

Slingshotting Ahead:

Why *Early College* models are important for underserved high need students

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In one of America's seminal works on race and education, Booker T. Washington details his struggles to travel 500 miles to the Hampton Institution, the joy he felt when he was admitted, and his anticipation for learning to read and write. Once admitted, he traded hours of work as a janitor for the opportunity to study (Washington, 1901). He became a successful teacher at Hampton, educating both black and American Indian students in how to assimilate into white America (Smock, 2009). Later, Washington established Tuskegee Institute with the goal of providing southern black students the opportunity to raise themselves out of their undesirable situation through education and indoctrination into the majority (white) culture. His school focused on industrial education by requiring students to work while they studied and to learn a trade. Tuskegee's original goal for black Americans, and its ongoing mission, is to educate in "disciplines which highlight the relationship between education and work force preparation" (Tuskegee University, 2016). This paper will evaluate a school reform effort called Early College High School, and explain how modern industrial education is relevant for underserved high need students, whether that classification is because of poverty, race, ethnicity, or disability.

An important part of Washington's design for Tuskegee is called *work-study* in modern educational parlance. Students who work during high school or college might not have as much energy to devote to their studies, but "decades of research have consistently demonstrated that high school employment has a positive effect on adult earnings, employment, occupational attainment, and wealth accumulation" (Ormiston, 2016). These powerful effects can be found as long as nine years post high school, and Ormiston's work indicates that the effects are driven not

by "firm-specific" knowledge (knowing something specific to a particular industry), but rather by "occupation-specific" knowledge (such as being respectful of authority, teamwork, and showing up on time). These are the same skills employers frequently identify as the most valued skills they want recent graduates to possess. For modern students, thinking about and being involved in productive work, while they are in high school, might be an important component in support of their long term employment stability and financial success. And, although scholars might debate the rightful place of economic considerations as a driver of curriculum design, the ability to support oneself and a family should at least be *among* the goals of education.

Despite over a century of access to education, African American students consistently graduate from high school at rates that lag behind those of white students. In 2013-14, 87.2% of white students graduated, while only 72.5% of black students did (NCES, 2016). The NCES trend of lower graduation rates is also seen in Hispanic (76.3%) and Native American (69.6%) students. For many underserved high need students, the economic opportunities that Booker T. Washington believed were provided by education are still out of reach because they are missing the very first credential most employers require.

In recent times, political focus has turned toward the goal of addressing underserved high need students, and career advisement is increasingly a part of the national conversation about what students need (Obama, 2016). Whether it is one of the 1,600 books in the Teen & Young Adult section of Amazon that focus on career, or the dedicated career planning websites developed by College Board (Big Future) and ACT (Profile), it seems adults everywhere are trying to support young people as they try to decide on a pathway toward productive adulthood. And for most newly minted high school graduates, any career they might consider will require at least some college. In fact, according to a recent study, "Over 95 percent of jobs created during

the [most recent economic] recovery have gone to workers with at least some college education, while those with a high school diploma or less are being left behind” (Georgetown University, 2016). While a high school diploma and a good union protected job were once a ticket to the middle class, the economic reality of modern America requires that high school students now be academically capable of completing postsecondary work.

Vocational education for career readiness

While philosophers have long asserted lofty goals for education, especially virtue and civility, vocational education has often received at least a passing mention. Vocational education is the oldest and most primitive form of education (Bestor, 1959). Indeed, in the seventeenth century, John Locke considered being educated in a trade a worthwhile goal in the education of a gentleman, both because it increases the student’s dexterity and skill and because it offers an opportunity for health (Locke, 1693). The idealized student Emile must learn a trade, and carpentry is Rousseau’s first choice (Emile, 1762). Vocational education grabs the interest of students and engages them, and teachers often find “that such work takes a vital hold of pupils” (Dewey, 1899).

High schools at the turn of the last century were highly selective and only educated perhaps 10% of the population (United States Department of Education, 1993), and so most young people launched into a vocation after grade eight. Around the turn of the last century, the National Education Association formed a committee to determine a recommended course of study for high school students. The Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies recommended 12 years of education for all Americans (National Education Association of the United States, 1894). The committee envisioned high school education centered on a

standardized curriculum that was not vocational in nature: "Every subject which is taught at all in a secondary school should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he pursues it, no matter what the probable destination of the pupil may be, or at what point his education is to cease" (National Education Association of the United States, 1894). These recommendations became foundational, and the spirit of career-neutral education can still be found in most American high schools today.

