

INTRODUCTION TO 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

OPERATING AND FINANCING AN EARLY COLLEGE DISTRICT



To adopt a districtwide early college approach, we worked to develop a financial infrastructure supportive of early college. We have contained costs by reviewing our finances and shifting some resources to support and align with an early college mission. In addition, a good partnership agreement with a college or university can help to define and limit early college costs. Here are some of the ideas we've used in Hidalgo to make early college sustainable.

PRIORITIZE EARLY COLLEGE AND USE IT TO BUILD COMMUNITY SUPPORT. In these times of tight budgets and fiscal restraint, nothing gets funded unless it is a high priority. If early college is to succeed, you'll need to make it a priority fiscally as well as functionally. Here in Hidalgo, early college is who we are. As educators, we see our job as preparing all students for college success. And our job as leaders is to realize that vision and make it sustainable.

We were fortunate to receive start-up funding for early college from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as later support from federal stimulus funds and an early college expansion grant from the Texas Education Agency. But now we budget for early college without those outside funds. Over the past three years, we have reduced our general supply costs, and last year we had no pay increases.

Like many school districts, we routinely develop a range of budget scenarios based on the level of funding we expect to receive. In one of our budget scenarios, for example, we project cost savings on energy and transportation by going to four 10-hour days each week in the summer. This change would allow us to continue our robust summer school programs, which include college courses. In all of our scenarios, early college is a given.

Our commitment to early college helps us galvanize community support. Last year, the residents of Hidalgo voted to raise their school taxes to the maximum allowable by the state, which will bring in an additional \$1.8 million this year. This vote reflected in part the goodwill generated by early college, which can shave off two years of college expenses for parents.

"We have a very supportive community here, and education is a high priority," says Irma Hinojosa, the district's director of special populations. "About 90 percent of our community is economically disadvantaged. They support us in helping their children to better themselves."



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.

BUILD AN EFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE. We have found that early college add three major costs to our district budget: transportation, teachers, and books. Our partnership with our local college, South Texas College, has helped us determine and limit the expenses in all three areas. Based on this partnership, we have created an infrastructure that enables us to sustain early college. Here are some suggestions based on our experience.

» **Manage transportation costs.** We have worked hard to limit transportation costs while ensuring that all students have access to the college courses and after-school tutoring they need. Our high school is about 20 minutes from South Texas College, and during the school year, about 570 of our students take college classes. We do not have the resources—either logistically in terms of scheduling or fiscally in terms of transportation—to provide courses at STC for all those students. Instead, we provide most college courses on our campus. Early on, we paid STC instructors to come to Hidalgo to teach many of the courses, a much less expensive option than busing students to the college. Now, we save even more money by staffing many of the courses with our own teachers who have Master’s degrees and have received adjunct status from STC.

During the summers, we do bus students (mostly seniors) to and from STC. In addition, during the school year, we bus students to STC for several college courses that cannot be delivered at Hidalgo Early College High School—such as health care-related courses that require special equipment.

» **Get faculty in place to teach college courses.** An equally important strategy is to provide incentives for high school teachers to earn Master’s degrees, apply to STC for adjunct teaching status, and teach college courses at the high school. These incentives include an annual \$3,000 bonus for teachers with Master’s degrees, as well as incentive pay for teachers to earn college credits toward an approved Master’s. Using our own teachers to deliver college courses, rather than hiring instructors on staff at the college, yields major savings that outweigh the cost of the incentives. (Through our partnership with STC, we do not pay tuition or teacher costs for our high school students who take classes on the college campus, so long as they enroll in course sections already being provided to other students. If course sections are dedicated to Hidalgo students, we pay the cost of the instructors’ salaries associated with those sections but still no tuition costs.)

At least 17 Hidalgo teachers now have Master’s degrees and have either received adjunct status from STC or are applying for it. This has created an early college infrastructure that holds down our costs, and it has enriched our instruction. It also has helped us align our curriculum with that of the college, because many of our instructors span high school and college.

» **Limit book costs.** For us, college textbooks routinely cost from \$75 to \$150 each—and can reach \$300 in the sciences. Our memorandum of understanding with STC includes ways to hold down these substantial costs. For example, where appropriate,

Hidalgo teachers with adjunct status at STC can use the state-adopted Advanced Placement textbook for their college courses. In addition, STC has agreed that core college courses for Hidalgo students will maintain their textbook edition for at least four years.

Hidalgo’s technology department is ordering 30 Kindles to see if they represent a better solution than textbooks for some students, in terms of both cost and ease of use. We will offer the Kindles to students on a voluntary basis.

» **Be aware of other fees and costs.** Ask college partners about additional costs that may be associated with college-going. Fortunately, neither Hidalgo nor our students pay tuition, admission fees, library use fees, or other use fees associated with college. However, we are responsible for equipment fees associated with some classes; in some cases, we share those costs with students who can afford to pay for such items as their own uniforms and stethoscopes. We do not pay for health insurance for students, but we have purchased additional liability insurance.

EXPLORE ALL FUNDING STREAMS. Early college brings some additional costs, but it also introduces new ways of approaching existing funding sources and opens doors to new options.

As an example of adapting an existing source of funding for career-technical education, we have paid for some college course equipment, books, and materials under Title I funding (Carl D. Perkins reallocations). Title I funding has also helped pay for the salaries of parent liaisons at every campus, who have been crucial for keeping parents informed about early college options.

Another source of funding was the Texas Education Agency, which gave expansion grants to selected high schools that adopted an early college approach. As an early college district, we used this opportunity to seek funding to improve our curriculum and course alignment in middle school. We were the only district in the state to receive an expansion grant for this purpose.

The following priorities have guided us as we look for new grant sources for early college in Hidalgo:

- » Network and forge new college partnerships, and use these activities to identify new funding opportunities.
- » Look for grants and other types of revenue that serve low-income and first-generation students in college.
- » Look for grants that can help pay for college books and materials.
- » Seek large grants rather than small ones; the application process can be laborious even for small amounts.
- » Seek state funding where possible, since federal funding is often highly competitive.
- » Apply to foundations, but be prepared to identify clear student outcomes.