



# Hawai'i Early College

## Implementation and Outcomes

APRIL 2018

Julia Marchand | Mary Nistler | Corrin Pitluck | Ryan Williams

MAKING RESEARCH RELEVANT

# Hawai'i Early College

## Implementation and Outcomes

APRIL 2018

Julia Marchand | Mary Nistler | Corrin Pitluck | Ryan Williams



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®

1000 Thomas Jefferson Street NW  
Washington, DC 20007-3835  
202.403.5000

[www.air.org](http://www.air.org)

Copyright © 2018 American Institutes for Research. All rights reserved.

## Case Study: Early College at Waipahu High School

Waipahu High School (WHS), on O’ahu, has established the most developed high school–based early college program in Hawai’i. It is a program one hears about when visiting other early college programs in the state because it is widely recognized as an early college program to learn about and learn from. It is the oldest high school–based early college program in a state where early college programs have begun to proliferate. A University of Hawai’i–West O’ahu (UHWO) professor who also coordinates the early college program on the campus said, “From my perspective, Waipahu is pretty much the model for early college here in the state of Hawai’i.”

In early 2017, AIR researchers went to high schools with early college programs across the state to talk with early college staff and students as part of its evaluation of the Early College High School initiative. Many high school leaders and early college coordinators who were interviewed by the AIR evaluation team had visited the WHS program to learn more about the planning and implementation of early college. Most of the respondents acknowledged that the program could not be replicated on their own campus because of substantial differences in context, size, location, and available staff and resources. Although the WHS early college program may be difficult to replicate, it offers strategies and perspectives that might be applicable and useful to other early college programs.

### About Waipahu High School

Waipahu High School is a Title I school serving students in Grades 9–12. The high school is located on the leeward side of O’ahu, 13 miles northwest of Honolulu.

School community	60,305
Enrollment	2,494
Percentage of students of NH/PI descent	22%
Percentage of students from low-SES families	56%

Source. School Status Improvement Report 2014–15 and U.S. News High School Profiles 2013–14.

The majority of students are Filipino whose parents have immigrated to Hawai’i (approximately 70%).

The high school offers its students six career pathways and 11 career academies, including Creative Media, Culinary, Engineering, Finance, Hospitality and Tourism, Information Technology, Law and Justice, and Teacher Education. Two of the high school’s academies—the Academy of Health & Sciences and the Academy of Natural Resources—were the first in the state to be recognized as National Model Academies by the National Career Academy Coalition.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The implementation sections are based on interviews conducted in early 2017 with the WHS early college coordinator, the coordinator (and college instructor) from the school's key college partner, the WHS principal, three WHS staff people who provide extensive support for the program, and the Waipahu Intermediate School (WIS) Junior National Honor Society advisor. In addition, five WHS early college students provided information during a focus group. The WHS early college coordinator provided documents on program offerings and achievements, and Hawai'i P-20 provided data about sustainability. Interview and focus group data were analyzed using standard qualitative methods and organized under topics shared with the larger early college study conducted by AIR.

High school and postsecondary outcomes data were collected from HIDOE for students who graduated in 2015–2017. WHS early college students were matched with other Waipahu students using propensity score matching based on prior student achievement and demographic data. Descriptive analytics were applied to compare the performance of WHS early college students with matched comparison students.

### Early College Origin and Growth

The WHS early college program began in 2012 with a single psychology class. A few years later, in 2016–17, WHS offered 15 college courses per semester. More than 600 students were enrolled in early college courses and approximately one third of the school's graduating seniors had completed early college courses. The program has grown through several phases that brought clear purpose and structure to the program, making it possible for participating students to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate degree.

### Redefining High School Goals

At about the same time that the early college program was initiated in 2012, the WHS principal led the high school staff and faculty in a re-examination of the high school's fundamental goals. According to the principal, the accepted goal, one that was logical for a high school, was to graduate students and make sure they earned enough credits to be awarded a high school diploma. In doing so, the high school identified its clients as students and situated student goals within the high school's walls, time frame, and expectations. "But we changed that," the principal said, by redefining the high school's clients as the communities and institutions students would engage in beyond high school: postsecondary institutions, the military, businesses, and the community-at-large.

