



*Student Achievement Leadership Team*

## **Resource Kit #15**

Reforming Ohio's high schools

*November 2007*

Ohio School Boards Association  
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Dear school board members, superintendents and treasurers:

We are constantly looking for ways to improve educational opportunities for our students. We try new teaching methods, new materials. We incorporate technology into the curriculum. We rearrange class schedules. We visit other schools to learn about their successes and failures. We share this information with others in public education to raise student achievement across Ohio and the nation.

One of the ongoing programs of the Student Achievement Leadership Team is our series of timely resource kits. This kit follows that tradition of looking at emerging issues and best practices. The KnowledgeWorks Foundation is involved in a number of projects to help students in the classroom. This kit takes a peek into the foundation's Ohio High School Transformation Initiative and Early College High School Initiative from inside the classroom.

Containing excerpts from two KnowledgeWorks publications, we feature Lima Senior High School and Lorain County Early College High School, located on the Lorain County Community College campus. While the classroom settings may be different from what you find in your district, I hope you will gain new knowledge to help your students and staff.

Martha F. Rothey  
2007 OSBA president  
board member, Findlay City

# Introducing small schools

## New schools gain ground, one step at a time

The idea that America's high schools — particularly its large urban high schools — are failing our children is no longer new. We all know their faces:

The graduate who can't keep up in college.

The dropout who seems surprised that he or she can't find a job.

The junior who quits out of boredom, the sophomore who is hiding an unexpected pregnancy, the freshman who is working at half his or her potential.

Even the rush to save these youngsters is not new. Educators, politicians, parents and business leaders have proposed and tried countless solutions. Some have helped, some have fallen short. Some may have even made matters worse.

## The promise of small schools

From all the turmoil and debate, a few promising new models have emerged to successfully prepare students for life beyond high school. One that is offering hope for schools around the country is, in some ways, very simple. At its heart are small, personal learning environments in which students can build close relationships with teachers and teachers can engage students with

*Excerpted from Small Moments, Big Dreams: Real-life stories of five redesigned urban high schools, KnowledgeWorks Foundation.*

demanding, pertinent studies.

The thinking behind this small schools approach defies much of what has been standard practice for American education in recent decades. Based on a solid body of research, it calls for each school to have a clear and specific focus, for its leaders to have the freedom to make decisions about teaching and learning within their schools and for teachers to collaborate across traditional disciplines.

With these and other innovations behind them, small schools in cities across the country have begun to rescue children at risk of dropping out and reinvigorate educators in danger of giving up.

## Ohio's high school redesigns

In Ohio, an ambitious effort is under way to introduce the small schools model in cities where it is desperately needed.

KnowledgeWorks Foundation's Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI), funded in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and others, has invested more than \$50 million in a sweeping reformation of the state's decades-old education system. Education leaders in nine urban districts are working to transform 13 large, underperforming high schools serving 14,822 students into 44 effective small schools.

Under the initiative, each large high school was divided into several schools with no more than 400 students each. Each small school has its own name, its own staff and its own area of specialization, whether it is a career area such as business technology or an instructional philosophy such as **Howard Gardner's** Multiple Intelligence theory.

The new schools operate within the original

school building, usually with each school occupying its own wing or floor and sharing facilities such as the gym or auditorium. More important, though, is that they adopt educational elements that separate them from traditional high schools. These new schools generate excitement for learning by incorporating real-world learning opportunities into core subjects, encouraging deep thinking through longer class periods and providing hands-on learning through innovative student projects and off-campus experiences.

In addition, teachers are given extensive professional development opportunities so that they, like the schools, move beyond traditional practice. Communities are active partners in the transformations, with each district having a local organization as a Center of Strength to provide input and resources.

As one of the largest concentrations of high school reform anywhere, the Ohio initiative serves as a proving ground for the small schools movement nationwide.

### **Year one: Chaos by design**

After several years of planning, the first small schools created under OHSTI opened in 2004-05 with high expectations and a blank slate. The future of small schools in Ohio was theirs to shape. Many of the first challenges were ones of logistics — finding ways to manage three, four or even as many as six separate schools within one building. Software programs couldn't handle the complicated scheduling requirements, class bells marking the end of a period for one school interrupted classes in another. Coaches had to field teams of athletes attending different schools, and no one knew who was in charge when a water pipe broke.

Beyond the logistics were questions of attitude. As teachers, students, parents and members of the community were introduced to the new

schools that replaced the traditional high schools they had known, each one had to find his or her own comfort level with a new set of priorities: trading a wide array of classes for fewer, but more relevant choices; focusing on academic achievement for all students, sometimes at the expense of small schools' first year was extracurricular activities; and reordering a top-down hierarchy to involve those at all levels in setting the school's course.

Change has been described as chaos by design, and change on this scale brought plenty of chaos. Yet the small schools' first year was marked by far more than disruption. The planners' goal for that year was to effect change in school climate — to move markers in areas such as attendance, satisfaction levels and student-teacher relationships — and on those fronts, significant gains were realized.

### **Year two: Taking shape**

The progress small schools made during their first year was evident from the first day of the 2005-06 school year. On campus after campus, hallways that had been crowded and confused on the previous opening day were orderly and quiet.

But the work to form fully functioning new schools was far from complete. Schools not only had to integrate a second wave of students and, in some cases, teachers, but they needed to move beyond improvements in school climate to see real growth in teaching practice and student achievement.

They also faced many new challenges. After exhaustingly long hours spent engineering their schools' redesigns, many of the original leaders were nearing burnout. Districts buffeted by forces unrelated to school redesign enacted changes that compromised the small schools model. And administrators worried that outsiders would have unrealistic expectations

about how quickly this new approach could turn around decades of ineffective teaching.

As the schools' external partner, KnowledgeWorks Foundation noted important advances. In addition to teachers interacting more, communities feeling more comfortable and students' perceptions of their schools growing more positive, a few districts took steps toward permanently integrating the small schools approach. **Toledo City** Schools became the first to apply for separate state identification numbers, allowing it to track each school's performance on state achievement tests. Other districts moved to do the same.

From inside the classrooms and hallways, though, progress often seemed uneven. In one school, bullying became a problem. In another, student leaders grew disillusioned when a budget committee wouldn't fund a project. At one campus, the neighborhood residents seemed uncomfortable with the students' presence. On another, a veteran teacher was physically threatened for the first time in her career.

### **And yet ...**

And yet courageous and committed teachers pushed on. Students overcame difficult home lives for the sake of their studies. Principals called students by name and knew how often they'd been tardy and what grades they'd earned on recent tests. One group of students found a creative approach to tackle the problem of bullying. Another organized a rally to raise money for the district school levy campaign.

