

Early College High Schools

Overview

According to the [Colorado Department of Higher Education](#), only 61% of adults ages 25–64 have earned a credential beyond a high school diploma as of 2020. Combined with the fact that Colorado is ranked third nationally for jobs requiring postsecondary education or training for employment underscores the importance of Early College High Schools (ECHS). This school model, [established in Colorado in 2009](#), requires students to enroll in and complete secondary and postsecondary courses while in high school making college education more accessible and affordable.

There are [18 Early College High Schools in Colorado](#), including district-run school and charter schools. The Early College model is supported by an innovative funding structure. Given that students enrolled in an ECHS are pursuing a postsecondary degree, they can allocate their [College Opportunity Fund](#) (COF) stipends for each college course taken. This funding is in addition to the per-pupil revenue (PPR), the high schools receive for the typical student count. Early colleges must apply for redesignation every five years, or sooner if requested by the State Board of Education.



THERE ARE
**18 EARLY COLLEGE
HIGH SCHOOLS**
IN COLORADO
**6 OF WHICH
ARE TITLE I
SCHOOLS**

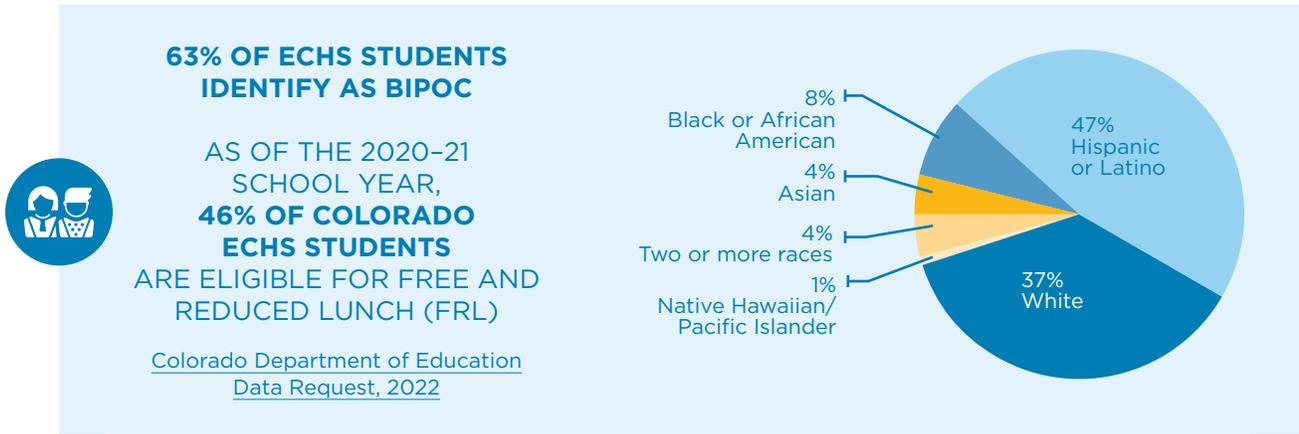
[Source](#)

Learnings & Best Practices

Since the inception leaders have had the opportunity to observe, support, and learn from these schools.

- ▶ Strong collaboration between ECHS and institutions of higher education offer students a wide range of choices as well as college campus experiences.
- ▶ Increasing the high school students' experience and relevant education by allowing them the opportunity to obtain industry certificates and college course credit that save both time and money.

ECHS Student Participation | 5,246 total students



Student Experience

The ECHS system is an innovative learning model that blends high school and college, allowing enrolled students to complete an associate's degree, a postsecondary credential, or 60 credits by the end of the four years.

This approach makes college realistic and attainable, especially for first generation college students. Taking college classes and passing these courses can be life changing for any high school student, let alone a student for whom college may not have been an option.

For example, Gloria (name has been changed), a first-generation college student and English Language Learner student enrolled in an ECHS in her senior year of high school. Unchallenged at her previous school, she found an engaging curriculum at ECHS. Despite not testing ready for college level math or English at first, she relied on the support of her teachers at the ECHS to help her demonstrate proficiency. The ECHS system allowed Gloria to stay an extra year and earn an associate's degree at no cost.

ON AVERAGE EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SAVE \$30,000 ON TUITION FOR COLLEGE

[Source](#)

National Context

Twenty-eight states around the nation have adopted the ECHS model. While the purpose remains the same across the board, there are noticeable differences in their approaches and methods.

With 182, [Texas](#) is home to more ECHS than any other state. Texas has been intentional about growing its ECHS ecosystem by developing a comprehensive authorization system as well as through its ECHS Planning and Implementation Grants. Among other areas, Texas' ECHS system is different than Colorado's when it comes to its focus on enrolling historically underserved students, targeting at-risk and economically disadvantaged students. Because of its established system, Texas has also been able to collect and report more data than Colorado.

On the other hand, New Mexico adopted the ECHS system to help address its low high school graduation rate. New Mexico's system is similar to Colorado's in size; today New Mexico is home to 21 ECHS. New Mexico has produced various studies and reports to help measure the efficiency of the ECHS system.

Policy Recommendations

- ▶ **Support flexible transportation options.** ECHS are not widely available across regions and innovative and flexible transportation solutions will allow more students to benefit.
- ▶ **Allow learners to take courses virtually outside of their “home” school.** The COVID-19 pandemic showed us the possibility and value of virtual experiences, particularly for students interested in earning college credits and certificates not readily accessible in their local community. Additionally, some ECHS have pre-set course curriculums and virtual or hybrid instruction models that would allow students to explore more courses from other partner schools.
- ▶ **Require rigorous data collection and sharing to ensure equitable practices and allow parents and students to make informed decisions.** There are no reporting requirements in statute other than what schools code in the [Student October Count](#) file for funding (unless asked directly by the State Board of Education). It is difficult to fully understand the demographics of students participating and whether or not the student is completing a postsecondary credential and the type of credential being awarded.
- ▶ **Encourage postsecondary credentials that have the maximum likelihood of transfer.** Currently, ECHS are designed for students to complete “an associate’s degree or other postsecondary credential or at least sixty credits toward the completion of a postsecondary credential.” Sometimes students are completing postsecondary credentials like an Associate’s in General Studies, which often do not transfer directly into a bachelor’s degree. To further improve this, community college and high school advisors need earlier access to 9th and 10th grade students to collaborate on associate’s degree options that fit their needs and transfer into bachelor’s credits or directly into industry-aligned hiring.