---

*The newly defined client expanded the range and potential impact of the high school, emphasizing not so much what students accomplished within the high school but what they were prepared to do and were able to contribute after high school.*

—WHS Principal

---

The principal conducted in-school focus groups with faculty and students, asking them to imagine themselves

as human resources directors and, in that imagined role, identify the characteristics and competencies of the employees they wanted to hire. They identified characteristics such as critical thinking, ability to work with others, punctuality, and initiative. The principal said,

*The next question was “what are you doing in the classroom for your kids to provide them the opportunities to demonstrate this?” That changed the focus from the content and passing tests to get a credit to how to arrange learning so that it provides opportunities for students to demonstrate these competencies. It’s a shift, a very different way we approach education.*

Early college supported and strengthened the newly defined focus of the high school. According to the principal, experience in early college courses would benefit students in two ways. First, it would reduce student anxiety about taking early college courses. The high school also had a Running Start program, in which only a few students participated. The principal said this was largely because “kids are afraid” to attend a big and unknown campus where other students are older and with unfamiliar teachers. A high school–based early college program reduces those fears. Second, early college would increase student incentive and future orientation. The principal stressed that students need to know and experience more than high school: “If they only know high school, there is no incentive for them to try and get better. . . we have got to change what the kids believe about themselves. We have got to get them successful.” The early college program, along with the school’s career academies, shows students a future that extends beyond earning a high school diploma and motivates students to be more purposeful about their education.

### **Early Years**

WHS’s early college program began in 2012 through a partnership between the high school and UHWO. One course, Psychology 100, taught by an award-winning educator, was offered in summer 2012. The course was full. The high school’s early college coordinator said, “The kids loved him. They absolutely loved him. He made learning relevant.” Students who took the course did well academically, and their attendance was near perfect, even though for 4 days a week that summer they had to be in school 6 hours a day for both the class and a mandatory study period. The high school offered additional early college courses the following fall, scheduling them after school. Again, the courses filled and students did well academically. The next semester, the high school offered four early college courses.

At this point, the McInerny Foundation, a Honolulu-based charitable organization founded to benefit the people of Hawai'i, expressed an interest in the program. Following discussions with high school and college stakeholders, the foundation awarded WHS a 3-year grant to build its

early college program. The grant was renewed in 2016 for an additional 3 years.<sup>37</sup> “We wouldn’t have been able to show what is possible without that support,” the principal said. “We’re enrolling 600 students in early college now.” The high school now offers 15 college courses each semester and several courses during the summer.

### ***Associate Degree Options***

In 2014, WHS created the first of its two Olympian early college options. The Olympian options are a series of college courses, supports, and structures that allow high school students to complete the course requirements for an associate degree by the time they graduate from high school. WHS has two Olympian programs: an A.A. in liberal arts (begun in 2014) and an A.S. in natural science (begun in 2016). (Students in the science degree program are referred to as STEM [science, technology, engineering, and mathematics] Olympian early college students.)

---

*The options were named Olympian to stress that achieving an A.A. degree requires effort and sacrifice, not unlike that made by athletes who aim to participate in the Olympics.*

*—WHS Early College Coordinator*

---

At the same time, the high school continued its nondegree option that allowed students to earn college credits more flexibly, to “step in, step out” depending on their circumstances and how they prioritized sports and other extracurricular activities.

Nearly all Olympian students are recruited through the nearby WIS, which serves students in Grades 7 and 8. Recruitment is through the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS). In 2013–14, a WIS social studies teacher became the new faculty advisor for NJHS. In his position as NJHS advisor, he wanted to expand the honor society and improve the academic climate of the school. He reached out to the WHS principal after reading an article the principal had written about the high school’s early college program. He asked if his NJHS students could observe early college classes. The principal put him in touch with the early college coordinator.

*He arranged for us to view two classes, so we just sat there and watched. We came back to the school. A lot of the kids said, “you know it’s kind of boring when you just watch. I wish we could have tried to be part of the class.” I gave that feedback to [the early college coordinator]. We went back again to another class, another two classes, and we actually participated.*

---

<sup>37</sup> The McInerney Foundation has committed nearly \$1.6 million to WHS in 6 years.

At that point, the NJHS advisor and the early college coordinator participated in discussions with school administrators and teachers and with parents to discuss the possibility of offering eighth-grade students the opportunity to enroll in college courses the summer before their freshman year at the high school. With agreements established, several eighth-grade students took the placement test for English 100 and passed.

The first course incoming ninth-grade students take is Interdisciplinary Studies (IS) 100, which emphasizes skills for succeeding in college and provides students the opportunity to reflect on their future life path. They take this course during the summer before entering high school. They then take a college elective of their choosing.

Opening early college to younger students made it possible for WHS to establish the Olympian programs because students could start accruing college credits early in their high school career. The first A.A. degrees in liberal arts were awarded to graduating high school seniors in May 2018, and the first A.S. degrees in natural science will be awarded to students in 2020.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Aligning Career Academies and Postsecondary Opportunities***

With the second round of McNerny Foundation funding in 2016, WHS became more intentional about aligning early college with career academies and postsecondary opportunities. The principal and the early college coordinator met with UH academic departments, such as the UH Mānoa College of Education, the UH Mānoa College of Engineering, and the UH West O'ahu Creative Media Program, to create a vertically articulated program whereby, within the high school academy structure, students accrue the appropriate college credits to enter UH programs as college juniors. The principal said, "How do we get our kids now taking early college courses so [after high school graduation] they can get into these programs as juniors? That's Early College 2.0." The Creative Media Program at UH West O'ahu was the first to be fully articulated.

