

Repurposing the Senior Year of High School to Increase Academic Outcomes and Workforce Success

A Pilot Project between Gadsden ISD, Doña Ana Community College,
and The Bridge of Southern New Mexico

Overview

The Bridge of Southern New Mexico has long been an advocate for improving high school graduation rates through innovative approaches to high school. The first outcome of its community-wide collaboration was Arrowhead Park Early College High School, an educational model that propels students toward high school graduation and two-year college degree completion simultaneously. Arrowhead Park and other Early College High Schools have demonstrated near 100% graduation rates for students, including those who are low-income, children of color, and first-generation college attenders.

Building upon the success of the model, The Bridge is exploring a new approach in traditional high schools that could forge a new and better path for early college access and success for all students. A “Blended” Senior Year, in which the senior year of high school becomes the freshman year of college could create a host of positive outcomes for students, schools, colleges, and taxpayers, as well as laying the foundation for the K-14 educational system that New Mexico needs for its long-term academic and economic viability.

The Model

Building upon the partnership between the Gadsden Independent School District and Dona Ana Community College, our pilot project will identify a group of 25 sophomores at Santa Teresa High School in SY 18-19 who self-select, with parental approval, to participate in the project beginning their junior year. The students we most desire to affect are for those who are "in the middle" academically and may or may not have pursued post-secondary education outside of their participation in the pilot.

The pilot will build a stronger bridge between high school and college using Dual Credit courses in Career and Technical Education pathways aligned to higher wage, higher paying careers in eight industry fields identified by county-wide economic development efforts:

- Healthcare
- Aerospace
- Defense
- Digital Media
- Energy
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Transportation & Logistics
- Value-Added Agriculture

Students in the pilot will complete 24-30 college credit hours during their senior year of high school, with some initial coursework possibly taking place in the junior year or the summer

before their senior year. Students will graduate with an industry-recognized credential, or one year of coursework completed toward an industry-valued associates degree.

The Outcomes

The pilot provides the "learning laboratory" in which we will integrate into the students' experience the critical elements of:

- Career exploration
- Determination of "college readiness"
- Establishing the students as a "cohort" to promote community and mutual support
- Blended advising between high school and college to ensure success in both places
- Peer mentors to help students navigate the "culture" of college
- Transportation between high school and college campuses
- Parental education, similar to that offered to Early College High School parents, to ensure they are aware of the implications of early college participation and the need for parental support throughout the pilot

The pilot also is intended to serve as a "learning laboratory" for education policy that would inform broader Career and Technical Education, Dual Credit, and Blended Advising practices in the future:

- Actual cost of dual credit programs on both public education and higher education partners with a model for future funding formulas
- Impact on high school and college completion rates
- Impact on remediation post-graduation
- Return on investment of state dollars measured to families and to the state
- Impact on employability post-high school
- Impact on middle-skills workforce gaps

As part of the effort, we will build into the pilot a host of metrics that will be continually tracked and will inform any "course corrections" that would be utilized in design to serve a second cohort of 100 students beginning in SY 19-20.

When we have implemented this program and demonstrated the viability, the Gadsden District and DACC will have started the true "BRIDGE" between K-12 and higher education. This program will demonstrate how it actualize what we have so often discussed as the K-16 educational system.