MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

College and Career Readiness Impact

Paterson Public Schools' Full-Service Community School

Montclair State University, through its Eastside Full-Service Community School partnership, offered College and Career Readiness programs from 2023 to 2025, making a positive impact on the lives of students and families. Progress includes:

A. Early College Program

Outcomes Achieved
The Early College program for Fall 2024 and Fall 2025 enrolled a total of 55 students from Paterson and Passaic, creating a collective cohort that reflects the program's reach and impact in the community. This initiative aimed to provide students with the opportunity to earn college credits while completing their high school education, fostering academic growth and a smoother transition to higher education.

Fall 2024 – Impact Summary:

Survey results demonstrate a strong impact on college readiness and academic success. 85% of students reported that the program helped them see themselves as college students, citing increased confidence, preparedness, and understanding of college expectations. Instruction quality, tutoring/mentoring, and program staff support all received 95–100% positive ratings, indicating participants were satisfied with the program and felt adequately supported throughout the experience. Notably, Fall 2024 students completed the program, earning all A grades and between 3 and 7 transferable college credits, reinforcing the program's rigor and effectiveness.

Fall 2025 – Impact Summary:

Fall 2025 results reflected continued and strengthened outcomes. 100% of respondents reported positive overall experiences, satisfaction with instruction, and feeling supported by tutors, mentors, and program staff. Students highlighted growth in communication skills, organization, confidence, navigating college platforms, and balancing high school and college responsibilities. Based on current performance trends, Fall 2025 students are expected to earn A and B+ grades, demonstrating their ability to excel in a college-level academic environment.

Program Overview

The Early College Program offered two carefully curated college-level courses designed to provide students with foundational knowledge and transferable credits. The courses were selected based on their relevance to the students' academic growth and alignment with general education requirements, ensuring a seamless transition to higher education. Additionally, there was an intention to offer students exposure to both a large university campus experience and a smaller college campus experience. Thus, one class took place at Montclair State University, while the other was facilitated at Bloomfield College of Montclair State University.

Developed to meet students where they are, the program combines academic support, skill-building, and mentorship to foster college readiness and long-term success. Key components include virtual office hours for academic support, professional development workshops focused on essential life skills, and a strong network of tutors, mentors, and faculty. Together, these elements equip students with the tools, guidance, and confidence needed to thrive in college, reflecting a shared commitment to youth empowerment and community strength.

To further support families, the Early College team provided a recruitment PowerPoint presentation and a registration link for the program. Recruitment efforts utilized standard acceptance criteria and a teacher recommendation. Extensive outreach was conducted at the participating high schools. Coaches were also available to assist with the application process, and staff offered to schedule additional virtual meetings with families as needed. This multi-pronged recruitment strategy ensured that all eligible students had equitable access to the program while maintaining a high standard for readiness and success.

The registration process was designed to be seamless, inclusive, and accessible for all eligible high school juniors and seniors. Program staff held information sessions where students received detailed guidance on how to claim and set up their university NetIDs and initiate Two-Factor Authentication for user security. A dedicated registration team, comprising staff from the University's Early College Programs, ensured that students had access to one-on-one assistance to address any questions or challenges. In addition, program staff facilitated two virtual Q&A sessions for students to receive assistance with registration and system onboarding, as well as a comprehensive orientation to acclimate students to the college experience, explain the program components, and share resources.

Courses offered included:

- **Argumentative & Analytic Writing (WRT 105)**: This course teaches students to use writing as a tool for community advocacy (focusing on connection)**,** crafting compelling narratives and persuasive pieces to promote understanding of the issue and elicit action. It aims to provide students with a foundation in the reading, writing, and research skills necessary to perform college-level communication successfully. In Fall 2024, this course was taught by Jennifer C. Johnson, a faculty member in the Writing Studies Program at Bloomfield College of Montclair State University. A textbook is required for this course and was provided to every participating student through Paterson One Square Mile.

- **Interpersonal Communication (CMST 146):** This course introduces students to concepts and practices of communication in interpersonal relational contexts. Topics include identity construction, perception of verbal and nonverbal cues, listening, disclosure, relationship development, and conflict management. Students develop capacities for effective interaction that are rooted in reflective awareness and responsive communicative choices. The course also introduces students to the experience of academic and campus life at Montclair State University through campus tours and field trips. In Fall 2024, this course was taught by Linda Zani Thomas, a faculty member in the School of Communication and Media, College of the Arts at Montclair State University. No textbook is required.

