

EDUCATION

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EFP Takeaways

The Costs and Benefits of Early College High Schools

Background

Early college high schools, which aim to increase college enrollment and completion, particularly among historically underrepresented students, leverage partnerships between high schools and colleges or universities that allow high school students to earn up to 60 college credits through dual-enrollment coursework. These programs also provide supports and services to help students succeed in their college coursework. The authors consider the effects of enrollment in early college high schools on postsecondary attainment, and the additional costs and benefits associated with these schools. Their work is published in vol. 16 issue 4 of *EFP*.

The Study

The authors use randomized admissions lotteries at 10 early college high schools to estimate the impact of enrollment on students' postsecondary attainment. Additionally, the authors collected primary data around resources and corresponding expenditures to conduct a cost-benefit analysis on the additional costs of early college high schools and their returns to both students and the public.

For more details:

- View the [full issue](#).
- See the [full article in *Education Finance and Policy*](#).
- [Sign up here to receive future *EFP Takeaways*](#).
- Summary of:
Atchison, D., Zeiser, K., Mohammed, S., Knight, D., & Levin, J. (2021). The Costs and Benefits of Early College High Schools. *Education Finance and Policy*, 16 (4): 659-689.

Findings

The authors find that students enrolling in early college were more likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree or associate's degree compared with students who did not attend early colleges. The increase in postsecondary attainment associated with early college enrollment translates into private benefits of around \$34,000 per student, public benefits of approximately \$24,000 per student, and total benefits of approximately \$58,000 per student.

Early colleges do cost more on a per-student basis compared with traditional high schools. However, the additional cost is by no means astronomical, amounting to approximately \$4,000 more per student than traditional high schools over four years of high school (\$1,000 per student per year).

Benefits of early colleges far exceed the cost, with an estimated benefit-cost ratio of approximately 15 and net-present value of \$54,000. Even using the most conservative measures of costs and benefits, the investment in early colleges make financial sense yielding an estimated benefit-cost ratio of 4.6 and net-present value of \$27,000.

The results of this analysis, along with the findings of other studies of early college, indicate that investment in early colleges is worthwhile. Both students and society would benefit from providing more college coursework that contributes toward earning postsecondary degrees during high school and supporting high school students in succeeding in college-level courses.