

METROWEST




College Planning Collaborative

METROWEST SCHOLARS EARLY START

**Expanding
college
access
& success
... by design**

College success starts early.



METROWEST SCHOLARS IS SHOWING WHAT'S POSSIBLE
WHEN ALL STUDENTS GET THE OPPORTUNITY AND SUPPORT
TO ACHIEVE THEIR POST-SECONDARY DREAMS.

MetroWest Scholars Early Start puts newcomers, first-generation college goers, and other underserved students on the path to postsecondary success, beginning in the 8th grade. A partnership of Framingham State University, MassBay Community College, and Framingham, Milford, and Waltham public schools, MetroWest Scholars provides students with an intentionally designed and well-supported pathway to complete up to two years of college coursework during high school.

We're raising aspirations—and outcomes—in the MetroWest region and helping lead the way for an early college movement across our state.



Because of [MetroWest Scholars] I find it easier to envision myself going to college and having a good time doing so. This opportunity should be available to many more people in need of academic challenge and opportunity.”

Katie Salvatierra

MetroWest Scholar,
CLASS OF 2024

Friends and fellow educators,

We're so proud of how far we've come in developing an effective, engaging, community-centered early college model for the young people of Massachusetts' MetroWest region. MetroWest Scholars Early Start is now one of the most mature and impactful early college programs in our state. Getting to this point has required clear-eyed leadership, partnership, and the sustained efforts of many—and we continue to dream big!

These days, we get a lot of questions from those seeking to learn how we've built such a successful, open access early college model. This report is our response. Inside, we share points we emphasize when we get a call from a peer or an invitation to speak at a conference—in far more detail. We hope this report can serve as a first stop for those seeking to understand the deliberate design decisions that have helped us create a meaningful early college experience for students of diverse backgrounds.

Here's what we can say in a nutshell:

Early college is powerful. For first-generation college goers and other underserved students, an early, accelerated on ramp to college can be a game changer, making higher education truly accessible and affordable... and providing scholars with the tools, confidence, and support network they need to attain a degree.

Early college is complex. Doing early college right—and making the model available to all students—takes careful planning and investments. With almost a decade of providing college access services in MetroWest, we've paid close attention to the needs and aspirations of our communities and designed a model for them. We believe our strategies will work in similar towns and cities across the state.

Early college is possible. Too many adults still believe that high schoolers—especially English language learners and other underserved youth—aren't ready for the challenge of college coursework. We're proving them wrong. Our extremely diverse scholars consistently outperform typical college students, beginning in 9th grade. They succeed because we know they can and because we provide the safety, community, and support that makes their success possible.

We're thrilled to be part of the early college movement building across our state and hope this report can serve as a guidepost for those who share our commitment to college access for all.

Sincerely,

MetroWest Scholars Early Start Team



Our Early Impact

4

years
(since launch)

