eliminate barriers to student participation. Design might therefore include, but not be limited to, tuition-free participation, open enrollment without regard to prior academic performance, student supports to promote success, scalability, multiple entry points for students, and student supports to prepare students for entry into the program.

The designation criteria pursuant to this guiding principle are designed to focus on the goal of closing achievement gaps and offering educational models to leverage students' own personal assets and help them thrive. Research of early college models nationally has demonstrated the effectiveness of designing early college to ensure equitable access. As such, the Massachusetts Early College designation is designed with the goal of broadening access to college through this model.

Therefore, this portion of the application is aimed towards keeping entry into early college pathways as open as possible, particularly with regard to prior academic performance. It is also focused on prioritizing program design and enrollments for students who have historically been underrepresented in higher education. Therefore, designation applicants are encouraged to make real, targeted, and thoughtful efforts to aggressively recruit students who may be the first in their family to go to college, who are part of demographic groups historically underrepresented in higher education, who may be English language learners, or who may otherwise not yet possess a perception that they may be a college going student.

Preliminary Designation Criteria to demonstrate Equitable Access

1. The program is designed and funded such that it will be offered free for all student participants—including tuition, fees, and other related expenses.
2. Should student applications exceed program capacity, participation should be determined by a lottery among applicants, or by another method intended to ensure equitable access to the program.
3. Initial enrollment in early college should be made without regard to past academic performance.⁶
4. The program will present an effective plan for outreach and recruitment of students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education, including students of color, low income students, English language learners and students with disabilities. The program leverages the work of existing college access programming to identify students who would benefit from the program. Programs are encouraged to utilize the postsecondary Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) to identify and target eligible students.

⁶ This aspect of program design is subject to and may account for appropriate processes to address suitability for special populations of students, such as those with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Programs may also be designed to require students to meet reasonable benchmarks of participation, engagement, and performance to continue participation.

5. Program design aims to reflect an admissions and placement policy that ensures that the highest number of first-generation and other underrepresented students are able to participate successfully in early college programming.
6. Data are presented about the current number and percent of students in the high school or district that are low-income, students of color, and/or first generation who would be targeted for inclusion.

Final Designation Criteria to demonstrate Equitable Access:

The applicant shall continue to meet all criteria requisite for Preliminary Designation. In addition, the applicant must demonstrate:

1. Long-term program design that reflects a reasonable plan to target enrollment of significant scale relative to school/school district size.
2. Program design that reflects thoughtfulness and opportunity with regard to student entry and exit points in the program. A program will demonstrate a clear pathway for students, but will also be designed to allow for more than one entry point for students. Program design will also be structured such that should a student need to exit the program, the student will be able to seamlessly transition out of the program and back into the traditional or a different high school program.
3. The applicant will also submit the following:
 - a. Longitudinal data showing at least five years of student enrollment trends.
 - b. Needs assessment demonstrating potential district need for such a program in the district or region. Such a needs assessment could include high school graduation rates, postsecondary entry/persistence/completion rates, skills gaps within the regional labor force, economic trends, community support, etc.
 - c. Written recruitment plan, including a timeline of recruitment and enrollment events, and recruitment materials for distribution at feeder schools and other appropriate locations in the community (e.g., recruitment schedule).
 - d. Written communication plan for targeting identified audiences, parents, community members, school board, higher education personnel, business and industry partners, etc.
 - e. Materials used for outreach and recruitment, including but not limited to, brochures and marketing in English as well as Spanish and/or relevant second language(s).
 - f. Written admission policy, including a potential lottery process and any program enrollment requirements.

- g. Calendar of family/parent outreach events and other opportunities to educate students, counselors, principals, parents, the school board, business and industry partners, and community members on the Early College program.

Guiding Principle 2: Guided Academic Pathways

Designated programs should be structured around clear and detailed student academic pathways from secondary and post-secondary education with regard to coursework, sequencing, and experiences beyond the classroom. Given this pathway, students should be expected to complete at least twelve college credits that count towards a postsecondary credential. Programs should also offer students substantive exposure to career opportunities in high demand fields, allowing them to make an informed decision about which career pathway to pursue. Students should also be exposed to the authentic experience and academic rigor of postsecondary education. This would require validating that courses are as rigorous as college level courses offered on campuses. Further, programs should prioritize allowing students to take at least one or more courses on college and university campuses where possible, and otherwise offer experiences intended to acculturate students to the postsecondary experience.