The implementation of the Early College Program focused on creating a seamless and supportive experience for high school students as they navigated their first college-level courses. Careful attention was paid to key components, including program timeline, instruction and course delivery, and support systems – including tutoring and office hours, as well as professional development workshops with topics such as College Life 101 and Time Management strategies. The program included regular check-ins with students and faculty to monitor progress and address challenges. In addition, peer and mentor connections were fostered through group discussions and collaborative assignments. As a program funded by the Full Service Community School, it prioritized a student-centered approach, ensuring that challenges like scheduling conflicts or transportation issues were addressed promptly to provide flexibility for participating students and their families.

The Early College Program cohorts for the Fall 2024 and Fall 2025 semesters concluded with an end-of-semester ceremony. This event celebrated the accomplishments of the participating students and

highlighted the transformative impact of the program. Additionally, students had the opportunity to present their final class projects during the ceremony.

To assess the program's efficacy and identify areas for improvement, we gathered feedback from key stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and tutors. The insights collected through surveys, tutor logs, and participant interactions were instrumental in understanding the program's impact.

- **Student Feedback**
  Students provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about their Early College experience:
    - **Overall Experience:** Students reported high satisfaction, with 75% rating their experience as "Very Satisfied" and the remaining 25% as "Satisfied."
    - **Instruction Quality:** Professors were praised for their teaching styles, particularly for being clear, interactive, and supportive. Students appreciated hands-on learning methods and the professors' ability to simplify complex concepts.
    - **Support Systems:** 100% of students felt adequately supported by tutors and mentors, though some noted areas for improvement, such as better alignment between tutors and professors on assignment expectations.
    - **Key Challenges:** Students identified language barriers, time management, and balancing high school and college workloads as significant challenges. Tutors and mentors helped address these through personalized support and resources such as planners.
    - **Testimonial:** "Earning college credits while still in high school was incredible. I learned time management, discipline, and effective communication while gaining confidence for my future." - *Program participant, Paterson STEAM High School*

- **Faculty and Staff Feedback**
  Feedback from faculty and staff highlighted both successes and opportunities for growth:

    - **Student Engagement:** Faculty and staff observed growth in students' confidence and academic abilities, particularly in writing and communication skills.
    - **Preparedness:** While 71.5% of faculty and staff felt students were adequately prepared for college-level coursework, others noted a need for enhanced organizational and time management skills.
    - **Support Needs:** Faculty and staff suggested providing clearer role definitions, additional training, and resources like laptops and planners earlier in the semester.
    - **Testimonial:** "The professors in the program helped give the students an amazing first look at what college could be like for them. They made the classes interesting and provided a lot of incredible information that was pertinent to the students' dreams and goals." - *Early College Program Tutor*

- **Tutor Feedback**
  Virtual office hour logs provided valuable insights into student progress and challenges:

    - **Personalized Support:** Tutors worked one-on-one with students on assignments, essay revisions, and time management strategies. Virtual office hour sessions helped improve students' confidence and academic skills.
    - **Common Issues:** Tutors frequently addressed issues such as misunderstanding assignment requirements, language barriers, and lack of access to technology. For example, students without personal laptops relied on their smartphones or school library resources, which sometimes limited their productivity.

- **Effective Practices:** Virtual breakout rooms were especially helpful for shy students, allowing them to ask questions in a more comfortable environment. Tutors also supported students with college application essays and FAFSA navigation.
- **Excerpt from Tutor Log:** "Today, we worked with a student on her M1 essay and added more analysis. We got a lot done on this and also helped explain that college is not as stressful as it may seem sometimes. We're waiting to hear back from her once she's done more work on her reflection, and we will help more." - *Early College Program Tutor*

Feedback from student surveys indicated high levels of satisfaction with the program — 100% of students said they were either "Very Satisfied" (75%) or "Satisfied" (25%) with their Early College experience. Students praised the professors for their teaching styles, accessibility, and ability to make complex topics understandable. Additionally, 100% of students felt supported by the tutors and mentors assigned to them, citing personalized help with assignments and college applications as particularly impactful.

Collective Impact Conclusion (Fall 2024–Fall 2025):

Across both years, the Early College Program demonstrates a **clear, measurable impact on students' college readiness, academic performance, and college identity**, aligning directly with the outcomes of the combined Fall 2024 and Fall 2025 survey data academic results, informing that students as a result of participating in the Early College college credit courses gain the confidence, skills, and structured support necessary to succeed in college-level environments and transition successfully into postsecondary education. If funding for the Full Service Community School is eliminated, Paterson and Passaic students will lose access to Montclair State University's Early College Program. This programming is made possible through the support of the Full Service Community School, whose investment has expanded access to transformative early college opportunities for Paterson and Passaic students.

