



Early College High School Initiative Evaluation Intermediary Summary Report: 2003–2004

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Introduction

Through its Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation plans to fund approximately 170 Early College High Schools (ECHSs) over the next 4 years. ECHSs will be designed to accelerate students' academic programs so that they are earning credit in rigorous high school *and* college-level courses while they are enrolled in high school and in a compressed timeframe. This initiative aims to increase the number of first-generation, low-income, and minority students who earn a postsecondary degree and is part of the foundation's broader efforts to develop a portfolio of effective high schools. To support the development of ECHSs, the foundation has invested more than \$100 million to defray the cost of school planning and start up. The foundation has funded intermediary organizations to support the development of ECHSs. These intermediaries represent a mixture of higher education institutions, philanthropic foundations, and education or community-based organizations and are located across the United States.

During the 2002–2003 and 2003–2004 school years, a team of evaluators from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and SRI International (SRI) studied the early implementation of the ECHSI. This report focuses on these organizations and includes 10 intermediaries, seven intermediaries funded in 2002 and three additional intermediaries funded by June 2004.¹

This report will draw on qualitative data collected through interviews and site visits to summarize the early work of the intermediaries. After providing some background on the ECHSI, findings are presented in four key areas. First, the report discusses the degree to which the intermediaries and the foundation share a vision for ECHSs and the ways in which intermediaries have personalized their vision. Second, the report notes the intermediaries' strategies to support the ECHSs and the ways in which some intermediaries underestimated the breadth of activities that would be required of them. Third, the report describes some typical implementation activities and provides examples of ways that intermediaries both are and are not meeting the needs of their ECHSs. Fourth, the report discusses the capacity of different intermediaries and how that capacity interacts with their ability to support ECHSs. The final section of the report summarizes the findings.

Background

The foundation has a number of expectations for the ECHSI. These include creating high schools that (1) target traditionally underserved students; (2) have rigorous, accelerated academic programs that include both high school and college courses and graduate students with high school diplomas and up to 60 college credits in five years; (3) are small, effective schools as characterized by the foundation (e.g., personalization, common focus, active inquiry); (4) were developed through partnerships between institutions of higher education (2-year community colleges, 4-year public or private universities, or private liberal arts colleges) and a public school system or other entity serving K–12 students; and (5) include middle school grades or formal outreach to middle-grade students to prepare them for the rigors of the ECHS curriculum.

The 10 intermediaries that received the funds from the foundation will broker and oversee the relationship between the institute of higher education (IHE), the school system, and any other partners to implement the ECHSs. The intermediaries also provide technical assistance to the ECHSs and facilitate the development of a learning network among their sites.

¹ By fall 2004, the foundation funded 13 intermediary organizations; this report discusses the work of the first 10 intermediaries that received foundation support prior to the 2003–2004 school year.

In addition to these 10 intermediaries, the foundation has also contracted with Jobs for the Future (JFF) to ensure that the goals of the ECHSI are effectively communicated and understood by intermediaries and the organizations, school districts, and IHEs that are interested in opening ECHSs. JFF is a national organization with an extensive history of creating successful transitions for youth, building economic opportunity for adults, and fostering social business ventures.

Below, we provide a brief description of each intermediary and its goals. Additional information can be found in *Early College High School Initiative 2003–2004: Summary of Intermediary and School Activities* (AIR/SRI, 2004).

Antioch University Seattle (Antioch): Located in downtown Seattle, Antioch is part of a six-campus national system of Antioch Colleges. Antioch has considerable experience working with Native American communities in Washington. All of Antioch’s ECHSs will be opened with a Native American community partner. These schools will target Native American students and will include culturally relevant instruction and curricula. Antioch intends to open eight ECHSs in Washington.

The City University of New York (CUNY): CUNY is one of the nation’s largest urban public university systems. CUNY has a history of collaborations with New York City’s Department of Education to offer a system-wide program of college courses, college-oriented workshops, and special activities. Currently, one of CUNY’s largest programs is College Now, a program that enables high school students, mostly in grades 11 and 12, to enroll in college classes that are held after the regular school day or on Saturdays. CUNY intends to open 10 ECHSs in New York City.

The Foundation for California Community Colleges (FCCC): FCCC is a cooperative consortium of California IHEs founded in 1998. The organization supports the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, the Chancellor’s Office, and the colleges, districts, and foundations of the CCC system. In addition to participating in the ECHSI, FCCC assists campuses in obtaining competitive rates from third parties providing technology, facilities, and database development needs. FCCC intends to open 15 ECHSs in California.

KnowledgeWorks Foundation (KWF): Based in Cincinnati, Ohio, KWF is a philanthropic organization dedicated to improving educational opportunities for all individuals. KWF pursues this goal by collaborating with public and private entities. The goal of these partnerships is to improve the educational outcomes for all students. KWF intends to open eight ECHSs in Ohio.

