



# Learning from the Past: Dual Credit

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*This study involved identifying, categorizing, and comparing critical incidents related to qualifying dual credit high school students' decisions to enroll or not to enroll in dual credit coursework in either a traditional or early college high school. The purpose of the study was (a) to identify the reasons qualifying students decide to enroll in dual credit courses in a traditional or early college high school and (b) to identify the reasons qualifying students choose the traditional versus the early college high school. For this qualitative study, the research method employed was the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) developed by John Flanagan in 1954. The study employed a written survey to obtain demographic information and the critical incident data. The study was conducted by appointed high school counselors at both high schools—traditional and early college. Both schools were located within the same school district. Total participants in the study totaled 139. The researcher, along with the help of a dual credit expert panel, identified, categorized, counted, and reported a total of 643 incidents: 340 effective and 303 ineffective critical incidents. For both enrolled traditional and early college high school students, "Incentives and Challenges" was the most frequent reason students cited for enrolling in dual credit. Both types of students also indicated "Culture/Atmosphere" as the top reason they chose to attend one school versus the other. Not enrolled traditional high school students cited the "Advanced Placement Course" category as the top reason they chose not to enroll in dual credit. These students also cited "Culture/Atmosphere" as the main reason they chose the traditional versus the early college high school. Not enrolled early college high school students cited "Personal Hindrances" as the key reason for not enrolling in dual credit. This same category was also cited as the top reason that early college students gave for choosing the early college versus the traditional high school.*

**Keywords:** dual credit, high school students, early college high school, critical incidents

## INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the state of Texas began an aggressive campaign to increase the number of Texans participating in higher education. This initiative, known as Closing the Gaps, was adopted in the year 2000 by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) in order to increase student participation rates in college by an additional 500,000 students by the year 2015 (THECB, 2000). The educational campaign was partly a result of the need to increase college enrollment numbers to improve the Texas economy. In 2006, the initiative was revised to increase participation by 630,000 students so as to reflect updated demographic projections (THECB, 2008). Since 2000, Texas legislators set about encouraging, approving, and implementing programs that would allow students to not only pursue higher education but also allow for a seamless transition between high school and college. One such way to accomplish this goal was through dual credit coursework. Dual credit enables qualifying high school juniors and seniors to obtain college credit while still enrolled in a high school setting, thus giving students a jump-start on higher education, while also preparing them for more rigorous college-level coursework.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

It is well-known that there is a positive correlation between one's educational level and earning potential. Studies have repeatedly shown the benefits of education as it relates to income as noted by a recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) study conducted in 2009 (BLS, 2009). The report indicated that those with only a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of \$626 per week, and those with a bachelor's degree had median weekly earnings of \$1,025 per week, representing an increase of almost 40% per week. Furthermore, unemployment rates were 8.6% for those

possessing a high school diploma compared to 5.2% for those possessing a bachelor's degree (BLS, 2009).

While there was a clear economic benefit in continuing one's education beyond high school, the trend of pursuing a higher education has not been one that is always readily adopted by many high school students. Reportedly there have been a number of factors that can discourage and prohibit high school students from taking their education to the next level. These factors included a highly detailed and confusing admissions process, high tuition costs, and the lack of availability of aid and opportunity cost (Hahn & Price, 2008).

One way to ease the transition process between high school and college is through the dual credit program. Dual credit is a partnership between high schools and community colleges or universities that enables students to earn high school credit and college credit simultaneously. Texas legislators and academic leaders have realized that dual credit programs are one way to increase college enrollment numbers. Dual credit programs in the state of Texas have increased in popularity since the year 2000. In 2005, Texas legislators passed a law requiring all school districts in the state of Texas to offer a minimum of twelve hours of dual credit coursework to their students by the year 2008 (Texas P-16 Council, 2007). Since the fall of 2000, dual credit enrollment numbers in the state of Texas have continued to increase. In just ten years, enrollment has grown from 17,784 students in the fall of 2000 to 91,303 in the fall of 2009 (THECB Data Center, 2010). Interestingly, while opportunities are now readily available for Texas high school students to enroll in dual credit coursework, many still do not take advantage of this option, triggering the need to examine further the reasons students do not take advantage of this opportunity.

