

## INTRODUCTION TO THE HIDALGO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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

## INTRODUCTION TO THE HIDALGO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



### HIDALGO'S STUDENTS

99.5%	Hispanic
89%	Economically Disadvantaged
70%	At Risk
53%	English Language Learner

Jobs for the Future presents the Hidalgo Early College District Toolkit, a resource for practitioners seeking to prepare all students for postsecondary success. Nationally recognized for its innovative approaches and strong results, Hidalgo is a small, rural school district in South Texas where every student earns college credits before graduating from high school. After two years of collaboration with Hidalgo, Jobs for the Future is pleased to share the district's knowledge about what it takes to create college opportunity for all.

### HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

The strategies and lessons in this toolkit, described from the voice of the Hidalgo Independent School District, were compiled by Jobs for the Future through visits and interviews over a period of two years. JFF created this collection of materials to help practitioners in other school districts, as they begin planning how to introduce early college opportunities or expand them to many more students, see how they might adapt Hidalgo's approaches for their own communities.

Each section of the toolkit describes how Hidalgo approaches a specific aspect of planning and implementing early college for all. Read the pages describing key strategies, then consult the USB drive for sample documents from Hidalgo, such as college partnership agreements, course syllabi, and informational packets about college for parents. Explore the special reports, which take a closer look at important aspects of Hidalgo's program.

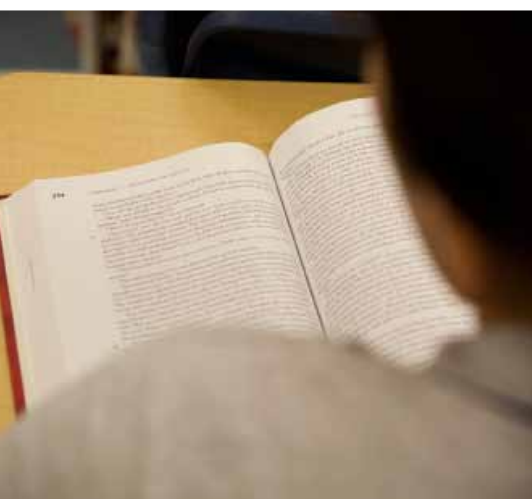
– *Jobs for the Future*



### PLUG IN TO LEARN MORE!

Learn more by exploring the USB drive, which contains related resources and example documents from Hidalgo.

Access the web version of this toolkit at [hidalgo.jff.org](http://hidalgo.jff.org).



**WELCOME TO THE HIDALGO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**, a rural district of nearly 4,000 students in South Texas on the Mexican border. In 2005, we made a commitment: all of our students, not just a select group, would earn college credits before graduating from high school. Since then, we have built the infrastructure to transform our district. We have developed robust college partnerships and rigorous course sequences, created comprehensive student support systems, and garnered the strong involvement of parents. Today, Hidalgo is a community where postsecondary education is attainable for all.

Early College High Schools are designed so students underrepresented in higher education can simultaneously earn a high school diploma and up to two years of college credit, tuition-free. Today, there are more than 230 early colleges nationwide, small schools serving 400 or fewer students. But in 2005, when we got the opportunity to open an early college, our comprehensive high school had 800 students. We wanted to take advantage of this opportunity but were unwilling to leave half our students behind. In partnership with the University of Texas–Pan American, the University of Texas System, and the Texas High School Project, we received approval for our “college for all” vision and a major grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to become the nation’s first comprehensive early college district.

Our results show that early college can be a reality for all—even in a rural, economically disadvantaged community. In 2010, our first class of early college students graduated with a combined total of 3,743 college credit hours. Our students completed math, English, and other core academic courses, as well as career and technical courses that lead to high-paying careers. More than 95 percent of our students graduated with college credits, and two-thirds of the students earned a semester or more of credit.

The class of 2011 earned 5,184 college credit hours, and the vast majority planned to enroll in college this fall across and beyond Texas. Through their early college experiences, they became familiar with the rigor and expectations of college, and they began to see themselves as college students. Our successes have been recognized in major media outlets and education journals such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *Education Week*, and *Edutopia*.

As we and our college partners began this journey, we borrowed or adapted many strategies from other early colleges. But many challenges were unique to Hidalgo due to our emphasis on early college for all students. Over five years, we have learned much about what it takes for a district to support every student to college success. And we continue to revise our design and practices to support students better and strengthen our sustainability.

In collaboration with Jobs for the Future, we are sharing and disseminating our lessons learned through this toolkit. We believe the knowledge presented here can inspire other school districts to adapt our strategies for their own communities—and to guide them as they, too, expand college opportunity to all.

- Hidalgo Independent School District