In contrast, vocational training is "the heart of the German qualification model" with differentiation starting around the eighth grade (Wolter & Kerst, 2015). Students in Germany are tracked early into either an academic track or a vocational track. The vocational track is further split, with younger students receiving only vocational training, and older ones receiving a combination of vocational and worksite training. According to Wolster and Kerst, the German dual system of training is an exemplar of well-defined vocational education and is considered throughout the world as a key component of German economic development and the German skilled workforce.

America has experimented with vocational education for almost one hundred years. The original vocational education act specifically described vocation education programs as being for careers that do not require a baccalaureate degree, including agriculture and home economics (Smith-Hughes Act, 1917). Some critics contend that vocational education was developed to keep minority and poor students away from the college-bound children of the elite class (Hanford, 2014). During the 1960's, concerns about tracking led to changes in vocational education. Nonetheless, modern day vocational programs are still sometimes accused of directing underserved high need students into dead-end careers.

In response to concerns about low-quality vocational programs and an increased focus on academic skills due to the No Child Left Behind Act, American policy makers coined the term “college and career readiness” to reconceptualize the dual tracks of academic and vocational education into a single, comprehensive goal for high school students. *College and career readiness* is usually defined as being prepared to "enroll and succeed— without remediation— in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program, or a high quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement" (Conley, 2010).

David Conley, an educational researcher at University of Oregon, has been involved with education and social justice for over four decades. In his book *College and Career Readiness*, he offers a four dimensional model for college and career readiness, which he envisions as a replacement to earlier forms of vocational education, because it prepares students for college *while* they receive industrial education (Conley, 2010). The first of Conley’s dimensions is *key cognitive strategies*, which he defines as "intentional and practiced behaviors that, rather than being habitual, remain strategic in nature, with students making conscious decisions when to apply which for the optimal effect in a variety of learning situations." Another dimension he coined is *academic behaviors* and includes self-monitoring, metacognition and study skills (including time management, contextual and awareness skills, test taking, note taking, and group study). *Contextual skills and awareness* is another of Conley’s four dimensions, and here he includes how to select a school, apply for financial aid, succeed on aptitude tests, and other skills that he broadly calls "college knowledge."

Perhaps most relevant to vocational education is Conley’s second dimension, *key content knowledge* (2010). He identifies reading and writing as overarching skills, and specifies

traditional content areas including English, mathematics (especially the need for an understanding of algebra), science, social studies, world languages (a second language where the student can get to a holistic meaning of what is being communicated), and fine arts. Notably absent from his list is any sort of technical, how-to knowledge, such as an understanding of shop, mechanics, applied physics, applied health, or other applied fields. Few teachers would argue that English and mathematics are essential to academic preparedness for most postsecondary programs of study. However, the absence of applied knowledge within Conley's descriptions of key content areas highlights the problematic nature of lumping two distinct items into one catchphrase without providing a full, detailed description of how to implement the "and" within the phrase "college and career."

Why career relevancy is important

John Dewey asserts that the dominant interest of many who are to be educated is "to do and to make" (Dewey, 1899). When applied fields are absent from the curriculum, such students may struggle with seeing the relevancy of their lessons. For earlier generations, after being educated in foundational academic skills, students would learn practical skills in preparation for a career. Bestor, writing during the late 1950's, at the height of vocational enrollment in America, asserted that apprenticeships are the preferred way of receiving training in practical skills: "Where the problem is one of applying specific techniques in definite practical solutions, the skill involved can be learned in no better place than on the job" (1959). For the baby-boom generation, vocational education was practical and engaging.

Policy makers and businesses tend to agree that workforce experiences make the curriculum more relevant, both for students and for their eventual employers. Conley (2010)

argues that career readiness in the high school curriculum can only be achieved by bringing in partners from outside the educational community. Today, the Carl D. Perkins Technical Education Act is the federal government's primary funding mechanism for supporting vocational education (also known as Career Technical Education, or CTE). In keeping with Conley's assertions, recipient funding requires both secondary and postsecondary recipients to have an advisory board. How well this mandate is implemented varies considerably, with advisory groups meeting anywhere from once per year to monthly. The intent, however, is clear: lawmakers expect schools to partner with the employers in their community to make sure their content is relevant. Relevant content is especially important for underserved high need students who may not have social systems in place to encourage persistence in studies that seem poorly connected to the "real world."

