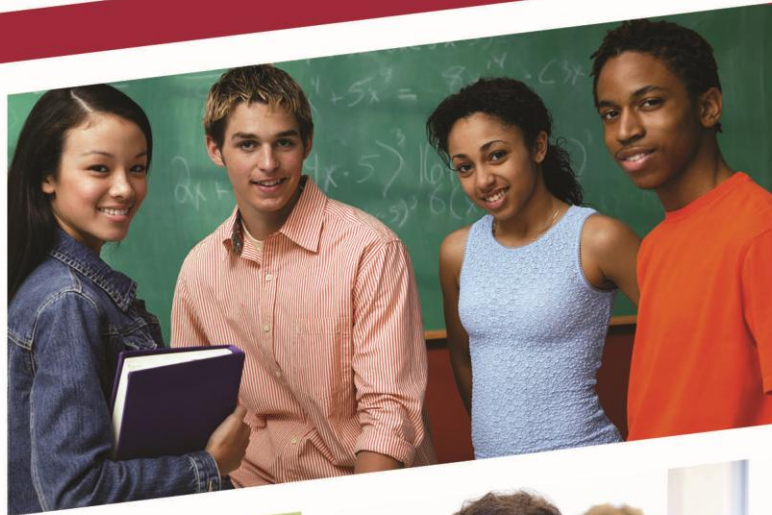


Early College Academy Evaluation Report

Cohorts 1-4: 2008-2012



Prepared by
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Acknowledgements

In the summer of 2008, members of the Lafayette Parish School Board and School System, along with researchers from the Picard Center, embarked on a mission to explore the Early College Initiative in North Carolina. It was the intent of the group to examine the possibility of bringing that concept back to Lafayette and creating an additional choice option for students and families of Lafayette Parish. While the North Carolina staff recommended taking a year to plan, the Lafayette Parish delegation decided the children of Lafayette could not afford to lose a year to planning. With the support of Dr. Jan Brobst, then-Chancellor of South Louisiana Community College, immediate action steps were taken, and the Early College Academy opened its doors in August 2008.

This report is part of the Lafayette Parish Schools of Choice evaluation conducted by the Picard Center for all Title I Schools of Choice, and it presents a descriptive analysis of the first four years of implementation of that program. While the Early College Academy is not a Title I school, the Picard Center is interested in the impact of the Early College Academy on participating students.

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We would also like to acknowledge Dr. Jan Brobst, former chancellor of South Louisiana Community College, and Burnell Lemoine, former superintendent of Lafayette Parish Schools, for their dedication and commitment to collaboration toward implementing Acadiana's first Early College Academy.

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Early College Academy: A Lafayette Parish School of Choice

A descriptive analysis of the Early College Academy, School of Choice, during the first four years of implementation.

Background of Early College High Schools

Early college high schools (ECHSs) are partnerships between public schools and colleges—and often other community agencies—for the purpose of enabling middle and high school students to take college courses for credit as they work toward high school graduation. Their goals are to increase educational attainment and to have high school students graduate in four or five years with not only their high school diplomas but to also earn up to two years of college credit. ECHSs typically target low-income, first-generation college-goers, English-language learners, students of color, and other youths who are often underrepresented in higher education. While the Early College Academy in Lafayette enrolls substantial numbers of minority and low-income students, the proportions are slightly lower than those found within the public school district, but higher than those found in the general population in Lafayette Parish.

The early college high school movement is usually traced back to 2002 when the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched the Early College High School Initiative with the aid of a number of other foundations and seven “intermediary” organizations (typically a school district, a school, or a community-based organization) charged with implementing the early college high school vision¹. One of the base assumptions of ECHSs is 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.

In the United States today, there are approximately 226 early college high schools scattered throughout 25 states. Approximately 75 percent of these schools are located in five states: North Carolina (61), Texas (44), California (38), Georgia (14), and Utah (14). Preliminary indications are that early college high schools are achieving some success. Approximately 70 percent of their students are non-White minorities, and 59 percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Thirty-three percent of early college schools receive Title I funds. Thirty-two schools serve students who have dropped out of a traditional high school setting. ECHSs tend to under-serve students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)².

