



**Rochester Early College International HS**  
**Marlene Blocker, Principal**  
Rochester City School District  
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## **“Where College and Career Ready Global Citizens shine!”**

Testimony Before the Governor’s Committee on Education Reform  
Presented by: Marlene Blocker, RECIHS Principal  
October 22, 2012

### **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Marlene Blocker and I am the proud founding principal of the Rochester Early College International High School. Prior to this position, I spent the last twenty years serving as a teacher and administrator at the elementary level. Each July, I would excitedly await the Sunday newspaper edition that listed all high school graduates in our area. I would scan each list for the names of my former students. As the years went on I realized how very few of the bright and charismatic students I sent on from the elementary school ever made it to high school graduation. I vowed if I ever had the opportunity to open my own high school I would figure out a way to eradicate this trend and propel my kids onto lifelong success.

### **What is Rochester Early College International High School**

In 2010 that dream of mine became a reality. RECIHS created a groundbreaking early college partnership between Monroe Community College, St. John Fisher College, and the Rochester City School District. We serve 274 students in the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. All scholars are expected to earn a minimum of 20 college credits in addition to their high school diplomas.

Our mission was to target diverse students who are typically under-represented in higher education and create a seamless path for them to graduate from both high school and college. Our ethnic breakdown is 6.5% Asian, 71.5% African American, 15% Hispanic, .4 % Pacific Islander, and 6.6 % white. We have 64.2 % females and 35.8% males. 10% of our population is Students with Disabilities and 11% of our students are English Language Learners. In addition, we have 58 students whose home language is not English. At RECIHS 83% of our scholars are first-generation college goers.

The RCSD currently has the lowest graduation rate in New York State of **49%** and the lowest black male graduation rate in the nation of 9%, according to the Schott Foundation for Public Education. These two statistics alone are enough for alarm bells to be heard around the world.

In order to reverse this trend, Rochester pursued an opportunity to be a recipient of the Smart Scholars grant and opened up an Early College International High School. For the past two years and two months our school has served as a vestibule that protects



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scholars from the harsh realities that greet them daily on the streets of Rochester and serves as a promising beacon of light and hope for a different future for their generation.

Our scholars start out by taking a dual credit college technology class their first year in high school to clearly set the tone that college success is realistic and an expectation for all. Each year additional college courses are added with the end goal being a minimum of 20 college credits.

### **THE ECHS Model is Working**

We have 100 % of our first class of scholars that are currently enrolled, with a minimum of 3 college credits earned to a maximum of 19 college credits earned. The average for our entering class of 2010 is 6.6 college credits. The pride that scholars feel about this is immeasurable. In addition to these college credits the high school credit accrual average is 14.2 as ending sophomores. Our scholars see the high school finish line and have the taste of college on the tip of their tongue. One scholar puts it this way” “RECIHS is truly a wonderful school, the offering of college credits is the icing on the cake and who doesn’t like icing? “ (Pearlie)

There are many elements that make RECIHS unique. A warm and positive atmosphere permeates the building. Scholars are happy and feel they have a sense of belonging. Another student says this:

“Being serious about your education is the key to success. This school is serious about us graduating not only from high school but college as well. I love this school and the people I’m surrounded by; including teachers.” (Deirdra)

Clear expectations for both college success and global competence are visible. The hallways are decorated with college pennants and international flags that indicate only the surface level of what we stand for. Going into the classroom you will find engaging lessons that are based on rigor, college and career readiness and the global competencies of taking action, communicating ideas, recognizing perspectives and investigating the world. Every scholar is expected to demonstrate the knowledge, skills and capabilities necessary to work and live in the interconnected world.

Scholars are eager to tell you what they are working on and how it relates to international content, what courses they are taking at the college campuses this semester, or how many high school credits they have already accrued. You will hear them say, “I am the first in my family to go college and I want to set a good example for my younger siblings.” (Abdu)



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You will not see the violence that plagues our community inside our walls. Our original class that started has not had one act of violence in our school since October of 2010. When each new class has joined our school they have been instrumental in sending the message to peers, “We don’t do that nonsense here. We are trying to get ahead.”

I invite each and every one of you to come and see what a high functioning urban high school looks like in Rochester and to attend our first class of graduating seniors in June of 2014.

### **Early Colleges Such as RECIHS Need Access to TAP Funding Support**

My largest concern is that this bright light that shines for our scholars daily will not be sustainable once the grant funding ends. For many of our scholars, college did not even seem like a possibility before stepping into our doors, and now it has already become a reality for them. With over 70% of our scholars economically disadvantaged this opportunity has been a blessing not only from the mental standpoint, but from a financial angle.

I strongly urge the Education Reform Commission to support early college high schools and include the recommendation in its final report to Governor Cuomo. Specifically, I urge the commission to allow these programs to apply for TAP funds on behalf of their eligible students. For the vast majority of our students this simply changes the incidence of TAP funding from the college to high school years.

The benefits derived from this are many. TAP funding now at ECHS programs’ would reduce the need for many first-generation college students to take remedial courses upon entering college that TAP is already paying for. It will enable more students to graduate from both high school and college. The more college graduates that reside in a community, the more fiscally stable this area will be for all including taxpayers and policy makers.

According to the American Institute for Research (AIFR; August 2011) New York State leads the nation in the present value of lifetime lost tax revenue from a single class (2002) of college dropouts, \$934 million. Rochester specifically holds the lowest graduation rate for black males in the nation according to the Schott Report for Public Education. Every black male that enters an ECHS has a greater probability of exiting those HS doors and entering into a college. 88% of ECHS graduates enroll in college.

Establishing TAP eligibility is sound fiscal and public policy. It enables access at an earlier age and increases the likelihood of college success. According to the US Census Bureau college graduates earn 66% more in a lifetime than a high school graduate earns.



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Increasing college graduation rates will enhance the future earnings of students , and in doing so, will positively impact long term state tax revenues.

Early college high schools successfully address the very same issues prioritized by the Board of Regents and the governor's office, namely anemic high school graduation rates and college-readiness. The initiative is successfully giving students a head start on the college experience—particularly first-generation college students, students of low income and students of color. These demographics factually represent the scholars that are in our classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

I am a first generation college graduate that was also from an economically disadvantaged background. Now I am the proud founding principal of the Rochester Early College International High School. I know firsthand the difference that attaining a college degree makes in the life of an individual and I am strongly urging each and every one of you to support TAP Funding for ECHS programs so that every scholar we work with has the same opportunity to attain a college diploma as I did!