Another, less obvious, way to ensure programmatic relevancy is for different levels of educational institutions to have aligned expectations. Alignment is important for keeping high need students engaged, as misaligned programs can build frustration when a student feels pressure to get into the workforce quickly. One of the "most powerful ways to improve the connections between high school and college is to align course content and student performance expectations" (Conley, 2010). Strategies that build academic alignment include Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, aligned syllabi, college-ready seminars, college-ready assignments, and paired courses.

Accelerated options take alignment one step further, by allowing students to earn college credit before they have completed high school, by being enrolled in both high school and college courses simultaneously. Dual credit is related to dual enrollment, but it allows students to earn high school and college credit for a single college level class. Dual enrollment and dual credit

programs expose students to college expectations while still in high school, and several studies suggest improved student outcomes such as "more likely to earn high school degrees, enroll in college, enrolling full-time, and persist in college than were students without college experience during high school (Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong & Bailey, 2007, as described in Kaxton, et al., 2016). Accelerated college options, whether they are dual enrollment or dual credit, are especially valuable to underserved high needs students who are often economically motivated to begin work at a younger age.

Most states have statutes on their books that require high schools to grant credit for at least some postsecondary classes (Zinth, 2015). Only about a third of states reimburse the costs, though, making dual credit perhaps one of the most common unfunded educational mandates in America (Zinth, 2015). Nonetheless, the legislators who pass these laws seem to be acting in favor of accelerated, aligned curricula, and they are at least intuitively aware of Conley's recommendation that alignment is critical for developing and maintaining relevancy (2010). As with CTE in general, here again the Perkins Act further illustrates policymakers' intentions. Perkins funding is limited to CTE programs of study which are aligned between secondary and postsecondary partners, meaning that the high school courses directly prepare the student for the entry-level postsecondary class in that same field. Applicants must provide evidence of their partnership, and representatives from both partners are required to sign the funding application. Thus, lawmakers are indicating that they value program relevancy through their actions that require access to accelerated, aligned programs of study.

The *Early College* model of acceleration

Early College High School (ECHS) is a school reform framework inspired by the Early Colleges at Bard College in New York. An ECHS is an accelerated high school, generally located on a college campus, that supports students in earning significant college credit through a dual credit partnership (generally the goal is 60 credit hours) while simultaneously completing high school. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation often provides funds for the launch of ECHS programs, and the foundation has been instrumental in their spread. Since 2002, at least 280 ECHS model schools have been launched using Gates Foundation grants; these schools serve roughly 80,000 students (Jobs for the Future, 2016). Several states have ten or more ECHS locations, including California, Washington, Texas, Ohio, New York, North Carolina and Georgia (Jobs for the Future, 2016).

Promoters of the ECHS initiative are evangelical in their enthusiasm. According to Jobs for the Future, the primary nonprofit organization for ECHS information,

Early college high schools replace remediation with acceleration, engaging instruction, and individualized supports to prepare all students—particularly those traditionally underserved—for college and careers.

Early College Designs are based on the bold idea that academic rigor, combined with the opportunity to save time and money toward a postsecondary credential, are powerful motivators for students to work hard and meet intellectual challenges. (Jobs for the Future, 2016)

Well-designed research generally supports reformers' enthusiastic claims that the ECHS design has positive outcomes. In a study evaluating the effects of ten ECHS programs, researchers found the design "has positive impacts on college enrollment and college completion as well as students' high school experiences" (Haxton et al., 2016). Although Jobs for the Future's website does not offer the detailed data analysis that one expects of a peer-reviewed research article, the claims they make are impressive: an overall 90% high school graduation rate, with 94% of ECHS Students earning free college credit while in high school, 85% of ECHS graduates obtaining significant college credit, 30% earning an Associate's degree or other postsecondary credential while in high school, and a 65% acceptance rate into four-year colleges (Jobs for the Future, 2016).

A key component in the design of ECHS programs is employer engagement. The school forms partnerships with a local college and with community workforce partners (Munoz, Fischetti, & Prather, 2014). Many ECHS programs only provide students with one or two programs of study, and the choices general reflect local industries with high demand for new workers.

