



# **THE GREAT MAINE SCHOOLS PROJECT**

**AT THE SENATOR GEORGE J. MITCHELL SCHOLARSHIP  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

## **EARLY COLLEGE IN MAINE: STUDENT OUTCOMES & LESSONS LEARNED FROM ONE MODEL**

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SENATOR GEORGE J. MITCHELL  
SCHOLARSHIP RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	3
<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	6
Background	
Description of the Early College Program Model	
<b>II. EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM STUDENTS: SPRING 2004–SPRING 2005</b> .....	9
Profile of Participating Students	
Future Plans and Post-Secondary Degree Ambitions: Before and After Participation	
Effect on High School Performance	
Student Performance at YCCC: Grades and Credits Earned	
College-Going among Program Graduates	
Student Experiences and Self-Assessments of Performance	
Failure to Complete the Program	
<b>III. STAFF AND ADMINISTRATOR INSIGHTS</b> .....	20
Program Impact on Wells High School	
Program Impact on York County Community College	
Program Impact on Participating Students	
Challenges	
College and High School Faculty Collaboration	
Changes in Policy and Practice	
Sustainability	
Effective Early College Programs: Advice for Other Schools	
<b>IV. HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE FACULTY PERCEPTIONS</b> .....	26
<b>V. IMPLICATIONS</b> .....	29
Sustainability	
Academic Preparation	
Student Support	
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	31
Selected Early College Resources	
Bibliography	

## SELECTED STUDENT PROFILES

Chris.....	7
Cassandra.....	9
Sagan.....	16
Scott.....	23
Eric.....	25

# LIST OF FIGURES

- FIGURE 1:** PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING STUDENTS: SPRING 2004–SPRING 2005 (p. 10)
- FIGURE 2:** POST-SECONDARY INTENTIONS: BEFORE AND AFTER PARTICIPATION (p. 11)
- FIGURE 3:** CHANGE IN HIGH SCHOOL GPA DURING PROGRAM PARTICIPATION (p. 12)
- FIGURE 4:** COLLEGE CREDITS EARNED: FIRST THREE SEMESTERS OF THE PROGRAM (p. 13)
- FIGURE 5:** DISTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUAL COURSE GRADES EARNED AT YCCC (p. 13)
- FIGURE 6:** GRADES EARNED AT YCCC BY SPECIFIC COURSE (p. 14)
- FIGURE 7:** OVERALL STUDENT ASSESSMENT OF THE EARLY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE (p. 17)
- FIGURE 8:** STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENTS: PROPORTION OF STUDENTS WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES “VERY SUCCESSFUL” IN FOUR AREAS (p. 17)
- FIGURE 9:** CONTRIBUTING FACTORS IN STUDENT DECISIONS TO LEAVE THE PROGRAM (p. 19)
- FIGURE 10:** HIGH SCHOOL FACULTY ASSESSMENTS OF PROGRAM IMPACT ON STUDENTS (p. 26)
- FIGURE 11:** COLLEGE FACULTY ASSESSMENTS OF STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS (p. 27)
- FIGURE 12:** COLLEGE FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATING STUDENTS COMPARED TO OTHER YCCC STUDENTS (p. 28)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early college experiences allow high school students to engage in college-level academic work and earn both high school and college credit while still in high school. The York County Community College Early College Program with Wells High School offers a promising model for improving the academic achievement, college-going rates, and longer-term educational attainment of high school students. Early college has also shown promise, when coupled with other efforts, as a strategy for encouraging reform at the high school level. Although Maine has comparably high secondary graduation rates—generally between 80% and 85%—only 50% of graduates enroll directly in college, and significantly fewer earn an Associate or Bachelor’s degree.

In 1998, the Maine Department of Education released a groundbreaking report—*Promising Futures: A Call to Improve Learning for Maine’s Secondary Students*—which has guided many successful high school reform efforts since its publication. Although our statewide high school graduation rate has increased slightly since 1998, as has the proportion of graduates reporting that they intend to enroll in college, the proportion of students enrolling in college directly after high school has remained flat and continues to be below the national and New England averages.

A grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation established the Great Maine Schools Project at the Senator George J. Mitchell Scholarship Research Institute, the organization that has funded the Program since the spring semester of 2003. The Great Maine Schools Project issued an interim report on the Program in September 2004. This final report includes data on student outcomes from the first three semesters of

the Program, as well as information collected through interviews with Program administrators, staff, and participating students.

While many high school programs that offer early college experiences target only high-achieving students, the program model developed at York County Community College (YCCC) and Wells High School (WHS) is specifically designed to serve students who may not be considering college an option, including students who would be the first in their family to attend college, who are struggling academically and socially in high school, or who might face significant financial barriers to college. The Program gives participating students the opportunity to take college courses on a community college campus for “dual credit” (students earn both high school and college credit for successfully completing a college class—also known as “dual enrollment”) during their junior and senior years of high school. The Program, as it is currently configured, covers the costs of student tuition and fees, while also providing on-site support services from a Program Coordinator based at YCCC and a High School Advocate (a guidance counselor) at WHS.

Fifty-nine students participated in the first three semesters of the Program. The typical participating student has a high school grade-point average equivalent to a C+; has not taken either an honors-level or Advanced Placement course, or a math course above Algebra II; and does not have a parent with a college degree. Given the profile of entering students, student outcomes from the first three semesters are encouraging:

- 48 students completed 125 college classes, earning grades of C or higher in 108 (86%) of them.
- Participating students earned an aggregate GPA of 2.97 (just below a B) in their college classes. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the students earned a college GPA equivalent to B- or higher.
- While nearly one-half (49%) of participating students reported that they planned to attend college full-time after high school, this proportion increased to nearly two-thirds (65%) by the end of three semesters. And the proportion of students reporting that they planned to attend a four-year college full-time increased from 37% to 51%.
- Among 31 participating students who had graduated from WHS as of June 2005, nearly two-thirds (65%) are now enrolled full-time in college. Among 16 students who graduated in 2005, the rate is even higher—12 of them (75%) are now full-time college students. These college-going rates significantly exceed Maine's statewide college-going average of 50% (Maine Compact for Higher Education, 2005).
- Nearly three-fourths (72%) of students improved their high school GPA while participating in the Program, and nearly one-half (49%) improved their GPA by one grade point or more.

Many participating students report that they found the early college experience liberating compared to high school, and that, for them, the college environment is better suited to their learning style. The following comments are representative of student perceptions:

- “Learning is easier here because everyone in all my classes really wants to learn.”

- “People treat you with more respect, and expect more from you. It’s a great feeling.”
- “There are older people in my classes and it shows me how important it is to do well now so I won’t have to come back when I’m 30 or 40.”
- “You have a lot more freedom, but the work is harder and you have no one to push you.”

Program staff and administrators observe that the Program has had an enormous impact on both the high school and college. At WHS, the Program has contributed to an emerging trend of more academically rigorous course-taking among students, while it has also increased the number of WHS graduates enrolling in community colleges. At the college, the Program created opportunities for more dual-enrollment partnerships with other area high schools, and secondary students now make up 12% of YCCC’s total enrollment. While administrators had to overcome a number of challenges to establish the Program, they now report that its success has been well worth the effort. Administrators expect the Program to continue indefinitely, but they also recognize that sustaining it in its current form—and at its current level—will require outside funding.

Several lessons learned during the first three semesters of the Program may be valuable for other high schools and colleges planning to establish early college programs in their communities:

- Requiring students and their families to make a financial contribution, such as paying for books, could help strengthen student commitment and conserve resources that could be used to allow more students to participate.

- When deciding which students to admit into an early college program, factors such as high school attendance records and having earned enough credits for an on-time graduation can help to identify those students who are ready to embrace the challenges of college-level courses.

Faculty at WHS report noticeable improvements in motivation, college aspirations, and other indicators among students who were participating in the Program. YCCC faculty who taught participating students compared them favorably to other community college students when it came to attendance, behavior in class, and interactions with faculty. The following comments are representative of faculty perceptions:

- “More students are able to learn in more meaningful ways. Many of them learn that they are more capable than they thought.”
- “I see evidence of increased self-esteem, willingness to take on challenges, and accountability. Their expectations of their peers have increased—Program students call others on whining or lame excuses.”