One reason for the lack of interest in dual credit coursework can be found in the attitudes and actions of senior high school students. The senior year of high school can often be described as dismissive, as students tend to be lackadaisical and often take less rigorous courses. This ever-prevalent trend was brought to light in October 2001 by a report conducted by the National Commission on the High School Senior Year. In the report, the Commission recommended that school districts provide more rigorous courses and that students be encouraged to enroll in such courses. Additionally, the rigorous courses allow for a seamless transition in order for students to further their education or work. Furthermore, the Commission recommended that there be a greater opportunity for students to experience college-level coursework (National Commission on the High School Senior Year, October, 2001). In the state of Texas, legislators realized the importance of a college educated citizenry and took action, such as the passage of House Bill 1 in 2005 that required all school districts to provide the opportunity for students to earn at least twelve semester hours of college credit in high school and to encourage high school students to pursue their education beyond the secondary level.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Texas legislators adopted several initiatives that were designed to assist the state of Texas in becoming a leader in higher education. In October 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) approved the Closing the Gaps initiative that outlined four major goals for Texas higher education: (a) Closing the Gaps in Participation, (b) Closing the Gaps in Success, (c) Closing the Gaps in Excellence, and (d) Closing the Gaps in Research (THECB, 2000). With the first goal, Closing the Gaps in Participation, the Coordinating Board set out to focus on areas that would increase participation rates in higher education. With the second goal, Closing the Gaps in Success, one of the areas the Coordinating Board focused on was to create incentives and requirements for seamless student transition among high schools, community and technical colleges, as well as universities. Based on these goals, dual credit coursework is an important concept as it lends itself toward achieving goals one and two of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Closing the Gaps initiatives.

In order to enroll in dual credit courses, a high school student had to meet the requirements set forth by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB, 2003). The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board stated that students were eligible to enroll in dual credit courses during their junior and senior years if they had demonstrated college readiness by attaining the minimum passing standards under the provisions of the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) or by demonstrating that he or she is exempt based upon the provisions made by the Texas Success Initiative (THECB, 2003). Junior and senior high school students would be eligible to enroll in dual credit courses if they had attained a score of 2200 in English Language Arts and/or Mathematics with a sub-score of three on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) examination. Additionally, students must pass all required prerequisite courses prior to enrolling in dual credit courses (THECB, 2003).



Although a student may qualify to enroll in dual credit each year, he or she might not take advantage of this higher education opportunity for financial reasons. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, neither the Texas Education Agency nor school districts across the state of Texas are required to provide funding for dual credit courses (THECB, 2003). Students who wish to enroll in dual credit courses are responsible for paying for tuition and books themselves; as a result, students who are economically disadvantaged may miss out on the opportunity to obtain college credit while still enrolled in high school. In recent years, there has been an effort by many traditional high schools and colleges and universities to offer dual credit scholarships to economically disadvantaged students. Additionally, colleges and universities have elected to waive all or part of the tuition and fees, as evidenced most recently with the birth of the Early College High School concept in 2003 (THECB, 2003).

The Early College High School was designed to allow students to earn simultaneously a high school diploma and an associate's degree tuition free. Generally, students at early college high schools have been first-generation college goers, economically disadvantaged, and typically members of minority groups who have been underrepresented in higher education. The number of Texas school districts and/or charter schools partnering with colleges and universities to provide this opportunity for their students has continued to rise (Jobs for the Future [JFF], 2010). While the numbers of students participating in dual credit coursework in both the traditional high school and early college high school have risen, there continue to be a number of qualifying students who do not take advantage of this opportunity.

Dual credit programs in both the traditional high school and early college high school have the potential to break educational barriers that prevent students from pursuing higher education. Barriers such as inadequate financial resources and limited course offerings are no longer issues that students once faced; however, data showed that students who meet the eligibility requirements to enroll in dual credit courses are continuing to decline the opportunity to begin their college careers while still enrolled in high school. For this reason, additional inquiries were made to ascertain the reasons qualifying dual credit students choose to enroll or not to enroll in dual credit coursework, particularly when a traditional and early college high school exists within the same school district.