ECHS partnerships with community college programs often focus not on transferrable credits that would eventually lead to a Baccalaureate degree, but instead upon applied certificates and degrees, such as the Applied Associate of Arts degree. These degrees are frequently terminal, but do lead to immediate employment. Common examples of careers include law enforcement, firefighting, auto mechanics, welding, and medical technicians. Because of the "captive audience" nature of high school (due to compulsory education), a student who is a high school graduate of an ECHS program is likely well-prepared for a career within the local community, perhaps as soon as age 18, but likely no more than one or two years later. At the

surface, this seems similar to the old vocational-track education programs of the 1950s; however, the increased emphasis on academic skills that are required for college attainment promises that ECHS students will be able to return to college without remediation to pursue baccalaureate degrees as adults.

Why Early College is right for underserved high need students

Perhaps the most important philosophical concern regarding the emergence of ECHS programs is their focus on students who are traditionally underserved in postsecondary institutions. ECHS recruiting explicitly targets low-income, minority, immigrant and first-generation students. The two-fold pitch for targeted families emphasizes cost savings (the dual credit college classes are generally free to students) and a quick path to a solid professional salary (Jobs for the Future, 2016). In other words, academic acceleration through ECHS can help move poor and working class students into a higher income bracket. The longstanding danger of targeting underserved students with such claims was expressed quite eloquently by W.E.B. DuBois: "We shall hardly induce black men to believe that if their stomachs be full, it matters little about their brains" (1903). In practice, ECHS programs must avoid dead-end industrial education where enrollment is determined based on membership in any traditionally underserved group, and the education students receive must prepare them for high level academic work.

The debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois has been ongoing for over a century, and does not show any signs of letting up soon. Washington expresses his perspective in several of his writings and talks, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the Atlanta Exposition speech (Washington, 1901). In that speech, he argues that black workers will gain their rights gradually as they prove the value of their work in the economy. He maintains

that “no race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized.” In both words and actions, Washington privileges productive work over intellectualism. He asserts that education is a means to an end, and that education allows blacks equality by providing equal opportunity for success through commerce. To Washington, educating the masses of recently freed slaves requires industrial education. A student is in school to learn the skills necessary for successfully managing his career as a craftsman or tradesman.

DuBois strongly disagrees with Washington about the role of public education (1903). His strongest argument concerns the importance of the “talented tenth” – that is the intellectual elite that will serve the masses of freed slaves as white-collar professionals – the doctors, lawyers, accountants, and especially teachers who can provide services in a still-segregated America. In considering the relevance of DuBois’ argument in relation to ECHS students, however, the more pressing issue is the other nine-tenths. What are we to do with those who are *not* the talented tenth? In what manner should they be educated?

ECHS programs, it seems, land squarely in Washington’s camp. Their appeal to parents and students lies in the practicality of their programs. ECHS students are encouraged to pursue an academic program that is aligned with the workforce needs of their community. If business needs shift, for example because of a worldwide depression in oil prices, ECHS programs respond by phasing out the waning program and replacing it – such as reducing enrollment in energy sector training and building capacity in another higher demand sector such as healthcare. Because local partners play an essential role in developing curriculum and providing experiential learning opportunities, ECHS programs are especially responsive to commercial concerns.

The debate between Washington and DuBois is sometimes miscategorized as an “either/or” dichotomy. Most school reformers who support ECHS models, however, would argue

that ECHS is not for all students. The ECHS design is a practical one intended to move students toward a career. It is targeted toward students who statistically are less likely to be successful in a traditional liberal arts curriculum that is focused primarily on admission to a selective Baccalaureate program. It uses an accelerated design and intensive interventions to slingshot underperforming students into college level work. ECHS is probably not the right program for a student who is clearly a member of the talented tenth. Thus, we can resolve at least some of DuBois' concerns by directing minority youth to rigorous college preparatory programs, such as those he describes, whenever such studies are a good match.

