

5. How Early-College High Schools Prepare At-Risk Students for College

In this *American Educator* article, Northwestern University professor James Rosenbaum and graduate student Kelly Iwanaga Becker describe the worst-case scenario for a C-minus high-school senior setting off for college with her college counselor's, teachers', and parents' words ringing in her ears: a college degree will get you a good-paying job. "No one has told her that she must pass a college placement test before she can take college classes," say Rosenbaum and Becker. "No one has told her that if she fails, she must pay for remedial courses for which she will receive no credit. No one has told her that she probably lacks the academic preparation to do well in remedial courses, much less college courses. No one has told her that most students like her never earn a college degree."

What can prevent this train wreck? The authors describe what successful early-college high schools are doing to provide preparation through acceleration and get amazingly good results with students who don't seem like "college material." Here are the key ingredients:

- Instead of relying on student choice, early-college high schools show students what content and skills they need for college and provide a package-deal curriculum that leads to mastery of that content and those skills. This includes giving college placement tests early in high school, clear curriculum pathways aligned with college-level coursework, and professional development for teachers to implement the standards.

- Instead of assuming students are motivated (and seeing motivation as a fixed trait), early-college high schools foster motivation by offering incentives and bolstering students' confidence. They structure the curriculum to produce early successes, and reward students with certificates and other credentials that don't take long to earn.

- Instead of student-initiated guidance, early-college high schools keep students on track by providing frequent, mandatory guidance and closely monitoring students' progress. Many students don't know they need guidance, and a voluntary system doesn't meet their needs. A better system includes required weekly (even daily) advisory work and check-ins, with one adult assigned to monitor each student and provide support and solutions when needed.

- Instead of leaving things to chance, early-college high schools manage the transition from high school to college. "The typical high school-to-college transition is abrupt and unsupervised," say Rosenbaum and Becker. "Even among seniors admitted to four-year colleges, research has found that 20 percent do not show up at any college in the fall."

- Instead of assuming that students have study skills, early-college high schools explicitly teach them how to study and survive in college. This includes critical reading, taking notes in lectures, logic, analysis, verbal and writing skills, time management, self-organization, library research, writing research papers, revising papers, understanding and avoiding plagiarism, and more.

"The Early College Challenge: Navigating Disadvantaged Students' Transition to College" by James Rosenbaum and Kelly Iwanaga Becker in *American Educator*, Fall 2011 (Vol. 35, #3, p. 14-20),

<http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2011/EarlyCollege.pdf>

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