

The Context of the Early College Initiative in Massachusetts

While the Gates Foundation did not fund individual high schools in Massachusetts, the Commonwealth took notice of the impact of these programs across the country. In 2016, the Barr Foundation partnered with the Commonwealth to sponsor an independent report, "[Breaking Down Silos to Put Students on the Path to Success](#)."² The report confirmed that Early College is a promising model which could be a critically important way to narrow educational opportunity gaps across groups of students; that aligning state policy goals with the promotion of Early College could have a deeply meaningful impact on scaling improved outcomes in postsecondary completion; and that existing Early College programs within community colleges and high schools in Massachusetts were a powerful base from which to build a broader statewide Early College initiative. The report also suggested that this initiative in turn could have a profound impact on the Commonwealth's economy.

Based on the national research, the report prioritized five essential elements of successful Early College programs that were ultimately adopted as the framework for the Massachusetts Designation Criteria for Early College programs. These five guiding principles are:

- Principle 1: Equitable Access
- Principle 2: Guided Academic Pathways
- Principle 3: Enhanced Student Support
- Principle 4: Connection to Career
- Principle 5: Effective Partnerships

In January 2017, the Boards of Elementary and Secondary Education and Higher Education jointly approved the establishment of a Massachusetts Early College initiative based on the five principles. In order to develop and evolve the initiative, the Boards also created an Early College Joint Committee.³ The ECJC was charged with developing an Early College Designation process for the Commonwealth based on the five identified principles and catalyzing the successful growth of high-quality Early College programs in Massachusetts. The ECJC meets regularly and issues final approvals for all Early College Program Designation in Massachusetts.

² Parthenon-EY, *Breaking down silos to put students on the path to success: The promise of early college in Massachusetts*, December 2016.

³ A five person joint committee of both boards, which includes the Chair of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Chair of the Board of Higher Education, one additional member from each board, and the Secretary of Education and on which the Commissioners of Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Education serve as non-voting members as well.