EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM DESIGNATION CRITERIA FOR EQUITABLE ACCESS

The Early College Joint Committee of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education developed and approved designation criteria for early college programs in June of 2017.

Guiding Principle 1: Equitable Access

Designated programs should prioritize students underrepresented in higher education enrollment and completion. To facilitate this, programs should be structured to eliminate barriers to student participation. Design might therefore include, but not be limited to, tuition-free participation, open enrollment without regard to prior academic performance, student supports to promote success, scalability, multiple entry points for students, and student supports to prepare students for entry into the program.

The designation criteria pursuant to this guiding principle are designed to focus on the goal of closing achievement gaps and offering educational models to leverage students' own personal assets and help them thrive. Research of early college models nationally has demonstrated the effectiveness of designing early college to ensure equitable access. As such, the Massachusetts Early College designation is designed with the goal of broadening access to college through this model.

Therefore, this portion of the application is aimed towards keeping entry into early college pathways as open as possible, particularly with regard to prior academic performance. It is also focused on prioritizing program design and enrollments for students who have historically been underrepresented in higher education. Therefore, designation applicants are encouraged to make real, targeted, and thoughtful efforts to aggressively recruit students who may be the first in their family to go to college, who are part of demographic groups historically underrepresented in higher education, who may be English language learners, or who may otherwise not yet possess a perception that they may be a college going student.

<u>Preliminary Designation Criteria to demonstrate Equitable Access:</u>
1. The program is designed and funded such that it will be offered free for all student participants—including tuition, fees, and other related expenses.
2. Should student applications exceed program capacity, participation should be determined by a lottery among applicants, or by another method intended to ensure equitable access to the program.
3. Initial enrollment in early college should be made without regard to past academic performance.[1]
4. The program will present an effective plan for outreach and recruitment of students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education, including students of color, low income students, English language learners

and students with disabilities. The program leverages the work of existing college access programming to identify students who would benefit from the program. Programs are encouraged to utilize the postsecondary Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) to identify and prioritize eligible students.

5. Program design aims to reflect an admissions and placement policy that ensures that the highest number of first-generation and other underrepresented students are able to participate successfully in early college programming.

6. Data are presented about the current number and percent of students in the high school or district that are low-income, students of color, and/or first generation who would be prioritized for inclusion.

Final Designation Criteria to demonstrate Equitable Access:

The applicant shall continue to meet all criteria requisite for Preliminary Designation. In addition, the applicant must demonstrate:

1. Long-term program design that reflects a reasonable plan to target enrollment of significant scale relative to school/school district size.

2. Program design that reflects thoughtfulness and opportunity with regard to student entry and exit points in the program. A program will demonstrate a clear pathway for students, but will also be designed to allow for more than one entry point for students. Program design will also be structured such that should a student need to exit the program, the student will be able to seamlessly transition out of the program and back into the traditional or a different high school program.

3. The applicant will also submit the following:
   a. Longitudinal data showing at least five years of student enrollment trends.
   b. Needs assessment demonstrating potential district need for such a program in the district or region. Such a needs assessment could include high school graduation rates, postsecondary entry/persistence/completion rates, skills gaps within the regional labor force, economic trends, community support, etc.
   c. Written recruitment plan, including a timeline of recruitment and enrollment events, and recruitment materials for distribution at feeder schools and other appropriate locations in the community (e.g., recruitment schedule).
   d. Written communication plan for prioritizing identified audiences, parents, community members, school board, higher education personnel, business and industry partners, etc.
   e. Materials used for outreach and recruitment, including but not limited to, brochures and marketing in English as well as Spanish and/or relevant second language(s).
   f. Written admission policy, including a potential lottery process and any program enrollment requirements.
   g. Calendar of family/parent outreach events and other opportunities to educate students, counselors, principals, parents, the school board, business and industry partners, and community members on the Early College program.

Download the complete Early College Toolkit here.