Why culturally relevant pedagogy is essential

Generally speaking, students from minority groups are more likely than white students to be enrolled in high school courses that are terminal and unaligned with postsecondary programs, and they are less likely to graduate from high school (Conley, 2010). In order to be effective with this population, ECHS teachers and administrators have embraced culturally responsive pedagogy. This teaching philosophy “embodies a professional, political, cultural, ethical, and ideological disposition that supersedes mundane teaching acts,” and he requires teachers, especially those of relative privilege in terms of race and/or financial means, to develop and express a belief in their students' ability to succeed at rigorous coursework (Howard, 2010). They should use the diversity in the classroom as a foundation for expanding skills and understanding. “Cultural responsive pedagogy is situated within a framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills that students from diverse groups bring to the schools” (Howard, 2010). Because ECHS programs tend to target underserved high need

students, ECHS teachers and administrators should be committed to working with their students in culturally responsive ways.

An example of culturally relevant pedagogy comes from a middle school in Los Angeles (Howard, 2010). At this school, when students live in a home where the language spoken does not conform to standard rules of English, they are classified as "Standard English Learners (SEL)." These SEL teachers use strategies from ELL research to validate the cultural experiences of home while teaching the intricacies of standard English. They may use writing as a way to get students to discuss their home experiences and thoughts, then use that same writing sample as a way to provide direct instruction in proper grammar, all while honoring the cultural diversity that is embedded within the content.

According to Howard (2010), several other key practices also support culturally relevant pedagogy. Effective teaching practices he mentions as being successful when educating at-risk students include spending more time on task, using effective classroom management techniques, and using multiple ways to assess learning. Culturally sensitive teachers do not teach down, even when students are below grade level, and visionary principals encourage their teachers to collaborate with one another and reteach until students master the material (Howards, 2010). Student interaction is another critical component in his description, as are well-designed interactions that help students reach mastery of the task. In addition to this type of intensive academic support, he mentions the critical role of parent and community engagement, along with an honest acknowledgement and dialogue about both the unique contributions and the special challenges of being a member of a non-dominant race.

Conley (2010) also provides recommendations for educators to support college and career readiness. He suggests that students be taught self-management skills through recurring

direct instruction. He recommends that administrators explicitly ask teachers to consider which cognitive strategies their students are using. Then teachers should develop lesson plans that build students' awareness and ability to use strategies outside of their existing range. He emphasizes keeping senior year meaningful, especially for first generation students and those from underrepresented and low-income groups.

Conley's emphasis on ensuring that students have college knowledge means that school personnel (especially those who work with an underserved high needs population) need to help students understand their college choices and help them apply for postsecondary programs and financial aid. Project based learning and work-based learning experiences can be especially important for ECHS students because the role models that are in their community may not provide sufficient breadth. While such experiences build career awareness, career exploration also needs to be explored through direct instruction. One way to do that is to utilize career exploration software, but such programs rarely acknowledge the community influences that ECHS students face. Partnerships with local employers and postsecondary programs can provide more nuanced, culturally sensitive advice. Another option is Gear Up, which provides academic tutors who spend large part of the day in the classroom, and tutors who make home visits. In one study, Gear Up participants had .78 higher GPA, enrolled in more AP classes, an 85% passing rate on the California exit exam (Howard, 2010). Wraparound supports such as Gear Up can be an important ancillary strategy, but for most ECHS programs, tutoring and other individualized strategies are built in to the very design of the school (Jobs for the Future, 2016).

These strategies of culturally relevant pedagogy, taken together with an intense focus on ensuring the student is both college and career ready, can propel a struggling student. ECHS programs often report substantial gains on standardized tests (Jobs for the Future, 2016). For a

student who enters ninth grade several years behind on literacy skills, the promise of completing their ECHS program of study and being college and career ready is an opportunity that is compelling. When they receive wrap-around, culturally sensitive supports, struggling students are able to rise to the challenge and make huge progress (Jobs for the Future, 2016). While culturally relevant pedagogy is valuable for all teachers who work with underserved students, it is essential for slingshotting such students from underperforming to college performing.

Conclusion

Early College High Schools provide a modern-day technical education that is focused on helping students develop the credentials they need in order to get started in the workforce. By partnering with postsecondary institutions, these schools help students develop the academic skills they need in order to be college and career ready. By focusing on employers within the community, ECHS programs increase the likelihood that their graduates will become productive members of the workforce.

Most ECHS programs target students who are low income, minority, and/or who have parents who did not attend college. This population often struggles to see the relevancy of high school, but may be quite engaged by the career focus of an ECHS program. When the engaged and motivated student is supported with culturally relevant pedagogy, the student may accomplish significant gains in a relatively short period of time. Many ECHS graduates finish high school with a significant number of college credits, and a substantial number go on to college immediately (Locke, Stedrak, and Eadens, 2014).