ECHSs appear to have some success in terms of their original goal of increasing educational attainment for the students they serve. The on-time, four-year graduation rate for early college students in 2008 was about 92%, as compared to 75.5% for U.S. students generally. The numbers vary across races/ethnicities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics³, the

¹ See the Early College High School Initiative (<http://www.earlycolleges.org>) for an overview.

² See the Early High Schools Initiative 2003-05 Evaluation Report, available here: http://www.earlycolleges.org/Downloads/ECHS_Eva_2003-2005.pdf.

³ The National Center for Educational Statistics. (2011). *Public school graduates and dropouts from the Common Core of data: School year 2008-09 first look*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011312.pdf>.

average freshman graduation rate (AFGR) was 82.2% for White students, 63.5% for African American students, and 65.9% for Hispanic students.

The successes of early college high schools, however, have not been without challenges as they work to serve students whose academic backgrounds and motivations are often problematic. After the first years of operation, many early colleges are considering adopting stricter screening standards for admissions, beefing up their support systems for students, and even counseling some students out. Moreover, some educators in both secondary schools and colleges feel the compression of time and blending of courses that ECHS programs often entail may make the quality of instruction and learning uneven².

As solutions to the high school dropout problem and educational persistence in general, early college high schools show considerable promise. Nonetheless, from a national perspective, these innovative schools still serve a relatively small population of students. More research is needed on these relatively recent educational innovations.

History of School Choice in Lafayette Parish

The Lafayette Parish School System (LPSS) has operated under a consent decree since 1966 that allowed for “freedom of choice.” At that time, the choice option was not exercised by many families, and schools within LPSS remained racially segregated. The courts approved a second consent decree in 1969. Stakeholders from all facets of the community worked through some exceptionally difficult times to solve the problems of dismantling a dual system based on race. In 1999, the courts transferred the case to U.S. District Judge Richard T. Haik. In May 2000, Judge Haik ruled the school district was in violation of its most recent consent decree and ordered the school board to redraw school attendance zones. In response to the newly issued order, members of the Lafayette Parish community had the foresight to view this as an opportunity to improve educational outcomes for all children. Judge Haik suggested the school system look at the creation of magnet schools.

In consideration of Judge Haik’s suggestion and to further desegregate the district’s schools, the LPSS submitted a proposal to the court targeting the implementation of Schools of Choice in April 2002. In March 2003, with Judge Haik’s approval, LPSS transformed the newly built J. Wallace James Elementary School into a wall-to-wall School of Choice with no neighborhood attendance zone attached to the school. In April 2006, Judge Haik issued a ruling that granted LPSS unitary status (i.e., returned to local control) in the final areas of facilities and student assignment. While granting unitary status, Judge Haik stated federal oversight would continue, indicating to the community his ruling did not complete his involvement with the school system.

The Early College Academy (ECA) is one option within the LPSS Schools of Choice plan. The Early College Academy subsists on MFP funding and in-kind services from South Louisiana Community College. Additionally, students and their families do not pay tuition, and they are not required to pay for books. Entrance into a school of choice is typically granted via a lottery system that is in place to support racial/ethnic balance in each of the schools. Students who have priority in the assignment process due to siblings, program continuity, or diversity are given first choice to enroll. The remaining spaces are assigned through a computerized lottery system that randomly selects

students. The ECA is subject to the same criteria, but to date, it has not yet had more interested applicants than available slots within the program.

Generally, there are no special performance standards or test scores required to apply to a school of choice, but in the case of the Early College Academy, students must perform Basic in Language and Math on their eighth-grade statewide Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) test. Another unique feature of the ECA in Lafayette in comparison to other schools of choice is the schedule; classes begin at noon and end at 6:30 p.m., with additional flexibility available in the upper grades.