Even on a relatively small scale—serving roughly one-quarter of the Wells junior and senior classes—the Program’s impact on WHS, YCCC, and the participating students

has been considerable. Students, staff, and administrators report that key factors in the Program’s success have been: (1) the opportunity for students to take college courses on a college campus alongside college students, and (2) the availability of staff to advocate for and support students both at the high school and college.

For this early college model to achieve its potential as an effective strategy for preparing more high school students for college and encouraging more students to enroll in higher education, sustainability and academic-preparation issues must be addressed. Funds from school-district budgets are needed to sustain early college programs, and these investments could be stimulated by providing a state match in the Essential Programs and Services funding formula. Participating colleges can make valuable contributions by reducing or waiving tuition and fees for early college students. Creative approaches to local fundraising can provide supplemental funding. Increasing high school graduation requirements and encouraging all students to take an academically rigorous course of studies (e.g.: college-preparatory English, mathematics, science, and social studies courses all four years of high school) would help prepare students for college-level work in advance of graduation.

**“The Program had a tremendous impact on me. I had a better appreciation for school. Being in classes with students who actually want to be there really motivated me....Everything about the Program worked for me. It helped me figure out where I wanted to go in my life.”**

# I. INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

The York County Community College Early College Program with Wells High School provides opportunities for WHS students to take college courses while completing their last two years of high school. The Program specifically targets students who are at risk, for whatever reason, of not attending college. Funding provided by the Great Maine Schools Project—a statewide high school reform initiative launched in 2002 with a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation—covers the costs of student tuition and fees, and pays part-time salaries for Program coordinators. The Great Maine Schools Project is working to develop the first sustainable, statewide early college initiative in the nation, and the York County Community College Early College Program with Wells High School is its first pilot program. The Great Maine Schools Project currently supports several early college programs across Maine, with many new sites being launched in 2006.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has awarded \$40 million in grants to fund early college programs around the United States. In collaboration with three other foundations, the Gates Foundation supports the national Early College High School Initiative, which is coordinated by Jobs for the Future in Boston. By 2008, the Initiative expects to create 170 new small schools in which students can concurrently earn a high school diploma and two years of college credit. Known generally as “early college high schools,” many of these alternative schools will be located on college campuses, and as of fall 2005, 67 of these schools—enrolling 12,000 students—are operating under the Initiative.

In Maine, early college opportunities have historically been limited to Advanced Placement (AP) courses offered by some high schools, as well as a relatively small number of opportunities for high school students to enroll in individual college courses. These opportunities tended to be available only to the highest-performing students. In 1998, Maine enacted the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program—also known as Early Studies—which pays one-half of the tuition for high school students enrolling in individual courses within the University of Maine System or the Maine Community College System. The post-secondary institution subsidizes the other half of tuition, but may charge additional fees. Participating students simultaneously receive high school and college credit for these courses. Since 1998, the program has subsidized roughly 400 college courses per year for Maine high school students. As originally enacted, students had to have a GPA of 3.0 (or the equivalent of a B) or higher to be eligible for Early Studies, but this stipulation has since been amended to allow exceptions for juniors and seniors who are recommended by their high schools. Another promising opportunity recently introduced to Maine is the Maine Community College System’s Early College for ME scholarship program. This initiative identifies underperforming students who have the potential to succeed in college, and awards them a generous scholarship to any of Maine’s community colleges. It also allows scholarship recipients to begin taking classes during high school.

Like the Early College for ME scholarship program, the York County Community College Early College Program with Wells

High School specifically targets at-risk and underperforming students and those who may not aspire to college. The Program also pays their tuition and fees, and provides additional support in the form of a half-time Program Coordinator position at YCCC and a stipend for a High School Advocate (one of WHS's guidance counselors). The Program's stated mission is "to inspire and prepare students to pursue educational and

career opportunities through engagement in a unique early college experience while still in high school." Wells High School enrolls about 500 students in grades 9 through 12. York County Community College is located in Wells, just a few miles from the high school. Administrators and staff from both institutions formed a Steering Committee and collaborated to develop the grant proposal that established the Program.

### STUDENT PROFILE: CHRIS



Chris took two classes, English and Psychology, at YCCC during his senior year at WHS. Chris describes himself as "not exactly a star student" in high school, but he earned an A- and a B+ in his college classes. Although he had a high school GPA equivalent to a C- when he entered the Program, Chris says, "I was actually an A/B student my last semester of high school. I'm pretty pleased with that."

Chris's parents are retired from the military, and up until the end of his junior year, he expected to enter the military rather than enroll in college. Now as a full-time student at YCCC, Chris is pursuing a teaching career and expects to eventually complete an advanced degree. Chris is more active and engaged in college than he ever was in high school, and he thinks that he is exceeding his parents' expectations. "They're proud that I'm in college and that I made the first step," Chris reports.

Chris believes that the encouragement and availability of the Program's coordinator for one-on-one counseling worked particularly well for him. Commenting on his experience in the Program, Chris says, "It made me realize the importance of college, and that I could do the work. I thought that I couldn't do the work in high school, but now I realize that was totally wrong."

### DESCRIPTION OF THE EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM MODEL

The Program is designed to serve students who fit the following profile:

- they would be the first in their families to attend college
- they are uncertain about their aspirations for the future
- they have a special skill or talent
- they have not considered college an option due to financial barriers

- they are not enrolled in courses that have traditionally prepared students for college
- they are not thriving, academically or socially, in the traditional high school environment

Program personnel developed a marketing plan specially intended to reach students

who fit this profile, which included a full-color brochure, a fact sheet, and a PowerPoint presentation about the Program. However, Program staff report that word-of-mouth has become the most effective method of recruiting students. In preparation for the first-semester launch of the Program, the high school also hosted an invitational awareness session for students and parents. Guidance counselors and teachers identified juniors and seniors who met one or more of the Program's criteria, and mailed invitations to their homes.

Students can be referred to the Program by a teacher or a guidance counselor, or they can self-refer. Students must complete an application form that includes a brief statement describing their interest in the Program, a parent's signature, and a teacher or guidance counselor recommendation. Once students have submitted an application, personal interviews are conducted by the Program Coordinator at YCCC. The Coordinator and the High School Advocate decide together which students to admit. Accepted students attend a registration night at the college, where the Coordinator helps them choose courses.

The Program's Steering Committee initially considered limiting enrollment in YCCC courses to electives, but ultimately decided not to limit the types of college courses students can take. There are also no limitations on when students can take classes at YCCC; they are welcome to enroll in day, evening, weekend, or online courses. During their first semester, however, the Program Coordinator generally tries to steer participating students away from courses that require placement testing.

The Program covers the full cost of tuition and associated fees, which averages about \$336 for a three-credit course. Initially, the program also paid for students' books at an average cost of \$70 per course. After the first two semesters, students began paying for their own books (special considerations are made if the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch). Administrators initially made this policy change to reallocate funds so that more students could participate, but they quickly realized that requiring a financial contribution from students and their families improved the overall level of student commitment to the Program.

Students can take one YCCC course during their first semester of participation. Continuation in the program is contingent on successful completion of college courses, weekly communication with the Program Coordinator, and completion of all surveys and paperwork related to their participation. After successful completion of the first-semester course, students may take up to two college courses per semester if adequate funding is available. The Coordinator keeps in touch with students using e-mail, phone calls, classroom visits, and visits to WHS. Furthermore, the Coordinator works to identify potential problems by monitoring class attendance, particularly early in the semester, and requesting mid-semester academic progress reports from the instructors of participating students. The High School Advocate is available to students during school hours, and also holds afternoon office hours at the college twice a week.

## II. EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM STUDENTS

### PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING STUDENTS

A total of 59 students, or about one-quarter of the combined junior and senior classes at WHS, participated in the Program over the first three semesters (spring 2004–spring 2005). Just over one-half of the participants (53%) are female (see Figure 1 on next page). About two-thirds (66%) of participating students had not taken an Advanced Placement (AP) or honors-level class, and 69% had not taken a math course beyond Algebra II, when they entered the program. Three-quarters of participating students worked during the school year, and nearly three-quarters (73%) reported that neither of their parents had a Bachelor's or advanced degree.

