

EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS



AN ISSUE BRIEF FROM LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD STAFF

ID: 3092

APRIL 2016

OBJECTIVE

Early College High Schools (ECHS) enable students who are least likely to attend college to simultaneously enroll in both high school and college.

KEY FACTS

- ◆ ECHS students enroll in a blended curriculum of high school and college courses.
- ◆ Students can earn 60 college credit hours at no cost to them.
- ◆ In school year 2014–15, school districts operated 106 ECHSs, an increase from the 65 ECHSs in school year 2013–14.

BUDGETARY IMPACT

During the 2012–13 and 2014–15 biennia, the Legislature funded ECHSs through Texas Education Agency (TEA) riders, with \$6.0 million in All Funds appropriated for both ECHS and Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM) initiatives each biennium.

In the 2016–17 biennium, the Legislature funded ECHSs through a TEA rider of \$6.0 million in All Funds and funded T-STEM initiatives using a separate TEA rider.

STATUTORY REFERENCES

The Texas Education Code, Section 29.908

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) defines Early College High Schools (ECHS) as schools that provide the students who are least likely to attend college the learning and support programs that enable them to simultaneously enroll in both high school and college. TEA approved the first ECHS in school year 2003–04. Students in an ECHS enroll in a blended curriculum of high school and college courses. Students have the opportunity to earn an associate's degree or up to 60 college credit hours during their four years at an ECHS. Students do not pay tuition or fees or for textbooks. Although the target population for ECHSs is students least likely to attend college, all students are eligible to participate. In school year 2013–14, 65 ECHSs served 23,390 students in 52 Texas school districts and charter schools, in partnership with 25 colleges, college districts or systems, and universities, located in 13 Regional Education Service Center (ESC) regions. In school year 2014–15, 106 ECHSs operated with a total enrollment of 35,375 students in 82 school districts and charter schools, in partnership with 35 colleges, college districts or systems, and universities, located in 16 ESC regions.

Figure 1 shows ECHS student enrollment in school year 2014–15. A large number of ECHS students are located in the southernmost counties in Texas.

STRUCTURE OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL

An ECHS can be a distinct program on a college campus, a distinct high school campus, or a smaller learning community on a high school campus. The Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Section 102.1091, requires that an ECHS must comply with the assurances in the program's application. The statute requires an ECHS to have its own principal or program director, a liaison with the college that interacts frequently with the ECHS, a counselor, and highly qualified teachers who teach the core high school courses for ECHS students. The school district initiates the development of an ECHS with a higher education institution, and then seeks approval of the partnership with TEA, who reviews and approves the ECHS.

The Texas Administrative Code, Section 102.1091, requires that each participating school district or charter school and higher education institution have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that defines how the funding will be provided for the partnership. The Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Sections 4.84 and 9.144, also require that the MOU include decisions on eligible courses, location of classes, student composition of classes, faculty selection, course curriculum, academic policies, and student support.

The higher education institution must deliver the content for college courses. The school district must ensure that student learning meets the standards of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Typically, school districts coordinate with higher education institutions to ensure that the coursework covers material that fulfills the TEKS.

