

**Education Commission Testimony**  
**Smart Scholars Early College High School**  
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**Syracuse City School District**

**Introduction:**

The purpose of this testimony is to ultimately encourage the commission to support the TAP reform bill, and additional efforts that support a high level of achievement for minority and economically disadvantaged students. Along with the rhetoric of developing “college and career ready” students, the State of New York must provide tangible means through which to achieve these ends. The specific continued funding of the Early College High School is one such reform that provides support to our students who are most in need.

**What is the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central?**

The Institute of Technology (ITC) is a public high school within the Syracuse City School District (SCSD). ITC was formed in the academic year 2007-2008 with the vision to be the central academic location for students enrolled in a career and technical education (CTE) program. Despite original plans for more comprehensive CTE offerings, ITC came to offer those CTE programs that aligned with STEM disciplines. Students at ITC can select from programs in: computer science, mechanical and electrical engineering, automotive technology, food science, bio-medical technology, and media production. The school enrolls, grades 9-12, 450 students.

At the start of the 2010-2011 school year the Smart Scholars Early College High School was implemented at ITC as an integral element of the curriculum for all students, and in conjunction with each student’s selected CTE course of study. Unique to the Institute of Technology is that students apply based on their interest in a CTE course of study, not the designation of ITC as an Early College program. Subsequently, students that attend ITC are statistically those students who compose the student population of the entire school district, and have no greater aptitude for college and college preparation than their peers. However, it is the school’s expectation that all students participate within the early college program as it is a vehicle through which to ensure adequate and robust academic experiences.

Early College at ITC allows students the environment of a meaningful college preparatory experience. Beyond the completion of course credits, students are offered the responsibility and

the experience of college preparation from the beginning of their 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade academic years are geared towards the completion of their New York State required courses and exam as well as exploration of CTE programs. Beginning in their 11<sup>th</sup> grade year, students select their CTE course of study, and its associated sequence of college courses. In conjunction with each CTE program students complete concurrent enrollment courses at the ITC campus, as well as on-campus courses at State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF) and at Onondaga Community College (OCC). Students have the opportunity to complete a robust number of college courses within their chosen area of technical study.

Students who attend the Institute of Technology are statistically representative of the broader Syracuse City School District. The ITC student body is comprised of students who are: 74% minority, 65% who receive free and reduced lunch, 22% students with disabilities, and 66% who are first generation college goers. While we are representative of a broader school district who has a graduation rate around 50% the class of 2011 had a 75% graduation rate, and the class of 2012 has a 77% graduation rate without the inclusion of August graduates. The 2012 graduation rate could potentially reach 80% with summer graduates. Beyond graduation rates, ITC graduates are twice as likely as the average SCSD student to attend a 4 year college.

While there is no specific study that establishes a causal versus correlational relationship between the Early College program and our students' success it appears to be reasonable to conclude so. ITC students represent the academic abilities and social circumstances of our broader school District; however, they succeed at far higher rates than their counterparts. We believe that is occurs because ITC students are educated in a college preparatory environment with on-campus courses and experiences, our faculty has a singular focus upon our students and their college preparation, and the financial funding to provide the supports and tutoring that must accompany a rigorous academic program are provided.

### **What does Early College funding support?**

Smart Scholars Early College High School funding is integral to the functioning and continued success of our students. Funding specifically supports:

- On campus summer program that introduces students to teachers and college professors they will be working with throughout the academic year. Mathematics and English Language Arts instruction that allows students to solidify their academic skills.
- On campus tuition payments without which the School District would not be able to pay for students' on-campus courses.
- Early College fellows, who as part of their graduate studies support the implementation of rigorous college course at ITC.

- Extensive tutoring and academic support that ranges from after school academies, to Saturday school, to vacation credit recovery programs.
- College awareness and induction activities on cooperating college campuses.
- Professional development to train ITC teachers to teach rigorous college preparatory courses.

### **What we Need?**

When the grant funding period ends next academic year, SCSD will be required to fund the cost of sustaining this program; however, the tuition and student academic support services will be too great for us to fund. In order for this program to be sustained once the grant period ends, it is critical for the TAP reform bill to be approved by the Assembly. It was unanimously approved in the Senate but has stalled in the Assembly. While the State Education Department and the Regents are launching “college and career ready” aspirational targets, it seems short sighted that the TAP bill is still not approved, when it supports exactly the mission the State is espousing.

I urge you to support the passage of the TAP reform bill and other efforts to support high level academic achievement for minority and economically disadvantaged students. It is a bit clichéd to say that all of our students can achieve great things, but our experience at ITC is that this is very much possible. It is possible through the implementation of the proper programs and curriculum, and it is possible through the adequate and just funding for services to those students who need us the most. We believe in a country and a dream that allows all citizens, regardless of societal circumstances to have the opportunity to pursue a better life for themselves. This dream is still possible, but not without an education that will prepare our students for college and career.

Thank you for the time you have given in participating on this commission, and thank you for listening to the ways in which we have achieved great things with our students. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me:

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