Student grade-point averages ranged from 61.4 (F) to 94.1 (A-) at the time they enroll-

-ed in the Program, and the median high school GPA was 82.9 (C+). Slightly more than half of the students (53%) had C averages, 31% had B averages, 10% had D averages, 5% had A averages, and one student had an F average. Students entered the Program with a wide range of credits earned in high school (not including courses in progress at the time of application). Wells High School requires 24 credits for graduation, but students can earn up to 32 credits. Entering juniors began the Program with a range of seven to 16 high school credits and a median of 13.75 credits. Students entering the Program as seniors had earned a median of 19.5 credits, with a range of 15 to 23 credits. Nine students (15%) entered the program with fewer credits than required to be on track to graduate from WHS on-time.

### STUDENT PROFILE: CASSANDRA



Cassandra participated in the Program for three semesters, taking five classes and earning a 3.57 GPA—the equivalent of an A-. While Cassandra's family expected her to go to college, she struggled in high school. Her GPA in the middle of her junior year was a B-. "Prior to the Program, I didn't really care about high school. In fact, I pretty much hated it. Being able to get out and experience a change of environment did wonders for me....As soon as I started classes my grades in high school went up."

College classes also helped Cassandra clarify her career goals. "I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I always dabbled with the idea of psychology but wasn't ever positive of anything. After I took a couple psych classes at YCCC, I knew that's what I wanted to major in. At Clark, I'm majoring in psychology with a concentration in biology to someday become a pediatric neurophysiologist. And it's all thanks to the Program."

Cassandra says that academic work in college is not like high school. She encourages high school teachers to make courses more challenging, and advises students to take Advanced Placement courses and work on developing their time-management skills. "The Program had a tremendous impact on me. I had a better appreciation for school. Being in classes with students who actually want to be there really motivated me....Everything about the Program worked for me. It helped me figure out where I wanted to go in my life."

**FIGURE 1: PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING STUDENTS: SPRING 2004–SPRING 2005**

	<b>NUMBER (%) OF STUDENTS</b>
<b>Total number of WHS students participating in the Program</b>	59
<b>Gender:</b> Female	31 (53%)
Male	28 (47%)
<b>Students entering the Program as:</b> Juniors	41 (69%)
Seniors	18 (31%)
<b>Number of honors or AP courses taken:</b> None	39 (66%)
One	9 (15%)
Two or more	11 (19%)
<b>Highest math course taken:</b> Algebra I and/or Geometry	18 (31%)
Algebra II	23 (39%)
Advanced Math, Functions/Pre-calculus	17 (29%)
<b>Semesters of participation in the Program:</b> One	33 (56%)
Two	13 (22%)
Three	13 (22%)
<b>Participating students with jobs during the school year</b>	44 (75%)
<b>Parental education (student-reported):</b> High school diploma or less	17 (29%)
Some college/Associate degree	26 (44%)
Bachelor’s or advanced degree	11 (19%)
Unknown	5 (8%)
	<b>GRADES</b>
<b>High School Grade Point Average:</b> Median	82.9 (C+)
Lowest	61.4 (F)
Highest	94.1 (A-)

**FUTURE PLANS AND POST-SECONDARY DEGREE AMBITIONS: BEFORE AND AFTER PARTICIPATION**

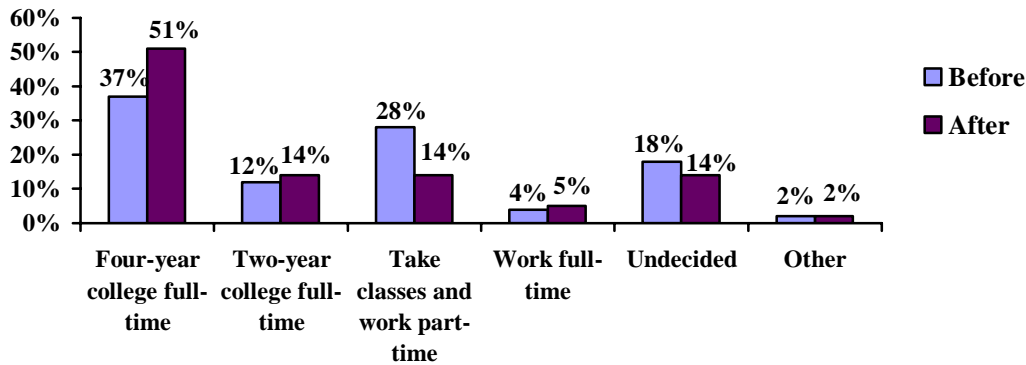
Students applying to the Program are asked about their post-secondary plans following acceptance, and then they are asked again at the end of each semester. Initially, about one-half (49%) of participating students

reported that they planned to go to college full-time (either in a two-year or a four-year degree program). As shown in Figure 2 on the following page, this proportion increased to nearly two-thirds (65%) by the end of

three semesters. The proportion of students who planned to take college classes part-time, meanwhile, decreased by half—from 28% to 14%—over the three semesters. Among the 12 students who reported—for the first time after participating in the

Program—that they intended enroll in a four-year degree program full-time, one-half had planned to take classes part-time prior to participation in the Program, one-third had been undecided, and 17% had planned to go to two-year college full-time.

**FIGURE 2: POST-SECONDARY INTENTIONS: BEFORE AND AFTER PARTICIPATION**



Participating students are also asked about the highest degree they eventually hope to complete. Before participating in the program, two-thirds (67%) of students reported that they hoped to eventually complete a bachelor's or advanced degree (This figure may seem high for a group of students identified as being at risk of not going to college, but it is much lower than the overall trend among Maine high school students. In 2002, 90% of Maine high school juniors and seniors reported that they planned to go to college, and 80% said that they expected to earn at least a bachelor's degree. See *Maine Policy Review*, Winter 2002. Typically, the percentage of students intending to earn a college degree far exceeds the number of students who actually enroll in a post-secondary program.).

After three semesters in the Program, the proportion of students who said they expect to eventually earn a bachelor's degree or higher had increased from 67% to 73%. The proportion of participating students expecting to complete an advanced degree increased from 21% to 29% over the three semesters. Of the 13 students who were undecided about their degree goal before participating in the Program, seven (54%) reported at the end of their latest semester in the Program that they hoped to eventually complete a college degree.

### **EFFECT ON HIGH SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**

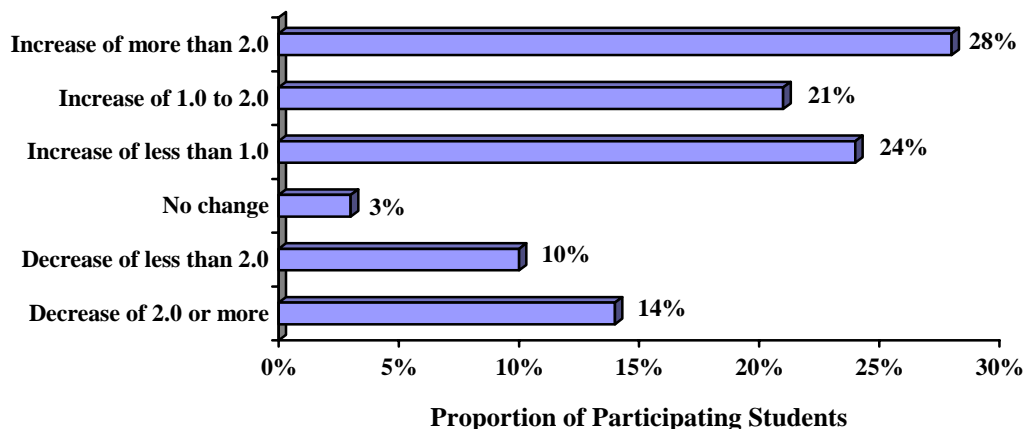
Nearly three-fourths (72%) of participating students improved their high school GPA during the three semesters they were in the

Program. Twenty-four percent had lower GPAs after participating, and 3% had the same GPA before and after participation. At

WHS, grades are reported on a 100-point scale, and 70 is the lowest passing grade. The change in GPAs during the time students participated in the ECP ranged from -2.57 points to 5.56 points, with a median of

1.3 grade points. For instance, one student improved her GPA from 81.0 to 82.3, or from a C to a C+. Another student improved from 83.8 to 87.3, which moved his GPA from a C+ to a B.