Middle College National Consortium (MCNC): MCNC was formed in 1993 to support secondary and postsecondary public-sector educators in implementing educational reforms to help “at-risk” learners. Schools affiliated with this network are known as Middle Colleges, and they receive ongoing technical assistance from the network. The developers of Middle Colleges believe that by situating schools on a community college campus, they can help at-risk students move beyond their limitations. MCNC intends to open 20 ECHSs nationwide.

National Council of La Raza (NCLR): NCLR is the largest national constituency-based Hispanic organization. One of NCLR’s five key strategic priorities is education. The NCLR ECHSs will be located in areas serving largely Latino communities. NCLR intends to open 12 ECHSs nationwide.

Portland Community College (PCC): PCC is a large, comprehensive community college located in Portland, Oregon. PCC’s Gateway to College offers alternative routes for high school completion and college preparation.

Gateway to College, located on the PCC campus, serves students who have not been successful in the traditional K–12 system. PCC intends to open eight ECHSs nationwide.

SECME, Inc. (SECME): SECME was created in 1975 as the Southeastern Consortium for Minorities in Engineering, and was renamed in 1997. SECME is a nonprofit corporation established through a collaborative effort. SECME links engineering universities, school systems, and corporate and government investors. SECME’s mission is to increase the pool of underserved students prepared to enter and complete postsecondary studies in science, mathematics, engineering, and technology. SECME intends to open eight ECHSs nationwide.

The Utah Partnership for Education and Economic Development (UP): UP was established in 1990 as an affiliate of the National Association of Partners in Education, Inc. UP aims to increase the number of students and employees with high-tech skills to support an increasing number and diversity of higher paying jobs; to improve the quality of education in Utah through business-education partnerships focused on student achievement and teacher retraining; and to increase the research partnership efforts of business and university communities. UP intends to open six ECHSs in Utah.

Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation (WWNFF): WWNFF, founded in 1945, is an independent, nonprofit organization with three broad areas of interest: the liberal arts, access and opportunity in higher education, and partnerships for learning. As an organization, the foundation focuses on the liberal arts and applies that focus in its ECHSs. The foundation also focuses on forming partnerships with “highly selective” and “selective” institutions of higher education (IHEs), including flagship state university campuses and some Ivy League institutions. The WWNFF intends to open 14 ECHSs nationwide.

Although CUNY, FCCC, and PCC are included in this report, they did not have any ECHSs in the evaluation sample in 2003–2004. Therefore, report sections that detail intermediaries’ work with ECHSs will not include these three intermediaries.

Intermediaries’ Visions

As stated above, there are several key characteristics in the foundation’s vision for the ECHSI. In accepting funding from the foundation, intermediaries are committed to establishing ECHSs that reflect these characteristics including: targeting students underrepresented in postsecondary education; developing programs that allow students to graduate with high school diplomas and at least 60 college credits in a compressed timeframe; creating small, effective schools as characterized by the foundation; developing schools through partnerships between a school system and institutions of higher education; and including middle school grades or formal outreach to middle-grade students.

Through our review of documents and interviews with intermediary staff, we have found that the 10 intermediaries’ visions generally share the dimensions stressed by the foundation. Specifically, all intermediaries’ visions include targeting traditionally underserved students, though there is some difference in the types of underserved students they target. For example, NCLR requires that at least 50% of the students enrolled in its ECHSs are Latino. Antioch focuses specifically on Native American populations. PCC specifically targets students who have previously dropped out of high school. All intermediaries mentioned targeting minority and low-income students, and most of them specifically mentioned first-generation college students. In addition, all intermediaries described visions for creating schools that blend high school and college course taking and credit earning. Some intermediaries envisioned ECHSs located on a college campus (e.g., MCNC, PCC) and high school students experiencing a schedule similar to that of the college students on that campus. Many discussed small enrollments, and hands-on and project-centered learning.

All intermediaries' visions included developing partnerships among IHEs, schools, and often community-based and service-provider organizations. Most intermediaries plan work with either charter or district-managed schools to establish ECHSs. Some intermediaries have decided to partner exclusively with public school districts in establishing ECHSs (e.g., KWF). NCLR, on the other hand, specifically states that its sponsored ECHSs will be charter schools. Although most schools are managed by the partnering organizations (e.g., the school district or the IHE partner), KWF and SECME specify that an advisory board or advisory committee will oversee the management of the ECHSs they support. Other than the requirement to partner with an IHE, intermediaries are free to determine the type of IHE that best suits their vision. Most intermediaries did not specify a type of partner in their vision. Rather they work with the partners that are available and that are interested in joining in an ECHS effort. WWNFF is an exception in specifying that all its ECHSs include a partnership with a 4-year college.

All intermediaries plan to include outreach to middle grades in their ECHSs. However, intermediaries have not yet specified the nature of this outreach. For example, some SECME and WWNFF ECHSs have middle school grades that feed directly into the high school grades. Others do not yet have this aspect of the vision in place for some of their ECHSs but mentioned that this is in their future plans.