In the second year of the Ohio high school initiative, as in the first, it was the people on the ground, those living the transformation day to day, who would deliver on the small schools promise.

### **Lima Senior High School, Lima City**

In one way, Lima Senior High School had an edge on other small school reform sites. When its three schools opened in August 2004, they began in a gleaming new \$38.5 million building with nearly 290,000 square feet, a professional-quality auditorium, two gyms and a two-story library.

But even a spiffy new building didn't make it simple to introduce a completely new way of "doing" high school. Lima confronted many of the same difficulties as converted campuses — everything from avoiding scheduling conflicts to handling union concerns to making sure that the three schools developed at a comparable pace.

It also struggled to adapt to a population base growing more diverse and to improve student performance. The first year of small schools saw Lima's state report card rating rise from the lowest category to the second lowest, but school leaders continue working to boost performance.

Led by energetic educators convinced that smaller, more demanding schools can keep kids from falling between the cracks, the schools had strong relationships with the community liaison, the Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce, which fostered partnerships between the school and local businesses. And they empowered teachers, students and parents to take ownership of the school environment and offer solutions for improvement.

All these elements, far more than its impressive building, would give Lima Senior High School the edge it needed to make lasting changes.

# The power of “We”: Collaboration at work

by *Peggie Cypher*

It’s been a busy year. **Jeff McClellan** sits in his office and takes a deep breath. There were the campus tours, the No Child Left Behind hearing, the new literacy lab, the school book projects — an almost dizzying array of activities. As principal of the School of Multiple Intelligence (MI) on the Lima Senior High School campus, McClellan rarely has a free moment to reflect.

“Small schools are one thing in theory,” he said. “But in practice, I can start to see it’s paying off. We have more kids signed up for AP courses, our writing OGT scores have gone up more than 17%,” he added, referring to standard markers of achievement such as Advanced Placement courses and the Ohio Graduation Test.

“But it’s about so much more than scores,” he said emphatically. “Over spring break, the number of students and staff here was amazing ... . They were eating pizza together, working on the NASA moon-buggy project. It’s a great feeling. And we’ve worked harder than we’ve ever worked.”

The key word here is “we,” as one look around his office will tell you.

More like a kindergarten classroom than an administrator’s office, the room is plastered with poems and handmade posters. Near the door hangs a paper dabbed with Post-it notes of what students think are the positive and negative aspects of their school. The back wall houses a board covered with teacher ideas on ways to help seniors pass the proficiency tests. On the file cabinet is a student’s list of how to respond to bullying.

Above his desk are posters made by students in

a college-credit program he established, called MI Ready. In bold letters, the posters list the different Intelligence that are part of the school’s teaching philosophy — Body Smart, Sound Smart, Logical Smart, Self Smart. “I like looking at them,” he said, scanning the walls.

For McClellan, the posters are more than just pretty pictures; they are testament to the collaborative process necessary for a small schools approach to work.

Students, teachers, parents — McClellan encourages them all to contribute to making the school a success. For a small school to develop the identity and independence it needs, the input of teachers, students, and the community all have to be in place. And at the MI school in Lima, the pieces are coming together.

## The leader

He’s young, early 30s, and sports a crew cut with spikes on top — someone you might expect to see playing professional sports or reporting the news. Certainly not the guy you’d think would be zig-zagging through the hallways of the Lima campus greeting students by name. “How’d you do on the test, Shanika?” he says to a sophomore. “What did you write about?” He stoops to pick up trash, confiscates a student’s earphones and pulls out his cell phone to lend to a student — all without missing a beat. “Hey Robert, was the test difficult? Did the tutoring help?”

Like a local celebrity, McClellan is swamped by students who come up to shake his hand or give him high fives. He’s not just the principal. He’s the person they’ve eaten pizza with at after-school meetings, someone they’ve spent the

weekend with at Ohio State University's chimp laboratory. The guy who has brainstormed with them on how to end school bullying.

McClellan, with a six-foot three-inch athletic build, towers over most of the students in the red, gray and black hallways of the new Lima building. A marked difference from last year, he says between high fives, is that the hallways are relatively calm these days. Gone are the noise, chaos and congestion of 1,300 students jammed together like they were last year. The three small schools on the Lima campus have staggered their schedules, each starting and ending at different times.

"We moved off the bell schedule at the suggestion of a student," says McClellan.

The suggestion of a student?

Yes, just one of the many ideas McClellan has instituted. Even the theme of the school was by consensus.

Three years ago, during its planning phase, McClellan and his staff came up with multiple intelligences as a focus for their new school. The theory identifies eight different types of intelligences, among them musical, mathematical and people smarts.

"It reaffirms what everyone already knew from teaching: that kids have strengths and when you tap into those strengths, they do better," he said. McClellan does a lot of tapping — with both students and teachers.

At a faculty meeting you won't see him standing up in front going through items on an agenda. He's likely to put teachers in groups or pass out Post-its and have them write down their ideas.

For one meeting on how to help seniors pass proficiency tests, McClellan asked teachers to rotate from room to room and respond to

different scenarios. And just for fun — because one of McClellan's mottos is "you gotta have fun" — he had teachers go to a room he called the "accountability room." With a stern look, he informed teachers they had to go into that room and hold each other accountable for OGT scores.

When teachers, already stressed, stepped in, they discovered a slanted wooden platform with a hole in the middle. They were to hold each other accountable ... for who could get the most bean bags in the hole.

"The staff had a ball," McClellan said, "but were under instructions when they left to look upset for the next group coming in."

A former science teacher of five years, McClellan was drawn to the small schools model because it emphasizes relationships.

"I would see kids that I'd established a relationship with make progress in my classroom," he said. "Then I'd often find out that the following year they'd dropped out of school. This reinforced the benefit of the relationship piece."

At MI, the relationship piece happens at breakfast meetings, pizza gatherings and in McClellan's two pet projects: MI Ready and Student Leadership. He formed MI Ready in cooperation with area universities to aid 9th- and 10th-graders with academic skills and allow them to earn college credit. The Student Leadership group meets weekly to address myriad issues in the school.

The relationship piece also takes place at the Friday night tailgate parties. The gatherings were designed as a positive way for parents and students to connect with staff, one that doesn't involve discipline problems. "Plus, they're fun," McClellan said.

“Last week we played football in the parking lot. I got to be quarterback.” He leans forward to stress his point — a commanding but not-so-commanding presence. “I never get to be quarterback.”