**FIGURE 3: CHANGE IN HIGH SCHOOL GPA DURING PROGRAM PARTICIPATION**



While an examination of the high school transcripts of participating students indicates that a more rigorous high school course of study was taken after starting the Program, the High School Advocate also reports that this trend has extended to the entire school. One example is that enrollment in AP courses has doubled during the past two years. Among participating students, 15% took a math course beyond Algebra II for the first time, and 12% took an AP course for the first time while participating in the

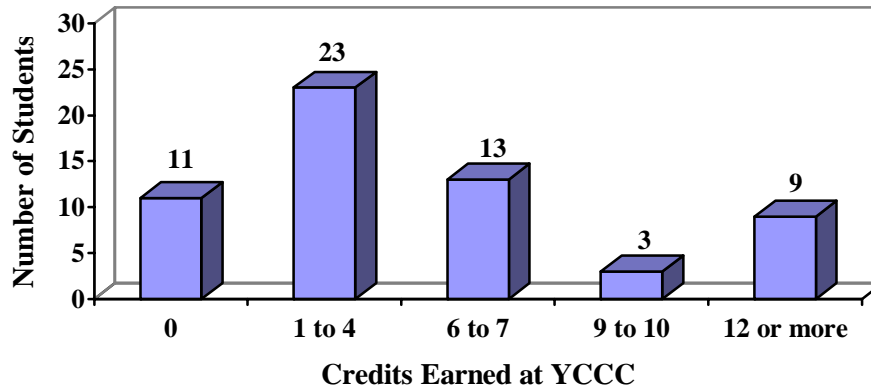
Program. The Advocate believes that many participating students would have entered the regional Career and Technical Education Center had they not had the opportunity to participate in the Early College Program at YCCC. “Participating students gain confidence and challenge themselves with more rigorous courses here at WHS. They also become more informed about those classes that are required for college admission,” he says.

**STUDENT PERFORMANCE AT YCCC: GRADES AND CREDITS EARNED**

Most courses at YCCC carry three credits. Exceptions are a one-credit College Success Management course and the four-credit laboratory science courses. Participating students earned between zero and 19 credits during the program’s first three semesters. As shown in Figure 4 on the following page, 23 students (39% of the 59 student participants) earned between one and four

credits. About one in five students (13 students or 22%) earned six or seven credits, and another one in five (12 students) earned at least nine credits by completing three or more college courses. Eleven participating students (19%) did not earn any credits at YCCC because they either dropped out of the Program or failed their college course.

**FIGURE 4: COLLEGE CREDITS EARNED: FIRST THREE SEMESTERS OF THE PROGRAM**



In the first three semesters of the Program, 48 students completed 125 classes at YCCC. Of the 125 classes completed, students earned a C or higher in 108 (86%) of them, which means that they can transfer the college credits earned if they are accepted to an institution of higher education. Students earned grades of B- or higher in 93 courses, or 74% of the time (see Figure 5 below). The average GPA earned by all ECP students over the first three semesters of the Program was 2.97 (just below a B), and the median was 3.17 (midway between B and B+). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of participating students earned a college GPA of B- or better.

12 students (20%) earned A to A- averages.

- 26 students (44%) earned B+ to B- averages.
- 8 students (14%) earned C+ to C- averages.
- 2 students (3%) earned a D average.
- 11 students (19%) either dropped out or failed their college courses (during the third semester of the Program, however, no students dropped out or failed YCCC course(s)—see further discussion beginning on page 18.)

**FIGURE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUAL COURSE GRADES EARNED AT YCCC**

LETTER GRADE	NUMBER EARNED	# OF STUDENTS WHO EARNED THIS GRADE*
A or A-	38	21
B+ to B-	55	35
C+ to C-	15	13
D+ to D-	9	9
F	8	7

\*in one or more classes

The grades that participating students earned at YCCC compare favorably with those of a national sample of community college students. While 69% of students earned an A or B GPA, only 49% of community college students nationally report that they earn

“mostly B’s” or higher. Only 8% of participating students earned a GPA of C- or lower, while 38% of community college students report that they usually earn “C’s and D’s or lower” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

**FIGURE 6: GRADES EARNED AT YCCC BY SPECIFIC COURSE**

<b>CLASS</b>	<b># OF STUDENTS</b>	<b>AVERAGE GPA EARNED</b>	<b>HIGHEST GRADE</b>	<b>LOWEST GRADE</b>
College Success Management (1 cr.)	21	B	A	C-
Psychology 101	14	B	A	F
English 101	9	B+	A	C+
Sociology 101	9	C+	A-	F
Digital Imaging	9	B	A	B-
Web Development	7	B+	A	C
Intro to Graphic Design	6	C	B+	F
Art Appreciation	5	A-	A	B
Intro to Drawing	5	B-/C+	A-	D
Food Service Sanitation	5	F	D	F
Computer-Aided Drafting I	4	B-/C+	A	F
Intro to Business	4	B+/B	A-	B-
Intro to Environmental Science	3	B+	A-	B
Web Programming I	3	C	A-	D+
Customer Relationship Management	2	B	B	B
Intro to Computer Operations	2	C/C-	A-	F
Motion Graphics	2	A/A-	A	A-
Social Psychology	2	B+	A-	B
3-D Animation	1	B-	–	–
Accounting I	1	C	–	–
Biology (4 credits)	1	B-	–	–
Computer-Aided Drafting & Design 2	1	B	–	–
Marine Biology (4 credits)	1	B+	–	–
Multicultural America	1	A-	–	–
Music Appreciation	1	C+	–	–
Oral Communications	1	A-	–	–
Principles of Nutrition	1	D-	–	–
Statistics	1	B+	–	–
U.S. History 1877 to the Present	1	C	–	–
Visual Basic Programming	1	B	–	–
World Religions	1	B-	–	–

Figure 6 on the previous page shows the distribution of grades in each of the YCCC courses that at least one participating student completed. The one-credit College Success Management course has been the most popular; it was completed by 21 early college students. Fourteen students took Psychology 101, and nine students each took Digital Imaging, English 101, and Sociology 101. Of all the college courses completed by more than one student, there is only one—Food Service Sanitation—in which no participating student earned at least a B. The instructor notes that the course “should only be taken by students who want to pursue a degree in Hospitality/Culinary Arts. The material is very dry.”

Participating students with higher high school GPAs tended to earn higher grades in

their college courses than those with lower GPAs. Factors such as the number of credits earned in high school, the specific courses taken in high school, parental-education levels, and stated college aspirations prior to entering the Program were not correlated with the grades students earned at YCCC. However, students who dropped out of the Program without completing their courses were more likely than others to have parents without a college degree and/or to have completed fewer high school credits than average. Students who succeeded in the Program were twice as likely as those who dropped out to have taken a math class beyond Algebra II, and more than twice as likely to have taken a Biology II or higher science course, in high school prior to entering the program.

**“I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life....After I took a couple psych classes at YCCC, I knew that's what I wanted to major in. At Clark, I'm majoring in psychology with a concentration in biology to someday become a pediatric neurophysiologist. And it's all thanks to the Program.”**

## STUDENT PROFILE: SAGAN



Sagan entered the Program as a junior, and that year she improved her grade-point average from a C to a B. Commenting on her high school experience, Sagan says, “I was a pretty bad student. I didn’t do my work, I wasn’t focused, and I didn’t really care.” She also says that the College Success Management course she took at YCCC helped her learn how to use her time more effectively and improve her writing. Sagan thinks the class “should really be given in high school.”

Sagan is now taking two Advanced Placement courses and a genetics class at WHS, and Graphic Design at YCCC. She has applied early admission to her first-choice college, where she hopes to earn a bachelor’s degree in equestrian studies and business. As the first person in her family to attend college, Sagan says, “My parents didn’t expect this much of me. They are really excited that I’m going to college.”

Sagan also reports the Program “showed me that people really do care out there and that they want to help you out.” She mentions that she likes the freedom of taking classes at the college during the school day, and that the experience made her want to attend a four-year college or university rather than a community college.

Sagan thinks that “a lot of kids come out of high school really unprepared,” and encourages teachers to “push them a little more academically, and help them get started sooner thinking about what they want to do” after high school.

## COLLEGE-GOING AMONG PROGRAM GRADUATES

Forty-four participating students have completed high school, and the other fifteen are now in their senior year. We received survey responses from 31 (70%) of the 44 graduates. Overall, nearly two-thirds of graduating students who participated in the Program (65%, or 20 of the 31 survey respondents) entered college immediately after high school. Fifteen of the survey respondents graduated in 2004, and sixteen graduated in 2005. The college-going rate among 2004 graduates, who had only participated in the Program for one semester, was 53%, or just above Maine’s statewide college-going rate of 50% for that year (Maine Compact for Higher Education, 2005). Among 2005 graduates who

participated in the Program for up to three semesters, 75% have enrolled full-time in college.