One area where the visions of the foundation and those of the intermediaries differ to some degree is the number of college credits students should attain while in the ECHS program. Several intermediaries believe that, given the populations they are working with and some of the constraints involved in working across educational systems, not all students at all ECHSs will be able to attain 60 college credits and a high school degree in five years. Antioch's goal, for example, is for a majority of students (90%) to earn some college credits within 5 years. Antioch expects about half of the students to earn an associate's degree within 6 years of enrolling in an ECHS. Antioch is basing its goals on historical postsecondary achievement in the Native American community and setting goals based on the current participation level in that community. WWNFF is also struggling with whether the goal of 60 credits for all students will be at odds with its goal of only developing ECHSs in partnership with selective 4-year institutions. Many of these IHEs do not think that they can arrange for a program that would allow students to obtain more than 1 year's worth of college credit.

Given the differences in vision between several intermediaries and the foundation on this point, the foundation has already adjusted its vision. Originally, the foundation believed that all ECHS students should earn 60 college credits and a high school diploma in 4 years. After the first years of implementation, and at the request of some intermediaries, the foundation has changed its vision of ECHSs to allow for 5-year programs.

The intermediaries' visions also include additional dimensions that they believe are critical for the development of successful ECHSs. Community outreach and support was emphasized by many intermediaries, including Antioch, NCLR, and SECME. For example, SECME identified community support for the ECHS model as an essential step in its site recruitment efforts. Because Antioch believes the needs of the Native American community should be the driving force behind its ECHSs, it will not develop a site without support from this population. Finally, a number of intermediaries described specific visions of the ECHS curricula and structure. For example, PCC requires a particular curriculum for students' first semester. SECME and UP require that the curricula at their ECHSs prepare students for technical careers with a strong emphasis on mathematics and science. Antioch specifies that its ECHSs infuse Native American culture and language into the curriculum. Additionally, intermediaries have specified other design elements, such as when students can begin taking college classes and what kind of assessment protocols must be followed. For example, MCNC requires that once students are participating in a dual-enrollment program (high

school and college courses), they must meet daily with a high school faculty coach who provides academic assistance and guidance.

Implementation Strategies

Not surprisingly, the 10 intermediaries, with their relatively distinct visions, also vary in their plans to create and maintain ECHSs. Every intermediary is responsible for engaging in many implementation activities. However, based on their organizational history and capacity, different intermediaries originally emphasized different aspects in their planned strategies.² UP and KWF planned to focus most of their resources into partnership development. WWNFF, with its history of working with IHEs, planned to serve as the primary contact for recruiting and supporting IHEs. Antioch, NCLR, MCNC, PCC, and SECME planned to leverage their existing educational expertise to assist the development of new ECHSs. Although all intermediaries received funding to create multiple ECHSs, few initially articulated plans for developing a network among these schools. KWF, NCLR, and MCNC noted that they planned to integrate ECHSs into their existing networks of schools to allow for peer learning and support. PCC, although starting with only one school, stated that it plans to set up systems for ECHSs to communicate. As state-based intermediaries, the strategies of KWF, Antioch, and UP emphasized influencing their state and local policy contexts. In fact, KWF’s proposal states, “Project success will be measured not only by the success of the new schools, but also by its impact on state policy.” MCNC planned to document and disseminate successful ECHS models in hopes of informing the educational community and providing support for policy change nationally and locally.

Intermediaries’ strategies, as stated in their original proposals, had varying degrees of commitment to the different types of activities that might prove important to supporting ECHS implementation. Originally, because of its experience in starting and supporting Middle Colleges, MCNC had the most comprehensive plan for supporting new school planning and development. In general, the evaluation team found that, the other six original intermediaries did not initially fully understand the degree to which they would need plans, capacity, and expertise to support an array of activities (discussed in the next section). Three years after the first seven intermediaries submitted their proposals, it is very clear that the learning curve has been steep. As a UP representative recently acknowledged, UP underestimated the diversity of assistance that overseeing the ECHSI would require. UP is hoping, with the assistance of the foundation, to provide more support to future ECHSs. Similarly, a KWF representative felt that the organization had been too hands-off with its first ECHS. The organization plans to undertake a more supervisory role with future ECHS partners.

Implementation Activities

Both implementation strategies and implementation realities interacted to determine the activities undertaken by the intermediaries. These activities can be characterized in terms of six dimensions: (1) partnership development, (2) grant distribution, (3) technical assistance, (4) ECHS network development, (5) policy and advocacy support, and (6) grant oversight (or accountability).

Partnership Development

One of the early, critical activities that intermediaries undertook was to choose sites for the ECHSs. A number of intermediaries relied on existing relationships to select their initial school sites. For example, MCNC solicited among

² The descriptions of intermediaries’ implementation strategies in this paragraph are based on the original proposals submitted to the foundation (with the exception of UP, which is based on conversations with staff members).

its member Middle Colleges to identify sites that were interested in converting to the ECHS model.³ NCLR turned to its member affiliates (usually community based organizations) and its charter school network to find sites interested in becoming an ECHS. SECME, too, sought interested higher education partners among its network of colleges and universities. WWNFF solicited RFPs, but only from specific partners recruited by WWNFF. Among the original seven intermediaries, only MCNC used a broad and inclusive RFP process to select their first round of partners to develop new ECHSs.

