ECS Resources Highlight Opportunity for Career Preparation in High School

DENVER, CO – Today, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) launches new tools designed for policymakers focused on dual enrollment and early and middle college high schools. The two databases and policy brief outline successful state approaches to preparing students for postsecondary education and career opportunities — starting in high school.

Early and middle college high schools, also known as early and middle colleges, typically target traditionally underserved youth. Middle colleges are designed to offer students the opportunity to earn some postsecondary credit. Alternatively, early colleges allow students to begin an integrated high school/postsecondary curriculum as early as grade 9 so that, in five years, students may earn a high school diploma along with an associate degree, technical certification or enough credits to enter college as a junior. Ideally, these programs prepare students for jobs with career potential that are aligned with local and state economic development priorities.

“Early college high schools prepare students with the knowledge, talent and skill they need for success in this competitive economy,” said North Carolina Governor Mike Easley. “By making a college degree more affordable and accessible, early college programs allow children to reach their full potential and help the United States build the most skilled workforce in the world.”

The early and middle college database (http://www.ecs.org/hsdb-echs) provides profiles of early and middle college state policies (guidelines for establishment, funding mechanisms, student eligibility, student supports and faculty requirements). A companion policy brief (http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/78/63/7863.pdf) highlights key state policy components that maximize the potential of early colleges.

The third ECS resource examines dual enrollment programs. Similar to early and middle colleges, these programs generally allow students to earn both high school and postsecondary credit, but often begin in grades 11-12 and target mid- to high-achieving students. This database (http://www.ecs.org/html/hsdb-de) highlights 15 characteristics of statewide dual enrollment policies including student eligibility, funding, course requirements and postsecondary partners.

As ECS Senior Policy Analyst Jennifer Dounay notes, “An increasing number of students nationwide are participating in dual enrollment programs. State policies can play a key role in ensuring students and their parents get maximum ‘bang for their buck’ — that courses are high quality and allow opportunities to earn postsecondary credit recognized by other postsecondary institutions.”

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The Education Commission of the States (ECS) is the only nationwide, nonpartisan interstate compact devoted to education. ECS helps governors, legislators, state education officials and others identify, develop and implement public policies to improve student learning at all levels. A nonprofit organization, ECS (www.ecs.org) was formed in 1965 and is located in Denver, Colorado.