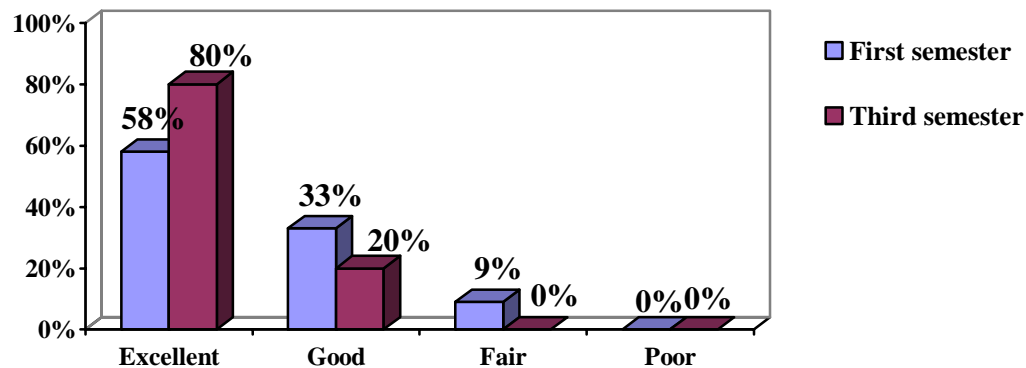
Among participating graduates who have gone on to college, 55% are enrolled in four-year institutions, and 45% are attending two-year colleges. Eight of the 20 (40%) are enrolled full-time at YCCC. Other participating graduates attend Clark University, Curry College, Keuka College, Lawrence University, McIntosh College, Salem State University, Suffolk University, University of New Hampshire, University of Southern Maine (2), Wentworth Institute of Technology, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

## STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND SELF-ASSESSMENTS OF PERFORMANCE

All participating students are asked to respond to a brief survey at the end of each semester. At the end of the first semester, most students (58%) considered their

experience in the Program to have been “excellent.” This proportion increased to 80% by the end of the third semester, as shown below.

**FIGURE 7: OVERALL STUDENT ASSESSMENT OF THE EARLY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE**



Of the 27 students who participated in the Program’s third semester, only four (15%) were taking college classes for the first time. Nearly one-half (48%) had also participated during the first two semesters of Program, and the other 37% were in their second semester. Participating students surveyed at the end of the third semester were more

likely than those surveyed at the end of the first semester to consider themselves “very successful” at (1) adjusting to the academic demands of college and (2) interacting with college faculty and staff, but they were less likely to say that they were “very successful” at managing their time (see Figure 8 below).

**FIGURE 8: STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENTS: PROPORTION OF STUDENTS WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES “VERY SUCCESSFUL” IN FOUR AREAS:**

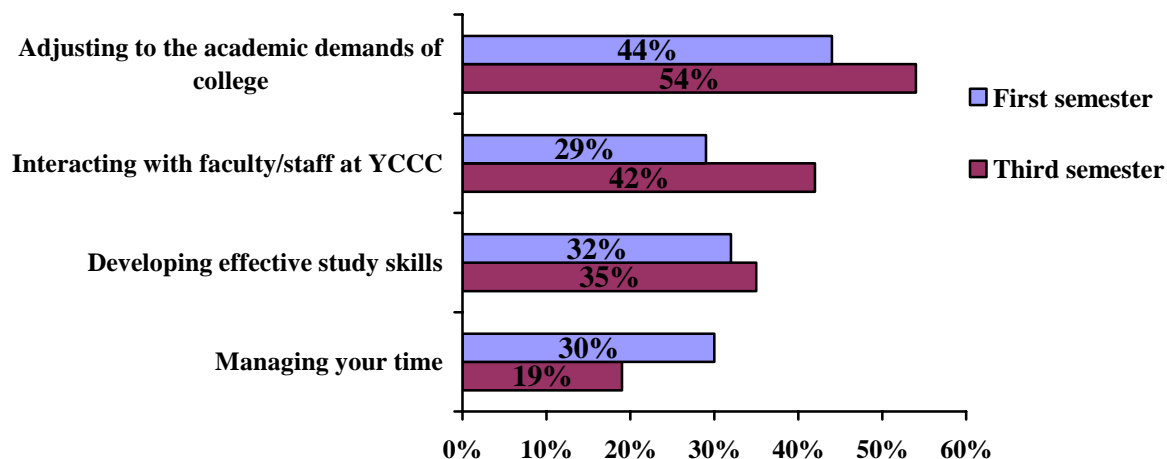


Figure 8 on the previous page shows that by the end of the third semester more than half (54%) of the participating students felt they had “very successfully” adjusted to the academic demands of college. Four in ten students (42%) reported that they interacted with college faculty and staff “very successfully,” and one-third (35%) said that they were similarly successful at developing effective study skills. However, fewer than two in ten participating students (19%) felt confident about how they managed their time. These self-assessments are strongly correlated with the GPAs students earned at YCCC—the higher the GPA earned in college courses, the more students considered themselves “very effective” in one or more of the four surveyed areas.

Participating students are also asked how their college experience differs from their high school experience. Students typically mention that (1) there is more freedom at the college, that (2) fellow students are more motivated than their high school peers, and (3) that they find the college environment more conducive to learning than their high school. Some students say that there is more work in their college classes or that the work is more difficult. The following are a few representative student comments about their college experience:

- “A lot more freedom—school is easier for me when I have room to breathe.”

## **FAILURE TO COMPLETE THE PROGRAM**

Of the 59 students who participated in the first three semesters of the Program, seven (12%) dropped out without completing their college courses. Six of these dropouts occurred during the first semester, and one student left during the second semester. Another four students (7%) failed their YCCC course(s), two in the first semester and two in the second. In the third semester,

- “I feel like an adult. I have more freedom and feel more motivated to do work.”
- “It seems much more relaxed and more quiet and comfortable. I enjoy it.”
- “Learning is easier here because everyone in all my classes really wants to learn.”
- “More freedom—hats, food are allowed in class. Teachers expect more of you and treat you as an adult. Classes have no goofing around.”
- “People treat you with more respect, and expect more from you. It’s a great feeling. Plus, you don’t have to sign out all the time.”
- “The college experience is a lot more laid back, but it gives you the responsibility. If you’re late, no one yells at you, but no one explains what you missed. I think it works out better in the end.”
- “There are older people in my classes and it shows me how important it is to do well now so I won’t have to come back when I am 30 or 40.”
- “You have a lot more freedom, but the work is harder and you have no one to push you to do it.”

none of the participating students dropped out or failed their college courses.

Three factors are correlated with dropping out of the Program: (1) student-reported parental education level, (2) the number of high school credits completed, and (3) the highest science course completed in high school. None of the students who dropped

out of the Program reported having a parent with a post-secondary degree, compared with 19% of students who remained in the Program, and dropouts also tended to have earned fewer high school credits than other participating students in their class. Students who left the Program were only about half as likely as other students to have completed a high school math course beyond Algebra II (14% compared with 31% of successful students) and they were twice as likely to have not taken a science course beyond Biology I (57% compared with 25%).

Of the seven students who dropped out of the Program before completing their courses, five reported that their primary reason for leaving the program was personal, while two left primarily for academic reasons. The specific reasons that students did not complete the Program appear to be highly individual. As shown in Figure 9 below, not one of the contributing factors listed in the survey was identified by a majority of respondents as a major factor.

**FIGURE 9: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS IN STUDENT DECISIONS TO LEAVE THE PROGRAM (N=7)**

REASON	MAJOR FACTOR	MINOR FACTOR	NOT A FACTOR
Decided the courses I enrolled in were not for me	43%	0%	57%
Trouble with classes/academic work	29%	29%	43%
Scheduling conflicts	14%	43%	43%
Transportation problems	14%	14%	71%
Health reasons	14%	14%	71%
Displeased with YCCC	0%	43%	57%
Need to work full-time for financial reasons	0%	29%	71%
Family reasons	0%	29%	71%

Students who dropped out were also asked to identify supports or resources that would have helped them remain in the Program. Three respondents indicated that nothing would have helped. The other four respondents answered with the following:

- “A lot more help and understanding. I've always had help with my work in school. Class was hard, and I knew it wouldn't work.”
- “If I didn't have such a full schedule at school and after school. It was hard to go to school after school.”
- “Not having to take care of financial problems and getting sick at the same time.”
- “Transportation was my biggest problem.”

