

**BUILDING STRONG COLLEGE
PARTNERSHIPS**

OPERATING AND FINANCING AN EARLY
COLLEGE DISTRICT

RECRUITING, DEVELOPING, AND
RETAINING TALENT

ALIGNING COURSES AND CAREER
PATHWAYS FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

CREATING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

DEVELOPING COMPREHENSIVE
STUDENT SUPPORTS

ENGAGING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY



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USB drive, which contains
related resources and example
documents from Hidalgo.

Access the web version of this
toolkit at hidalgo.jff.org.

BUILDING STRONG COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS



Many high schools and colleges collaborate for years with little to show for it. Early college provides a concrete objective for these collaborations: preparing and supporting all students in earning college credits while in high school so they enter college with no need for remediation.

TAKE STEPS TO PARTNER WITH A LOCAL COLLEGE. Establishing a close working relationship with a college, supported and guided by formal agreement, is crucial for developing a sustainable and effective early college. Here are some of our ideas about forging a productive partnership.

- » **Make contact as soon as possible.** Our college partners have helped us determine our costs, course offerings, and responsibilities. As a result, we recommend initiating partnership conversations with a college as soon as possible, before presenting a partnership proposal to a school board.
- » **Contact college leaders.** Eventually, the support of the college president—and the college’s board—will be crucial to ensuring a strong commitment across the institution. It is also important to find supporters among faculty, including the academic dean or provost. To establish working relationships at these levels, consider beginning by approaching contacts in dual enrollment programs and programs serving first-generation college-goers. Staff in these positions can help you facilitate additional relationships across the college.
- » **Approach meetings as equals.** In our early meetings with college leaders, the attitudes around the table are often as important as the topics we discussed. We approach all meetings with a strong interest in learning about the college, its opportunities, and its expectations. We are also clear in describing our goals and identifying the resources we are committing in support of student success. It is crucial that the school district and the college work together as equal partners.
- » **Agree on the concept and goals.** In developing our partnerships, many of our first discussions focused on the concept and goals of early college and their implications for our students and institutions. Early conversations also focused on securing support and commitment at the highest levels in the college and the district. Gradually, we created a steering committee to plan for resource commitments, particularly regarding tuition and fees, instructors, transportation, and books and materials. The committee also discussed administrative and logistical challenges, from applications and financial aid to scheduling. And we talked about academic issues and student supports, including course sequencing, instructional strategies, college readiness assessments, and academic advising.

BE PREPARED FOR COMMON MISPERCEPTIONS. As our plans for early college moved forward, we not only visited our college partners but also invited deans and faculty to our schools and our community to meet with parents and students. Both in our schools and on college campuses, we encountered many misperceptions about what high school students can accomplish. While we did not expect to convert anyone overnight, we designed approaches that could expand support for early college over time.

- » **Academic readiness of high school students.** We have worked hard to develop academic and career pathways that are appropriate for our students. We commit to preparing our students to succeed in college courses, and we support them in those courses. For high school teachers uncertain about their students' abilities, we invite them to apply for summer positions auditing the college courses themselves and tutoring the Hidalgo students taking them. When choosing college courses for our students, we select those taught by instructors with experience teaching high school students or first-generation college-goers.
- » **Maturity of high school students.** We require all freshmen to take a "college success" course on the study skills and other habits associated with college success. We also assign monitors to ensure that our students act appropriately on college campuses.
- » **Questions about instructional quality.** Hidalgo high school students are expected to fulfill the same requirements as other students in their college classes. Thus, we defer to our college partner and its faculty regarding all questions of instructional quality. For college courses taught at the high school, our teachers must have a Master's degree and receive adjunct instructor status from the college. The college's department dean, who must approve all syllabi, provides the same oversight for Hidalgo teachers as for all adjunct instructors. For all college courses, Hidalgo provides additional tutoring and other supports to help our students succeed.

ESTABLISH REGULAR LINES OF COMMUNICATION. To assist in planning for early college, we created a steering committee with high school and college participants representing faculty, student services, and administration. In addition, we have developed several lines of ongoing communication across institutions:

- » **College president – district superintendent.** In our partnerships, the college president and district superintendent are responsible for setting the vision and ensuring institutional commitments regarding the goals of early college.
- » **College dean/dual enrollment director – high school principals.** Each principal works closely with a dean, associate dean, or director who can cut through bureaucracy, resolve challenges, and provide a consistent voice regardless of personnel changes over time. When logistical or procedural questions arise, many crucial decisions about programming happen at this level.

- » **Dual enrollment or early college coordinator – high school counselors.** In Hidalgo, we charge our counselors with understanding the detailed rules, timelines, and procedures of college, including applications, financial aid, assessments, course selections, scheduling, and transcripts, as well as tracking other student outcomes. Our counselors work hand in hand with a coordinator at the college who can answer questions and resolve concerns promptly.

- » **College instructors – high school teachers.** It has taken a lot of work, but we have developed substantial, ongoing, invaluable contacts between individual high school teachers and college instructors. Due to time commitments on both sides, we have had less success with developing formal committees than we have with providing incentives for our teachers to earn their Master's degrees, apply for adjunct status from our nearby college, and teach college classes at our high school. Because so many of our teachers are college adjuncts, they collaborate with other college instructors as department colleagues. As adjuncts, our teachers receive oversight and regular information from their academic departments concerning professional development and curricular changes. College faculty, through contacts with teachers, gain information about effective instructional strategies for high school students.

DEVELOP A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING. A Memorandum of Understanding, signed by the college president and the district superintendent, provides a formal framework to support early college.

The MOU clearly establishes responsibilities for key resources and accountability, as well as identifying means for resolving issues as they arise. Early college has a national track record, with many examples of MOUs to draw upon.

At Hidalgo, our MOU with South Texas College has helped us build an early college infrastructure that holds down costs regarding tuition and instruction, transportation, and books. It also is essential to how we manage and finance early college. Other key elements to consider in an MOU include governance, planning, communications, professional development, student supports, and grading policies.