Perceptions of the best approach for selecting ECHS sites have evolved with the ECHSI. After three years, most of the original intermediaries agree that an RFP process, or some other mechanism for making interested partners develop thorough plans, is essential. As SECME staff recently noted, the lack of an RFP led to issues of inconsistency with design and implementation efforts in some schools, and they will be using an RFP to select future sites.

Two of the newer intermediaries, PCC and FCCC, did not even consider anything other than a written application and review process to determine which sites were really ready to undertake the work. PCC, for example, contacted community colleges across the nation, and interested colleges sent representatives to PCC to learn more about its ECHS vision. These colleges then submitted a letter of interest that outlined their plan for replication, and the PCC representatives visited each site to assess its capacity and to determine its compatibility for working with PCC.

Through RFPs or application packages, many intermediaries now inform eligible school systems and institutions of higher education about ECHSs and delineate the attributes of their model. The RFP indicates which of the intermediaries' attributes are loosely interpreted and which ones are tightly prescribed for sites interested in participating in the ECHSI. For example, MCNC has a long history of supporting the opening of schools and requires many specific dimensions of the model to be completed before a site can even apply for funding. KWF has several nonnegotiable requirements in its RFP as well, such as active engagement in the coaching process, participation in technical assistance events, obtaining union sign-off on contract agreements, hiring the instructional leader 1 year in advance of school opening, and authorizing release time for the ECHS instructional leader in the planning and design year. Several intermediaries, such as Antioch, MCNC, and NCLR have also prepared guides or documents with benchmarks for their affiliated ECHSs that include supplemental details about the desired attributes of an ECHS.

Once potential school sites are identified, the next step is to form strong and viable partnerships between school systems and IHEs. To formalize the partnership and delineate the responsibilities of all involved in the management of an ECHS, ideally partners should all sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). MCNC requires interested sites to have documentation of the partnership prior to completing the RFP process, while other intermediaries, such as Antioch and FCCC, work with the interested parties to develop a strong and detailed MOU. According to JFF,⁴ only about one half of all schools and their partner organizations had signed an MOU in 2003–2004. A good MOU helps the partners negotiate the right balance between the specific vision of the intermediaries and the perceived needs of their partners and the local context. WWNFF shared that in spring 2004 none of its ECHSs had appropriate MOUs in place. The WWNFF representative noted that the draft MOUs needed considerable work, including identification of the responsibilities of all partners. KWF did not get an MOU signed for its first ECHS, and found that the lack of a formal document made roles and responsibilities of the partners unclear. FCCC noted that it

³ Middle Colleges are high schools located on a community college campus. These schools provide students with the opportunity to take college courses; the programs do not allow students to complete 60 college credits.

⁴ This information comes from a June 2004 interview with JFF staff.

includes a copy of the proposal with the MOU to assure that all partners understand their responsibilities before signing the document

Although not usually a formal partner, some intermediaries specified that they deemed the community to be a necessary stakeholder in developing an ECHS site. To generate interest before the start of every school, SECME holds town hall forums and focus groups. SECME believes that taking these steps allows the stakeholders in the community to get answers to the questions that are most important to them. Antioch decided to participate in the ECHSI only after holding meetings with tribal leaders across Washington. Through the meetings, Antioch fostered willingness to participate as well as agreement on central tenets for the program, including infusing the program with a native culture curriculum component.

As intermediaries began developing partnerships, they encountered some challenges at the IHE and high school levels. For example, MCNC reported that many college faculty believe that college is a privilege and not a right, so it is “trying to change [such views], but it takes a long time to break through those barriers.” UP reported that the details of the college course sequence took considerable effort “to get the IHE on board and moving in the right direction.” This discussion is ongoing and the IHE partner has yet to agree to a course sequence that would provide student with 2 years of college credit. At the high school level, some instructors doubted the ability of all students to graduate from high school, let alone ever complete college courses. Intermediary staff at MCNC reported that in existing middle college high schools, getting the entire staff to understand and commit to working with a college-level curriculum posed a challenge. One ECHS staff member noted, “Kids are going to be taking college literature instead of high school literature, and the teacher’s role around helping them should be more of a coach...It’s not that there are negative cultures there that you have to fight against...It is that they have to figure out how to shift the roles.” Several instructors at a UP ECHS stated that given the skill level of their students, especially in reading and mathematics, they are concerned about these students finishing high school and do not see them being prepared for college courses. One of the roles of the intermediaries is to develop support among the leaders of the partnership and then assist these leaders in engaging others.