### **College Partners**

WHS partners with both a 2-year college and a 4-year college, Leeward Community College (LCC) and UHWO. LCC is two miles and UHWO is six miles from the high school campus. WHS has strong ties to each campus through the high school early college coordinator. The coordinator was once both the vice-chancellor and chancellor at LCC. He knows LCC administrators and professors and works with the LCC early college coordinator to not only select courses but also select the instructors that he thinks will do well with high school

---

<sup>38</sup> A senior at WHS earned her A.A. degree from LCC in December 2017. She was the first early college student in the state to do so before graduating from high school.

students and create an initial positive impression of college. He also works closely with the UHWO professor who taught the first early college course at WHS. That professor has since been named UHWO's Director of College and Career Readiness.

---

*Early college gives us an opportunity to talk to our high schools about preparing students for college and for preparing the whole student and not just the academic side of the student for college. It has created a stronger partnership between us and our high schools. I think that the money that was put into it went well beyond just the work that happened at the schools that they financed.*

—LCC Coordinator

---

LCC partners with eight high schools to provide early college courses; three are funded by Hawai'i P-20. UHWO partners with five high schools in the vicinity. The interview respondents from each college said their institution's commitment to early college is high. UHWO respondents said the institution "offers support in the best ways we can," including working with high schools to select classes and instructors, providing resources for running the classes, and providing student services such as tutoring and help at the college testing center. UHWO has an enrollment specialist, funded by grants, who works with high schools to enroll students and with students to make sure they have access to the student course websites.

The LCC early college coordinator has an equally comprehensive role, perhaps more challenging because the number of early college students in high schools supported by LCC is greater. The LCC coordinator creates partnership terms with the schools; helps with recruitment, testing, and application; determines the eligibility of students for the classes they want to take; assists with communication between the high schools and instructors; and oversees the LCC early college counselors.

### **School and Program Leadership**

The principal has advocated for the early college program for years and led or facilitated efforts to embed early college into the high school. Under his leadership, WHS has aligned the program with its career academies and expanded opportunities for students by making it possible for them to graduate from high school with an A.A. degree. The principal expressed a strong dedication to the WHS community and students, similar to principals and coordinators at other high schools with early college programs, particularly (though not exclusively) by those who grew up and went to school in the area and then returned as an educator to serve their community.

The WHS early college coordinator was described as the architect of the school's early college program. A college partner respondent said the coordinator "has done a fantastic job. He started off by himself and now he has a small support staff, but he has been pretty much the architect of the early college program under P-20, in the state in general."

He and the principal have formed a strong partnership. This is an important partnership, according to a long-time college partner from UHWO who, as the university's early college and career readiness director, has worked with other early college programs in the state. The partner said nothing contributes to a program's success as much as the WHS principal and the early college coordinator. He cited WHS as an example, saying success does not depend on the size of the school or location but on the principal who "fights for his resources so they are able to sustain the program" and who decides "who will be the person to carry the torch for the program." Without a committed principal and the right person directing the program, he said, "you can try to cobble together whatever kind of early college high school program, but it won't stick."

---

*The principal has given the coordinator the support, trust, and latitude to choose courses, to establish program guidelines and procedures, develop new partnerships, plan program expansion, and promote the benefits and culture of the early college program.*

*—UHWO College Partner*

---

As noted earlier, the WHS early college coordinator was formerly a vice chancellor and chancellor at LCC, one of the school's two college partners. As chancellor, he championed early college by promoting early admission programs for high school students and encouraging LCC faculty to "go out to the high schools and provide an early admit type class." He knows and is known by the faculty of LCC. He also knows the college academic and vocational departments and college requirements related to admissions, degrees, and transfers.

The coordinator has a strong interest in motivation and how to incentivize students to succeed. He and the UHWO college professor who has been teaching Psychology 100 at WHS since the first early college course was offered "are always looking at what can we do to incentivize. What buttons can we push?" Many of the coordinator's policies and much of his messaging were explained in terms of incentivizing students. Related to this, the coordinator has promoted concepts such as grit, or perseverance in the face of challenges (as researched by Angela Duckworth), and growth mind-set, the concept that intelligence and talent are not fixed entities (as described by Carol Dweck). With a colleague, he is writing a book on what organizations can do to develop grit and a growth mind-set. The concepts were familiar to the

students who were interviewed during the focus group and familiar to the staff who help with the coordination of the early college program.

An early college team assists the coordinator. An assistant who was once an early college student at WHS has many responsibilities, including academic advising, maintaining student files, tracking attendance, presenting information on early college during orientation and in talks to eighth-grade students, supporting students, and helping organize and supervise community service and leadership training opportunities. In addition, a part time UH Mānoa student provides technology support 3 days per week. He said technology is a major and necessary component, particularly because the UH system has transitioned its college reading materials to an online format. This support person also helps students with laptops and Chromebooks that are loaned to students. He updates the early college website and helps the professors with their technology setups. A third support for the program is the high school counselor who helps students manage their course loads and align their early college courses with their high school requirements. The counselor also helps students with their “social-emotional stability” in school, advising them when they feel overloaded.