Key Factors in the Implementation of the Early College Academy

Institutes of Higher Education (IHE): As defined by the ECHS Initiative, all early college programs are required to partner with an IHE. Nationally, public two-year IHEs have been the most common choice as a partner to serve in this unique initiative. With its open enrollment policy and location of its campus in Lafayette, South Louisiana Community College (SLCC) was a likely partner.

In addition to the partnership with SLCC, the local four-year college made a commitment of support to the graduates of ECA. Dr. E. Joseph Savoie, president of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, made a public statement in the early developmental stages of the program. He noted that any student finishing the ECA program with a 3.0 GPA or higher in their college courses would receive a scholarship to UL Lafayette for up to four semesters and would have all of their college courses transfer to the University. As of the printing of this report, four Early College Academy graduates within Cohort 1 received scholarships to UL Lafayette during their first semester beginning August 2012.

ECA Location: Given the “power of place” emphasized in previous research relative to high school reform initiatives, having the students located on the SLCC campus supports the additive effects on students having access to an authentic college environment².

Enrollment Window: Due to the design of the curriculum, students can only enroll in ECA upon becoming eligible for ninth grade. While students may leave the academy at any time and return to their neighborhood high schools (although students are asked for a four-year commitment upon entry), students are not eligible to enroll into ECA beyond the first semester of ninth grade. Upon enrollment, students can remain at ECA through 12th grade. Students who receive grades below a C will be required to retake those courses to receive college credit, and the cost for retaking the course will be the students’ responsibility. Depending on the course and district policy, the course may be counted for high school graduation.

Class Size: The enrolling ninth-grade class was limited to 50 students for the first cohort and was increased to 80 students thereafter. None of the cohorts have met their limits, nor have there been waiting lists for students to enter the program. Therefore, any student meeting the entrance criteria and wishing to enroll has been accepted into the ECA program.

College Courses: The classes are arranged with only ECA students taking the course. The ECA college courses are not open to other SLCC students.

Student Support: To ensure students have the supports needed to be successful in their high school and college classes, LPSS has placed a full-time high school counselor on the SLCC campus with the students. The counselor’s working time coincides with the students’ hours of attendance.

Having a full-time counselor on campus with the students ensured that at least one adult in the school had a handle on the academic and emotional needs of each student. However, it should be noted that there is a balance between providing the support and teaching the students to self-advocate and approach instructors when they need assistance. This support is particularly important given the rigor of the ECA curriculum. The ECA high school teachers are a small staff, and an emphasis is placed on providing personalized attention and giving the students easy access to their instructors if assistance is needed with college course work.

After Cohort 1 completed their first year in the academy, a course called College Success 101 was added to the ninth-grade college curriculum. This course assisted students with skills such as researching, note-taking, and time management.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to identify what is known about the students who have elected to enroll in the Early College Academy and to review their academic performance. Presumably, this knowledge will help to strengthen the program for future students.

Study Questions

During the project year, the Picard Center conducted research activities specific to the following questions:

1. What makes the Early College Academy a unique choice option?
2. What is the demographic makeup of the students enrolled in the ECA?
3. Which middle schools did these students attend in eighth grade?
4. Of the students enrolling within each cohort (1 through 4), how many remain in the program through completion (graduation)?
5. Did all of the students within each of the cohorts take the same coursework by grade level and by semester?
6. Upon completing their fourth year, how many students in Cohort 1 have obtained a high school diploma and an associate degree?

Program Structure and Criteria

Study Question 1: What makes the Early College Academy a unique choice option?

There are several characteristics of the ECA that make it a unique option within the Schools of Choice model available within LPSS. While each characteristic is not necessarily unique in isolation, when taken together, the ECA provides a completely unique opportunity for children with the Lafayette Parish School System.

Entrance Requirements: While some early college high schools target high school students who are disadvantaged, at risk of dropping out of school, or typically underrepresented in higher education, this was not the focus for the LPSS Early College Academy. LPSS was interested in creating another “choice option” for students and families. Because the ECA was created as part of the Schools of Choice initiative, entrance is based upon a lottery system if other entrance

requirements are met. To date, the number of applicants has not exceeded the number of available slots, so no lottery has been conducted.