## Teachers

It’s 10 minutes before the end of class. A clump of freshmen gather around the front board, giggling. A quick glance in the classroom might suggest the teacher has finished the lesson and given the students free time. Yet this is the classroom of **Lori Rose**.

Students are actually doing a “gallery walk.” They’ve just finished their presentations on a short story and are writing their responses on large papers posted around the room. “OK. Time to switch to the next one,” Rose tells her students. “Remember to make your comments specific.”

During the MI summer retreat, teachers came up with three goals on which to focus their efforts. These goals, or “rocks,” are raising attendance, boosting literacy and incorporating lessons using multiple intelligences into their classrooms.

It is this last — the incorporation of the multiple intelligences — that can pose the greatest challenge, even for veteran teachers. Yet Rose makes it look easy.

She does it using the short story “The Most Dangerous Game” by **Richard Connell**, about a stranded hunter in Brazil who engages in a dangerous challenge with a Russian. In response to the story, Rose had students create a series of projects. They drew a map of Ship-Trap Island using setting clues, made a plot outline with pictures and created a skit incorporating sound effects. Students had to explain or defend their projects and then present them to the class. Now, presentations

finished, students rotate to critique each other’s work.

The other goals, attendance and literacy, are regularly addressed at the weekly MI staff meetings.

“We are a teacher-driven school,” Rose said. “Jeff’s empowered teachers who are not strong, not involved and allowed them the opportunities to step up.”

And step up is just what they are doing. At one meeting of Critical Friends, which is a group for sharing ideas about how to improve teaching, math teacher **Christa Krohn** presents a dilemma. It is a dilemma the teachers say they all share. Indeed, it is one of the largest challenges of being a teacher.

“Students come into class with gaps in knowledge,” Krohn says to her small group. “I want to work with them and support them, but also maintain the integrity of the course standards. How can I do this?”

Between bites of homemade cookies, teachers follow a protocol of clarifying, asking questions and then adding their suggestions: Mandated tutorials. A Saturday boot camp. Research how math is important. Hold regular meetings with parents. Create a “math attitude,” where you have a theme on the wall, jargon, funny slogans, a tune.

Unlike meetings in the past, which were likely to turn into gripe sessions, the Critical Friends meetings allow teachers to actually get things done, Rose said. One is transforming their student advisories, an element of the small schools model designed to give students contact with one staff member, into interest-based seminars that will let teachers and students connect around a shared hobby or talent.

“The teachers came to me and told me they

wanted to switch them to interest-based,” McClellan said. “So we formed SEMINAR — Students Engaged in Multiple Intelligence and Authentic Relationships.”

SEMINAR topics range from knitting to hunting and fishing to “The Simpsons” television show and popular culture.

Teachers also have been working on strategic plans such as weekly literacy writing prompts and a schoolwide book project, which includes a research paper and an oral presentation.

But perhaps more important than strategic endeavors to address their “rocks” are efforts to make daily lessons relevant to students’ lives. English teacher **Jeannine Jordan-Squire** is a master at this.

One of her recent lessons started with **Arthur Miller’s** *The Crucible* and ended with Mexican food. Jordan-Squire had no lesson plan calling for her students to have lunch with the mayor of Lima. It grew out of a discussion about the marriage of church and state in the play, which focuses on Puritan witch-hunting. The class was discussing how the average person can make a difference in politics when soon-to-be-voting **Michelle VanMeter** quipped that it was too bad the mayor didn’t sit down and talk with regular people. A few days later, students sat down with the mayor of Lima over Mexican food and chatted about everything from the Lima prison to school uniforms.

## Parents and community

“Hello. This is **Mabel Fisher** of Lima Senior High’s School of Multiple Intelligences. I’m calling on the absence of ....”

She’s there every morning for at least an hour. Not a school employee, but a parent volunteer calling the numbers on the absence list. Out of their summer meetings with McClellan — yes,

he holds meetings even in the summer — parents developed a plan to call the homes of students on the absence list.

“There’s a different tone when it comes from the parents as opposed to staff,” McClellan said. “And it helps for parents to talk to the same parents over and over. They begin to network.” This approach may be responsible for fewer absences this year. Attendance is up to 90.5% from 85.1% last year.

Fisher is glad to help out. In fact, she can’t do enough for the MI school. She credits its approach for the success of her son, **Peter**, who had struggled in previous academic settings. Because he had been diagnosed with neurological problems, Fisher was committed to enrolling Peter in a school that appealed to different kinds of intelligences and allow him to pursue his interests in music and film.

She isn’t the only parent who contributes. **Beth Klay**, who is paid by the school to be a parent liaison, rounds up other parents to make calls about open houses, bringing food to tailgate parties and volunteering at the MI Expo, a showcase of the school’s lessons and activities.

Community members, too, play an integral role — from individual members such as **Jane Seiling**, who regularly volunteers to evaluate student book presentations, to the Community Advisory, which brings in guest speakers and arranges job shadowing. The Lima/Allen County Chamber of Commerce, which serves as Lima’s Center of Strength for the transformation initiative, has secured a grant to help students prepare for the SATs. Area universities have set up a literacy lab and provide tutors for writing and OGT prep.

## Students

Community groups can provide speakers, parents can make phone calls, teachers can

arrange lunches with the mayor, but perhaps it is the student voice — the students' ideas, their perspective, their sense of ownership — that ultimately makes for a successful small school.

Today McClellan's Student Leadership kids file in for a meeting and drop their books on desks. They race up to a table and grab pizza and a pop. Some chug the soda immediately and rush back for another. Students eat greedily as McClellan passes out paper and divides them into groups of three.

"Make a list of things going on in the school — good and bad," he tells them. "We'll discuss your lists in the large group in a few minutes." Students get down to business; they know the drill well.

When the whole group convenes, students call out positive items from their lists: the flow of classes and the way teachers are teaching now. They switch to negative ones: smoking in the bathrooms, the mozzarella sticks in the cafeteria, bullying.

Bullying. A month earlier a student was involved in a fight and sent to the hospital. It started with words, with one student making fun of another. Since then, bullying has been a recurring issue in the small school.

The leadership group has been role-playing bullying scenarios. Using improvisational techniques from the Playback Theatre, a national troupe that improvises the life stories of members, the leadership kids hope they can translate to others how it feels to be bullied. They've also made the posters that hang in McClellan's office, and are working on a video presentation that addresses bullying. Students **Alex** and **Liz** are tweaking the script. Peter, the son of parent volunteer Mabel Fisher, is in charge of filming it.