595

scholars enrolled
across 3 communities

2824

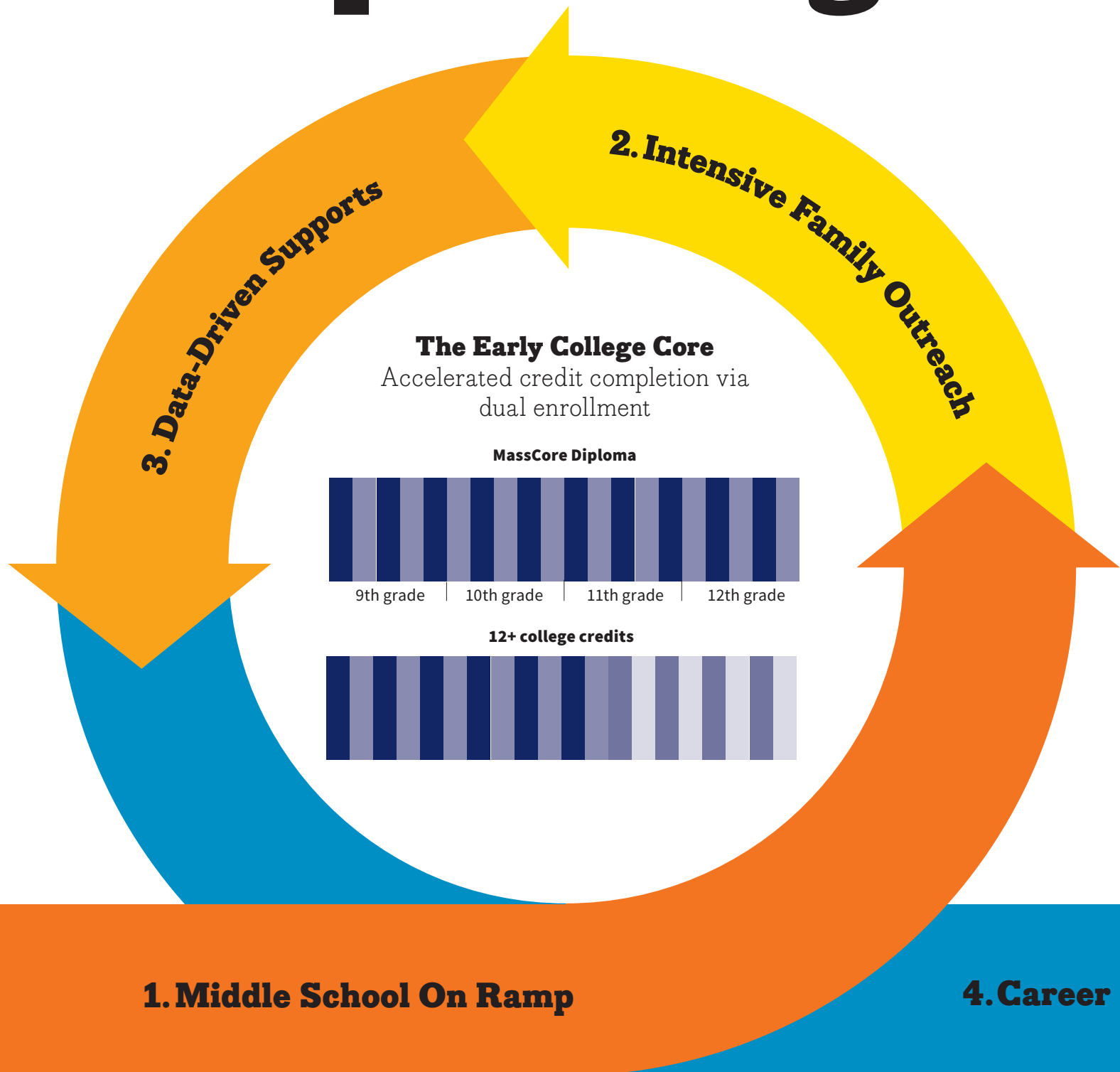
college credits
earned

\$847,200

saved in college costs to date

MetroWest Scholars'

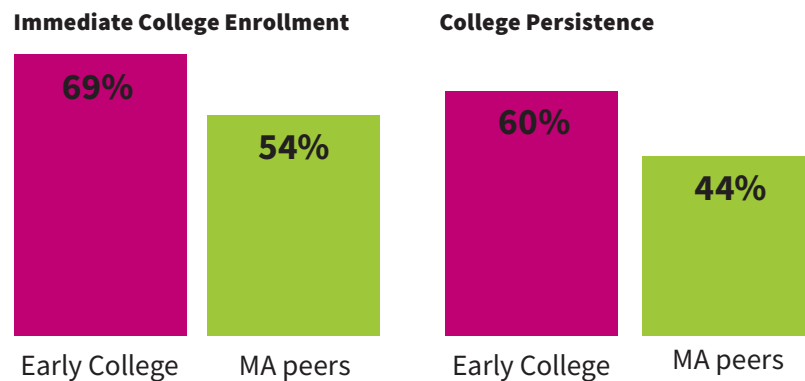
Unique Design



Early college is a proven approach to improving high school and college outcomes, especially for traditionally underserved students. Early college accelerates the path to a college degree by strategically embedding college courses into the regular high school day, at no cost to students or their families. Early college makes earning a degree more affordable and more achievable. When students experience early success in college coursework, they acquire the confidence, habits, and skills they need to persist to a degree.

MetroWest Scholars builds on successful early college designs nationally with four enhancements that put college success in reach for youth in our region.

Early College Impact in Massachusetts



Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, June 2022

Apprenticeships

Outcomes

- MassCore diploma
- 12-40 college credits
- Career credentials



MetroWest Scholars'

Powerful Impact

MetroWest Scholars is showing the world what is possible when high school students are given the opportunity to engage in rigorous college coursework. After just four years, our students are already defying expectations. We anticipate even more impressive outcomes as our first student cohorts complete their diplomas and advance on their postsecondary pathways.

Diverse Students

MetroWest Scholars deliberately recruits—and successfully serves—students from the region's most underserved communities.