### **School Knowledge and Support**

The early college program is a visible feature of WHS. The program, however, is not intended to usurp the “primacy” of high school, according to the early college coordinator and the principal. Various respondents said that early college courses are integrated into the school’s career academies and pathways but do not conflict with high school courses or activities. High school courses and extracurricular activities are not discouraged, and the interview respondents did not suggest that teachers were anxious about their courses being displaced because of early college.

WHS has an updated website with detailed information about early college. Early college is highlighted in school activities, notably college days when students who are taking classes wear college T-shirts. The only mention of nonsupport was by the principal who said some teachers were uneasy about ninth-grade students taking college courses.

### **Recruitment and Target Population**

All WHS students who meet the college and/or community college admission requirements are eligible to take early college courses. The principal said, “For 3 years, we only offered it to juniors and seniors. Then we said, ‘Hey, wait a minute. If the freshmen come in and qualify for English 100, if our philosophy is opportunity, age shouldn’t be a discriminating factor.’”

Initially, the early college coordinator said faculty and administrators recruited students to participate in early college. However, he and several other respondents said, "Now the word is out." Peer-to-peer recruiting is strong. Students said they tell their friends and younger siblings about the program and encourage them to participate. The program has been publicized in the media, and now families are applying for geographic exceptions so their high school-aged children can attend WHS and take early college courses.

College going in general is promoted at WHS in tangible ways. On Mondays, faculty wear the T-shirts of their alma mater, and early college students wear their LCC or UHWO T-shirts. The coordinator said students wear the T-shirts "as a badge of honor," which is an important influence on other students, as are other tangible acknowledgements of the presence of the program, such as the high school graduation ceremony during which approximately one third of the graduating students are recognized for earning college credits.

Recruitment of eighth-grade students is through the NJHS. These are the top achievers in their class and "really want to grab the opportunity to take college courses for free," an early college team member said. The honor society is growing. The faculty advisor noted that other students see those with NJHS T-shirts and "they know that these kids are college bound and say, 'I want to join that.'" As a result, the pool of eligible eighth-grade students has grown.

## Enrollment

As the oldest early college program in the state, WHS and its college partners have worked out many of the logistical issues with the application and enrollment process. Like other high schools, WHS experiences some challenges with students and families not completing their applications, particularly not obtaining the required health clearances. The high school's early college team offers a high level of support with the paperwork and online application process, as do the college partners.

---

*A unique aspect of WHS's enrollment is that students are required to complete the UH system's EdReady online courses before they take their placement tests. This is part of the enrollment process and is a measure of student commitment. It takes students 23 hours to complete this course.*

---

UHWO has a specialist who supports early college enrollment in the three high schools UHWO has partnered with: WHS, Nānākuli, and Wai'ānae. His position is funded through grants other than Hawai'i P-20, such as Title III and a GEAR-UP cohort grant. For all dual-credit programs, no matter the funding source, he processes transcripts and health records, makes sure students

meet course requirements, helps set up placement testing, and helps with registration and placement into courses.

At LCC, early college program coordination is the responsibility of the LCC student services program officer. College partner respondents from both colleges said the WHS enrollment process goes very smoothly. "I've never run into any problems with Waipahu. It's always been very good, very consistent. They know what they're doing." The LCC respondent said experience helps, and each problem provides an opportunity to develop a better approach for enrolling students:

*This coming term, I'm working with Waipahu, trying to make sure that we do not miss any paperwork. We're actually developing a new system. We're both signing off on things to ensure that everything is received and returned to each other. Then, like I said, there's constant communication going back and forth between Waipahu High School and myself, just making sure that we're on target with everything or that we have received all the forms and Waipahu is well aware of the status of their students' applications as well.*

Students face more challenges in getting admitted to UHWO courses than LCC courses because UHWO has an admission requirement of a 2.7 GPA (LCC has an open admission policy) and an ACT score on record. This is an issue for high school freshmen and sophomores because they have not yet taken the ACT test.

## Course Schedule

The early college courses are offered during the summer and after school. None are offered during the school day, and there is no plan to change that. During the school year, courses are after school Monday through Thursdays. WHS has two summer sessions, one beginning in late May and the other in late June.

---

*I won't integrate this [early college] into the bell schedule because I want sacrifice. I want to prequalify my students.*

—WHS Early College Coordinator

---

The coordinator's message to students is that if they want this opportunity, they will have to work hard and sacrifice their afternoons. In other words, they must demonstrate their commitment. The coordinator said he has observed that students in schools that schedule early college courses during the school day act as though the courses are "just high school but dressed up." He said students too easily "fall into that comfy couch they call high school expectations."

