SBCTC ISSUE BRIEF
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Identifying Relevant College Milestones for Running Start Students and Implications for Widening Their Pathways to College

Washington State's Guided Pathways Initiative seeks to increase completions and close equity gaps for college attainment. The initiative focuses on first-time in college (FTIC) students enrolled in Washington's community and technical colleges. In order to focus on the students most likely to struggle with college completion, we have purposefully excluded dual credit high school students from the initiative's launch. That said, dual credit programs are extremely popular with families and students. Pushing pathways down into high schools can play an important role in improving college completion for younger students.

Running Start Program

This brief describes 12,842 high school juniors and seniors who started Running Start in fall 2014. Demographic comparisons are given for two other student groups- all public high school 11th and 12th graders enrolled in 2014-15 (167,859 juniors and seniors) and 7,089 post high school, first-time in college students in fall 2014 under 20.5 years old. These young, post-HS, FTIC students never participated in Running Start and are included to represent a comparison group of students who enroll in college within (close to) one to two years after high school graduation.

In addition to understanding who participates, Running Start students are analyzed for total college credits earned and completion of at least one quarter in college math. We also include information on vocational credits earned as a means to discern students' longer-term goals. A limitation in our data is that we do not know if a student is in their junior or senior year for high school. Therefore, we measure attainment in their first dual enrollment year. Comparisons are made to the group of younger students we proxy as having enrolled directly after high school graduation. Based upon our analyses for who participates and their first year college progression, we discuss possible metrics for Running Start students and implications for the Guided Pathways Initiative.

Running Start needs to increase participation for students from underrepresented groups, lower socio-economic backgrounds, and males.

Figure 1 compares Running Start participation by race and ethnicity to all public high school juniors and seniors and to FTIC students attending within 1-2 years after graduating high school and no prior Running Start. These data are shown using Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction/U.S. Department of Education race and ethnicity reporting categories for non-Hispanic race alone and Hispanic of any race. The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) typically reports non-Hispanic race alone and in combination, which suggests higher percentages for individual race categories and includes a category for other. For simplicity, we maintain the K-12 reporting throughout the brief. Following SBCTC conventions, the patterns between Running Start and FTIC students would remain the same. Students from under-represented groups do not participate in Running Start students on a par with the makeup of all 11th and 12 grade students or other young FTIC students.

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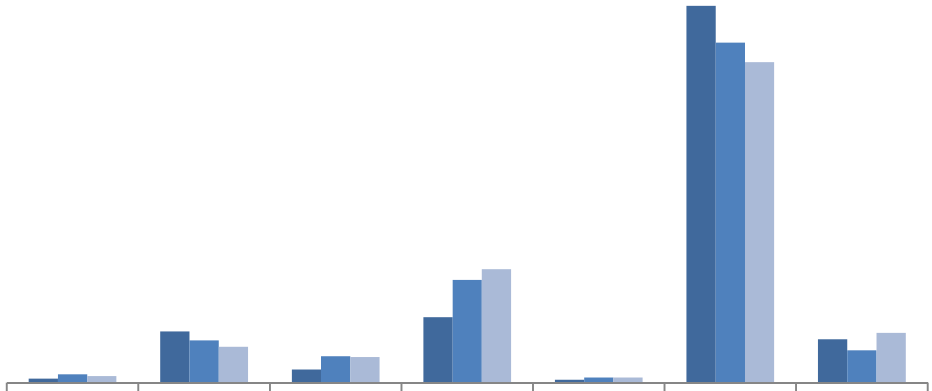
Fig. 1. Participation by Race/Ethnicity for Running Start to All 11th and 12th Grades, and Post-HS, First-time College Students



	Alaska Native/ Native American alone	Asian alone	Black/African American alone	Latino/ Hispanic any race	Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander alone	White alone	Multiracial/ other
RS (Race reported=90%)	0.7%	9.2%	2.4%	11.8%	0.5%	67.7%	7.8%
All HS Jrs and Srs (Race reported=100%)	1.5%	7.6%	4.7%	18.4%	0.9%	61.1%	5.8%
Post-HS,FTIC (Race reported= 96%)	1.2%	6.4%	4.6%	20.4%	0.9%	57.6%	8.9%

Running Start students are predominantly female (Fig. 2). Male students are substantially less likely to participate in Running Start when compared to their incidence in either the overall high school population or first-time college students.