This research examined the following questions:

1. What specific reasons do qualifying dual credit students give for choosing to enroll in dual credit courses in a traditional high school?
2. Why do qualifying dual credit students choose the traditional high school over the early college high school?
3. What specific reasons do qualifying dual credit students give for choosing not to enroll in dual credit courses in a traditional high school?
4. Why do qualifying dual credit students choose to remain at a traditional high school rather than enroll in an early college high school?
5. What specific reasons do qualifying dual credit students give for choosing to enroll in dual credit courses in an early college high school?
6. Why do qualifying dual credit students choose the early college high school over the traditional high school?
7. What specific reasons do qualifying dual credit students give for choosing not to enroll in dual credit courses in an early college high school?
8. Why do qualifying dual credit students choose to remain at an early college high school rather than enroll in a traditional high school?

## METHOD OF PROCEDURE

For this study, the researchers employed a qualitative research design in order to obtain the data needed to answer the research questions regarding dual credit courses. The purpose of this study was to identify causes leading public high school students to enroll or not to enroll in dual credit courses in either the traditional high school or the early college high school. This study focused on junior and senior students enrolled in an English course at two types of

Texas public high schools, traditional and early college. Both high schools were located within the same school district. Students met the criteria for dual credit enrollment as set for the by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB, 2003).

In order to obtain the data, the researchers employed the data gathering method technique known as the Critical Incident Technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954). Specifically, the researcher developed and distributed a CIT survey to all qualifying dual credit students whether enrolled or not enrolled in a dual credit course. A brief overview of the steps and procedures that were taken to obtain the data are as follows: (a) Critical Incident Technique Overview, (b) Creation of Survey Instrument, (c) Selection of Dual Credit Participants, (d) Data Collection Process, (e) Implementation of Expert Panel, (f) Cataloging of Data, (g) Study Findings, (h) Study Sample Population Identifiers, and (i) Treatment of Data.

### Critical Incident Technique Overview

At some point in every individual's life, decisions are made that determine the path one will ultimately follow. These decisions can be measured through a qualitative approach, such as that of Flanagan's Critical Incident Technique (CIT), in order to study their importance and impact on one's life. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was developed by John Flanagan in 1954 as a systematic, inductive, open ended procedure for eliciting verbal or written information from respondents (Flanagan, 1954). Flanagan described the CIT method as a flexible set of procedures for "collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems" (Norman, Redfern, Tomalin, & Oliver, 1992, p. 591).

### Creation of Survey Instrument

The researchers constructed and distributed a critical incident survey to those students who met the criteria to enroll in a dual credit English course at two Texas public high schools within the same school district. A school district located in a north central Texas town was chosen due to the fact that the school district offered two types of high school settings for its students—a traditional high school and an early college high school. Additionally, both campuses provided a diverse student population. The pen and paper survey was distributed to students at both high schools by qualified counselors who had been trained by the researcher.

### Selection of Dual Credit Participants

Working with both counselors at the traditional high school and the early college high school, the researchers obtained a list of junior and senior students who were enrolled in an English course and who had met the criteria for dual credit English enrollment for the fall of 2011. Counselors at both schools utilized the test scores students received on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) examination during their sophomore year to determine if the student was eligible for dual credit coursework. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, students must obtain the following scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) examination to qualify for English dual credit enrollment: English Language Arts, 2200, and a sub-score of three on the writing portion of the examination (THECB, 2003). Once the number of qualifying students was determined by the high school counselors, parental consent was obtained prior to the administration of the survey.

### Data Collection Process

Prior to conducting the survey, the researchers obtained a signed commitment form from the superintendent of the school district and the principal at each high school. Once all commitment forms were received, the researchers contacted the lead counselor at each high school and requested that a list of qualifying dual credit English students be developed for the study. All students remained anonymous as the researchers asked the counselors at each school to give each participating student a participant code. The researchers provided parental consent forms for the counselor to send home to the parents of qualifying dual credit English students so that the survey could be administered. At no time did the researchers have contact with the students during the selection process nor during the administration of the survey.