### **III. STAFF AND ADMINISTRATOR INSIGHTS**

#### **PROGRAM IMPACT ON WELLS HIGH SCHOOL**

High school staff and administrators say that the Program has had a significant impact on the high school. “The entire school community has opened its eyes to YCCC and all the opportunities it offers,” says the High School Advocate. In addition to giving students the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school, the Program (1) demystified college for many students who were uncertain about their plans for after high school, (2) helped students with the transition to college, and (3) allowed students to make connections between their personal interests and specific degree programs or majors they might pursue in college. Beyond the students who participate in the Program, the partnership with YCCC has improved general understanding at the high school about community colleges and associate degrees. The high school has also observed a ripple effect—more WHS graduates are now enrolling in YCCC and other community colleges than before the Program began. The partnership between YCCC and WHS has also made students and faculty aware that it is possible to pursue a

liberal-arts education at a community college (a liberal-arts degree option is a relatively recent addition to the Maine Community College System). “Today, kids who in the past would not have set foot on a college campus are now fearlessly challenging college professors as well as themselves as they attend classes,” says the WHS principal.

The High School Advocate reports a general trend toward more rigorous course-taking at WHS: “We have added more AP level classes and have encouraged more students to enroll.” As a result, the number of students taking at least one AP course at WHS has doubled during the past two years. “We have also cut many ‘soft’ electives from our program of studies. The WHS population in general has elected for a more rigorous course of studies, but the Program students have by far increased their aspirations...The Program is a major factor,” says the Advocate.

#### **PROGRAM IMPACT ON YORK COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

YCCC’s Vice President and Dean for Academic and Student Affairs says that the Early College Program gave the college a way to partner with high schools, both strengthening its relationship with its local high school and demonstrating to other high schools in York County that a partnership with YCCC is a viable option. The Community College now has “concurrent enrollment” early college programs in place with two additional high schools and will begin new programs with two others in January 2006. As of fall 2005, high school

students made up 12% of YCCC’s total student enrollment. The Vice President expects that YCCC will eventually have concurrent-enrollment programs with 11 or 12 high schools in the area, and reports that she has been surprised by the enthusiasm with which schools are embracing concurrent-enrollment opportunities. “The beauty of the Program model is that it primed the pump. It’s the birth model.”

YCCC now offers a menu of concurrent-enrollment options, each with specialized payment structures, to local high schools:

- Interested high school students can be integrated into regular college courses (as in the WHS Program)
- College courses can be offered at the high school either during the school day or after school
- The college can offer an on-campus class specifically tailored for high school students

### **PROGRAM IMPACT ON PARTICIPATING STUDENTS**

At the college, staff members have observed that the college environment allows some students to realize their potential, academic and otherwise, in ways that they could not in high school. The Vice President of YCCC believes that the Program changes the lives of many students who were underachievers in high school because it is specifically marketed to them; she also feels that one of the college's top priorities is to serve these students. She believes that the Program provides greater access to higher education for students who may not be considering college an option, and that it empowers students who haven't been successful in high school. At the same time, students need to have adequate academic preparation to succeed in college classes, and college administrators have encouraged staff at the high school to help ensure that all students are taking math and science courses every year—in particular, YCCC staff suggest that participating students continue taking math courses after their sophomore year. The comments of students who have performed well in college courses support the validity of this advice.

At the high school, students whose academic records put them at risk of not getting into

The Program Coordinator also reports that the Program has had a positive impact on YCCC's public relations. In the words of one faculty member, "I see the program as a way for YCCC to reach out to the community and effect positive change in some young peoples' lives. This, in turn, has a positive impact on the general atmosphere at YCCC and on its reputation in the community."

college, and those who have not thrived either academically or socially in high school, are seen as prime candidates for the Early College Program. The High School Advocate believes that, in some cases, the opportunity to take college courses at YCCC is the one thing that helps some students "pull it together" and succeed in high school. "The college environment seems to give them a real world application of what they've learned in school, and it motivates them to work harder in all their courses," he says.

The Program Coordinator reports that faculty at the college generally cannot identify the high school students in their classes, and that the Program has resulted in a higher regard for high school students among the college faculty. She adds that the success of most participating students proves that those who may have been identified as poor or unmotivated students can rise to the challenge of college-level work given the opportunity and necessary support.

Administrators say that some of the most successful students in the Program, who have since enrolled college, would likely not

have been seen as potential college students. “We’ve been so successful that some of the students don’t need us anymore,” comments YCCC’s Vice President. A total of eight former Program students have enrolled full-time at YCCC, and the Program Coordinator reports that many of them have become unofficial mentors to current Program students. The number of participating students who have enrolled at YCCC after graduation, however, is smaller than some at the college initially expected.

## CHALLENGES

College and high school staff members indicate that scheduling is one of the main challenges in administering the Program. For example, the high school recently adopted a trimester schedule, while the college has semesters, which means that while the high school’s second trimester begins on December 5, the first semester at the college doesn’t end until December 17. Students who have new classes starting at the high school in early December may experience conflicts during their last several weeks of college classes. Block scheduling, where classes meet on alternating days from week to week, is also common in high schools, making it challenging for students to coordinate high school classes with college classes that meet on the same days every week. Furthermore, students taking college classes after school may find it more difficult to participate in extracurricular activities at their high school.

In the Program, the High School Advocate plays a key role in addressing scheduling challenges, as does the support of WHS administration. The Advocate encourages faculty at the high school to make necessary exceptions for participating students so that they can coordinate their high school and

The Program Coordinator also mentions that a hidden benefit of the Program is that it provides high school students access to some of the services at the college. For example, she encourages students to consult with the admissions and financial aid offices at YCCC as they prepare to apply for college, regardless of where they are applying. Participating students also have access to YCCC’s library and computers, and they get a student e-mail account at the college.

college classes. For example, students may need to miss part of a high school class for a few weeks at the beginning of a new trimester, or the teachers can allow Program students to engage in directed independent study. The WHS principal strongly supports the Program, and encourages the high school faculty to be flexible when scheduling conflicts occur so that participating students can maintain their full-time status at the high school.

Securing continued funding, for tuition and support staff, has been a challenge for Program administrators. The high school budget added funds this year to underwrite several tuition slots, and the Program began requiring students’ families to pay for books. Still, administrators believe that it is unlikely they will be able to preserve the current 30–35 course slots per semester without continued grant funding.

Another barrier has been convincing some high school and college faculty members of the Program’s merits. At the high school, some teachers perceive college courses as competition or even as a potential threat to their positions. In fact, the general perception exists that some high school

faculty members still don't understand or agree with the Program's goals. At the college, some faculty members were initially concerned about the ability of high school students to meet academic standards, but college administrators report that this

concern has largely or entirely been dispelled.

### STUDENT PROFILE: SCOTT



Scott says that he found the first year or two of high school monotonous, but that his experience improved once he entered the Program. Scott began the Program with a high school GPA of 81.9 (C), but he earned a B+ average in four YCCC classes—College Success Management, English, Environmental Science, and Psychology—over three semesters, while also improving his high school GPA to 86.5 (B-). He is now studying engineering at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts.

One of seven siblings, Scott says, “I will be the first in my immediate family to go to college.” He thinks that he may eventually pursue an advanced degree.

Commenting on his experience in the Program, Scott says, “I’ve always wanted to be an engineer, but the taste of college life showed me why I really wanted to do it. College is a really good environment for learning, in comparison with high school.” Scott feels like the Program helped him reach his educational goals, and that taking college classes while in high school taught him to manage his time better. He adds, “The accessibility of [the Program Coordinator] is perfect. You are helped instead of being thrown into the mix with all the other college students. In terms of getting into the daily grind, the advice they provide makes it much easier on you.”

### COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL FACULTY COLLABORATION

YCCC's Vice President reports that an assistant dean at the college is convening faculty members from YCCC and local high schools to begin the process of aligning their math curricula. She also reports that the Program has created a positive and mutually beneficial partnership between staff and faculty at YCCC and WHS. A business professor at the college is reportedly planning to offer a course at the high school sometime in the near future. It does not appear, however, that the Program has as yet fostered widespread communication or

collaboration across faculties at the high school and college. One high school teacher suggested that the two institutions “arrange more interaction with YCCC staff and Wells staff, so we understand what each group does a little better.” Another teacher suggested that administrators arrange a tour of the facilities at YCCC for Wells faculty members.