In the modern economy, most people will not work in a single career for their entire adult lives, and this might be considered a philosophical threat to the ECHS model. Furthermore, brain

development researchers now assert that the pre-frontal cortex, which is responsible for executive control and complex decision making, is not fully developed until people reach their mid-twenties. So a fair question might be if the ECHS student will be satisfied with their career preparation a decade after graduation. Given that the national ECHS initiative did not begin in earnest until 2002 (Jobs for the Future, 2016), it is still too early to answer this question empirically. Nonetheless, reformers would argue that an important aspect of being college and career ready includes having life-long learning skills that enable the student to return for additional schooling whenever the time seems right (Conley, 2010).

Human dignity comes from being a productive member of society, and educators would do well to recognize that production is a reasonable goal of education. A passage in *Up from Slavery* suggests a valuable perspective on this issue:

The masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands... we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify the common labor and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life...there is as much dignity in tilling a field as writing a poem. (Washington, 1901)

Early College models of career technical education offer underserved high need students a path to economic dignity by using a slingshot to propel them from underperformance in high school to on-level in college. Social justice demands that educators continue to innovate until academic attainment disparities disappear. Perhaps over time, the family-sustaining wages that are created by ECHS experiences will contribute to reducing both academic economic disparities.

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Overview

Industrial education – mentioned in Locke as befitting a gentleman
Emile also needs it – Rosseau prefers carpentry
Booker T. Washington really makes a strong case for it for freed slaves

Currently, African Americans national graduation rates lag those of white by 15 percentage points (87.5% versus 72.5%) as do Hispanic 76.3% and Native 68=9.6%

Over 95% of jobs created during the most recent recover went to those with at least some education (Georgetown 2016)

So underserved high needs students – those of color, poverty, and without well educated parents – are being cut out of the workforce at alarming rates

History of Vocational Education –
around 1900, only 10% of Americans attended High school and in 1894, The Committee of Ten set out a recommended high school curriculum to make ED Hirsh proud– every student was to learn the same thing, “no matter what the probable destination of the pupil may be.”

But increased access meant more kids were attending high schools, so in 1917, the Smith Hughs Act created separate vocational classes, which some historians think was an attempt to siphon lower class kids away from the elite students the Committee of Ten envisioned when they wrote the curriculum.

By the 1960’s political, politics were eroding support for vocational programs because it was clear that they were being used to segregate high needs students out of mainstream classrooms.

Vocational education was on its way out, and NCLB killed programs in many areas.

But minority kids are still not gradating! So education wonks came up with a new term, college and career readiness, to describe a vision for vocation education that includes college preparedness alongside career prep. It is now called Career Tech Education or CTE.

Done well, college and career readiness includes cognitive strategies, college knowledge, and content knowledge. Career relevancy is built in through academic advising and through course alignment. Dual Enrollment and Dual Credit are often part of CCR.

A small school design called ECHS taps into the CCR movement by offering kids the opportunity to accelerate into a postsecondary degree or a workforce recognized credential while they are still in high school.

ECHS are especially important to underserved students because ECHS uses acceleration to slingshot underperforming youth into college ready work. They do this using a combination of highly relevant curriculum and culturally relevant pedagogy to support and encourage students.

Funded by Gates, there are currently at least 280 ECHS, serving 80k students, with 7 states that have 10 or more of them. Preliminary data are strong – 90% nationwide graduation rates, 94% earn at least some college credit, 30% earning Associates degree or credential, and 65% acceptance rate into 4-year. In New Mexico, our first 4 year cohort had 100%, and the second class had one student out of approx.. 100 who didn't finish.

ECHS use partnerships with industry and postsecondary to ensure relevancy and work-study opportunities are essential. Programs target high-demand employment such as law enforcement, medical assistants, and oil field workers.

ECHS is not designed for ALL students, and to WEB DuBois point, some students who are poor, or of color, or have under-educated parents will need and want a traditional liberal arts education. This isn't the school for them.

This school is designed for those who want to accelerate their timeline to employment. While doing that, though, they get enough rigor that students will be able to take college classes (perhaps years later) without remediation.

It is designed to provide a pathway to production but has its roots in a concern for social justice.