Surveys were dispensed by the high school counselor at each high school to qualifying students for whom parental permission had been obtained. Furthermore, the surveys were dispensed on a specified date as agreed upon by both the researchers and the counselor at each high school campus and at a time and internal campus location that



best suited the needs of the counselor, students and English instructors. All eligible students were informed by their counselor that they did not have to take part in the survey or that they could elect to answer only the questions of their choosing contained in the survey. Because students were given a participant code, the identities of all students participating in the survey remained confidential. Once the surveys were complete, the researcher picked up the surveys in a sealed envelope on a date agreed upon by both the researcher and the counselor.

### Implementation of Expert Panel

The researchers utilized a panel of experts who were versed in dual credit programs in the state of Texas to assist with the categorization of the overall themes that emerged from the student surveys. Additionally, the panel had an understanding of both the traditional high school and early college high school. The panel consisted of the following individuals: the lead counselor at the traditional high school; the lead counselor at the early college high school; the instructional dean at the local community college; a dual credit English professor; and a professor from the Department of Educational Leadership at Texas A&M University-Commerce. The researcher provided the panel with the necessary training needed to understand the Critical Incident Technique method so that they could correctly categorize the overall themes that emerged from the student surveys.

### Cataloguing of Data

One of the researchers catalogued the data by placing each participant's response into the categories and/or themes that naturally emerged from the surveys. Once catalogued, the researcher reviewed the data collectively with the expert panel to ensure that the data had been placed into the appropriate category or theme.

### Study Findings

After reviewing the data and agreeing on the emerging themes, the factors that promoted, as well as prevented, students from enrolling in a dual credit English course in either a traditional high school or early college high school were identified and reported. The data was catalogued into each appropriate theme and counted to determine the frequency of themes.

### Study Sample Population Identifiers

The researchers provided a description of the study sample population for reporting purposes. Study sample population identifiers that were reported included gender, age, ethnicity, education level of mother and father, as well as the participating student's future college plans. Data were then recorded according to whether a student was enrolled or not enrolled in a dual credit English course in either the traditional high school or the early college high school.

### Treatment of the Data

To present the findings of this study, data was shown both visually and in text format. Data was represented visually through the use of tables. Furthermore, through the use of text, the researcher provided an in-depth explanation of the findings at the conclusion of the study. By utilizing both methods the researchers were able to explain the overall themes and categories that helped to identify why qualifying dual credit English students choose to enroll or not to enroll in dual credit coursework in either a traditional high school or early college high school.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Based upon the findings of this research study, the following conclusions are provided for each research question.

### Question One: Traditional High School Student Enrolled Research

The "Incentives and Challenges" category played a key role in a traditional high school student's decision to enroll in dual credit coursework. The ability for a student to earn college credit was the reason that was most cited for enrolling in a dual credit class because college credit was guaranteed as long as the student obtained a grade of "C" or higher in the class. Additionally, students also frequently referred to the financial savings that are afforded to them when taking a dual credit class. Because high schools often partner with local community colleges for their dual credit programs, students reap the financial savings of community college tuition and fees which are significantly less than



that of a four year university or college. Many students also noted that dual credit coursework provided an academic challenge. The level of rigor in a dual credit course enables students to experience a college level course and become acclimated with college level expectations.

It is important to note that the traditional high school utilized for this study placed equal weight with regard to Grade Point Average (GPA) points for both dual credit and advanced placement courses. For this reason, many students did not refer to obtaining "Extra GPA Points" as a primary reason for choosing dual credit over advanced placement courses.

The advantage of an "Early College Start" and "College Readiness" was also a key incentive for students to enroll in dual credit. A large number of student respondents referred to the benefit of graduating from high school with a number of college credits and being able to enter college ahead of the game. These same students also believed that being college ready would allow them to have a more enjoyable first year academic experience while in college.

