

Early College Folio

The House of Education Needs Overhaul

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Educational “Overhaul” Expands Pathways to College and Career

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EDITORS’ NOTE: *This is one of several responses to Elizabeth Blodgett Hall’s [“The House of Education Needs Overhaul.”](#) Hall was the founder and president emeritus of Bard College at Simon’s Rock, the only full-time, four-year, residential college of the liberal arts and sciences designed for students ready for college after the 10th or 11th grade. Hall’s article is published alongside these responses by early college leaders in this first issue of Early College Folio.*

In 1967 Bard College at Simon’s Rock founder Elizabeth B. Hall declared that “the house of education needs overhaul” in an article outlining the theory behind Simon’s Rock. She pointed out that the unaltered, outdated structure of education in which children were expected to enter “at the bottom and emerge at the top prepared, presumably, to enter the adult world” (p. 2) needed to be transformed to capture the “middle years” of the educational sequence. She defined the middle years as the last two years of high school and the first two years of college where students “mastered the Three R’s [reading, (w)riting, and ‘rithmetic] but are still not in a position to make a commitment as to the way in which they will spend their lives” (p. 3). Mrs. Hall argued that students needed to be given an early opportunity to follow a liberal arts education through self-discovery by expanding their worldviews before the pressure of making a commitment to college or pursuing a particular career.

For over 50 years, the United States has exerted recurring efforts to design and implement an educational paradigm shift to raise the bar, close the achievement gaps, and finally address the need to appropriately prepare all students for both college and career. The root of the reform movement began two years prior to Mrs. Hall’s article when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty program. This extensive legislation was aimed at improving the education of poor students by narrowing the achievement gaps through equal federal funding and opportunities for all students that included high standards and accountability without imposing a national curriculum.

To prepare all students for college and career, it is important to understand the past that inexorably shapes the future. The purpose of public education has long been to develop and prepare students to lead productive lives by attend-

ing an institution of higher education or by directly entering the workforce. After decades of research and reform, the nation was still grappling with how to abate the American education crisis and reform the system to benefit all students. History demonstrates that the reform movement had been plodding along on a long and winding road without significant traction and progress on the very goals the agendas were designed to promote.

The American dilemma of preparing all students for college and career was not new, but Mrs. Hall's theory of action was progressive. She challenged the status quo by suggesting an effective overhaul of the hierarchical educational system by offering a liberal arts experience to the high school student. The premise of her proposal was to capture the time when students' interests could be stimulated and their talents and skills honed while they were still free from the burden of needing to prepare for their future. She wanted to allow students to grow intellectually at a pace more aligned with their physical growth—to be divergent, critical thinkers. Her theory was that it was best to provide students with exposure to responsible adulthood before they actually needed to be responsible adults. It was a practical approach that opened the door to the possibilities available to better prepare young high school students to make wise choices based on knowledge and experience gained within a safe environment where they had time to develop and find themselves.

Preparing all students for college and career is a primary responsibility and moral imperative for K-12 school districts across the nation. All students deserve equitable access and preparation for college and career opportunities. While most reform efforts that had been in existence for over 50 years repeatedly failed to make a substantial impact, Bard College, the parent institution of Simon's Rock, gave birth to a network of public, tuition-free high school early colleges which have made a substantial difference in the lives of countless students. Bard Early College operates under a slightly different model than what is widely known as the Early College High School (ECHS) model. The latter typically gives students the opportunity to take college courses during their junior and senior years either on the high school campus or on a local college campus, while the former "provide[s] both the high school and college education in one building, with a unified, college-credentialed faculty teaching both high school classes (in 9th and 10th grades) and college courses (in place of 11th and 12th grades)" (Bard Early College, n.d.). In both models, students complete the high school graduation requirements concurrently with college credit accrual. Besides opening the minds of students by introducing them to college curriculum at an earlier age, early college high schools also make college more accessible and affordable to lower income and minority students.

In 2010, Conley offered a nationwide definition of college and career readiness as:

the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate

program, or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement. (p. 21) The key phrase of Conley's definition is "without remediation," as that is a path which leads to courses that incur debt without bearing college credits, which then leads to college dropouts. The ECHS models help to eliminate the need for remediation and therefore give students a distinct advantage so they can be successful.

In an era of diminishing financial aid, complex systems, and rising expectations, leaders need support and guidance on how to adapt, inspire, and maximize opportunities for all students. To maintain high expectations for all students regardless of their academic, health, or social status, school districts need resourceful leaders who know how to drive systemic improvements beyond the mandated learning standards, performance measures, and data driven agendas (Dweck, 2006; Feinburg, 2012; Houston, 2001; Schlechty, 2009; & Sergiovanni, 2007). These researchers underscore that district leaders must be willing to ensure that they are implementing the appropriate strategies across K-12 systems to improve access and opportunities by creating multiple pathways for college and career readiness of all students. Feinburg (2012) further identifies the need for leaders to take specific and strategic actions that are widely shared and embedded deep within the fabric of the school structure and culture.

The Early College High School model has become an increasingly popular and effective strategic action high schools nationwide embed within their course offerings. It does not cost districts a lot of money, however, the courses taken within the high school setting can save families thousands of dollars in college expenses. Students are given the opportunity to do challenging work that helps them to stretch their minds, satisfy their curiosities, and pursue their passions. The credits are typically accepted by institutions of higher education, and as Mrs. Hall points out, there is "still time ahead for specialized, or vocational, training" if the period of time spent in high school "freely searching for an understanding of self and others" leads a student to that independent conclusion and pursuit (Hall, 1967, p. 5).

Elizabeth B. Hall was a pioneer with high expectations for transformational leadership during a decade when female leaders were just beginning to emerge. Her theory behind Simon's Rock began a Renaissance within the "House of Education." Deep cultural shifts have since altered the way leaders think about traditional sequential pathways and, as a result, how students progress from high school to college and career.

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