"I'm trying to develop a culture where students

have a constructive way to deal with issues like these," McClellan said. One of the things, indeed, *the* thing, he reveres most about the small school concept is that the school's size magnifies the benefits of student involvement. If McClellan can reach 20 or 30 students about the consequences of bullying, and if they then can reach two or three friends, there will be a sizable impact in the MI School. This is what, he hopes, will ultimately change the culture, the atmosphere of the school.

At the meeting, students speak freely about that bloody fight. Soon they move on to others.

"I saw this one fight where ... ."

"Someone hit a teacher ... ."

"So and so was stabbed ... ."

McClellan listens for a time, but soon scolds. "Nobody hit a teacher," he said. "Nobody was stabbed. We talked about this rumor mill before. This is how these things get started. How many of you run to watch a fight?" A few students raise their hands. "Why do you do it when you know it's wrong? What can we do about fighting?"

"Have students be automatically expelled for the first fight," calls one student.

"Then nobody'd be at school," a girl responds.

"If you're able to control your temper, you won't fight," a boy adds.

"Sometimes it's not your fault," says the kid next to him.

"Don't engage," the boy retorts.

"From what I've seen," says a girl across the room, "fights are a way to get attention. But in a negative way."

“Why are teachers afraid to break up fights?”

The discussion quickly disintegrates. “Why can’t we have more sports like dodge ball?” Random bits shoot back and forth. McClellan listens patiently. While they’ve clearly wandered off topic, students seem to need to vent, to be heard, to feel a part.

“We can end early,” he tells them, “unless you want to stay and chat?”

A tall male stands and points to his blue-and-gold jersey. “Yeah. We can stay and talk about Michigan football.” An explosion of jeers. A girl across the room gets up and jiggles her red and gray Ohio State bangle bracelets in the air. The banter flies.

McClellan laughs and lets it go. While he thrives on their input, he also has realistic expectations. Creating a culture that deals with issues takes time. For teachers, for students. McClellan can wait.

## A typical day

The day starts out as usual. Parent volunteer Mabel Fisher makes her phone calls. Teachers teach their lessons — Lori Rose’s students write self-reflective pieces, Jeannine Jordan-Squire’s act out scenes from a play. Community member Jane Seiling sits in the library evaluating book presentations. Student Michelle VanMeter presents **John Grisham’s** *Bleachers* as part of a multiple-intelligences component. For the reflection portion, Michelle says the book showed her “that we all have our own heroes and skeletons. In the end, you learn how to love them.”

Soon it’s 2 p.m., dismissal. Yet, as usual, from a walk through the red-and-black hallways you wouldn’t know it. A small group of kids hang out in Christa Krohn’s room playing with the tires and spare parts they’ve collected for their

moon buggy, which they’ll build and race next year in Alabama. Students Peter, Alex and Liz gather with other MI Ready students in the science lab for experiments on acids and bases.

Down the hall, teachers sit in small groups at rectangular tables. A tall, dynamic leader moves among them, passing out Post-its. He asks the teachers to discuss what is happening in SEMINAR. “It’s OK to disagree,” McClellan says. “Just don’t be disagreeable.”

The teachers talk quietly in their groups, they joke. One tells how his Hunting and Fishing SEMINAR students saved a duck the previous week by untangling the wire wrapped around it. McClellan goes up to the giant pad of paper taped to the blackboard.

The groups take turns talking about their ideas: relationships are being built, students are learning skills they wouldn’t learn in school, regular contact with parents is being maintained.

Next McClellan asks teachers to discuss the things that are not happening in SEMINAR. Later they will propose some changes. Now the teachers huddle; they call out their ideas and McClellan adds them to a giant list — later, it will become his newest poster for his office. One more testament to collaboration. His ever-changing wallpaper.

Teachers call out their ideas. McClellan writes them down. And of course, because his motto is “you gotta have fun,” McClellan interrupts the task to make an announcement: “Don’t forget the pig roast at my house. It’d be great to hang out and actually not have to talk about school.”

After all, it’s been a busy year.

*About the author: Peggie Cypher is an award-winning freelance writer from Toledo.*

## **OHSTI: A midterm report**

The Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI) seeks to move low-performing urban high schools from a 19th-century factory model of instruction to agile high-performing 21st-century learning organizations.

Launched in 2002 by KnowledgeWorks Foundation, OHSTI currently serves 14,822 secondary students in 44 new small schools on 13 campuses in nine of the state's most challenged urban districts. Thirty-six of these new small schools (all converted from large, traditional, comprehensive models) opened their doors in fall 2004; eight are in only their second year of operation. The schools have about 400 students each, the number research shows to be best for effective, personalized teaching and learning. Each small school has responsibility and management authority for its resources, staffing, curriculum development and instructional strategies, and involves staff, students, parents and community members in making decisions about these four critical areas.

The OHSTI sites have a large minority population (76%), and more than 65% of their students have been identified as economically disadvantaged. For the majority of sites, long-term economic, social and safety challenges in the districts and communities surrounding the schools place further strain on efforts to initiate and sustain high school improvement.

In the midst of these challenging conditions, however, early signs of success are emerging from participants in OHSTI. Looking at the state rating as a surrogate for school quality, it is significant that as of August 2006, 87% of the

campuses supported by OHSTI had increased their state ratings during the grant period, some jumping as many as three rungs on the rating ladder, i.e. from Academic Emergency to Continuous Improvement or from Continuous Improvement to Excellent. While this movement is encouraging, it is not yet time to claim victory in these schools. Much work remains to reach the goal of every child graduating ready for college or career without remediation.

### **OHSTI performance highlights 2003 – 2006**

- Over the first 2 years of implementation, the percentage of students who were at or above the proficient level in mathematics increased both for the OHSTI schools and across Ohio schools, but OHSTI sites outpaced the state, improving 26% to the state's 15%.
- OHSTI schools showed much larger gains in reading than schools across Ohio. OHSTI sites changed at double the state rate in reading, 20% and 10% respectively.
- None of the OHSTI schools met the Ohio minimum standard for Ohio reading proficiency before transformation; a majority met the state's standard in implementation years one and two.
- The achievement gap in reading between white and African-American students narrowed to a greater degree than across the state.

## What are we learning?

The following observations were recorded as a result of a 3-year statewide evaluation performed by the nationally recognized American Institutes for Research. Based on on-site observation, this third-party evaluator reported:

- Many staff members agreed that the small schools contributed to personalization and the development of relationships with their students. This finding was supported by many students.

- Many students, teachers and parents felt that positive personal relationships existed between students and teachers. Parents reported that their children have a good rapport with their teachers, and many students indicated that they liked their teachers and had someone to turn to when in need.