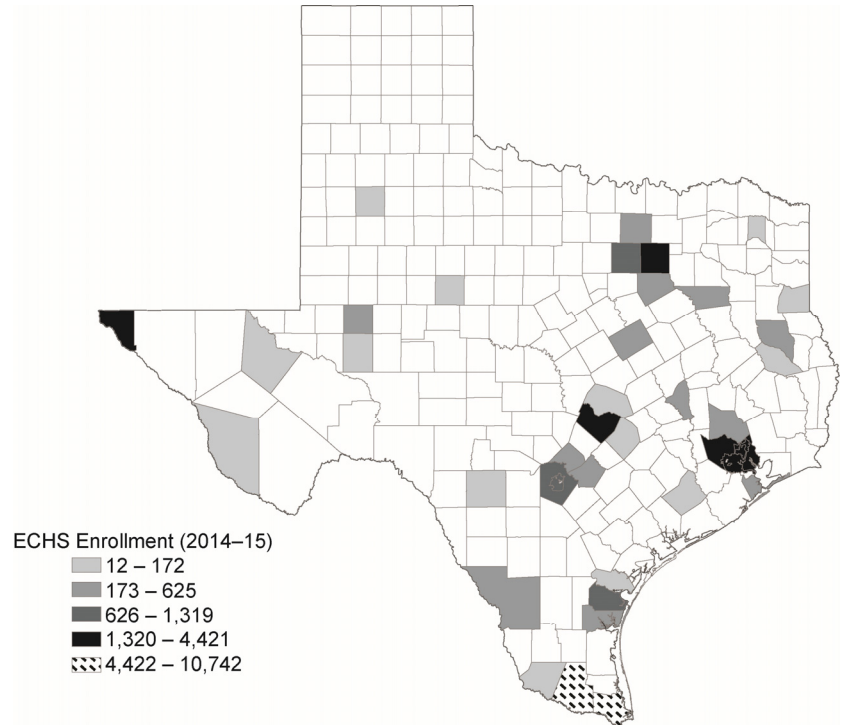
The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) requires that teachers who teach the college-level courses be faculty members at the higher education institution or meet equivalent standards. SACS requires instructors of college-level courses to have a master's

degree or a doctoral degree with 18 graduate hours in the discipline that is being taught. For workforce education courses, SACS requires a bachelor’s degree in the discipline or an associate’s degree with demonstrated competencies in the discipline.

FINANCING EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS AND SECONDARY SCHOOL–PUBLIC COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

The Eighty-second Legislature, Regular Session, 2011, funded ECHSs through a TEA rider, which appropriated \$6.0 million in All Funds for ECHS and Texas Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (T-STEM) initiatives. During the 2012–13 biennium, funding expended specifically for ECHSs included \$1,551,516 in technical assistance and \$21,865 in grants to schools. TEA spent the remaining \$4.4 million on items that simultaneously benefitted ECHS/T-STEM initiatives or were specifically for T-STEM initiatives. Technical assistance included coaches who provided guidance, professional development, curriculum support, and training for ECHSs. In the 2012–13 biennium, TEA awarded grants to mentor schools that provide support to new ECHSs. The Eighty-third Legislature, Regular Session, 2013, funded ECHSs through a TEA rider that appropriated \$6.0 million in All Funds for ECHS and T-STEM initiatives in the 2014–15 biennium. Of the \$6.0 million appropriated, TEA expended \$3.0 million for ECHS and \$3.0 million for T-STEM initiatives. The Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015, funded ECHSs through the General Appropriations Act, 2016–17 Biennium, TEA, Rider 52, which appropriated \$6.0 million All Funds to ECHSs, with T-STEM funded through a separate rider.

**FIGURE 1
EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN TEXAS COUNTIES
SCHOOL YEAR 2014–15**



SOURCE: Texas Education Agency.

ECHSs differ from other dual-credit programs. Through school year 2014–15, according to the Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Section 4.161, and the Texas Education Code, Section 29.908, a student attending an ECHS was able enroll in college courses in grade nine, whereas dual-credit students had to wait until grade 11 to enroll in college courses. However, House Bill 2812, Eighty-fourth Legislature, 2015, effective for school year 2015–16, authorizes students to enroll in dual-credit courses starting in grade nine. Unlike other dual-credit programs, ECHSs are required to provide support to students, although no statutory definition of support has been made.

DUAL-CREDIT PROGRAMS

SUCCESS OF EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOLS

A 2014 American Institutes for Research (AIR) report found that early college students were significantly more likely to enroll in college and earn a college degree than comparison students. During the study, 81.0 percent of early college students enrolled in college, compared with 72.0 percent of comparison students. In addition, 25.0 percent of early college students earned a college degree (typically an associate’s degree), compared with only 5.0 percent of comparison students. Although Texas ECHSs were not included in the study, these results show the positive effects of similar programs.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- Texas Education Agency: www.tea.state.tx.us
- Educate Texas: www.edtx.org
- Texas Early College High Schools: www.txechs.com

- Legislative Budget Board interactive graphics: public.tableau.com/profile/state.of.texas.lbb#!/vizhome/EarlyCollegeHighSchools/ECHSDashboard

CONTACT

Scott Rizzo Email: IssueBrief@lbb.state.tx.us