While no specific grade point average (GPA) scores are required to attend this academy, students must score Basic on both the LEAP English Language Arts (ELA) subtest and Math subtest in order to be eligible. All students meeting these entrance criteria are welcome and encouraged to apply.

Location: The Early College Academy is located entirely on the campus of South Louisiana Community College. Early college high schools blend high school and college work in a rigorous yet supportive program, compressing the time it usually takes to complete a high school diploma and a college degree. The students enrolled in ECA attend classes on the South Louisiana Community College campus and take high school and college courses simultaneously.

Flexibility on the College Campus: The SLCC campus is the site of the ECA program. ECA students are provided with the same flexibility as the other students enrolled at SLCC. They do not have to wear school uniforms, are allowed to participate in “breaks” between classes, and can come and go from campus without having to “check out of the office.” This appears to have positive effects on ECA student motivation and engagement, but it can also have some negative effects on the college experience of more mature non-ECA students.

ECA students complete the regular TOPS curriculum, following the state's regular high school curriculum, but they are also able to take regular college classes.

High School Diploma and Associate Degree: One of the most unique characteristics of the ECA program is the ability for these students to obtain a high school diploma and an associate degree in general studies at the end of their four years in high school.

Teachers: While students are taking high school and college courses simultaneously, the teachers for the high school courses are certified high school teachers employed by LPSS. Moreover, the teachers for the college courses are employed by SLCC and are itinerant faculty members of the community college. For this upcoming school year (2012-13), SLCC's new chancellor, Dr. Natalie Harder, has made a commitment to have 40% of the college courses taught by full-time faculty members.

ECA versus Dual Enrollment: ECA is not the first time LPSS high school students have been offered an opportunity to earn college credit. Dual-enrollment programs have existed for decades, and they have perhaps endured in part because of data indicating high school students graduating with at least six hours of college credit are more likely to complete college. The most significant difference between ECA and dual enrollment is the limited number of college credits a high school student has the opportunity to earn within a dual-enrollment program. Generally, in dual-enrollment programs, the course is taken on the high school campus and is taught by high school teachers with significant certification to meet the criteria for teaching freshmen-level college courses.

Dual-enrollment programs have also tended to be more exclusive, focusing mainly on students who have successful academic track records during the early years in high school. ECA students need only to meet the “Basic” criteria for ELA and Math on their eighth-grade LEAP assessment.

ECA versus Advanced Placement: Advanced Placement (AP) courses are meant to better prepare students for college-level coursework while fostering a college-going and college-ready culture. AP courses have been viewed most recently as a way to increase the rigor of high school coursework. Upon completing their AP course(s), students must pay to take an exam before they are awarded college credit. In 2011, BESE developed a policy requiring all high schools to offer no less than one (1) AP course for the 2011-12 school year and two (2) additional courses for the next two school years. Students are limited to the amount of credits they can earn while attending high school.

Student Population Size: While most of the high schools in Lafayette Parish have large student populations (1,650 on average), the total ECA student enrollment averages 200.

Starting Time: While most high school students attend school from 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., ECA students attend classes during the hours of noon to 6:30 p.m. There is some emerging research that suggests later school start times for adolescents may be related to enhanced academic performance.

Transportation: Because of the unique hours of operation, transportation is provided by the City of Lafayette transit system, which has partnered with LPSS to provide students with bus passes.

Meals: While many students are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals, this support is not provided on the community college campus. This has not presented a problem since the student can eat lunch at home prior to coming onto the campus at noon.

Study Question 2: What is the demographic makeup of the students enrolled in the ECA?

Table 1 shows the enrollment numbers for ECA by cohort based on the end-of-year numbers for 2011-12. During the first four years of operation, ECA has steadily increased the number of students enrolling and remaining in the program.

