



2022

## Book Review: Early Colleges as a Model for Schooling: Creating New Pathways for Access to Higher Education

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### Recommended Citation

Tremblay, Christopher W. (2022) "Book Review: Early Colleges as a Model for Schooling: Creating New Pathways for Access to Higher Education," *Journal of College Access*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 6. Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jca/vol7/iss2/6>

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## Book Review:

# *Early Colleges as a Model for Schooling: Creating New Pathways for Access to Higher Education*



Authored by  
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### The Third Space of Schooling

I have been working with early and middle colleges since my second admissions director role as we have many of them in Michigan. Since I find them fascinating, I was thrilled to be able to review this new publication from Harvard Education Press.

As I expected, the book opens up with a student story and testimonial about an early college experience and the outcomes. We learn about Jaleesa’s enrollment, support systems, and her graduation. It sets the stage for an overview about the role of early colleges in the U.S. The book revolves around the experiences of three students: Jaleese, Guadalupe and Darius.

I appreciated that the authors disclosed that this book was motivated by “wasted human potential,” as they put it. Essentially, it’s their version of “no child left behind.” The authors, who have been studying early colleges for 15 years, take an idealistic and optimistic approach in presenting their case. I also appreciated the mindset that postsecondary

education is for everyone, that it is necessary for earning a living wage in the U.S., and is a benefit to society overall. The authors believe that the “early college model addresses economic, societal and individual needs by merging high school with college” (p. 12).

The introduction describes the current state of higher education and postsecondary attainment rates, while also describing early colleges. This is especially helpful for the person who knows little about early colleges. The book refers to early colleges as a “third space” beyond the traditional high school and collegiate environments (p. 7). The authors also state that the largest barrier is the “educational system divided between secondary schools and college” (p. 7).

An early college enrolls students in college courses while in high school so that when the student earns their high school diploma, they



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can also earn their associate degree with the hope that the first two years of college are complete. The authors advocate for a “more seamless system” of education to address what they refer to as a “leaky pipeline to postsecondary education (p. 19).

What first drew me into this book was its nine chapters. The first two chapters set the foundation about the early college model and the case for this new educational system. Then four chapters are dedicated to each of the primary college access barriers: academic barriers, cultural barriers, logistical barriers, and financial barriers. The book concludes with thoughts on scaling up and needed policies.

The authors define academic barriers as rooted in the difference between the transmission of knowledge (high school approach) and using knowledge for critical thinking (college approach). Cultural barriers focus on the differences of expectations between high schools and colleges. Logistical barriers primarily pertain to the myriad of steps required to apply to and enter college. Financial barriers include the cost of college since public high schools are free.

One of my favorite parts of the book was the history of the American high school system. For example, did you know about the 1892 “Committee of Ten” that produced a report that indicated the “core purposes of secondary education was to prepare students for college through a classical

curriculum...” (p. 23)? The first junior colleges were formed as part of high school before eventually separating. Some educators in California experimented with a 6-4-4 plan (6 years of primary school, four years of middle school (grades 7-10) and four years of high school (grades 11-14). We learn in chapter two about the 1974 concept of “middle college” developed by Dr. Janet Liberman of LaGuardia Community College. It wasn’t until 1993 that the Middle College National Consortium was founded to support middle colleges with a set of core design principles. And there’s more historical details provided within the book.

The chapter that fully describes the early college model was very persuasive at stating why early colleges are important. The fundamental basis is this question: “what would it take to have all students in the school earn a postsecondary credential?” (p. 33). Outside of early colleges, ALL high schools should be answering that question and addressing their own barriers (but that’s for another commentary.)

The chapter on academic barriers discusses course taking, instructional strategies, bridging academic gaps, and academic supports. The chapter on cultural barriers addressed expectations, college-ready mindsets and student aspirations. The chapter on logistical barriers focused on six specific steps of the college enrollment process. In particular, that chapter missed the opportunity to reference the recent test

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optional movement. The chapter on financial barriers primarily highlighted the cost savings of earning so many college credits without a financial burden to the student and their family. That chapter also missed discussing how perhaps financial literacy was present (or absent) in the early colleges model.

I valued the extensive two-page table of early college definitions and policies showcased from four different states. The authors heavily cite David Conley's work on college readiness since there are a lot of intersections. I appreciated the authors' statement that "early college is not simply dual enrollment on steroids" (p. 124), which is an important reminder for readers who may associate them as one in the same.

Chapter seven is dedicated to three approaches for scaling up early colleges: increasing the number of them, creating a school-within-a-school model, and transforming a high school into an early college. A table in this chapter offers a good summary of six structural components associated with each of the three approaches. Chapter eight is quite extensive in discussing all of the six primary policies needed for scaling early college. In particular, this chapter includes a table on the pros and cons of four funding models. This chapter also revisits the six design features that comprise an effective early college operation. This chapter gets into the weeds in covering eligibility requirements, information/advising, staff policies, transfer of credits,


providing support, postsecondary partnerships, technical assistance, networks, advocacy and more. I felt that this chapter could become the follow-up book to this text. The book concludes with its shortest chapter that is a 30,000 foot re-cap of the entire text. Those five pages are ideal for the K-12 or higher education leader who does not have time to read the entire book. Give them these pages as an introduction for discussing early colleges.

Overall, this book offered the historical context and evolution of the early colleges movement. It highlighted statewide early college initiatives, chronicling the funders involved, the existing legislation, state policies and consortiums in this field. My only major criticism of this book is that it primarily takes a one-sided, supportive approach of early colleges, rarely mentioning their shortcomings. The addition of that would have enhanced the credibility of this piece. Also missing was the role of college admissions operations in all of this. Having dealt with how to work with early college students in the college admissions process (how they're coded, scholarships eligibility, etc.), it is an incredibly important piece that was not covered.

Despite that, I still highly recommend this text. It is perfect for newcomers to the field of early colleges and for those who want an in-depth review of early colleges. This will also make an excellent early college textbook for a graduate course in K-12, higher education or

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college access.

Onward to creating more third spaces in the American education system! 

### REFERENCE

Edmunds, J. A., Unlu, F., Glennie, E., & Nina Arshavsky, N. (2022). *Early Colleges as a Model for Schooling: Creating New Pathways for Access to Higher Education*. Harvard Education Press.