The coordinator acknowledged that students may have to choose between early college and after-school leadership activities or sports. At the same time, students have options and can “step in, step out,” taking early college courses one semester and participating in other after school activities in another.

## Courses

WHS offers 15 or more college courses each semester and several summer courses. According to the coordinator, the courses are “tightly nested” to help students get closer to an A.A. degree “in the most economical and expeditious way.” Course variety is limited, the coordinator said, because of budget factors and because “I like to simplify the pathway for a student by not giving much choice within each band of courses they need for the general education core.” For example, high school students have one oral communication course available to them, although students on the main college campus have several options.

Course selection also considers student readiness. Courses include those that are appropriate for entry-level students who may have not considered college as part of their educational path as well as courses that are appropriate for middle and high-achieving students. The coordinator includes courses that reflect the ethnicity of the student population, such as Tagalog, Asian Studies, Pacific Worlds, Philippine Culture and History, and Hawaiian Studies. “I’ve even offered Samoan 101,” the coordinator said. He noted that those courses “feel comfortable and nonthreatening” for students and help build their confidence. In that way, they are “a launching pad” for many students new to the early college experience.

## Instructors

The coordinator, in partnership with the college partners, selects the course instructors. The coordinator’s past as the LCC chancellor is an advantage. He said, “Because I was working at Leeward for 10 years, I know the teachers. I know the good ones. I know the dynamic ones. I know the ones that really understand the heart and the spirit of what we are trying to do in the expansion of the early college program, both here in the state and nationally.”

---

*I’m very careful about the teachers I bring in because I know the first impression that a student has, especially a student who is probably scared to death to go to high school, never mind take a college course . . . We need to make sure that their first introduction and first impression is positive. That is again the launching pad that catapults them into another class, and another class, and another class.*

—WHS Early College Coordinator

---

The focus group students were very enthusiastic about the instructors, enjoying their interactive instructional methods and the type of course experiences they would not get in a high school class. For example, students reported that they had participated in a college-level debate competition (and did well), observed family interactions at a restaurant in one of their classes, and worked on a research paper about how students may benefit from participation in early college.

## **Instruction**

The early college coordinator and the principal said they are adamant that early college classes are as rigorous as the courses taught on campus. "I will not tolerate grade inflation," the early college coordinator said. Similarly, the UHWO early college director commented, "First, of course, I meet with the instructor to see if they would be appropriate for the program. We want to maintain the rigor and the class curriculum the same as it would be offered at West O'ahu. We also want the instructors to understand that they're going to be teaching high school students."

## **Support for Students**

Early college students at WHS receive a high level of support because the coordinator "has been very proactive in terms of finding resources," according to a college partner interview respondent. Another respondent said the high school has a "pretty comprehensive support service in that area, drawing from the postsecondary educational partners, as well as being resourceful in its own way."

Support includes tutors from the UH Mānoa campus as well as tutors from the UHWO campus. In some classes, mathematics being mentioned by the college partners, tutors sit in class with the students and, after class, students who have problems understanding the course material work with the tutors.

The expectations for attendance and punctuality are high. The coordinator said he "made it clear" in the consent letter that parents sign and during the orientation sessions (scheduled at the beginning of each semester) that the principal or his designee (the coordinator) "has the right to pull you out of class if you're constantly late, not doing your homework, or missing more than three classes." He has students and parents sign a document that articulates this policy.

The coordinator closely monitors attendance in each class. He or his assistant uses a QR code system (computerized system) to record attendance. The message is "You need to be in class. This is extremely important. I'm watching."

The coordinator emphasized the importance of being available to the college instructors. He said by “popping into” classes, instructors know him, and he and the instructors have an opportunity for brief conversations about students who are having difficulties—for example, a student who missed class again because of medical problems. Conversations help the early college coordinator decide if any student should withdraw, if students are keeping up with their work, falling hopelessly behind, if a situation can be turned around, and what support a student might need.

Several students in the focus group said it was important for them to have support from the early college coordinator and the high school counselor in balancing early college courses with their other interests and responsibilities. Some students are “entry-level” students, a term the coordinator uses to refer to students who may be less likely than others to consider college in their future. These students may require encouragement and academic support. Other early college students are very active; for example, they take AP courses and have one or more student leadership positions. A student said the coordinator and the counselor “help me pass the class or get what I need to get done . . . that is a big help.” The counselor said, “If they are feeling overloaded . . . maybe they need to talk to me about priorities, what is going on.” If students are having trouble managing the early college courses, they are provided help to withdraw early into the semester. As an example, some students took two intensive writing courses in the same semester and felt overwhelmed. The counselor said although the courses were required for their A.A. degree, she reminded them that taking both at the same time would be difficult for anyone. When the students went to the early college coordinator, he said, “That’s not a problem. You can schedule the other course in the fall of next year.” This, the counselor said, is what they opted to do.