SBCTC can map student addresses into the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS). This data allows us to describe students in terms of the socio-economic status (SES) of their neighborhood based upon the median household income, percentage of adults with bachelor degrees, and that work in professional/management jobs. One inference from SES is that students in the lower quintiles come from backgrounds and environments where they are more likely than students in the higher SES quintiles to be first generation college students (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 2. Participation by Sex for Running Start, to All 11th and 12th Grades, and Post-HS, First-time College Students

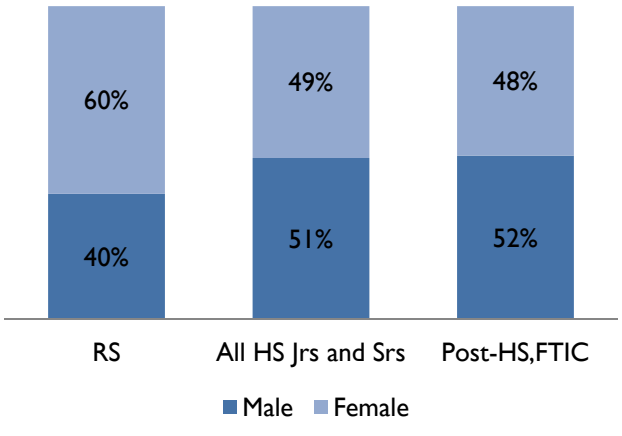


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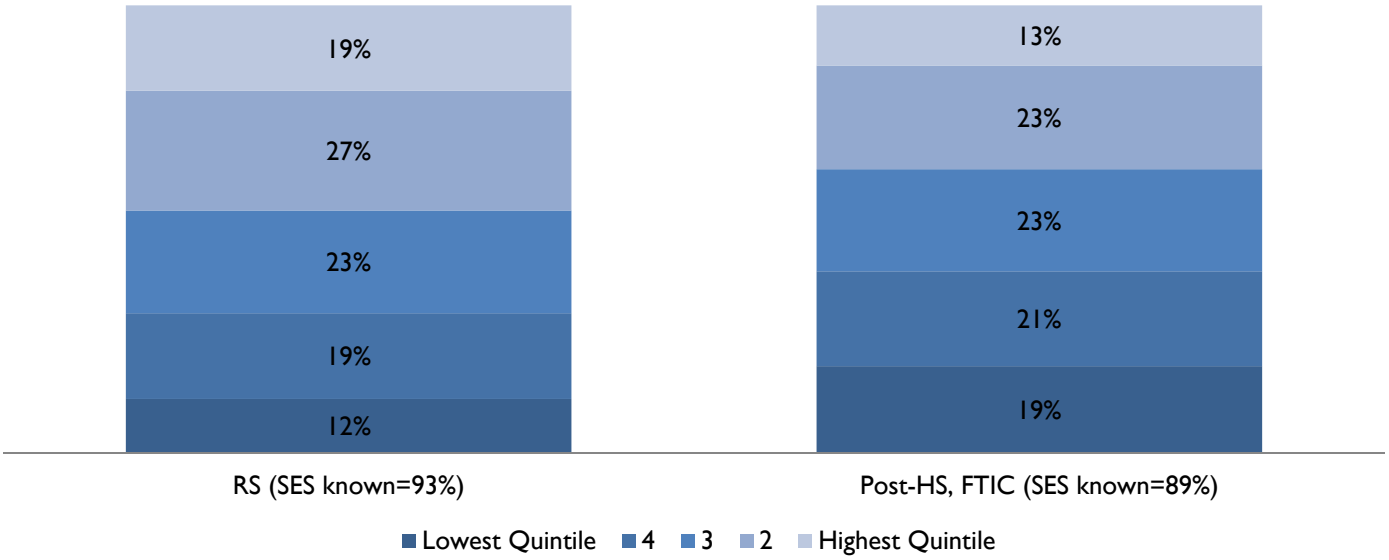
Fig. 3. Participation by Socio-economic Status for Running Start to Post-HS, First-time College Students



Comparisons can be made for Running Start and FTIC students only. Running Start students are typically from higher SES backgrounds than are students who come directly from high school with no prior Running Start.