- This year, the school changed coaches, small school leaders and teachers in several schools indicated that instruction has undergone some changes. Teachers reported being more focused on literacy, writing and differentiated instruction.

- Teachers across the small schools report that they use the following three instructional techniques most frequently: relating instructional content to real-life situations; helping students strengthen their writing and speaking skills; and helping students explore topics in depth.

- Teachers in OHSTI schools have increased opportunities in governance and decision-making.

- Most schools saw improvement with community groups; Centers of Strength forged by OHSTI have continued to be involved in improving labor relations.

# Introducing new Early College High Schools

## A new breed of college students

Why do kids drop out of high school? You might expect complicated answers to that question. Answers about family issues, drug use, poverty, behavior problems and peer pressure.

All those reasons are real, and their implications for schools are enormously complicated. But those are adults' answers.

If you ask kids, most will tell you something much simpler. They were bored. The stuff they were learning had nothing to do with their lives. They couldn't see that going to high school was getting them anywhere. And nobody there much cared whether they showed up or not.

In the very strictest terms, those reasons — the kids' reasons — are what early college high schools are designed to address. By letting students attend college during high school, these schools challenge kids in ways they've never been challenged. They offer class work that leads directly to the jobs they want. They make it possible for students who can't afford tuition to get college credit or an associate's degree for free.

And because they're small, somebody cares whether every single student shows up.

## Opportunity for all

Keeping kids from dropping out is, of course, just one of the problems facing today's high

schools. But if educators can keep students in school — can keep them engaged and challenged — they will have gone a long way toward resolving many of the issues that keep high schools from effectively preparing students for college and careers.

That's why school districts across the country have turned to what's known as accelerated learning. These programs take many different shapes, but what they have in common is that they permit students to earn college credit while still in high school.

Although college-credit options have been part of high school for many years, until recently most targeted the academically advanced student. That began to change as businesses came to need more college-educated workers and the number of students earning college degrees didn't keep pace with demand.

On the flip side of that shortage were the growing numbers of young adults who were beginning their working lives poorly equipped for productive careers — the students who never completed high school, those who collected a diploma yet had inadequate job skills and those who chose not to continue their educations or failed at them. Educators began to realize that the traditional path to college and career was leaving too many students stranded along the way. Another avenue was needed for those with limited incomes, those without college graduates in their family trees and those without the skills to get into or succeed in college.

That's when a new approach — one that accelerated opportunity for all students — began to emerge.

*Excerpted from Learning by Degree: Real-life stories of three early college high schools, KnowledgeWorks Foundation.*

## A diploma and a degree

The most ambitious of these new learning options is early college high school. Instead of simply providing college-credit classes to supplement high school, these schools are intense, fully integrated programs where students complete both their high school work and an associate's degree at the same time. It is a radical — and in some ways counterintuitive — idea. Rather than being sidelined while more successful students prepare for careers, kids who haven't done well academically are asked to do more and harder work.

These students, many of them as young as 14 or 15, divide their days between a demanding high school curriculum and college classes, where they sit next to high school graduates and do the same work, often without the knowledge of either classmates or professors.

In return for this intensive effort, the students can earn an associate's degree or 60 hours of college credit that can be applied toward a bachelor's degree — for free. They can leave high school already qualified for a far better paying job or halfway to a four-year degree

They aren't expected to do all this on their own, though. To help these motivated but underperforming learners, early college schools are small enough so that students can work closely with teachers who not only teach core high school classes, but also provide support and guidance to help them adjust to college expectations.

While it builds on previous programs, early college high school is a new idea. Since 2001, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other partners have invested \$124 million nationally to support the creation of more than 170 early college high schools in 25 states. The first three schools in the initiative opened their doors in 2002; by 2012 some 62,000 students are

expected to attend early college high schools.

By giving high school students a taste of college life and the opportunity to succeed in college, the early college high school experience gives teenagers who never considered themselves “college material” the confidence to dream bigger dreams.

## Ohio's early college highs

KnowledgeWorks Foundation was among the first to act on the potential of the early college high schools. The philosophy behind early college fit perfectly with KnowledgeWorks Foundation's mission to increase access to high-quality education for all students.

KnowledgeWorks, along with its partners, set out to prove that every child can be college material — that every child can graduate from high school and succeed in college.

The first Ohio early college high school, now known as Dayton Early College Academy, opened in 2003. By 2005, six were up and running in urban areas across the state, and more were in the planning stages.

The foundation asked these new schools to bring college to a new group of students. Each school was to consist primarily of students who were:

- the first in their families to attend college,
- from economically disadvantaged homes.

These were the students who would pioneer early college in Ohio. With the first early college classes yet to graduate, this bold new program has already produced results that counter common wisdom about who can succeed in college.

At Dayton Early College Academy, students as a group have earned more than 1,000 hours of college credit. By their fifth semester, some

students had already earned 45 college credits — the equivalent of a year and a half of full-time college.

At Youngstown Early College, 43 students enrolled in 46 different college courses and earned an overall grade point average of 2.9.

### Lorain County Early College High School

As Lorain County Early College High School began its second year in the fall of 2005, the puzzle pieces that would have to come together for it to succeed were only partly in place.

The school — established as a partnership among **Elyria City** Schools, **Lorain City** Schools and Lorain County Community College — had started the previous year with 60 students from Elyria. With the first group of Lorain students just arriving, the school had yet to blend teachers, students and parents from the two perennial rivals into a single cohesive identity located on the campus of Lorain County Community College.

Principal **Roslyn Valentine** had weathered the school's first year with her generous store of energy and enthusiasm intact, and was supported by a team of teachers that managed to overcome the chaos of the early days to craft interdisciplinary instruction. But a new group of teachers, added to accommodate the second year's influx of students, appeared less committed to the early college approach, and it was unclear whether Valentine's passion would inspire or alienate them.

Even more important was the question of student preparedness. The early college highs are designed to serve students from low-income families, some of whom have only spotty support for educational pursuits at home, and many students struggled with the academic rigor.

So for Lorain County Early College High School, progress during the 2005-06 school year would be measured in small pieces — puzzle pieces painstakingly sorted and fitted to form the picture of a school.

### People-powered

But of course, early college high schools are not machines magically producing these results. The concept is only as effective as the high school teachers and their college counterparts who are setting high expectations for students and inspiring them to live up to those expectations. It is only as effective as the principals and parents who support those teachers. And it is only as effective as the students who overcome disadvantages to achieve more than they knew was possible.