## **CHANGES IN POLICY AND PRACTICE**

The Program has undergone several changes since it began. First, the Program Coordinator position was reduced from a full-time to a half-time position, although the Coordinator is likely to eventually serve students from all the dual-enrollment high school programs that YCCC is developing. Second, the Program stopped paying for students' books (except for those students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch). This is seen as a positive change, as it conserves funds for tuition slots, cuts down on the Coordinator's administrative duties, and is said to give students and their families a manageable financial stake in their college courses. Thirdly, student admission criteria became stricter over the first three semesters, with the result that fewer students participated in the third semester than in the

first (27 compared with 42). The High School Advocate and Program Coordinator began looking more carefully at high school attendance and course-taking histories to help gauge whether interested students would be prepared for college-level work and able to make the necessary commitment to the Program. For example, students must have earned enough credits to be on track for an on-time graduation from high school to qualify for the Program. Limitations on the number of college courses participating students could take were also adopted. Program students now take one college course during the first semester, and those who do well in the course and satisfy all the Program requirements can then take up to two courses in subsequent semesters.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

While administrators and staff expect the Program to continue indefinitely, they believe that the Program will likely have to serve fewer students—possibly half as many or even fewer—when grant funding ceases. The WHS budget is now paying the tuition for a small number of current students, and the principal hopes to see a line-item increase in the school budget to further support the Program. One option under consideration is asking families to pay 50% of the tuition for YCCC courses in order to give more students the opportunity to participate.

Financial support is needed to pay for student tuition and to fund and staff the Program Coordinator position. The Program model, in which high school students are integrated into regular college classes, is more expensive in terms of tuition and student support than other models of dual or concurrent enrollment. At the same time, many participating students credit their on-campus experience in college classrooms and the hands-on support of the Program Coordinator for their academic successes during and after participating in the Program, so there is evidence that the more expensive elements of the Program are also the most beneficial to participating students.

## **EFFECTIVE EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAMS: ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS**

Administrators at YCCC encourage colleges that are considering offering early college opportunities to be flexible in working with

various high schools. The Vice President has been surprised by the variety of specialized needs among the high schools in York

County, and she believes that colleges must be ready to balance their own needs with those of partnering high schools. She urges colleges to “keep an open mind, be flexible, and think outside the box.” For example, expanding the roles of existing staff to provide support for early college students, or enlisting deans and faculty to work on aligning high school and college schedules or curricula, would facilitate partnerships with high schools and benefit early college students.

The Program Coordinator recommends that high schools and college consider early college programs even if they do not have funding identified to cover student tuition. “Students and their parents need college exposure and will be willing to pay for it.” She adds that having a contact and coordinating person on the college campus to help high school students makes a big difference. This staff person should be able to serve many students, particularly since once participating students become more familiar with the college and comfortable

with the new responsibilities they become more independent. Now that she is in the fourth semester of coordinating the Program, the Coordinator finds herself doing less “hand-holding” and more academic and college advising with students.

The High School Advocate encourages schools that have a college campus nearby to develop early college programs, saying that “it’s only been a benefit to us.” He says that having an advocate or advisor for early college students at both the high school and college will make a significant impact on the retention and success rates of students in the program. “At least initially, this population of students needs help navigating scheduling and other obstacles both with teachers at the high school and at the college,” he adds. The WHS principal advises others that “the minor glitches and diatribes surrounding the Program are miniscule compared to the overarching triumphs of the spirit experienced by our kids.”

### STUDENT PROFILE: ERIC



Eric began the Program as a junior in spring 2004 with a low B grade-point average. He characterizes his experience in high school prior to entering the Program as “the same dull thing every day,” adding that some students in high school don’t want to be there, which can make learning, and desiring to learn, more difficult. Without the Program, Eric says, “I wouldn’t have lasted another full year in high school. The Program gives you a chance to get a jump on your future, rather than waiting for it.”

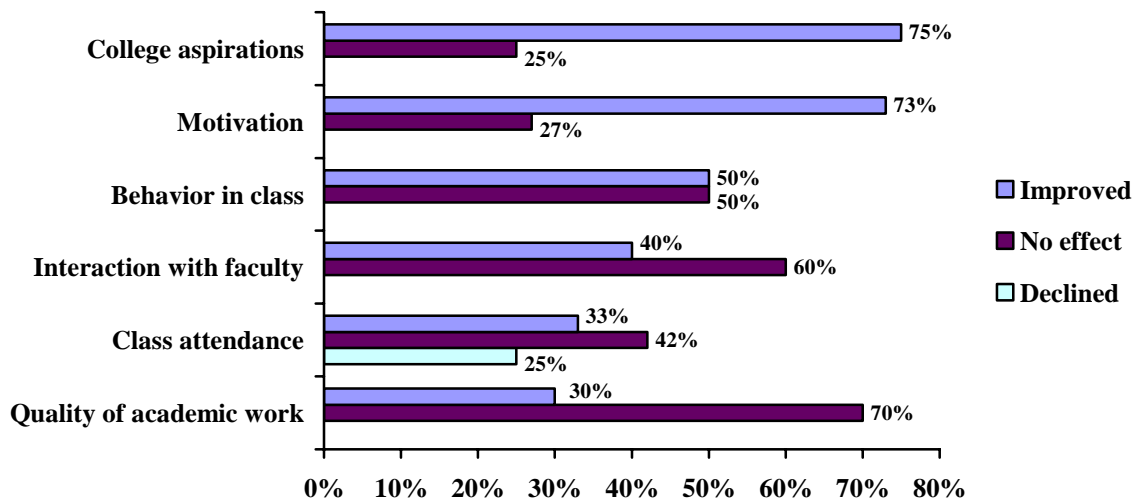
Eric completed six courses at YCCC and earned 16 college credits during his last three semesters of high school. Now a student at Keuka College in New York, Eric says that the Program had a huge impact on him. “The Program allowed me to see what college is about and experience the enlightened atmosphere.” At the beginning of his first semester in the Program, Eric was undecided about his post-secondary plans and wasn’t sure what career fields interested him—although he did eventually hope to earn a bachelor’s degree. Eric now intends to pursue an advanced degree. Eric’s parents and his older brother all have some form of post-secondary education, but Eric will be the first in his family to earn a bachelor’s degree.

## IV. HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE FACULTY PERCEPTIONS

Twenty-one WHS teachers and nine members of the YCCC faculty who taught participating students responded to a written survey during the Program’s first semester. At the high school, teachers were most likely to report student improvements resulting from participation in the Program in the areas of college aspirations (75%), motivation (73%), and behavior in class (50%), as shown in Figure 10 below. The

only area where any respondents indicated declines as a result of participating in the Program is class attendance—25% said class attendance declined, while 42% said there was no effect, and 33% said it improved. While 70% of high school faculty did not report any change in the quality of academic work, a review of high school transcripts showed that 72% of students improved their GPAs while participating in the Program.

**FIGURE 10: HIGH SCHOOL FACULTY ASSESSMENTS OF PROGRAM IMPACT ON STUDENTS**



About two in five respondents from the high school (38%) reported that having Program students in their classes had an effect on other students, in terms of the quality of classroom discussions, classroom dynamics, or in other ways. One teacher explained, “I see evidence of increased self-esteem, willingness to take on challenges, and accountability. Their expectations of their peers have increased—Program students call others on whining or lame excuses.” Another teacher said, “It gives kids some insight into postsecondary education that they may not get normally (e.g., high school

kids can handle college work).”

Nearly all respondents (94%) said that the Program has had an impact on Wells High School as a whole. Four in five (81%) said that the overall effect of the Program has been positive, and the other 19% said it has been both positive and negative. The following are a representative selection of comments made by WHS faculty:

- “It is tough when YCCC classes conflict with obligations here at school.”