Guided academic pathways ensure that students experience coherence, clarity and connection as to their path, but flexibility as to their exploration. And these pathways also ensure that young people develop identities as college going students. As a corollary, we hope for a similar combination of innovation and structure with regard to early college program design itself. Early college designation will not require that a pathway be in a specific field (nor is such specificity precluded), although designation expectations require that students will, at a minimum, be educated as to their postsecondary education *and* career options and the connection between both.

More specifically, designation will prioritize the valuable work of our public campuses to develop Associate's to Bachelor's degree pathways between the public two and four year institutions. Applicants should, at the program design phase, think deeply not only about the pathway within the early college program itself, but also the value of the courses and credits achieved by students who successfully complete early college and how they would transfer to degree programs.

Understanding that some applicants may include postsecondary partners who are not public higher education institutions, we appreciate that there will necessarily be exceptions to this preference. Furthermore, we understand that there may be programs that are designed as intentional pathways, but not aligned with a major or course of study that is currently mapped. Ultimately, however, the designation will require a demonstration that the course taking in early college is intended to support relative flexibility for students as well as credit attainment that will be of value as the student continues on the pathway in pursuit of an associate's and/or a bachelor's degree.

Preliminary Designation Criteria to demonstrate Guided Academic Pathways:

For a Preliminary Designation, the applicant must meet the following criteria relevant to Guided Academic Pathways:

1. The program design has clearly articulated, thoughtfully designed, and fully integrated pathway(s) for students, including:
 - a. Pathway(s) are designed to prepare students in earlier grades for later college level coursetaking;
 - b. inclusion of early career development and postsecondary education exploration, grounded in employability skills and labor market information;
 - c. program design reflecting an integration of coursetaking and career awareness exploration and/or work based learning experiences, informed by and offered in partnership with area employers;
 - d. course taking is linked with the broader college going experience, such that where feasible, at least some academic courses are taught on the campus of the postsecondary partner institution;
 - e. program is designed such that during high school, students will have gained a clear understanding of the postsecondary pathways and courses of study available to them, and how those courses of study will help facilitate their career aspirations; and
 - f. program is designed such that upon completion, students will have at least 12 transferable college credits, and students will also fully understand the range of postsecondary institutions available to them, how to matriculate at those institutions, and how to pursue the financial aid necessary to pay for those opportunities.
2. The program outlines a basic plan for scope and sequence of high school courses to enable participating students to prepare for and later access college-level coursework in a cohort of their peers.
3. The range of college credits available to be completed (with a minimum on-plan target of 12) should be stated. To the extent possible, these courses should fall under the MassTransfer Gen Ed Foundation and align with established “A2B Mapped” Degree Pathways.⁷
4. The program includes a description of when and where college coursework will be completed and how it is articulated with a high school’s graduation requirements.

Final Designation Criteria to demonstrate Guided Academic Pathways:

⁷ The Department of Higher Education, in collaboration with the three segments of public higher education, has developed “A2B Mapped” degrees in specific disciplines and metamajors that seek to create a seamless transition from two-year to four-year institutions. To the extent possible, high school pathways and course offerings should be aligned with the “A2B” mapped degrees, and these pathways should be an essential part of the consideration of any Early College program design process.

The applicant shall continue to meet all criteria requisite for Preliminary Designation. In addition, the applicant must provide:

1. Scope and sequence evidencing a course of study allowing for all students who complete the program as designed to graduate with at least 12 college credits.
 - a. We strongly suggest that, at a minimum, students complete English Composition I or the equivalent and a college-level mathematics course prior to completion of the early college program. Students should be identified as more interested in a STEM or non-STEM pathway for the purposes of completing a math course that will be appropriate for their field of study.
 - b. Further, as stated above, program design should reflect an effort to ensure that student course taking aligns with MassTransfer Pathways. As such, it is recommended that the remaining course sequence be mapped with major requirements for a particular A2B Mapped Degree Pathways or with the MassTransfer GenEd Foundation.
 - c. Program design should also reflect a pathway that allows a student to complete both a two year and four year degree, should they wish. As such, it is strongly recommended that program design reflect course sequencing aligned with admissions requirements for the Massachusetts public four year institutions and that the program is designed such that students complete MassCore. If, for some reason, program design does not so align, applicants must articulate the rationale.
2. Evidence of curricular alignment between high school and college courses.
3. Proposed schedules for students enrolled in the Early College High School program. Note that should the proposed program require a Student Learning Time waiver, the application for that waiver should be included in the application for final designation.
4. Sample redacted individualized learning plan (ILP), including connections between areas of interest and exposure to career opportunities.
5. Proposed high school course catalogs or additions to existing catalogs, including program outlines and course descriptions and syllabi.
6. Written policy for placement of students into college courses that includes strategies for assuring student preparedness. Early college partners are strongly encouraged to explore alternatives to determine student placement.