Intermediaries worked to generate support for the ECHSI by bringing in individuals with strong reputations. For example, Antioch, using in part a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, hired a curriculum expert to help faculty adapt and change curricula to be multicultural. Staff at Antioch reported that the college faculty embraced this work with great enthusiasm. NCLR acknowledged the need to promote the ECHS concept to colleges. To support this effort, NCLR recruited an individual who knew the ins and outs of the postsecondary community and the intermediary organization.

Not all partnership building has gone well. For example, several staff at one ECHS site felt that its intermediary did not have the educational background to support schools. A leader at the site stated, “[The intermediary] is figuring out how to run schools and at the same time figuring out how to do this partnership. I think they’re in a larger learning curve.” A leader at another site also affiliated with this intermediary noted that the intermediary’s inexperience has led to difficulties working with a district because the district does not respect the organization. Several staff members at an ECHS affiliated with another intermediary said that the intermediary is responsive, but not as much as it could be. One IHE representative hypothesized that this lack of responsiveness might be due to both inexperience and a staffing shortage. One school-based ECHS leader felt quite strongly that the intermediary had a lot of “principles” for the school, but did not have suggestions for enacting these principles (i.e., what do I do on Monday?). This individual felt that, in general, there was little useful in the relationship between the school and

the intermediary. Another ECHS leader recognized a similar distance between the intermediary and the ECHS needs: “They need to be more energized, to be more involved in these schools.”

Grant Distribution

Although seemingly one of the most straightforward tasks, given the complexity involved in organizing successful partnerships, some intermediaries struggled to distribute the grant money as they had planned. Table 1 contrasts the intermediaries’ original plans for opening ECHSs over three years with the number of ECHSs that have actually opened.

Table 1. Proposed and Actual ECHS Openings by Intermediary and by School Year.

Intermediary	2002–2003 Openings		2003–2004 Openings		2004–2005 Openings	
	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual ¹
Antioch	n/a	n/a	2	3	3	1 ²
CUNY	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2 ³	1
FCCC	n/a	n/a	0	1	5–7	2
KWF	n/a	n/a	1	1	3 ⁴	2
MCNC	4	4	7	6	4	5
NCLR	n/a	n/a	2	2	3	5
PCC	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2–3	2
SECME	n/a	n/a	3	2	3	0
UP	n/a	n/a	1	1	1	2
WWNFF	n/a	n/a	4	4	6	2
Total	4	4	20	20	32	22

¹Data based on JFF information as of October 2004.

²One school, not counted here, is a preexisting school that is primarily in a planning year, but is implementing some aspects of reform.

³Data from May 2004 JFF document.

⁴Data from November 2004 correspondence with KWF.

At this stage of the initiative, 4 of the 10 intermediaries have opened as many as, or even more than, the number of ECHSs they proposed. However, 6 of the intermediaries have fallen behind their initial plans. Of these intermediaries, 2 intermediaries (FCCC and CUNY) recently joined the initiative. It is possible that they, like MCNC and Antioch, will open more schools than proposed in subsequent years to catch up with their original replication plans. Only SECME opened fewer ECHSs than proposed 2 years in a row. In fact, SECME did not open any ECHSs in 2004–2005.

Intermediaries encountered a number of obstacles in developing partnerships. KWF pulled funding from one school because the ECHS planning team changed from a start up to a school redesign model. KWF did, however, allow the team to resubmit a proposal for the new plan and the school will eventually open. Several SECME ECHS sites fell through for various reasons. One potential SECME site could not recruit a principal. Another site first experienced

facilities difficulties and then a new superintendent was not supportive. A third SECME prospective site had a district partner that never got enthusiastic about the model. State policies came into play in determining if a site could feasibly implement an ECHS across two educational systems. For example, in Mississippi, the state's dual enrollment legislation did not include language about the state assuming responsibility for the cost of college courses.

Technical Assistance

Intermediaries offered a breadth of technical assistance to partnerships and individual ECHSs. These activities included holding conferences and workshops and providing coaches or site liaisons.

Conferences and Workshops

Intermediaries commonly provided professional development workshops or training. Early in the implementation process, most intermediaries hosted orientation and design meetings for key stakeholders and school leaders. Two intermediaries, PCC and MCNC, arranged for leaders to spend up to 2 weeks at an existing school to receive training. NCLR hosted annual national professional development institutes modeled after Teach for America training institutes.

Many intermediaries held conferences to bring together current and future ECHS partners (e.g., Antioch, MCNC, NCLR) and school leaders and staff in particular (e.g., NCLR, MCNC, PCC). For example, MCNC holds three conferences each year. The principals meet twice, a small percentage of instructors (both high school and college-level) attend a training conference, and there is even a conference for students.

Several intermediaries arrange for professional development conferences organized around a particular topic or issue. Antioch hosted workshops on at-risk community college students and other reform efforts. SECME, known for its community engagement and parent involvement programs, arranged for appropriate ECHS staff, such as guidance counselors and leaders, to attend this preexisting training.