Table 1. Total ECA Enrollment Numbers by Cohort at the End-of-Year 2011-12

| School Year 08-09 | School Year 09-10 | School Year 10-11 | School Year 11-12 |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Cohort 1 | Cohort 2 | Cohort 3 | Cohort 4 |
| 30 | 45 | 51 | 69 |

Source: Lafayette Parish School System and Picard Integrated Longitudinal Data System

Race/Ethnicity of Students: The ECA student population by race is presented in three categories: White, African American, and Other. The Other category includes American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic. Within the ECA enrollment, there were 119 students (60.7%) classified as White, 60 students (30.6%) classified as African American, and 17 students (8.6%) classified as Other. Figure 1 displays the percentage of students by race remaining in the ECA program at the end of the 2011-12 school year.

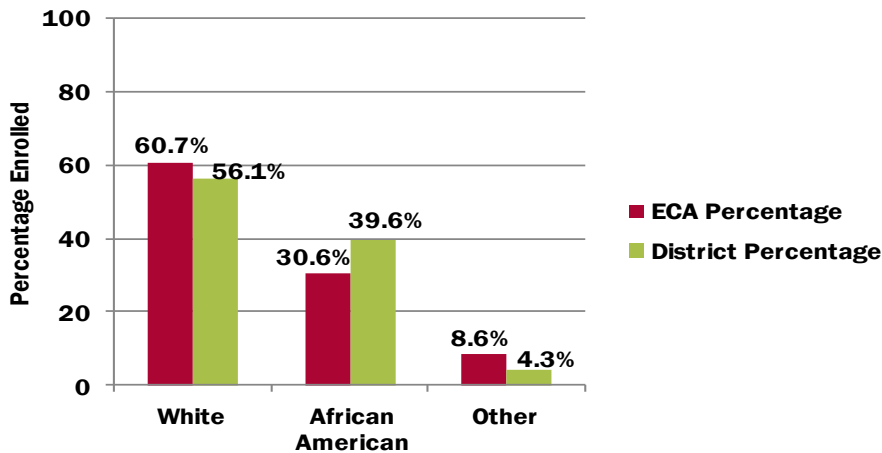


Figure 1. Percentage of enrollments of minority and White students in ECA and the district at end of year 2012.

Source: Lafayette Parish School System and Picard Integrated Longitudinal Data System

Nationally, 70% of students participating in early college programs are minority students. However, it should be noted that, traditionally, early college programs target low-income, racial, and ethnic minorities who are underrepresented in higher education. This is not the focus of the LPSS ECA program. Additionally, the 2010 U.S. Census reports that 29.4% of the Lafayette Parish population is classified as minority. Clearly, the ECA is serving a larger percentage of minority students, although this is moderated by the substantial nonpublic school population within the parish.

Low-Income/Poverty Students: As noted in Figure 2, the ECA program had a smaller percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals than did the district-wide student population. It should be noted that, unlike national early college start programs, ECA does not specifically target these populations who are traditionally considered at-risk, as well as populations underrepresented in higher education. Nationally, 59% of students enrolled in early college start programs are eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals.

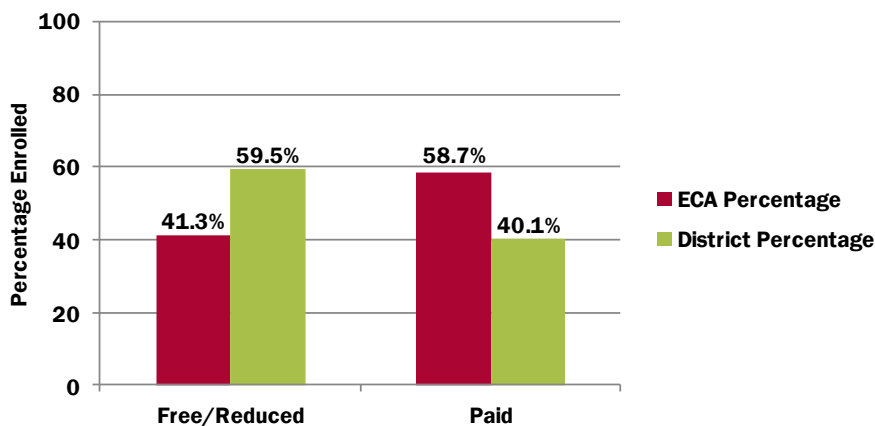


Figure 2. Percentage of enrollments of free/reduced and paid students in ECA and the district at the end of year 2012.