Guiding Principle 3: Enhanced Student Support

Designated programs should incorporate sufficient wraparound services to promote academic success and completion, taking into consideration the needs of diverse populations of students.

Early college should be designed not as a boutique program, but should reflect a holistic program design in contemplation of the lived experience of the target student population. Specifically, programs are encouraged to develop student support in consideration of a whole

student, in contemplation of student development broadly, development of academic proficiency and support related to barriers faced both externally and with regard to academic course taking.

Preliminary Designation Criteria to demonstrate Enhanced Student Support

1. The program plan identifies potential academic and nonacademic challenges for potential student participants.
2. Plans include supports for academic, nonacademic, and career purposes. These plans should incorporate evidence-based strategies and consider the supports offered by existing college access programming, e.g. scaffolding of curricula and student learning outcomes.
3. Program design includes an outline of potential academic supports, including but not limited to counseling/advising and tutoring, both at the high school and college levels.
4. An appropriate contact for student support is named in the application. Contact information for this individual is provided, along with a description of the role. If the role requires staff to be hired, a proposed job description is included.
5. Appropriate behavior, health and safety procedures for students on college campuses are addressed.

Final Designation Criteria to demonstrate Enhanced Student Support

The applicant shall continue to meet all criteria requisite for Preliminary Designation. In addition, the applicant must provide:

1. Comprehensive plan for ongoing academic and non-academic support so students will be on a pathway to take college courses in high school; the plan must address supports for English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and first generation college students.
2. Student schedules evidencing advisory/or college access/ readiness and support time built into the program.
3. If the proposed schedule for students is likely not to meet the minimum 180 days/990 hours of instruction, applicant shall include a description as to how the proposed schedule will ensure that students will have sufficient access to learning supports to successfully complete program requirements.⁸
4. Advisory/study skills curriculum material and tutoring schedules.
5. Detailed calendar of awareness activities for current and prospective students, including application assistance, financial aid counseling, and college and career advising.

⁸ Final designation of an Early College design will also serve as a waiver of the [Student Learning Time \(SLT\) regulations](#), if needed.

6. Policy on communicating to students that they are at risk for failing a course, supports for helping the student get back on track, and actions that may or may not be taken if a student fails a course or multiple courses.

Guiding Principle 4: Connection to Career

Designated programs should expose students to a variety of career opportunities including greater depth in careers relevant to their selected pathway, for example, by providing opportunities for targeted workforce and career skills development, career counseling, and elements of experiential and workplace learning.

This guiding principle dictates that designated early college programs should be designed to support college and career readiness such that students are expected to develop awareness of their educational growth and development while understanding the manner in which their educational path is connected to career opportunities. This connection should be framed broadly, to allow students to explore career possibilities and to more generally develop foundational employability skills necessary to thrive in any work environment.

Preliminary Designation Criteria to demonstrate Connection to Career:

1. Career Development Education (CDE) is integral to the early college program design, with career awareness, exploration and/or immersion activities included in the program across the four years of high school⁹,
2. Program is designed to incorporate in depth and comprehensive college and career counseling that aligns to the necessary elements of individual learning plans (as defined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education).
3. College and career counseling and education incorporates relevant regional and statewide labor market data as a method to inform students about career opportunities beyond college and supports students to make the connection between that information and their potential pathways.
4. Specific career and college counseling will be part of the early college program plan, including the guided use of individualized learning plans beginning in 9th grade.
5. Program will engage area employers to support connections between education and career.
6. Courses offered as part of the early college program will be aligned with multiple postsecondary and degree pathways (see Guided Pathways).

Final Designation Criteria to demonstrate Connection to Career:

The applicant shall continue to meet all criteria requisite for Preliminary Designation. In addition, the applicant must provide:

⁹ Immersive experiences include internships, capstones, cooperative education, or clinical experiences (as defined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education).

1. Proposed career development education activities, by grade level, that include awareness, exploration, and/or immersion (internships, proposed career pathways) that consider labor market information.
2. A plan for proposed career development education activities for students. This plan should include specific employer contacts in order to demonstrate a commitment of community businesses and other partners, with the goal of exposing students to a variety of career options and internship opportunities.
3. Identification of the higher education partner's commitment and resources to help support connections between education and career.
7. Incorporation and integration of an online tool for use in college and career counseling (e.g., Naviance or MEFA Your Plan for the Future).