The people creating Ohio's first early college high schools are breaking new ground. Teachers, counselors and principals struggle to help young teenagers develop the maturity they need to succeed in a college classroom and to help parents who never attended college themselves understand and support their children's journey. Students work to master difficult subject matter and, often, difficult lives.

In one school, educators must reconcile hopes for a radically different instructional approach with the realities of their students' needs. In another, a principal must calm a tenured professor whose classes are interrupted by her students' boisterous ways. Teachers battle to engage students with short attention spans and little interest in the world beyond what they know; students cope with everything from long commutes to unexpected pregnancies.

# The sounds of growth — discord or harmony?

by Catherine Gabe

Principal **Roslyn Valentine** stands in a room full of teachers and drums. She says little as one of the people leading the professional development retreat introduces the idea of a drum circle. “Okay, this might seem a bit hokey at first,” he says, “but I think you’ll like it.” Valentine picks up a drum for herself and begins thrusting drums into the hands of her staff, urging them to shake off the after-lunch malaise. While students are on their winter break, this is an opportunity for teachers from Lorain County Early College High School to gather at a Lake Erie resort to relax and regroup.

But drums? A few teachers roll their eyes. Others sigh as if to say, “You want us to do what?”

“Pick a drum,” urges **Ed Boas**, a professional drum circle facilitator who takes over.

Some rest the big drums awkwardly in their laps. A few self-consciously set their drums to the side, cautiously testing the sound with one finger: tap, tap, tappity, tap.

“We do drum circles for all different reasons,” Boas explains. “It helps with communication.”

He looks around. A few smile, still others eye him skeptically.

“There is no right way to do this,” Boas continues, tapping his drum a bit.

Slowly, a few begin drumming. **Gwen Gilmore**, 10th-grade math teacher, beams a wide smile and begins pounding away on a conga drum. Bat-a-bat-bat-bat. Gilmore is a natural leader with an emphasis on the can-do — she’s also an adjunct professor and a pastor. Others look to her and begin adding their sounds. Patter,

patter. Thrum. Da, da, dum.

Quick, fast, slow, off the beat.

“It’s always different at first,” Boas says, the noise growing around him. “But eventually, a song comes out of it.”

Valentine, a strong, decisive leader, is hoping the exercise translates back to the classroom so her staff members will suspend their skepticism and jump in without waiting to be pushed. She is looking for leaders. Too often, everyone looks to her to solve the problems of this early college high school in its second year. The veteran administrator spends far too much of her time providing no-nonsense solutions to parents, teachers, staff and students. She pushes, prods and nudges.

But there’s only so much a strong leader can do alone. Though she accepts that the public doesn’t understand the idea behind the school, Valentine is coming to the even more disconcerting realization that nearly half her staff doesn’t either. They volunteered for the assignment, but many believed they would be teaching academically high-caliber students. What they discover is that because Early College High targets students who might not otherwise be considered college material, some of its students are barely ready for high school.

Is her staff on board? It’s a question Valentine will ask herself time and again this year. **Jeffrey Jaroscak**, a coach supplied by KnowledgeWorks Foundation to help get the school off the ground, is the person she confides in most.

He sees the dilemma clearly: “The leadership is working, but sometimes I think Roz is holding the entire place together.”

## Dissonance

As the first semester progresses, uncompleted assignments are piling up among freshmen. The remedy? Valentine and her ninth-grade staff launch Friday Night School in November — a mandatory two hours after school for anyone missing three or more assignments in a week.

The rooms are jammed on the first Friday. Some students work on their assignments. With the work quickly completed, the kids hang out. A few play card games. Some rest their heads on desks, napping. Girls put on makeup or comb their hair.

Although Friday night school reduces the number of missing assignments, staffing soon becomes a struggle. Assessing its success is also a problem.

Valentine pushes her ninth-grade staff along: “What are you using to determine or gauge if this program is successful? Are students coming just to socialize?”

The staff can’t answer her questions, and the program continues. But it doesn’t accomplish its goal. Students are getting their work done in the Friday night sessions, but they’re still not turning assignments in on time.

The staff decides students must make up work and get no credit. But Valentine vetoes the idea. “That’s double punishment,” said Valentine, usually the most ardent disciplinarian of the bunch. “I won’t allow it.”

When teachers don’t come up with another approach for turning the sessions into a more effective deterrent and let the program slide, Valentine doesn’t step in. She decides to let them suffer the consequences.

Within weeks, missing assignments are again on the rise among not only the freshmen but

the missing sophomores as well.

By spring, teachers are barking at students, reminding them to buckle down. Not only are the missing assignments making life stressful, but every week teachers must carve out time to prepare sophomores for the Ohio Graduation Test, helping them with study skills, writing ability and course content.

Throughout the year, Valentine waits for teachers to take the initiative on problems like these. It doesn’t happen quickly, and the friction between the principal and some of her teachers doesn’t help.

Some teachers grumble about her toughness; others interrupt staff meetings trying for a quick laugh. Valentine eyes them down and confronts them at a later meeting, saying, “I like to play as a team member. This is where I’m most comfortable. When that doesn’t happen, it makes me play principal, and I don’t like it.”

Some of the teachers keep waiting for her to lighten up.

It will be a long wait.

Valentine is focused on the early college mission. She demands teamwork, commitment and responsibility from both staff and students. She won’t tolerate less.

Witness her at a November Study Skills class: “Did I lose control somewhere along the line and give it to you?” she asks the class, reminding them of things needed for next week’s session. “The longer it takes everyone to remember, the longer I take to ask the questions. I get paid a salary. I do not get paid by the hour, which means if I have to stay here till six or seven tonight, I will be here. I’m only responsible for myself. If I take action for myself, the rest of you will all fall in.”

She won't tolerate less.

And one by one, they do.

Valentine's tough demeanor doesn't completely hide how deeply she cares.

A native of southeastern Ohio, rooted deep in Appalachia, she is herself a first-generation college student and says she's the poster child for the Early College program. It took her three times to get through college.

"For the first time in my life, I really believe in something," she said. "This is my passion."

But her passion has been tempered by grief. During her first year at Early College, her husband, **Mark**, was diagnosed with cancer and died.

"Since then I have become more of an observer than a participant," Valentine said. She is reluctant to say more and turns away to hide her pain. "It was like I was gone for a while, but I'm back."

She does smile and laugh, but it's always with an eye toward her job. She confronts students about their behavior.

"I swear to God I will meet your boyfriends," she tells two girls for whom she's started the paperwork to revoke their driver's licenses for being continually late to school. "If they are affecting attendance at my Early College, I will meet them."

She tells another student caught in an infraction: "OK, not only do I find you in the college bookstore where you're not supposed to be, but you're buying a candy bar, too. Now go."