Source: Lafayette Parish School System and Picard Integrated Longitudinal Data System

Study Question 3: Which middle schools did these students attend in eighth grade?

Table 2 documents the number of children coming from each of the middle schools within Lafayette Parish, including nonpublic schools. The nonpublic schools are sending the largest number of children (28 over the four cohorts). Of the nonpublic group, those students from home-school settings comprise the greatest percentage.

Three public middle schools follow closely behind the nonpublic population, with Youngsville, L. J. Alleman, and Lafayette Middle sending 24, 23, and 20 students, respectively. We are not able to determine if the students are coming directly from the School of Choice academies within Lafayette Middle or Youngsville; L. J. Alleman is a School-wide Choice Academy.

Cohort 4 includes one student entering the program from an out-of-parish middle school and one student from an out-of-state middle school.

Table 2. Number of Students from Each of the Middle Schools in Lafayette Parish by Cohort Year

| School Name | SY 08-09 | SY 09-10 | SY 10-11 | SY 11-12 | Total |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| | Cohort 1 | Cohort 2 | Cohort 3 | Cohort 4 | |
| Acadian Middle School | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 12 |
| L. J. Alleman Middle School | 7 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 23 |
| Broussard Middle School | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Carencro Middle School | 2 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 12 |
| Edgar Martin Middle School | 3 | 3 | 2 | 10 | 18 |
| Glencoe Charter School | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Judice Middle School | 2 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 14 |
| Lafayette Middle School | 7 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 20 |
| Milton Elementary/Middle School | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Mire Elementary/Middle School | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| N. P. Moss Middle School | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 8 |
| Paul Breaux Middle School | 1 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 19 |
| Scott Middle School | 0 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 9 |
| Armstrong Middle School | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Youngsville Middle School | 2 | 6 | 6 | 10 | 24 |
| Nonpublic | 3 | 7 | 8 | 10 | 28 |
| Total | 30 | 45 | 51 | 69 | 195 |

Source: Lafayette Parish School System and Picard Integrated Longitudinal Data System

Student Outcomes

Study Question 4: Of the students enrolling within each cohort (1 through 4), how many remain in the program through completion (graduation)?

Table 3 documents the number of children enrolling in ECA annually and their subsequent matriculation through the program. In the start-up year (Cohort 1), enrollment was limited to 50 students; however, 45 students enrolled in the program. As these students were promoted to the 10th grade, 11 students left the program, leaving 34 students in 10th grade. These students remained with the program through 11th grade. As the cohort approached 12th grade, four additional students left the program for various reasons.

Table 4 provides the detailed reasons given by the students for leaving the program. This information is collected by the school counselor as the students exit the program. The most commonly cited reason (from four students) that the students left the program was that they moved out of the district or out of the state. The next most common reason was that students earned a GED (provided by three students). Overall, 30 of the 45 students who entered the ECA in the first year completed the four years and earned both a high school diploma and an associate degree. These results will be discussed in greater detail below in the section related to Study Question 6.

Tables 3 and 4 also list the results for cohorts 2, 3, and 4, showing the number of students enrolling as ninth-graders, the year-to-year attrition, and the reasons for leaving the program. It appears that, of the students who decide to leave the program, the 10th-grade year is when the most attrition occurs. Across all four cohorts to date, the most commonly cited reason for leaving the program are poor grades, but the second cohort accounts for the majority of children citing that reason. The next most common reasons are high school socialization and moving out of the district or state. While student mobility may be beyond the control of the program, the location of the ECA on the SLCC campus is directly related to high school socialization.