Guiding Principle 5: Effective Partnerships

Designated programs should be a partnership between at least one institution of higher education and one public secondary school and district, and may include one or more employers. Partnerships should present evidence that the program is consistent with collective bargaining agreements and memoranda of understanding detailing the nature of governance, budget, sustainability, scheduling, respective responsibilities, and performance measures. Programs should be sufficient in size to capture economies of scale goals and to ensure long-term sustainability.

Fundamentally, an effective and sustainable early college program necessitates a fully integrated partnership between the school, district, and postsecondary institution. Tacit agreement to collaborate is not sufficient—deep commitment to partnership and continued full collaboration on both sides is imperative. While designation purposes therefore require substantive evidence of these partnerships in the form of a MOU, what will be most important to maintain these partnerships will be clear and respected relationships between instructors and leadership at both institutions.

Preliminary Designation Criteria to demonstrate Effective Partnerships:

1. The K-12 school district(s) and postsecondary institution outline plans to be fully integrated partners in the program. Roles and responsibilities of each partner during the planning process are clearly identified, including which entity will be the fiscal agent.
2. Where there is a requirement for local bargaining relating to any aspect of the pathway, local requirements must be followed. The proposal outlines plans to have discussions concerning collective bargaining agreements, at both the K-12 and higher education level, as needed.
3. Each partner has identified personnel empowered with the authority to enter into memoranda of understanding discussions.
4. Application details the leadership at each partner institution empowered to make decisions around early college at the K-12, higher education, employer, and community level.

5. Plan will detail initial plans identifying key costs associated with the program for both institutions, including—but not limited to—per credit student support and student transportation. Applicant partners have realistic plan to sustainably support a high quality program across all partners, and have identified a necessary funding structure to achieve that goal.
6. Applicant has provided preliminary outlines and a clear plan to complete detail regarding graduation requirements, college course taking, and pathways to credentials including certificates, associate, and bachelor's degrees.

Final Designation Criteria to demonstrate Effective Partnerships:

The applicant shall continue to meet all criteria requisite for Preliminary Designation. In addition, the applicant must provide:

1. A joint or common vision statement agreed upon by partners, and the value add of and value proposition for each partner.
2. A current, signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that defines an active partnership between the school district and the institution of higher education (IHE) that addresses topics including, but not limited to:
 - a. the location and proposed faculty of the dual credit courses offered in the Early College program ;
 - b. the anticipated costs and planned funding sources for all instruction costs and for all support, logistical, administrative and other activities, including but not limited to costs for tuition, fees, and textbooks;
 - c. student transportation;
 - d. program coordination plan;
 - e. student support plan;
 - f. faculty support plan; and
 - g. career partnership coordination plan.
3. The MOU shall also include the following necessary components:
 - a. grading periods and policies;
 - b. courses of study;
 - c. curriculum alignment;
 - d. student learning outcomes;
 - e. instructional materials;
 - f. instructional calendar;
 - g. student enrollment and attendance policies;
 - h. provisions for discontinuing ECHS program operation in the event that becomes necessary;
 - i. provisions and processes for collecting, sharing, and reviewing student and teacher/instructor data to assess the progress of the ECHS program;
 - j. policy for advising students on the transferability of all college credits offered and earned;
 - k. professional development for ECHS faculty (including both district and IHE faculty/staff);
 - l. policy to ensure the IHE transcripts college credit earned through dual credit in the same semester that credit is earned;

- m. policy addressing the role of each partner in the resolution of student issues (including student conduct, investigative procedures, consequences); and
 - n. indication of how often the MOU will be reviewed.
- 4. The MOU shall also detail performance measure goals, and how the data attached to those measures will be collected, analyzed, and disseminated. Those measures should include but not be limited to the following:
 - a. retention rate of participating students, disaggregated by subgroup;
 - b. high school graduation rate of participating students;
 - c. percentage of participating students who complete the program;
 - d. percentage of participating students who gain postsecondary credits and how many credits;
 - e. percentage of participating students who achieve an associate's or bachelor's degree within three or six years of high school graduation; and
 - f. college and/or career outcomes of students.
- 5. Detailed MOUs for any other partnerships, including community based organizations, businesses, and other partners.
- 6. The application should also include the following for the program in the aggregate:
 - a. budgets, including estimates of both start-up costs as well as per student ongoing costs to sustain the program (with reference to the cost estimates described in the Parthenon study);
 - b. staffing plans;
 - c. faculty and teacher qualifications;
 - d. job descriptions for individuals supporting the ECHS Program;
 - e. training or professional development and support plans;
 - f. student mentor/induction program plans;
 - g. faculty and teacher assignments.