The coordinator does not discourage students who miss classes or have not completed homework from trying again. “I tell them, ‘Okay, sit out a semester. Whatever is interfering, please talk to your counselor . . . fix those. Deal with those. I want you to come back.’”

## **Student Outcomes**

Figure C1 shows student outcomes for WHS early college students ( $N = 458$ ) and matched comparison students ( $N = 277$ ).<sup>39</sup> The total sample of early college students consists of students with the following characteristics:

- No dual credits in high school ( $n = 15$ )

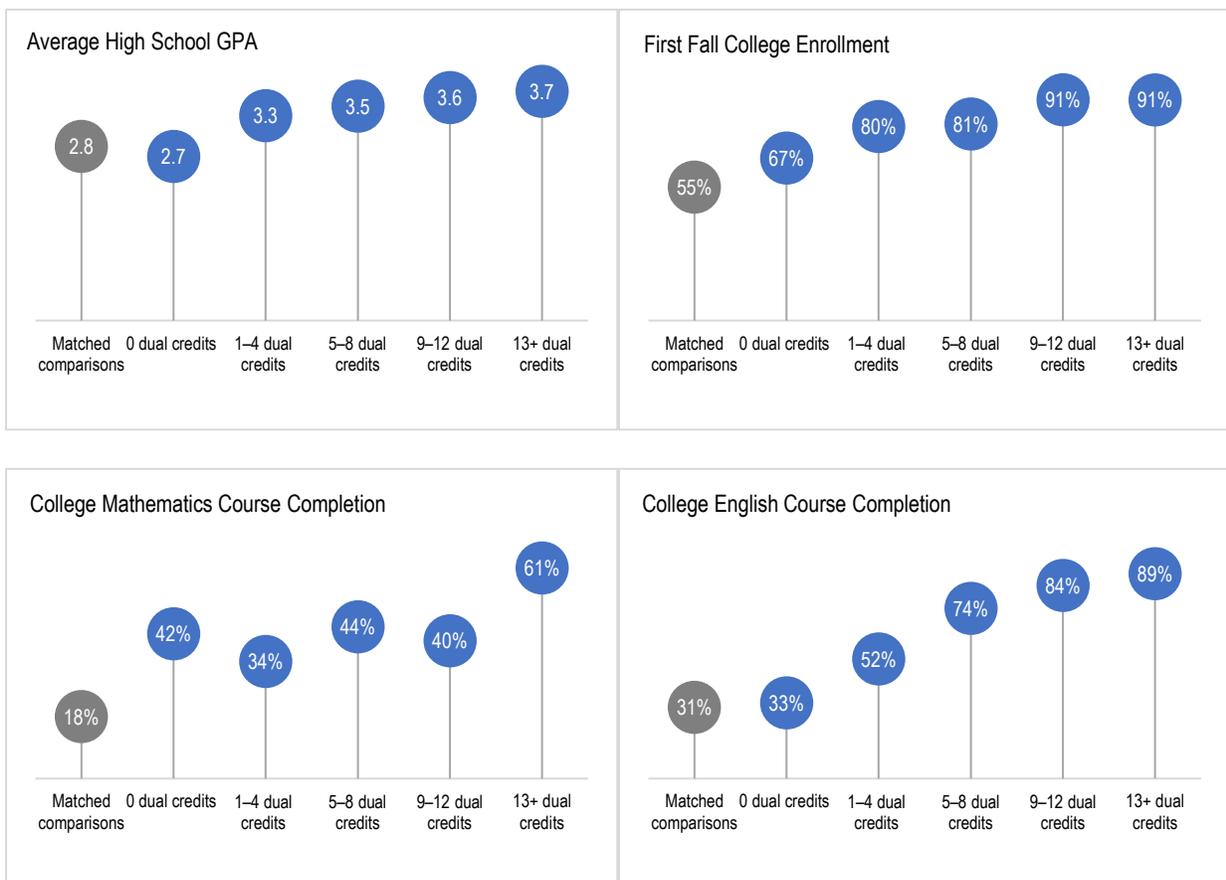
---

<sup>39</sup> WHS early college students were matched with nonparticipating students also attending WHS who were most similar to them on demographic characteristics and prep-program academic achievement.