B. College Readiness-Infused Programming

Fall 2024 and Fall 2025, we coordinated a series of professional development workshops that engaged approximately **300 students across three high schools** – Eastside, International, and Passaic. The workshop series drew from four **Career Readiness Competencies** to equip participants with the skills and knowledge to empower them to make successful transitions into the workforce or higher education after graduation. The workshops included effective resume writing, job interviewing, navigating today's job search, and LinkedIn tips and tricks.

Further, the College for Community Health at Montclair State University, Paterson Public Schools, and Paterson One Square Mile are developing the Food Technician Career Pathways Training for all Eastside High School 12th-grade students in the Culinary concentration. The proposed 8-week program will be developed by the College for Community Health faculty during the 2025-26 academic year. Training will be facilitated at Eastside High School and will include job shadowing opportunities at St. Joseph's Health Dietary Department. The program is focused on teaching the fundamental skills needed to become a **Food Service Aide** at a healthcare facility. In Fall 2024, a Food Technician Career Pathways interest survey was released by the Eastside High School Administration, and 45 students indicated interest in the Food Technician Career Pathways Training. Potential considerations for this program include: 1) Training could be provided at Eastside High School to make it accessible for student participation; 2) Training could include paid job shadowing opportunities supported by the Eastside High School University-Assisted Full-Service Community School; and (3) Training could focus on teaching the fundamental skills needed to become a Food Service Aide/Nutrition Assistant at St. Joseph's Health Dietary Department. Further, the Training will provide Career Pathway Mapping by outlining a pathway for career advancement beyond entry-level through continuing education. **The first Food Service Aide cohort is anticipated to launch in April 2026, following final program coordination and implementation planning.**

In addition to career readiness-infused programming, we assessed student competencies in the following **eight career readiness areas** before and after the professional development workshop series with pre- and post-surveys: **Career and Self-Development, Communication, Critical Thinking, Equity and Inclusion, Leadership, Professionalism, Teamwork,** and **Technology**.

Survey results revealed the notable trends listed below:

1. **Strengths:**
   - **Leadership and Professionalism:** These emerged as the strongest areas, with consistently high post-survey scores across all schools.
   - **Communication and Teamwork:** Students demonstrated clear growth, with a significant increase in "Strongly Agree" responses, reflecting improved collaboration and communication skills.

2. **Areas for Improvement:**
   - **Critical Thinking and Technology:** Mixed outcomes indicate a need for enhanced instruction and practical application opportunities in these competencies.
   - **Equity and Inclusion:** Responses suggest variability in students' comfort and confidence, indicating room for more focused interventions.
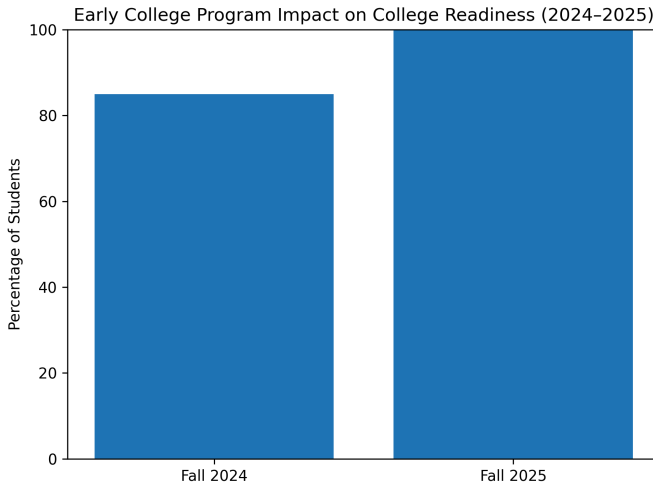
3. **Key Observations:**
   - Most students showed improvement across competencies, particularly transitioning from "Agree" to "Strongly Agree" in many areas.
   - Variability in results highlights the importance of tailored instruction to meet diverse student needs.

4. **Recommendations:**
   - Strengthen Critical Thinking and Technology components with hands-on, real-world applications.
   - Enhance Equity and Inclusion training through structured discussions and activities.
   - Introduce mid-program assessments to address gaps in real-time and track individual progress.

The program demonstrated its effectiveness in improving core career readiness skills while identifying opportunities for further development to maximize impact.

Early College Program Impact on College Readiness (2024–2025)

This graph illustrates the Early College Program's impact on students' college readiness and their mindset toward pursuing higher education, comparing the Fall 2024 and Fall 2025 cohorts, and underscores the importance of sustained access to Early College preparation opportunities for students. We are deeply grateful for the Montclair State University–Full-Service Community School partnership, which empowers Paterson and Passaic students to grow, thrive, and pursue meaningful college and career opportunities while strengthening their community.