Liaisons and Coaches

Intermediaries provided ongoing, general assistance both through their staff members and through coaches assigned to work with specific sites. All intermediaries try to visit each site with some regularity, both to determine how the school is progressing and to provide assistance. Two ECHS leaders for one school noted that the WWNFF representative frequently attended partnership meetings, while the UP representative met with the principal of the one open school on a weekly basis. Antioch representatives attended ECHS meetings.

Many intermediaries hired individuals to coach particular sites. MCNC provided on-site coaches for implementation and curriculum development assistance. KWF has added coaches to its support of ECHSs. NCLR has some coaches available to various regions of the country. One leader noted that when a facilitator for a school retreat was needed, WWNFF recommended someone "...who was great." Antioch hired a staff liaison specifically to assist districts in targeting underserved students and another liaison specifically to provide technical assistance in grant management. PCC ECHSs used student resource specialists to facilitate community outreach. These specialists are charged with identifying students for the program and developing relationships with the schools and youth-serving agencies in the community for future students. Both NCLR and MCNC trained ECHS staff to conduct Critical Friends reviews (a process and format for allowing teachers to provide feedback to one another). MCNC also contracted with an

evaluation team to provide feedback to its schools and to its own staff. One leader noted that the feedback provided from these evaluators had been “invaluable.”

ECHS Network Development

Along with providing assistance directly to the ECHSs, many intermediaries also developed approaches to facilitate the sharing of ideas and lessons learned among school leaders and staff. To develop a learning network among ECHSs, intermediaries developed electronic connections among ECHSs and organized site visits between ECHSs.

To foster connections, several intermediaries (e.g., MCNC, PCC) established an extranet for use by all their ECHSs' principals and staff. The extranet provided a useful and easy approach to sharing resources related to the various design principles among school leaders. Several intermediaries also encouraged teachers to share curriculum across schools on the extranet. NCLR also established an online learning community and listserv to facilitate the sharing of ideas among its ECHSs. Antioch is sharing emails among its ECHSs to develop a tool kit for ECHSs around topics such as mentoring, planning, college policies, and curriculum. During a planning period, FCCC led online open conference calls for all interested sites.

Several intermediaries (MCNC, WWNFF) also encouraged ECHSs to send school teams to visit each other so that new instruction and curriculum could be directly observed across ECHSs. To foster the sharing of ideas and provide an opportunity for ECHS leaders and staff from various locations to spend time together and strengthen relationships among ECHSs, several intermediaries (Antioch, MCNC, NCLR) sponsored workshops for all their affiliated schools. Many MCNC ECHS staff mentioned that one of the best resources for their work is the connection to others doing the same work.

Policy and Advocacy Support

In most cases, the success and sustainability of the ECHSI will depend on the intermediaries' efforts to develop local and state support for the initiative. For several intermediaries, community involvement is an integral component to their mission and they are continually seeking to increase local and state involvement and support in the ECHSI. Several intermediaries (Antioch, MCNC, KWF, and SECME) received funding from the Kellogg Foundation to support community engagement efforts. KWF is developing a community engagement strategy to identify local partners at two of its ECHS sites and facilitate community involvement and investment in the initiative. Antioch hired a Community Engagement Specialist to develop relationships and maintain communication with the local tribal community. The specialist seeks the involvement of tribal leaders and the broader tribal community in the planning process and also brings together parents, teachers, school personnel, community colleges, tribal teachers, students, and community members for a 2-day orientation prior to the opening of a school. In one community, there are competing small school initiatives and CUNY is actively involved in meeting with eligible IHEs to foster interest and participation in the ECHSI. UP has advocated the ECHS model to the local business community. As a result, local businesses provided funding and materials donations, as well as support for field trips, connections to guest speakers, and internship positions for students.

Although JFF has an extensive policy agenda, several intermediaries have focused on seeking support for the initiative by advocating for state and local policies to support the ECHSI. Antioch is seeking funds from the state legislature for a dual enrollment policy that would benefit ECHSs and it successfully secured a continuing budget item within at least one school district for a local ECHS. UP is assisting in efforts to establish a new Charter School Board of Education to support charter schools throughout Utah. KWF operates at the state level to lobby for

resources. In addition to the community engagement specialist, Antioch also has a policy analyst who assists sites with funding and informs local sites of the state policy environment.

A number of intermediaries have struggled with contrary state policies resulting in significant challenges including delays in school openings. For example, one SECME school opening was delayed due to state legislation on dual enrollment that failed to provide a way for the state to pay for college classes. Intermediaries working in California have encountered state policy restrictions on the number of summer and evening college courses that high school students can take. This policy has forced ECHSs in California to reevaluate their course sequencing to determine whether it will be possible for students to earn 60 credit hours in the designated time frame. In addition, a state policy in Florida requires students to pass a set of assessments before they can enroll in college courses, posing a formidable challenge to intermediaries developing ECHSs in that state. Most ECHS leaders hope that state policies related to course taking and credit earning can be modified to better support the goals of the ECHSI or that they can develop course sequences around these policies.

