

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

RECRUITING, DEVELOPING, AND RETAINING TALENT



**EARLY COLLEGE
DESIGN SERVICES**

 **JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**



As leaders of an early college district, we have learned to play a variety of roles and take on many challenges in supporting every student to succeed in college. In doing so, we have found that part of being a leader is empowering all of our staff to adopt new roles and take leadership as well. Here are some concrete strategies to consider when leading the district toward the goal of early college for all.

USE EARLY COLLEGE TO CREATE A STRONG VISION OF CHANGE. A key benefit of early college is a powerful vision of student success that can be communicated clearly to everyone: We help every student prepare for and succeed in college courses while in high school. Making this vision concrete does not happen overnight—we still have a lot to learn in Hidalgo after six years—but there is no reason to delay in moving forward.

» **Reach out to state and national leaders of early college.** We were fortunate in Hidalgo to receive a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, through the Communities Foundation of Texas, to help us become an early college district. As important as this funding was, we also needed information and resources to help us plan and move forward. Firsthand networking with those who have experience with early colleges—such as Jobs for the Future, the Texas High School Project, and the University of Texas—helped us with our planning and implementation.

» **Work with your college partners to determine key factors.** As our grant from the Gates Foundation has ended, we have continued to partner with local colleges to expand our early college infrastructure. We have found that partnerships with colleges help us determine what we can offer and how much it will cost. This is the kind of information you need when you approach your school board about an early college strategy.

» **Communicate clearly with your school board.** Every board has its own dynamics and opportunities. When communicating with our board, we are transparent about the challenges as well as the benefits of early college. In terms of challenges, we emphasize that we already undertook these when we began working in education: to prepare all students to succeed beyond our hallways. In Hidalgo, early college has helped us clarify our vision and translate it into concrete actions to raise expectations for all students.

» **Create a community-wide vision.** Early college has helped transform our aspirations as a community. Many parents and community leaders were on board from the start. But we also encountered resistance from some parents who were hesitant to allow their children to plan for the possibility of attending college away from home. We took concrete steps to ensure that parents and community leaders would help make early college a reality.



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.



ADJUST FOR NEW ROLES IN ACHIEVING EARLY COLLEGE. When Hidalgo became an early college district, we knew immediately that we needed a total team effort—the job of aligning secondary and postsecondary education was too big for any single staff person. To succeed, everyone had to try new roles. If we were raising our expectations of students, we felt we had to take on greater roles ourselves. Here are some of the ways our jobs changed at the high school:

» **Principal.** Our high school principal keeps everyone focused, in the midst of daily challenges, on the overall goal of supporting all students in preparing for and succeeding in college classes. No one has all the answers, but the principal helps everyone find a way through to solutions. For example, the principal is our on-the-ground leader in managing our partnerships with colleges. The principal must be a negotiator and communicator who can help others accept and bring about change, from college partners and teachers to parents and students.

» **Assistant principals.** Given the curricular and instructional adjustments needed to prepare and support high school students in taking college classes, we adopted a “distributed leadership model” in which assistant principals become instructional leaders. Based on her or his experience and interests, each assistant principal is assigned to several academic and career-technical departments. The assistant principals meet regularly with the teachers in those departments to ensure they have the support needed to reach their instructional goals for early college, including assistance and training in aligning their curricula to those of college.

» **Teachers.** Our teachers enable students to make a smooth transition from high school to college—both by aligning curriculum and by providing interventions and supports to help students succeed in college classes. We train teachers to use a common set of instructional strategies that are effective in developing the deeper learning necessary to succeed in college classes. Teachers meet as departments once a week to plan and serve as leaders in aligning coursework between high school and college. Our district provides incentives for teachers to earn Master’s degrees and teach college classes as adjunct faculty of the local community college. Teachers also provide tutoring before, during, and after school, and audit college classes with students on the college campus during summer.

» **Counselors.** In addition to their traditional responsibilities, our counselors serve as liaisons with colleges. More than anyone else at the high school, the counselors need to understand the details of college admission processes, registration processes, scheduling, financial aid, course sections, and options for academic and career-technical pathways. Counselors develop a master schedule that supports college course-taking for students. They help students with high school planning, college planning, and career planning, and they motivate all students to take rigorous college courses. They keep track of student progress and grades across multiple institutions—including calculating grade point averages and class rankings. And they are prepared to explain complex educational systems in ways that make sense for parents and students.

» **Bus drivers, custodians, office clerks, food workers, and other staff.** Every staff member of the district, not just academic staff, has a role in helping students succeed. Bus drivers offer service at flexible times for students who stay after school for tutoring or college classes. Custodians and other staff are flexible in accommodating building use after school and on weekends. And food service workers ensure that students have access to nutritious meals at appropriate times.