

# Minnesota Principals' Academy -- Action Learning Project

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## Early Early College-Readiness: The Effectiveness of the Early College Prep Course at Chippewa Middle School

### Abstract

This action research project came about as an effort to determine if the Early College Prep program offered at Chippewa Middle School was successful at pushing college-level readiness skills down to seventh and eighth grade, thus enabling students who score in the 30-70th percentile to access Mounds View High School's Early College Program and college-level course work without support classes in grades nine and ten. Early College Prep (ECP) has been offered to Chippewa Middle School since the 2013-14 school year, and those students are currently enrolled at Mounds View High School. This study looks at whether those students were still required to take a support class during ninth or tenth grade, whether those students enrolled (or intended to enroll) in college-credit bearing courses during high school, and how those students feel that ECP prepared them for some of the non-cognitive skills required to be successful in college level courses.

Measuring the effectiveness of Early College Prep involved examining lists of students and their high school transcripts as well as processing survey data where the students themselves provided insights into their experiences with ECP. In general, students who took ECP at the middle level still had to enroll in the high school support classes in order to gain access to the Early College curriculum and the opportunity to earn college credit. However, large numbers of students (96.4%) who took ECP did either access college level course work by their sophomore year or intend to at some point during high school. It is unclear whether taking ECP is what resulted in students taking college level courses during high school or if that can be attributed to other factors. Approximately sixty percent of students surveyed did indicate that Early College Prep was helpful or significantly helpful in preparing them for the rigor of college courses in high school. Finally, students reported feeling that ECP assisted them in developing the necessary non-cognitive skills required for college level course-work such as collaboration and self-advocacy. Overall, however, it is still too early fully measure the impact of ECP, as the majority of the students who had access to the course or who are currently accessing the course are not far enough into their high school careers to fully participate in Early College at Mounds View High School.

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**Vision:** Preparing ALL Students for Post-Secondary Success

**Background/Context:** As part of Mounds View Public School's equity promise -- that the school district implements programs and services that offer success to all students in the district regardless of race, class, or disability -- the two district high schools became the first schools in the state of Minnesota to offer an Early College Program where students could earn an Associate's Degree while they were still in high school. This was established through a

partnership with Anoka Ramsey Community College (ARCC), and it especially targeted students in the academic middle, who traditionally have not had opportunities to access college-credit bearing courses while in high school, by offering support courses during high school required to qualify for Early College.

**Program Rationale:** In an effort to get support to students before high school, the Early College Prep (ECP) course was created for seventh and eighth graders. Ideally, the supports offered in middle school would alleviate the need for high school students to give up an elective slot during their freshman and sophomore years to take a required support course that allowed them to take ARCC courses. Further, ECP would intentionally teach non-cognitive skills that would better prepare students for the rigor of college level coursework.

**What We Did:** We examined the transcripts of former ECP students to determine if taking ECP in grades seven and/or eight made it so students did not need “Seminar” and/or “Foundations” in grades nine and ten. We determined if students did enroll in college-credit bearing courses. We surveyed former ECP students and asked them about their intentions to take college courses in high school, how they felt ECP prepared them for that experience, and to what degree they believed ECP helped them develop skills in collaboration, reflection, engagement, advocacy, and exploration.

**What We Found:** The vast majority of students who took ECP at the middle level still had to enroll in the high school support classes in order to gain access to the Early College curriculum and the opportunity to earn college credit. Large numbers of students (96.4%) who took ECP did either access college level course work by their sophomore year or intend to at some point during high school. Sixty percent of students who responded to the survey reported that ECP was helpful or significantly helpful in preparing them for the rigor of college courses in high school. Finally, the majority of students reported feeling that ECP assisted them very much or a moderate amount in developing the necessary non-cognitive skills required for college level course-work such as collaboration (75%), engagement (62.5%), self-advocacy (67.9%), reflection (64.3%), and exploration (62.5%).

**Implications for Practice:** There is simply not enough data to determine whether or not Early College Prep course at the middle level is effective in supporting the Early College Program at the high school. In order to truly determine that, the definition of success must be agreed upon (for example is success: students will not be required to take support classes at the high school regardless of whether they earn college credit; taking any college level coursework during high school; earning college credit at some point during high school; reporting successful acquisition of non-cognitive skills; and/or seeing evidence of enhanced non-cognitive skills. Then, it must be determined if taking ECP was the factor caused that success for students. Finding additional evidence of ECP’s positive impact will enable district leaders to expand the program so all qualified middle school students have the opportunity to take the course. If that evidence doesn’t exist, then the district should suspend the program and put those resources into other ways to encourage college-readiness at the middle level.