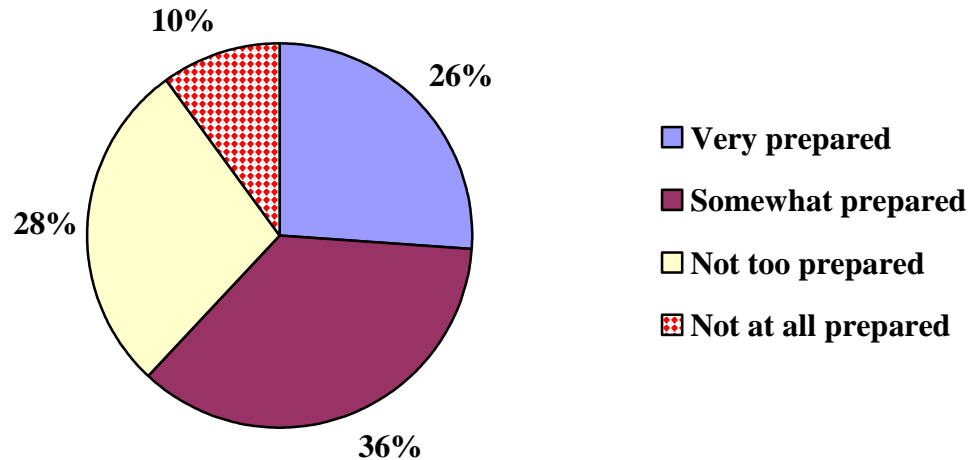
- “More students are able to learn in more meaningful ways. Many of them learn that they are more capable than they thought.”
- “Raises student aspirations; gives students who might not traditionally consider attending college the opportunity to do so.”
- “Some students are exposed to the rigorous demands of college courses and make that rigor known to other students. Several students chosen for the program have left it or are struggling, which reinforces a message of college being out of their reach.”

YCCC faculty members were asked how academically prepared participating students

were for their classes. As shown below, teachers considered about one-quarter of Program students “very prepared,” more than one-third (36%) “somewhat prepared,” 28% “not too prepared,” and teachers considered 10% of participating students “not at all prepared.”

YCCC faculty members reported that participating students “fit in” to the college classroom well. Two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that Program students fit in “very well” to their classrooms, and one-third said that the students fit in “somewhat well.” No teacher said that participating students fit in to their classrooms “not too well” or “not at all well.”

**FIGURE 11: COLLEGE FACULTY ASSESSMENTS OF STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC PREPAREDNESS**



**FIGURE 12: COLLEGE FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATING STUDENTS COMPARED TO OTHER YCCC STUDENTS**

CRITERIA	ABOUT THE		
	BETTER	SAME	WORSE
Class attendance	0%	100%	0%
Motivation	0%	89%	11%
Behavior in class	0%	100%	0%
Quality of academic work	0%	78%	22%
Interaction with faculty	0%	100%	0%
Interaction with other students	11%	89%	0%
Class participation (quality and/or quantity)	11%	78%	11%

YCCC faculty members report that participating students are comparable to other YCCC students, as shown in the Figure 12 above. Exceptions include: two of nine respondents (22%) considered the academic work of Program students' to be of lower quality than that of other YCCC students. One respondent (11%) indicated that students' class participation was better and another (11%) reported that it was worse than the attendance records of other YCCC students. One instructor reported that participating students had better interaction with other students, and one indicated that the early college students were less motivated than other YCCC students.

One-third of respondents (three faculty members) reported that they had made special arrangements for a Program student. One teacher said that the course syllabus was modified to better address the learning style of participating students. Two teachers said that they held extra study sessions for the Program students, and one of these also held an extra test-taking session.

Two-thirds of responding YCCC instructors indicated that the presence of early college students did not affect other YCCC students, while one-third reported that the students do have an effect on other students in their classes. These teachers reported effects on classroom dynamics and discussions. Two of three faculty members said that the impact of Program students on others was positive, and one said it was both positive and negative. Teachers offered the following descriptions as illustrations:

- “Older students treated them like sons and daughters. Very positive effect.”
- “Other students in the class accepted Program students as peers and treated them with respect.”
- “A student was great about introducing himself and networking.”
- “The Program students seem to be highly motivated and conscientious. Having these students on campus increases exposure to YCCC, helps prepare students for college because of in-depth advising, and adds to the diversity of the campus, which is always positive.”

## V. IMPLICATIONS

Even as it current level—serving roughly one-quarter of the Wells High School junior and senior classes—the Program’s impact on the high school, the college, and the participating students has been considerable. The academic success experienced by most Program students in both college and high school demonstrates the enormous potential of this early college model for improving the academic achievement and college aspirations of underperforming high school students. The individual experiences of students show that early college can be transformative for those who are not thriving in a traditional high school setting.

Program participants were specifically selected because they had been identified as at risk of not attending college, yet participating high school graduates enrolled directly in college at a rate well above the state average. This finding suggests that early college has the potential to increase the likelihood that more Maine students will enroll in college. As the Great Maine Schools Project expands its statewide early

### SUSTAINABILITY

To truly serve at-risk and underperforming students, students whose parents may not have earned a college degree, and those who face financial barriers to college, early college programs must find ways to cover the costs of tuition and fees. Assuming grant funds may not be available to support most early college efforts, changes may need to be made to the school funding formula set out in Maine’s Essential Programs and Services. For instance, the State could provide an incentive to identify local funding for early college programs by

college efforts and research, and as it follows early college students and graduates over time, we will learn whether this improvement in college going is going to be both sustainable and exportable to other Maine communities.

Student, staff, and administrators all report that key factors in the Program’s success have been (1) the opportunity for students to take courses on a college campus alongside actual college students and (2) the availability of staff to advocate for and support students at both the high school and college.

The first three semesters of the Program have also revealed several broader issues that must be addressed by Maine’s high schools, community colleges, universities, and state policymakers before early college can become a viable statewide strategy for improving Maine’s high school achievement, college-going rates, and post-secondary attainment.

providing matching funds. Other potential outside sources of funding for early college are local businesses, community organizations, and philanthropic foundations and individuals. Schools should take creative approaches to tapping local resources for early college.

A key contribution can be made by post-secondary institutions that are willing to invest in early college as a matter of enlightened self-interest. After only three semesters in operation, 12% of YCCC’s

enrollment is now composed of concurrently enrolled high school students, and that percentage promises to grow with the addition of several more early college partnerships with area high schools. Since early college students can be placed into under-enrolled classes and program-coordination costs can be recouped by the

increase in enrollments, subsidizing these programs—by waiving fees or offering reduced-price tuition—can be a wise long-term investment strategy for colleges and universities.

## **ACADEMIC PREPARATION**

High school students must be well prepared academically to succeed in an early college program. Among the seven students who dropped out of the Program during the first two semesters, four were not on track to graduate from high school on time (as gauged by the number of credits they had earned relative to their year). Program administrators note that students tended to be particularly under-prepared in math, and recommend that all high school students take a college-preparatory math course all four years of their high school career. Participating students advised other high school students to challenge themselves with

rigorous courses, and they suggested that high school teachers offer more challenging coursework, including more analytical writing.

Early college also seems to be an effective strategy for promoting reform at the high school level. As WHS experienced, the Program, in conjunction with other reforms, encouraged more rigorous course taking by students who had not traditionally enrolled in higher-level classes, while perceptions were changed about which kinds of students were capable of succeeding in college.

## **STUDENT SUPPORT**

Individualized support for early college students on the college campus seems to have been a crucial element in the success of the Program, particularly for students who were not necessarily considering college an option during their freshman and sophomore years of high school. The Program

Coordinator believes that one supporting staff person working part-time can serve as many as 55 students at a time, particularly if there is a guidance counselor or other staff member at the high school helping with scheduling issues, marketing, and advocating for early college students.

**“I wouldn’t have lasted another full year in high school. The Program gives you a chance to get a jump on your future, rather than waiting for it.”**

# APPENDIX

## RELATED RESOURCES

Great Maine Schools Project website: [www.greatmainschools.org](http://www.greatmainschools.org)

Wells High School website: [www.wocsd.org/whs/index.htm](http://www.wocsd.org/whs/index.htm)

York County Community College website: [www.yccc.edu](http://www.yccc.edu)

Jobs for the Future's Early College High School Initiative website: [www.earlycolleges.org](http://www.earlycolleges.org)

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**“Students’ ultimate success in high school may depend largely on how they perceive their future with regard to higher education.”**

**—Jobs for the Future, 2005**

**“I didn’t care about school, but since I started the early college program at York County Community College I began realizing that my future depends on what I do now, and that forced me to do better and set more goals for myself. And now, not only am I doing better in school, I feel better about myself. The teachers I have had at YCCC are the best teachers that I’ve had so far, and I’ve learned so much.”**

**—Maggie, Junior at Wells High School**

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