Table 3. Number of Students, by Cohort, Enrolling into ECA and the Number of Students Leaving the Program Annually, by Cohort

| Cohorts | 9th Grade | 10th Grade | 11th Grade | 12th Grade |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Cohort 1 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 |
| Enrollment (number leaving) | 45 | 34 (11) | 34 (0) | 30 (4) |
| Cohort 2 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | |
| Enrollment (number leaving) | 68 ⁴ | 51 (17) | 45 (6) | |
| Cohort 3 | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | | |
| Enrollment (number leaving) | 51 | 41 (10) | | |
| Cohort 4 | 2011-12 | | | |
| Enrollment (number leaving) | 74 (5) | | | |

Source: Interview with Early College Academy Counselor

⁴ There were four students who enrolled in the ECA at the beginning of the 2009-10 school year (Cohort 2), but these students were “no-shows,” having not attended the academy for one day. These four students have not been included in the total count.

Table 4. Reasons Provided by Student for Leaving the ECA Program, by Cohort

| Reasons for Separation | Cohort 1 | Cohort 2 | Cohort 3 | Cohort 4* | Cohorts 1-4 |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| Obtained a GED | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Moved out of Parish/State | 4 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 9 |
| Poor Grades | 2 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 16 |
| Curriculum | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| High School Socialization | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 11 |
| Inability to Acclimate to Community College | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Transportation | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Other | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 15 | 22 | 10 | 5 | 52 |

*NOTE: It is unknown at this time how many freshmen in Cohort 4 will return to the ECA for their 10th-grade year.

Source: Interview with Early College Academy Counselor

Study Question 5: Did all of the students within each of the cohorts take the same coursework by grade level and by semester?

When do students start taking college classes? ECA introduces college classes to students as early as ninth grade. During the 9th- and 10th-grade years, all classes are taken within the cohort setting. The students remain together, regardless of the course level (high school class or a college class). Traditional SLCC students are not enrolled in the cohort classes.

By the time ECA students enter 11th grade, they are no longer enrolled in high school classes and have two cohort college classes to complete: English 1010 and History 2020. During the remainder of the 11th-grade year and all of the 12th-grade year, ECA students have a full SLCC college schedule and are included in classes with traditional SLCC students.

All teachers for the high school courses are certified high school teachers employed by LPSS. Teachers for the college courses are hired by SLCC and are itinerant faculty members of the community college. All of the courses are taken on the campus of SLCC.

Study Question 6: Upon completing their fourth year, how many of the Cohort 1 students have obtained a high school diploma and an associate degree?

Of the 45 Cohort 1 ninth-graders enrolled in the ECA, 30 completed the program within four years, earning both a high school diploma and an associate degree. During the first year of participation in the ECA (2008-09), three (3) students left and earned a GED. Over the next three years, an additional 12 students left the ECA for a variety of reasons. Eight (8) students returned to their neighborhood high schools and four (4) moved out of the parish/state.

The national high school graduation rate for ECHSs is 92%, and approximately 78% earn some college credit. Additionally, 22% complete their early college program with two years of college

credit. The Lafayette Early College Academy had 73% of its original cohort reach this level of achievement (earning two years of college credit), more than triple the national rate. At least 80% of the original cohort earned at least a GED or high school diploma.

Comparing the national high school graduation rate of 92% to the ECA rate is difficult because of the 18% of students who left the program and whose final graduation status four years later is unknown (speculatively, up to 91%⁵ of the original cohort may have successfully completed high school in four years).

Table 5. ECA Cohort 1 Statistics Compared to the National Average of Early College Students

| | ECA | | National |
|---|-----|------------------|----------|
| Total Enrolled in Ninth Grade | 45 | - | NA |
| Left ECA and Graduation Status Unknown | 8 | 18% | NA |
| Moved out of State or District | 4 | 9% | NA |
| Both High School Diploma and Associate Degree | 30 | 73% ⁶ | 22% |
| Earned High School Diploma or GED | 33 | 80% ⁶ | 92% |

Source: Interview with Early College Academy Counselor and Early High Schools Initiative 2003-05 Evaluation Report, http://www.earlycolleges.org/Downloads/ECHS_Eva_2003-2005.pdf.