Running Start participation closes equity gaps for earning college credit

Table 1 shows Running Start students earn an average of 31 college credits in their first dual enrollment year. Disaggregating by race and ethnicity, the difference between the highest average (Asian students-33 average credits earned) and the lowest average (Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders 30 average credits earned) is just three college credits.

Post-HS, FTIC students earn an average of 25 college credits in their first year. The difference between Asian students (29 average credits earned) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (17 average credits earned) is 12 college credits. Much of the gap in credits earned is closed when Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Latino/Hispanic and Black/African American students participate in Running Start.

A similar and even stronger case can be made for closing equity gaps when students of lower SES participate in Running Start. There is just a one credit difference among Running Start students disaggregating by SES quintiles. The difference increases to seven credits for FTIC students. Increasing participation for students from the lowest SES quintile potentially reduces the biggest difference.

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Table 1. College Credits Earned	Running Start (N=12,842)	Post-HS, FTIC- (N=7,089)	
	Average 1st Year College Credits Earned		Difference
All Students	31	25	6
Race/Ethnicity			
Not Reported	30	27	4
Alaskan/Native American alone	26	22	4
Asian alone	33	29	4
Black/African American alone	28	20	8
Latino/Hispanic of any race	31	21	10
Multi-racial/other	31	23	8
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander alone	30	17	13
White alone	32	26	6
Sex			
Not Reported	32	32	0
Female	32	25	8
Male	31	25	6
SES			
Not Known	31	25	6
Highest quintile	31	29	2
2nd quintile	32	26	6
3rd quintile	31	24	7
4th quintile	31	24	7
Lowest quintile	32	22	10

Current Running Start students are more inclined toward academic transfer paths and may be more ready for this path to college. Post-HS, FTIC students participate more in professional technical education.

Running Start students are 11 percent more likely to complete a full year of college coursework and nine percent more likely to complete college math in their first year enrolled than their counterpart FTIC students (see Table 2).

Younger students as a whole are more likely to attend community college for academic transfer. The coursework taken by Running Start students also suggests a stronger inclination toward college transfer than for FTIC students who come after high school. While the percent of students that take at least one vocational course are similar, FTIC students earn twice as many vocational credits on average and are twice as likely as Running Start students to take 10 or more vocational credits. Given that high school students are required to take at least one HS vocational credit, we can assume these Running Start students are taking a single college vocational course to meet their high school graduation requirement.

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Table 2. Academic Path	Running Start	Post-HS, FTIC College Students
% that earned at least 45 college credits	24%	13%
% that earned at least 5 credits in college math	34%	25%
Average vocational credits earned	7	13
% that earned 5 or more vocational credits	32%	33%
% of students with at least 5 vocational credits who earned 10 or more vocational credits	19%	38%

Discussion- Possible Metrics and Implications

Running Start appears to be an integral avenue for closing equity gaps that exist by race/ethnicity and SES. The current Running Start population underserves underrepresented students and students from the lowest SES quintile. It substantially underserves males. This suggests that access is an important metric to measure for Running Start in a Guided Pathways framework. We would expect to see changes for how Running Start students compare to high school 11th and 12th grade enrollments, and that over time as profiles change, we see less demographic difference between Running Start and their FTIC student counterparts.

On the whole, younger students are more likely than older students to retain in college and complete credits. Measuring completion of 45 college credits in their first year of college and completing college math remain critical milestones for predicting long-term success.[i]

Given differences in backgrounds that currently exist between Running Start and other post-HS, FTIC students, we cannot assume that more publicity and explanation about the current program better will effect change and expand participation. One implication for planning Guided Pathways for younger students is the importance of strengthening professional-technical career programs in Running Start. Younger students who pursue these options appear more likely to begin them in college than to start them in high school in a dual enrollment program. Emphasizing professional-technical programs can be an important tool for increasing participation from groups we are currently underserving. However, this also requires examining programs for their current postsecondary attainment and building more ways for professional-technical two-year graduates to continue on to bachelor's degrees in fields in which further education beyond a two-year credential are critical to higher earnings.

[i] See http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/early-momentum-metrics-college-improvement.html

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