But she has the students' devotion. They scamper around her like puppies. Whenever

she is in the hallways, it's "Ms. Valentine. Ms. Valentine, look." They show her their latest grade reports. "Maddie, that's great. All As — that's the first time this year, right? Great."

**Amber Webb**, a 10th-grader says, "Mrs. Valentine should get a Nobel Prize for this. She has done everything to get us to stay and she devotes so much of her time to stay after school."

Despite this, the freshman class is struggling. Many of the students don't have basic math and reading skills. By midwinter, 25 of the 60 freshmen are failing algebra. Poor preparation, problems at home or lack of study skills might be to blame, but at this point teachers and administrators focus on pounding basics into kids' heads. The solution is an early morning math intervention program over several weeks. Twelve freshmen improve, but 13 are still failing by year's end. They'll have to take summer school and get up to speed before next fall.

Unlike regular high schools, everything is accelerated here to earn a high school diploma and an associate's degree in just four years. For many, this is their single hope for rising out of the mire of Lorain County's struggling economy, which is desperately trying to shed its dependence on dying steel and manufacturing-based industries. The enticement is even stronger because the program is free to those selected to attend. But Valentine wants it known that the program is anything but free; the price includes leaving friends and home schools behind for plenty of hard work and no place to hide.

In March, Valentine takes parents to task at a mandatory parent meeting: "If your child is in this school and they are in college courses and they fail college courses, they will not have a high school diploma. The stakes are high. You have to decide as a family what you need to do to be successful."

Perhaps it's because this school is so small and has so few diversions that drama and crisis sometimes seem to be the order of the day.

One day it might be a breakup between a boyfriend and girlfriend; on another, a student comes to school drunk. No drugs are found during a locker sweep, but a student is expelled for having vodka. On yet another day, race issues simmering for months boil over.

In these hallways filled with only 100 students, mistakes seem to echo more loudly.

**Amber Gray**, one of Valentine's prize students, sports several body piercings and can usually be seen wearing plaid pants, toe socks and shirts advertising Rancid, her favorite rock group. Amber, who longs to be a journalist, is often an ambassador to visitors and is pointed out as someone who can speak — and write — eloquently about the school.

In early spring, Amber pens a petition signed by 35 of the sophomore class claiming that some students get preferential treatment. Students have been grumbling about a peer who was never disciplined for taking a teacher's keys and driving her car around the parking lot. Valentine first learns about that student's misdeeds through an anonymous note. The second and louder way she hears about it is through the petition, which doesn't name the student.

The petition blindsides Valentine, but if she has been sucker punched, she doesn't show it. Yet she clearly is not happy about this public way of bringing the problem to light. She walks more forcefully, talks more loudly.

She faces the issue head on, canceling classes all day for students who signed the petition. They have to attend three consecutive sessions to explore their complaints. Her message is clear: things must change and the problem

must be addressed. Now.

"I'm really listening to your concerns," Valentine says, pacing in front of the classroom. "I am not trying to ignore them. I want to talk about the things I heard you were frustrated about. Jennifer, give me a specific example."

"Like when someone is rude and disrespectful."

"Obnoxious," someone adds.

"That's too general," Valentine counters.

Students offer a variety of behaviors: singing in class, talking out, cell phone use, listening to music.

"Interruptions," Valentine writes on the board. "Where are you going?" she says to a student getting up.

"He was going to get some tissue," someone explains. "What's wrong with that?"

"You have to ask to throw something away," Valentine says, deciding to use this as a teachable moment. "The fact that you can get up and walk in front of us, would you do the same if we were sitting in a church pew?"

Disrespect. Discrimination. Lack of accountability. Those are the top three items students say trouble this school.

"Look inside yourself," Valentine says. "You want this school to work, then look inside yourself. Some of you are doing this. It's so easy to complain; some just whine and complain about it."

Before the meeting ends, Valentine turns to the students: "Do not, under any circumstances, think that what you do today changes what I have to do legally. If charges are pressed against this student, he could go to jail. If they aren't pressed, he is out of school for 10 days."

Over the next days, the students meet with counselor **Rosey Wagner** and several other teachers. Students conclude they're also guilty of the things they're accusing the administration of. They take ownership and responsibility.

The student whose treatment provoked the petition is suspended for 10 days. By the time he returns, the mood in the school has changed. Students are working more cooperatively. They are focused on a new drama — passing the Ohio Graduation Test.

The OGT, which Ohio students must pass to earn a high school diploma, measures proficiency in reading, writing, math, science and social studies. Students take the test for the first time in the spring of their sophomore year. Aware that they must score well in all five subject areas, the Lorain County 10th-graders are getting edgy and crack jokes about whether they'll pass or pass out. When a student asks Valentine about an outing to an amusement park, she answers, "We have to find out whether we pass the OGT, or whether we will be going somewhere at all."

One student says, "Our moms are going to be sending us CARE packages down here. It will be like a dormitory until they're over."

Another: "It'll be like prison duty."

Another: "We'll be on full lockdown."

## Signs of hope

Well into the second semester, Valentine is still pushing teachers to do whatever it takes to bring students along. "This isn't a program about anything other than getting these students out and through," she tells her staff. "Our mission is that we're doing everything we can for these students."

She expects extra effort from the teachers.

"Some of us don't understand how they have lived in a continual crisis, but for some that's normal," Valentine explains. "These are kids who live in a crisis mode, but here, they are our purpose; here, they are struggling."

Valentine understands their reality. "These are kids who take care of their parents," she says. "Very few of them have what most people think of as the American family. Two-thirds live with single parents, six have lost parents to cancer, some of their parents are on drugs or alcohol-addicted. There are pregnancies."

By year's end, two students' siblings die tragic deaths. The suicide of another student from a neighboring district jars the lives of several at Early College.

"Resiliency," Valentine sighs. "I am amazed at kids who are able to forget what goes on at home and come to school to work."

Midway through the year, a tangible sign of what these students are working toward arrives. Class rings are in for 10th-graders.

A flood of students stream to Gilmore's classroom. Aside from grades and paperwork, the rings are the first symbols to help them dream beyond the snow outside, the work they're doing, their home lives. Maybe they really will do this.

As **Leah Madding** opens her ring box her eyes pop wide open. She places the ring on her right hand: a perfect starburst of pink. One side of the band is inscribed with "EHS" for Elyria High School, the first graduating class from Early College, and the other with "Early College."

The rest of the year, Leah wears the ring, which she sometimes fingers nervously in class before softly answering a question. Valentine can't believe the rings cost \$350 — 10 times more than hers did. But for many it's a necessity, a

talisman; a visible sign that they are in this for the long haul.