Based on the benefits associated with dual credit, high school administrators and counselors must develop a more efficient plan of communicating the advantages of dual credit to both parents and students, as many students who qualify for dual credit do not take advantage of the opportunities it offers. Community college counselors and dual credit coordinators should work with high school administrators to develop a plan that educates more parents on the benefits of dual credit. This is crucial as the "Family/Friend/Teacher Influence" subcategory located within category one, "Incentives and Challenges," only included five responses. Parents simply do not know about dual credit benefits. Administrators from both the high school and community college could host dual credit parent orientations in the evening to notify parents that their child qualifies for dual credit and explain the benefits of enrolling in the program. Another option to educate parents would be to contact them via phone, either individually or through an automated phone message. High school counselors should also counsel dual credit eligible students one-on-one during school hours to ensure they fully understand the program, how to go about enrolling in the program, and to ensure students are not intimidated by the process.

### Question Two: Traditional High School Student Enrolled Research

The "Traditional High School Culture/Atmosphere" category played a significant role in a traditional high school student's decision to enroll in a traditional versus early college high school. Students cited the ability to participate in extra-curricular activities, followed by the traditional high school experience, as the top two reasons for choosing to attend a traditional high school. The number and variety of outside activities offered by the traditional high school, such as band, athletics, drama, and choir, was a key factor in a student deciding to remain at the traditional high school. The perception that the traditional high school somehow offered more than that of an early college high school in the form of outside interests should be investigated more thoroughly by both traditional and early college high school counselors and administrators. Counselors at both types of schools should provide brochures to parents and students on all activities offered, academic and social, so that students can make a more informed decision. The traditional high school experience was also referred to many times by respondents. The ability for students to attend athletic events, such as a football game, and cheer on one's alma mater was found to be important and valuable.

The thought of a traditional high school student leaving behind his/her friends to attend the early college high school played a considerable part in the decision to remain at the traditional high school. Twenty-five percent of survey respondents alluded to "Friends" being the reason for their desire to enroll in dual credit at the traditional versus the early college high school. Oftentimes high school aged students would rather cling to the security of the known than step outside of their comfort zone into the world of the unknown. This finding proved to be quite interesting as high school counselors and administrators from both types of campuses must now take into account the simple aspect of student friendships playing a major role in a student choosing one high school over another. A simple solution may be for upper-classmen from both types of high schools to share their stories with younger students and how they overcame change in a positive manner. Counselors may also want to investigate assigning incoming freshman students to a junior or senior student mentor to minimize the intimidation that change brings.

### Question Three: Traditional High School Student Not Enrolled Research

"Advanced Placement Course" and "Financial Circumstances" were the two major obstacles that traditional high



school students identified that prevented them from enrolling in dual credit. Nearly 25% of students responded that they believed that Advanced Placement (AP) courses provided more challenging and rigorous coursework than that of dual credit. Perception also played a role in one's choice not to enroll in dual credit as students perceived AP courses as more prestigious. Furthermore, the notion that AP courses are more widely accepted by colleges and universities across the United States was another deciding factor to decline the dual credit opportunity.

The role of the high school counselor in educating students in an unbiased manner on the advantages and disadvantages of advanced placement and dual credit is crucial. Counselors and administrators must be willing to immerse themselves in both college credit programs and provide students and parents with enough objective information for them to make an educated, informed decision. The role of counselors should be to inform, and not to sway, students one way or another based on their personal opinions and preferences.

A student's financial circumstances also weighed heavily on the decision to enroll in dual credit. Many students simply did not have the funds to pay for dual credit tuition, fees, and textbooks. Ironically enough, several students mentioned that they knew the benefits of enrolling in dual credit and that it would save them money in the long run. Students also made mention of the fact that Advanced Placement (AP) exams were less expensive should a student decide to take the AP exam at the end of the course. Lastly, students feared that the financial benefit of enrolling in a dual credit course did not outweigh the risk of credit transfer.