The ECA High School received a letter grade of A based on the 2010-11 School Performance Report published by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE). It is the only high school in the district receiving an A. Table 6 lists all of the public high schools in Lafayette Parish and their corresponding letter grades as determined by the LDOE.

Table 6. 2010-11 School Performance Letter Grade Provided by the Louisiana Department of Education

| High School | Letter Grade |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Early College Academy/SLCC Campus | A |
| Lafayette High School | B |
| O. Comeaux High School | C- |
| Acadiana High School | D- |
| Carencro High School | D- |
| Northside High School | D- |
| Lafayette Charter High School | F+ |

Source: Louisiana Department of Education

⁵ Excludes students earning a GED.

⁶ Excludes the four (4) students who left the district or the state.

Summary

This report covers the first four years of implementation of a new, blended high school/college model of education designed to help students compress six years of education into four. While only a single cohort of students has been enrolled in the ECA for four years, the initial results show substantial promise.

The ECA program is a partnership between the Lafayette Parish School System and South Louisiana Community College. The following list provides a summary of the findings of the first four years of the program's existence.

- One of the most unique characteristics of the ECA program in comparison to other national ECHS implementations is the location (SLCC main campus), with the college courses taught by college faculty.
- The demographics of the ECA students are somewhat similar to the demographics within LPSS, but there are higher percentages of White students (61% ECA, 56% LPSS) and a lower proportion of students who receive Free or Reduced Price Meals (41% ECA, 60% LPSS).
- ECA students receive ongoing support from an on-site school counselor who supports the development of their academic and social skills, as well as behaviors necessary for college success.
- The nonpublic middle schools, over time, are sending the highest percentages of students to the ECA program, with a number of these students coming from home-school settings.
- The majority of the students exiting the program leave either between ninth and 10th grades or during 10th grade.
- Of the 45 students initially enrolled in Cohort 1, 73%⁶ of the students earned both a high school diploma and a two-year associate degree, which is more than triple the rate of ECHS programs nationally (22%).

Recommendations

Data System: The process for collecting the data on ECA students has been difficult, mainly because the students are enrolled in two different systems: one for the high school transcript and one for the college transcript. Therefore, most data had to be collected via paper and pencil and transferred into a combined data system. LPSS and SLCC should consider the creation of a process that would allow the school counselor to input both high school and college courses into one system and create a single transcript documenting all coursework taken. Additionally, this would enable the four-year outcomes of all students who were ever enrolled in the ECA to be longitudinally tracked. One of the data issues with this report is that there are 18% (8) of the students from the original cohort where the four-year outcome is unknown.

Curriculum Alignment: There is a need to support a seamless transition for the students as they move into dual-enrollment classes that satisfy both high school and college credits. Department heads at the community college should meet with the LPSS curriculum directors to discuss curriculum alignment, especially as the state moves forward with Common Core State Standards.

College Success: To support students' transitions from the middle-school setting onto the college campus, a college success class was implemented after Cohort 1 completed its first year in the academy. Moving forward, there is a need to provide opportunities for student engagement in clubs or other activities that may minimize student loss due to social aspects.

Targeted Population: Consideration should be given to recruiting more students who are traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary education and offer them the opportunity to simultaneously pursue a high school diploma and earn an associate degree. Special attention should be paid to first-generation college attendees. Ensure that ECA and the LPSS work collaboratively to recruit more ECA students who are eligible for Free and Reduced Priced Meals.

Growth and Expansion: Investigate an ECA that could be implanted on the campuses of the Louisiana Technical College.

Economic Impact: Commit to following ECA graduates longitudinally for five years post-graduation to determine their career paths and contributions to the workforce.