Grant Oversight (Accountability)

Most intermediaries started the initiative with some form of grant oversight upon award distribution. Usually, this oversight required partners to provide regular reports on progress, challenges, and timelines for future work. Antioch required ECHSs to follow development objectives and provide a planning calendar. One ECHS leader said that MCNC requires schools to write an implementation plan “...and stick to [it].” NCLR keeps a portfolio of all the participating schools; in fact, it would like to have even tighter control over the schools, with stricter timelines.

In their proposals to the foundation, intermediaries suggested strategies for how ECHSs would be selected and the level of funding each site would receive. However, after making award decisions few intermediaries had explicit plans for ongoing ECHS accountability. Several intermediaries (e.g., KWF, SECME) proposed to release funding in two phases; grantees that did not successfully complete the planning phase would not receive an implementation grant. Although most intermediaries mentioned requiring sites to complete regular progress reports or external evaluations, only a few intermediaries detailed possible rewards or sanctions. An example of tighter control is FCCC’s plan to require its 5-year grant recipients to submit five separate annual grant agreements and to achieve annual performance goals each year to qualify for grant renewals.

As the initiative has progressed, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has focused more attention on intermediaries’ oversight activities. The foundation, with the support of JFF, engaged in a thorough review process in 2003–2004. As a result of this process, many intermediaries determined that they also need to institute similar detailed processes with all of their sites. Many of the intermediaries plan to institute similar policies with their ECHS partners. WWNFF plans to require ECHSs to provide: partnership information, status of MOU, student selection process, academic plan, student supports, and budget and policy details. SECME also plans to require status reports from the participating schools and to assess this understanding by scoring plans against a rubric. PCC is monitoring its sites through monthly reports much like those required by the foundation. In addition, after the ECHS sites have completed the first part of the planning year, PCC requires them to do an implementation plan and a revised budget.

KWF has instituted a very hands-on review process with its partners and requires a high level of accountability. It requires a program audit review for each site once a year. For this review, the ECHSs have to produce a written report and also visit the KWF office where they talk with a panel that includes JFF. Here, they discuss their lessons learned, challenges, strengths, and their plan of action. This intermediary has also explicitly stated that it will pull the funding from a site that does not comply (however, this would be done only in consultation with the Bill & Melinda

Gates Foundation and JFF). One ECHS leader stated that the new planning process has been helpful in keeping the school focused as it moves forward.

Some intermediaries tightened, or planned to tighten, the level of accountability required from participating ECHS partners. This work put some of them in the difficult situation of being both a supporter and an enforcer. One NCLR staff member said that the organization has difficulty balancing the roles of grant provider, technical assistance provider, and monitor. Two ECHS leaders (with different intermediaries) also mentioned the tension; they felt that the constant reporting to the intermediary was more of a burden than a help. One ECHS leader said that the oversight by the intermediary has been taxing; an intermediary representative attends every meeting (although the leader did not feel this was needed), and the leader feels it is necessary to show everything to the intermediary until trust develops. As the intermediaries continue to oversee these grants, they will most likely have to continue to rework their oversight plans to balance their need for information to make decisions about the future of each ECHS with the need to be a source of support for the schools.

ECHSs' Perceptions of Support

As the number of operational ECHSs grows, the intermediaries will find supporting all of their schools to be an increasing challenge. The evaluation team accumulated a number of comments in 2003–2004 that relate to this issue. In ECHSs affiliated with several intermediaries, ECHS staff had, as one instructor put it, "...a foggy understanding" of their work. One SECME ECHS instructor stated: "I'd like to know what they could offer me as an instructor.... I'm sure they have a lot to offer." Some intermediaries were fairly well known by a subset of ECHSs but less involved with others. For example, instructors at one ECHS were very aware of NCLR staff visiting the school and providing feedback—a relationship possibly facilitated by the close proximity of an NCLR office to the school setting. In contrast, instructors at another NCLR ECHS knew that the school received funding and guidance from NCLR, but did not know much else about the organization. High school instructors noted the involvement of Antioch in their design work; yet one IHE instructor only knew that Antioch provided funding.

MCNC serves as an example of an intermediary with high visibility at the school level. Many MCNC instructors attend conferences and use MCNC resources. Especially because many of the ECHSs were previously Middle Colleges, ECHS instructors are very aware of MCNC's work. The variation in the amount of contact and technical assistance between an intermediary and its sponsored schools may be related to whether the ECHSs are actually implementing the model as envisioned by the intermediary. Visits to three MCNC-affiliated schools confirmed that all schools adhered to the basic MCNC design elements.

ECHS partners noted that they have suggestions for additional assistance they would like to receive from intermediaries. Both SECME and UP ECHS staff mentioned that they would like their respective intermediaries to provide more assistance in getting local businesses and professionals involved in their schools (such as providing equipment, internship opportunities, grants, and scholarships). Leaders at ECHSs associated with SECME and NCLR requested more assistance and support for sending instructors for training. One IHE representative associated with a WWNFF ECHS learned that other intermediaries bring all of the partners together several times per year and wished there were similar opportunities within the WWNFF network to hear what other IHEs are doing to support ECHSs.