High school and community college counselors should provide students and parents with a comparison chart that shows the long-term savings one would experience when enrolling in dual credit in a community college versus that of a four year college or university. Another consideration would be for the high school to partner with local businesses and charitable organizations to provide dual credit scholarships for students who qualify. One such charitable organization may be the school district's education foundation, if one exists, and another idea would be for the community college to provide scholarships through fundraisers. Students should also understand that passing an AP exam does not guarantee college credit. Counselors should provide students with a list of colleges and universities and the AP exam scores required by each college in order to obtain college credit, since many vary. By the same token, counselors should also have a document showing students and parents the colleges and universities that will accept the dual credit courses being offered.

#### Question Four: Traditional High School Student Not Enrolled Research

Traditional high school students who were qualified to enroll in dual credit and chose not to enroll at the early college high school cited some of the same reasons as their enrolled counterparts. The desire to experience the "Traditional High School Culture/Atmosphere" outweighed the benefits of enrolling in dual credit at an early college high school where tuition is waived. Once again, students cited the ability to participate in extracurricular activities as the number one reason for choosing to remain at the traditional campus. This reason was closely followed by "Academic Offerings." Outside activities offered by the traditional high school, such as band, athletics, drama, and choir, were key factors in students wishing to remain at the traditional high school.

The variety of academic offerings also played a part in student decision making. The early college high school did not offer advanced placement courses and other academic programs such as cosmetology, welding, and teacher preparation courses. Furthermore, the early college high school offered a number of science, technology, and math electives, all of which traditional high school students did not show interest. The "Traditional High School Experience" was also referred to by respondents. The student's desire to be a part of the tradition and history of a traditional high school was important enough to forgo enrolling in an early college high school. Based on these findings, the early college high school must more clearly demonstrate their offerings, academic and social, to potential students. This can be done online via the school's website, with printed and electronic brochures, and through offering individual and small group campus tours and meetings.

The notion of leaving behind one's friends to attend the early college high school once again played a considerable part in a student's decision to remain at the traditional high school. "Friends" was the second highest category mentioned as the reason for not enrolling in dual credit at the early college high school. Yet again, students preferred the security of the known over stepping outside of their comfort zone into the world of the unknown. High school coun-

selors and administrators from both types of campuses must now take into account the simple aspect of student friendships playing a major role in a student choosing one high school over another. The ability to clearly demonstrate the advantages of the early college high school in the short and long term to students must be effective, since emotions such as loss of friendships effect decision making. Perhaps one of the best ways to reach students who are considering entering the early college high school might be for current early college high school students to share their personal testimonies. Oftentimes, students will listen and connect with someone their own age which in turn may make them feel more at ease about leaving behind the familiarity of the traditional high school. Counselors may also want to investigate assigning incoming freshman students to a junior or senior student mentor to minimize the intimidation that change brings.

### Question Five: Early College High School Student Enrolled Research

Like traditional high school students, early college high school students also cited “Incentives and Challenges” as the key factor in their decision to enroll in dual credit coursework. The difference between the two types of students was that early college students believed that being academically challenged and prepared was more of an incentive to enroll in dual credit coursework than obtaining college credit and experiencing financial savings. Early college students cited the financial aspect of free college tuition as an incentive only 15% of the time. Ironically, the ability for early college students to enroll in college level courses and experience college level rigor was the drawing factor to enroll in the early college high school, and based on the survey respondents, free college tuition appeared to be a bonus. Counselors may wish to emphasize to students and parents in greater detail the academic challenge that enrolling in dual credit at an early college high school offers.

“Early College Start” ranked second in most effective responses. Since such a large group of students indicated that the ability to obtain their associates degree and get an “early start” on their college careers was important, counselors should also provide this information when explaining the differences between a traditional and early college high school. Given that early college high schools offer dual credit in every subject area and traditional high schools are often times limited, the early college high school poses a clear advantage with regard to dual credit offerings. Parents and students must have clear information in order to understand the value that obtaining both high school and college credit simultaneously holds, which includes saving money and shortening the time to complete degree requirements.