## Leader of the band

In April, to her chagrin, Valentine is still leading her small band of teachers. She's doing too much. She leans on a podium, crutches propped on the wall behind her. She's still recovering from surgery a few weeks earlier for her torn meniscus, the shock absorber for her left knee.

This night, nearly 200 parents and students from various school districts in the county are eager to learn about the school.

Lorain County Early College is currently a blend of two school districts. The first year's students, now sophomores, signed on from the **Elyria City** School District, the county seat. The 2005-06 freshmen came from **Lorain City** Schools to the north. The two communities have such a long history of feuding it's been described as a civil war.

The latest skirmish between the two began in the winter, when Elyria decided to take a year off from the Early College program, primarily because it didn't want to lose the per-pupil funding from the state that follows the student to Early College. Elyria would send students to Early College in the coming years.

But in the spring, Elyria officials are offended when Lorain administrators mass-mail an open letter inviting students across the county, even those attending Elyria, to attend Early College through open enrollment. Elyria officials are angry that their logo appears on the letter without their consent, as if they are endorsing the program. They quickly begin distancing

themselves from Early College, publicly urging students to do the same.

Despite Elyria's plea to students, 18 voice some interest in attending. That could mean a loss of \$90,000 for the Elyria district.

"That's not chump change either," says Valentine, bracing for a fight. "That could be three new teachers."

Valentine knows this is a battle she's not likely to win. She's spent this past year trying to meld one staff out of these two completely different districts, teachers whose hiring is entirely beyond her control and based on union contracts.

But tonight at the podium she has other battles to fight. She's poised to sell her program. Honestly.

"This is a program of hard work," she proclaims. "Attendance is an issue. Tardies count. Absences count."

She scans the roomful of parents and caregivers and says, "Who really is interested in this program — is it you, or is it your child?"

She knows it's vital for the students to be as motivated as their parents. Unless she gets the students on board, Valentine is clear that the program will fail.

"By 10th grade you have lost them. They are starting to grow up and make their own independent choices."

At the end of the evening, a line of students wait to talk with Valentine about coming to Early College. She has won a small victory.

## The sounds of victory

In early June, Valentine sequesters 10th-graders in the college's cafeteria. She's there to announce their results on the OGT, but she's not ready yet.

"I have been excited for five days," she tells them. "Why? I guess I am always going to be your mother. How many of you remember your first day?"

A few share stories: **Samantha Allegier** cried for two weeks straight. **Justin Arbogast** was the politest kid ever. She shushes the crowd.

"This truly is a party. We had 98% passage rate on the OGTs! Everyone in here passed all five OGTs." She beams and the room erupts into cheers, hugs, tears, high fives. There is reason for celebration; they are above the state average in the percentage achieving the two highest designations in every area but science.

Cell phones immediately come out.

"And I will take those cell phones," Valentine says just as swiftly, her authoritative voice gathering respect.

"You didn't just pass. Many of you were at an accelerated or an advanced level. You have worked hard. You passed the OGT. It was painful. You passed college Spanish. You are halfway through this. You are halfway through your college education."

Teachers slice into a large sheet cake boasting "Congratulations Ohio Graduation Test Success." In minutes kids are chattering, tossing down cake and ice cream. Soon, a frosting fight breaks out.

Strong, fierce Roslyn Valentine has lost control. She smiles. This time it's music to her ears.

*About the author: Catherine Gabe is a freelance writer based in Oberlin.*

## Ohio Graduation Test performance 2006

The Early College High Schools (ECHS) initiative seeks to develop new high schools that genuinely engage and encourage populations underrepresented in postsecondary education as a means to increasing the numbers pursuing higher education.

### ECHS performance highlights, fall 2006

- 70% of all students in Early College High Schools have personalized learning plans;
- 96% passed the reading portion of OGT on the first try;
- 96% passed the writing portion of OGT on the first try;
- 94% passed the mathematics portion of OGT on the first try;
- 59% successfully earned college credit by the end of first year;
- 70% successfully earned college credit by end of second year;
- 48% of students are on track to simultaneously attain a high school diploma and complete 60 hours of college credit or an associate's degree.

Taking a data-based redesign approach, KnowledgeWorks has worked with the Ohio Department of Education to finalize a set of data to be collected at all Early College High Schools. This data set covers a total of 10 data points and results are being monitored across all demographic categories. One early indicator is performance on the Ohio Graduation Test.

The schools offer those students the chance to earn two years of college credit during high

school. The first school in the KnowledgeWorks ECHS initiative opened in 2002-03, followed by additional schools in 2003-04 and 2005-06. Three more were on track to open in fall 2007. Since the schools opened, ECHS students have earned a total of 3,808 college credits.

In partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Jobs for the Future, KnowledgeWorks Foundation is supporting the development of an Ohio-based network of eight Early College High Schools. The ECHS initiative tests the idea that intellectual challenge and academic rigor, along with the opportunity to save time and tuition dollars, are powerful ways to motivate students to work hard and succeed in serious intellectual work. As well as increasing the diversity and number of young people who successfully access higher education, ECHS serves as a learning ground for systemic P-16 reform.

Early College High Schools serve students who traditionally might not be college bound, including low-income, first-generation, English language learners and students of color. The schools offer those students the chance to earn two years of college credit during high school. The concept unifies and restructures academic work from ninth grade through the second year of college, challenging the current system of secondary and postsecondary institutions. Students are expected to graduate in four to five years with a high school diploma and two years of college credits.

## What are we learning?

Preliminary qualitative findings from a third-party researcher based on site visits and interviews indicate:

- Early College High Schools cultivate higher academic and behavioral expectations than traditional high schools. They use extended assignments that require “deep critical thinking” and higher levels of quality; a stronger work ethic is required.
- Use of required placements tests and benchmarks ensure students are working at a level of rigor that is higher than at a traditional high school.
- Students at ECHS have closer relationships with their teachers than at traditional high schools; the environment accords students more freedom, which, in turn, increases their

ownership of their high school experience.

- Support and cooperation from the higher education partners are unique supports for ECHS; professors and college students often serve as tutors, and college mentoring programs supplement the extra supports provided by the ECHS.

*For more information on the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, Ohio High School Transformation Initiative or Early College High School Initiative, contact Lisa Duty, KnowledgeWorks Foundation, One West Fourth Street, Suite 200, Cincinnati, OH 45202-3611, (614) 456-6523 or [DutyL@kwfdn.org](mailto:DutyL@kwfdn.org).*