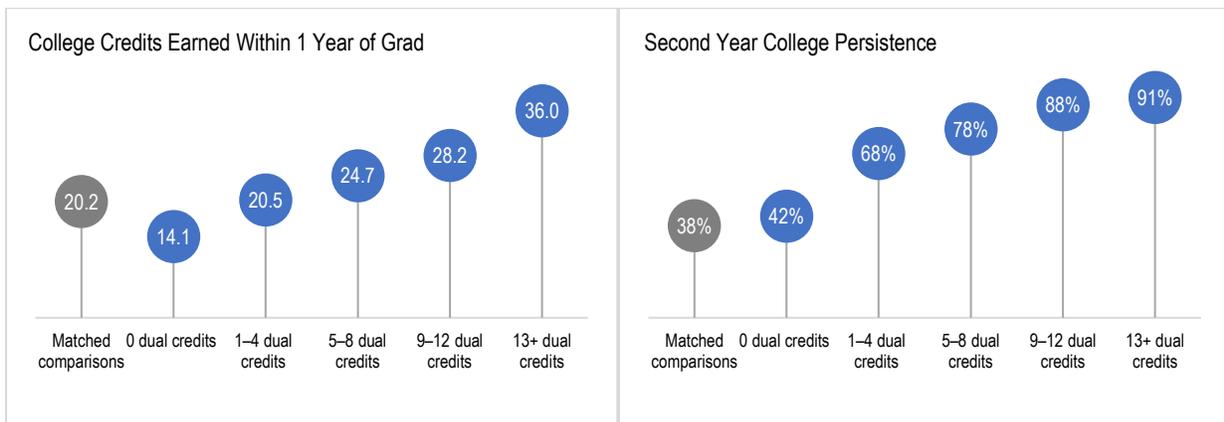
- Between one and four dual credits in high school ( $n = 171$ )
- Between five and eight dual credits in high school ( $n=122$ )
- Between nine and 12 dual credits in high school ( $n = 70$ )
- Thirteen or more dual credits in high school ( $n = 80$ )

On all student outcomes of interest, WHS students outperformed matched comparison students.<sup>40</sup> The gap was particularly notable for postsecondary outcomes, such as college course completion and persistence into the second year of college. Across the board, WHS students who had earned more dual credits in high school tended to have better outcomes.

**Figure C1. Outcomes for WHS Students**



<sup>40</sup> One exception is on-time graduation from high school. WHS early college and matched comparison students, regardless of dual credits earned, graduated at high rates—98–100%.



## Student Benefits

Nearly all the students who participated in the focus group were Olympians and had begun taking early college courses during the summer before their freshman year of high school. One student was not; she had recently transferred to the high school and, as a senior, expressed regret that she had not done so earlier. In describing the benefits related to academic performance, students referred to a research study with one of their college professors on the impact of early college. One student had graphs of the results, showing students who took early college classes had higher GPAs in their college campus courses than other students and demonstrated more persistence in terms of continuing their college education. Another found that early college does increase students' grit and growth mind-set: "We found that it also makes them have more courage to enter college than before they even took early college."

A major theme among the focus group students was the confidence they gained from taking early college courses. This, students said, was because they could better manage their time and succeed in the courses. A student said, "Before you even take early college, you didn't even know you could actually do this stuff and manage your time better. . . You didn't really think that you could really achieve as much as you're achieving now." Most of the students said that participation in early college led them to set higher goals for themselves than they otherwise would have.

Students also reported that they were clearer about their career direction, and, related to that, their individual strengths and preferences. In the focus group, this was a prominent theme, far more prominent than in focus groups in other high schools. The sharper clarity about future aspirations came about not just because of the classes but the related leadership opportunities provided through early college and the high school's career academies. For example, students participated in a college debate competition and did well; a student was the ambassador for

her career academy; students referred to the research projects they have conducted; and others talked about the launch of a Rizalian Youth Council–Hawai'i through one of their early college classes.

One student said, “What I like about Waipahu is that we have different academies. We can really find ourselves with what we like and early college. We can see our strengths and all that.” Another student commented, “Originally, I wanted to be an engineer, which is why I was in the IET pathway, industrial engineering technology. However, after going to early college and getting to know the professors as well as the classes, I found out that I actually like teaching a lot. As a result, I want to be a professor myself in the area of social sciences, psychology, [or] sociology.” Another student said the experience of the debate competition led her to consider a career in law or politics. A fellow student who participated in the debate competition said she realized she had a “passion for sharing my voice and helping the world.”

### School Benefits

The Olympian program has provided the incentive and opportunity for WHS, WIS, LCC, and UHWO to vertically align their career academy curricula. These efforts began with the UHWO Academy of Creative Media. Because of the vertically articulated pathway, students can be recruited for the academy in eighth grade, take 3 years of creative media courses at WHS, and then by their senior year, take UHWO's more advanced creative media courses. UHWO said that is why it is crucial that UHWO be flexible on admission policies. Students would be groomed through the early college program. Similar initiatives in education and health sciences are in development.

One advantage of the vertically aligned pathways is its potential to motivate students. Both the early college coordinator and the principal discussed the importance of students knowing they are on a path with a future, contrasting this with the confusion of students who do not know what will happen after high school. The early college program offers students who complete the curriculum the assurance that they will be accepted into University of Hawai'i 4-year institutions.