### Question Six: Early College High School Student Enrolled Research

The “Early College High School Culture/Atmosphere” category played a significant role in a student’s decision to enroll in the early college versus traditional high school. Small class size and student population was a major draw for student attendance, followed by the perception that the environment was superior both academically and socially. To communicate these ideals, counselors could ask current early college students to share their personal testimonies with those students who are considering attending the campus. Furthermore, early college high school counselors may also want to offer campus tours led by the students themselves. Allowing students to connect with one another may assist apprehensive students and parents to feel more comfortable about the possibility of attending an early college campus.

Once more, early college high school students cited “Incentives and Challenges” as their reason for choosing the early college over the traditional high school. Financial incentives and the early college option were key deciding factors that prompted students to enroll in the early college high school. Since the early college high school model is relatively new, many parents and students may not realize that all dual credit courses are tuition free. Furthermore, the ability for a student to obtain up to two years of college credit and gain an early start on college saves both time and money and will enable students to embark on their careers much sooner. This finding indicated that counselors needed to clearly explain, more than once, the financial benefits of attending the early college high school.

### Question Seven: Early College High School Student Not Enrolled Research

Since the overwhelming majority of students who attend an early college high school enroll in dual credit coursework, there was a very small population of students who were not enrolled in dual credit English. Of those students who were not enrolled, many mentioned personal hindrances as the factor that kept them from enrolling in dual





credit English. Many students who enroll in early college high schools come from homes in which a high school diploma is the highest degree attained. The sheer fact that these students may be the first to experience college in their family may be intimidating. Counselors must work with students to provide academic and mental support and offer plenty of encouragement to students who may suffer from fear of failure. When considering the early college option, students and parents must be assured that tutoring is available and that faculty and staff are there to support and promote student success.

Lack of information was the second category that was touted most by students. Students suggested that they were unaware of their eligibility to enroll in dual credit English or they did not know where to sign up for the class. Counselors must do a better job in promoting dual credit to those students who qualify even if that means counseling students individually or in small groups.

### Question Eight: Early College High School Student Not Enrolled Research

Early college students who chose not to enroll in dual credit at the traditional high school offered the same reasons for not enrolling in the coursework at the early college high school. Personal hindrances, including lack of self esteem and holding an after-school job, played a part in student decision making. Early college high school administrators and counselors must work to alleviate student and parent fears of academic failure by assuring them that the school will work with students to promote academic success.

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings and conclusions for this research study have brought about the following implications that should be considered:

1. The findings of this study indicated that the eighth grade year is a pivotal turning point in a student's high school career since one must make the decision to enter the traditional or early college high school by the start of his/her ninth grade year. Many times, students and parents simply do not have enough information to make an informed decision about either type of high school campus.
2. High school and community college counselors and administrators must work closely with eighth grade students and parents to provide accurate and detailed information about traditional and early college high schools. Parents and students must be able to objectively learn the advantages and disadvantages of attending each campus, including academic and athletic offerings, cost of tuition, fees and books, and the social activities offered by each. Information could be distributed via parent letters, automated phone messages, and parent-student campus information nights. Should an information night be held, upperclassmen from each campus should be available to answer questions and provide information from their point of view.
3. Students who choose the traditional high school route are eligible to enroll in dual credit at the start of their junior year. High school counselors must work to quickly identify those students who are dual credit eligible. This can be done by running a simple report on the school district's Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Notices of eligibility may be sent home via a parent letter, along with a student's TAKS scores, and students can be counseled one-on-one and in small groups. Other ways to communicate include an automated phone message, email, or phone call.
4. Since the number of students who qualify for dual credit may significantly outnumber high school counseling staff, a plan must be put into place by high school administrators that provides for additional help for counselors during the dual credit notification period.
5. Community colleges and high schools should partner together and offer parent information sessions to clearly outline the benefits of dual credit.
6. High schools should partner with their local education foundation to provide dual credit scholarships to assist students in paying for dual credit tuition and fees. Furthermore, community colleges should also explore ways to raise funds for dual credit scholarships through events such as a charity golf tournament, black-tie galas or other activities.

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