Intermediaries' Capacity

As evidenced above, intermediaries' organizational capacity is central to the success of this initiative. Intermediaries that had difficulties meeting ECHS needs began their initiatives without enough staff within their organizations to carry out their funded activities. WWNFF was severely understaffed in 2003–2004 and could provide little technical assistance to its schools. One of the WWNFF school staff members reported that the representative from this organization did not visit the school during the 2003–2004 academic year and had only been in contact with the college liaison to the ECHS, not the ECHS leaders. In another example, evaluators who visited several ECHSs affiliated with NCLR noted that the amount and quality of technical assistance provided by NCLR were uneven across the schools. One ECHS that is in close physical proximity to a main NCLR office reported receiving extensive support and felt aligned with the NCLR ECHS model. In contrast, another NCLR-affiliated ECHS, located several states away, reported limited contact with the intermediary and a lack of understanding about how to implement the model effectively. In addition, a number of intermediaries (NCLR, SECME, UP) experienced turnover of senior staff managing the ECHSI and had to recruit staff to replace them.

In response to early experiences, many intermediaries focused on building organizational capacity in 2003–2004. Several intermediaries (KWF and WWNFF) hired additional staff to improve their efforts to provide technical assistance to their ECHSs. The three newest intermediaries (CUNY, FCCC, and PCC) also hired directors to lead their ECHS programs. Two intermediaries hired staff to seek additional funding for the ECHSI: Antioch hired a grant writer who helped them seek federal charter school funding and UP hired a business development officer to engage local businesses in the initiative. As mentioned above, several intermediaries chose to employ coaches to support the start-up efforts of their ECHSs.

Most intermediaries were aware that not all implementation activities were fully supported this year. As the ECHSI matures, the balance of staffing and capacity needs for the various implementation activities may shift. At this time, the greatest area of concern for several intermediaries was providing adequate technical assistance to the ECHSs. For intermediaries with schools in several states, sufficient capacity to support and monitor ECHSs was of particular concern. As one SECME representative noted, "one of the things we need is enough staff at the national level so that we can do hands-on monitoring of what is going on at the sites." In response to meetings with the foundation and JFF about the status of intermediaries' implementation plans, most intermediaries received feedback from JFF on how to strengthen their work in particular implementation strategies to more adequately support their affiliated ECHSs.

Summary

During the first 2 years of the ECHSI, all of the intermediaries showed marked progress toward meeting the multiple goals of the initiative as evidenced by the opening of ECHSs, the formation of new partnerships between higher education institutions and districts, and the successful enrollment of the target student population in the initial ECHSs. Yet as the ECHSI progressed, most intermediaries faced a number of challenges and learned a number of valuable lessons about creating ECHSs, including:

- **Capacity is critical.**

The original intermediaries did not fully understand the variety of activities that they would be called on to perform. All the intermediaries are strong in some of the implementation activity areas. The greatest concern is developing the capacity to adequately support ECHSs in all areas. Moreover, supporting schools in multiple states seems to have created challenges for a number of intermediaries. It is difficult

for the staff of the national and regional intermediaries to effectively support their ECHSs due in large part to geographical constraints. It appears to require a substantial investment in support staff, as evidenced by MCNC's extensive use of retired principals to support new ECHSs.

- **Formal agreements create an invaluable foundation.**

Without the RFP, intermediaries experienced challenges in implementing ECHSs that adhered to the foundation's design principles. Similarly, many intermediaries did not require partners to sign a MOU that delineated the responsibilities of all organizations; that made it difficult for the intermediaries to hold partners accountable for their responsibilities.

- **Middle school outreach needs to be a higher priority.**

Although some individual schools have incorporated middle school grades, middle school outreach has not received much attention from the intermediaries. For the initiative to be a success, intermediaries will need to flesh out their visions for assisting students prior to entry in to the ECHS. Working with middle schools to help prepare students for the ECHS experience is a critical step to ensuring the success of the initiative. The students targeted by and enrolled in the ECHSs are traditionally underserved and therefore often enter high school with limited educational opportunities and experiences. Once in ECHSs, these students are put on an accelerated path that will expose them to college curriculum and much higher expectations for their performance than they have ever experienced. Therefore, rather than letting each school come to its own determination about the method of outreach, intermediaries may want to set the stage by incorporating details in their overall vision and strategy.

The intermediaries have put in several years of very hard work to bring the ECHSI to the point in fall 2004 where nearly 50 ECHSs have opened their doors. It is already apparent that intermediaries are learning from their early experiences and modifying their activities to improve their work. The foundation and JFF have also become more aware of and sensitive to the role intermediaries are required to play to adequately support the start of a new school; in response they are providing more support to the intermediaries in all implementation activities. Future intermediaries will be in the enviable position of learning from the work of the early intermediaries, allowing them the opportunity to adapt policies and practices that worked well and to learn from the trial and error of their peers.