---

*The idea is that students who have a clear purpose in high school and a pathway after high school are more likely to work harder and persevere because they know where they are going.*

—WHS Early College Coordinator

---

Both the principal and the early college coordinator said school culture has slowly improved as the program has grown. They mentioned data showing that since the beginning of the early college program, student suspensions have decreased. In addition, student survey results show the school environment has improved. The high school has embarked on efforts to establish higher expectations for students. For example, the coordinator said the message is clearer that students must be in class; if they miss more than five classes in any given quarter, the school policy is that they will not pass that class.

The high school reputation also has improved because of early college, both the principal and early college coordinator said, as did the UHWO respondents. According to the principal, "Now we have [students] coming in from other schools . . . our own teachers are bringing their kids here. I bring my daughter to this high school. She loves it."

### **College Partner Benefits**

The perception that college partners may benefit from supporting early college has evolved. A college partner respondent said the college provided courses on the campus "because they asked." However, this changed as the early college initiative grew.

*Our view of it really changed. We saw it as an opportunity to help not only more students get to college but also be successful in college. It was an opportunity for our college to become involved with students earlier and to help them develop both the academic and nonacademic skills that they needed to be successful in college, so that when they ended up on our campus, we had students who were positioned to be successful. That's the reason that we do the work now. At the beginning, it was more because schools asked us to.*

Another college partner said that WHS students now represent 12% of UHWO incoming freshmen, and they have higher retention rates and higher GPAs than other incoming freshmen. He said, even though the A.A. degrees are offered through LCC, with UHWO offering courses to supplement the LCC courses, "we are hoping that they look to UHWO as a possible choice for their 4-year degree."

### **Sustaining Early College**

Legislative funding for the HIDOE to support early college programming will support nearly all WHS's early college courses as of spring 2018, when WHS plans to offer 20 courses with all but three funded by state funding. The growth of early college and the A.A. degree options have presented additional needs for WHS, including having embedded tutors or supplemental instructors in the content area; additional staffing for program operations; and physical spaces

for early college classes and related activities, such as counseling, study halls, study groups, and orientations.

### Applicable Strategies

Although the WHS program may not be replicable in its entirety on other high school campuses in Hawai'i, several strategies and approaches of WHS that respondents considered important are possible to replicate because they do not depend on specific geographic, demographic, or funding circumstances.

- **Messaging.** The messaging of WHS about early college emphasizes both the opportunity provided to students and the expectation of commitment. The messaging has been reinforced through WHS policies and expectations and by providing students with opportunities to read about and discuss concepts such as grit and growth mind-set. The WHS interviews across different groups show consistency in messaging. Also, the students who participated in focus groups—though only a few of many students—conveyed that this messaging had reached them.
- **Setting and Enforcing High Expectations.** WHS has high expectations for students in terms of academic behavior. The expectations are articulated in letters to parents and discussions with students. The early college coordinator or assistant takes daily attendance in the early college courses. The coordinator is available to course instructors and learns whether the instructors have any concerns about student performance. He also talks to students who are late or have not regularly attended classes to determine if they need support or if they should withdraw from a course until they are more able to fully participate.
- **Providing Support.** High expectations are balanced by high levels of support and guidance. Students are offered academic help—through different people and programs—as well as social and emotional support for personal issues that affect their academic performance. The support comes from different sources, indicating a system of support versus support by a single early college advocate.
- **Developing Strong Partnerships.** The WHS program is marked by strong partnerships within the school, particularly between the principal and the early college coordinator, partnerships between the high school and its college partners, and partnerships with its feeder school (the nearby WIS). A college partner said the partnerships, particularly those within the high school, are essential for a strong and thriving program.
- **Scheduling.** WHS was one of the few schools that prefers all its early college courses to be scheduled after school or during the summer months. Not all the early college programs that were included in the study offered or wanted to offer early college courses after

school. Some had changed their daily bell schedule so that early college courses could be offered during the regular school day, which was considered more convenient for students, particularly those with transportation difficulties. The reasons for WHS favoring an afterschool schedule are worth considering by other schools, no matter how they decide to schedule the courses.

- **Limiting Course Choice.** Although WHS offers many early college courses, the courses are limited in scope and do not represent the full range of courses available to students who take college courses on campus. Limiting the courses is more efficient for the school and less confusing and daunting for students.



Established in 1946, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research on important social issues and delivers technical assistance, both domestically and internationally, in the areas of education, health, and workforce productivity.

## MAKING RESEARCH RELEVANT

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH  
1000 Thomas Jefferson Street NW  
Washington, DC 20007-3835 | 202.403.5000  
[www.air.org](http://www.air.org)

### LOCATIONS

**Domestic:** Washington, DC (HQ) | Monterey, Sacramento, and San Mateo, CA | Atlanta, GA | Honolulu, HI | Chicago and Naperville, IL | Indianapolis, IN | Metairie, LA | Waltham, MA | Frederick and Rockville, MD | Chapel Hill, NC | New York, NY | Columbus, OH | Cayce, SC | Austin, TX | Reston, VA

**International:** El Salvador | Ethiopia | Haiti | Honduras | Zambia