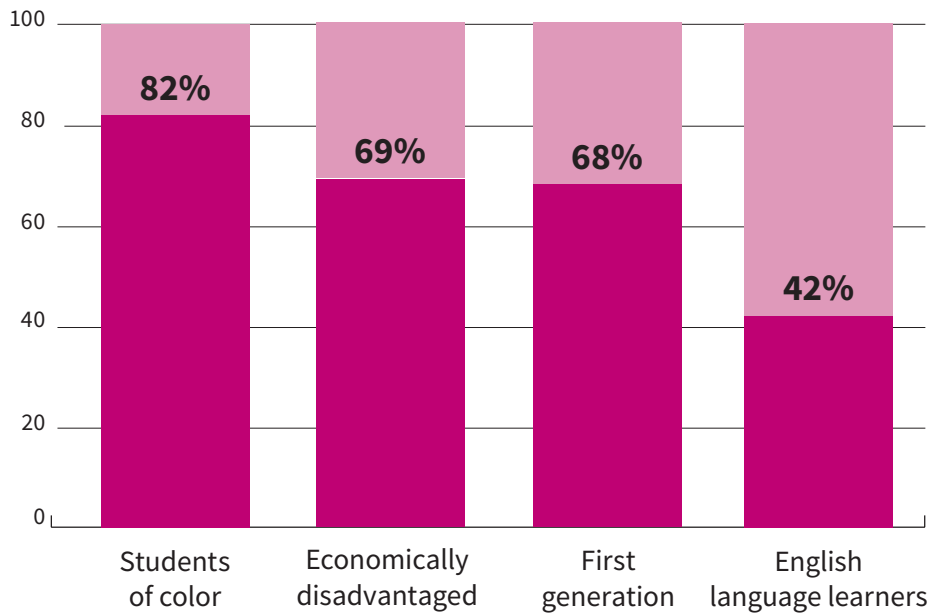
595

Scholars

Impressive Outcomes

MetroWest scholars are completing college courses and earning grades that are similar (or better) than their college peers.

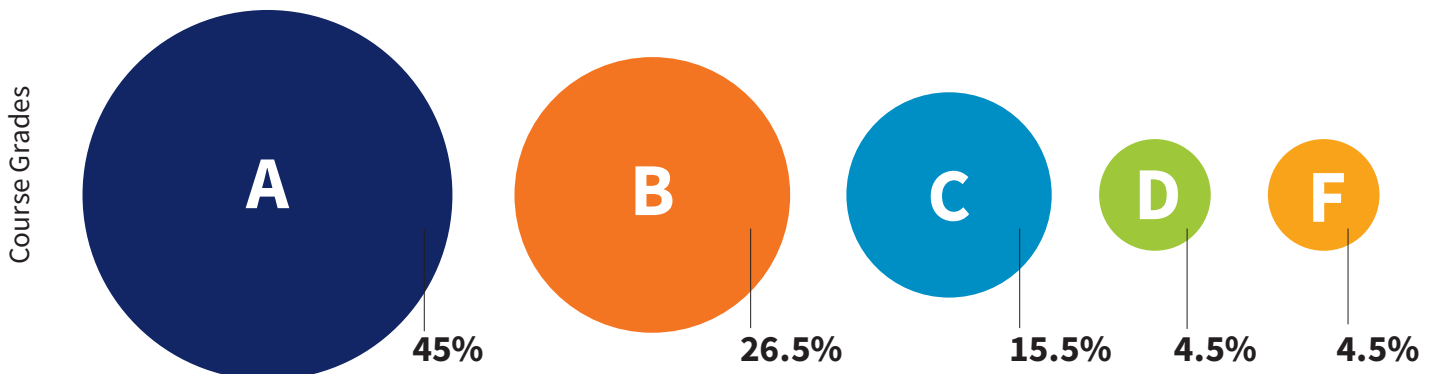
An additional 3.9% earned passing grades for an ungraded course, and 1% had received an "incomplete" at the time of data collection.



3,344
attempted college credits
(fall 2020 to spring 2023)

2,824
earned college credits

85.2%
credits successfully completed



College is now possible.

I am so proud
of how far
I've come.
I cannot wait
to see where
this program
takes me!"



Melanie Cerin

Framingham
High School,
MetroWest Scholars
Early Start
CLASS OF 2024

As a middle schooler, Melanie Cerin hadn't considered college seriously. Her parents—both immigrants from Guatemala—didn't think of college as a realistic option for their daughter either. But then Melanie's mother attended a school fair where she learned about the enrichment programs offered by the MetroWest College Planning Collaborative. "My mom was like, 'Yes, give me the papers!'" Melanie recalls, laughing.

After a month of field trips and activities, Melanie was hooked. "It was amazing," she says. "I had such a fun summer." That fall, Melanie enrolled in MetroWest Scholars Early Start, although still wasn't completely sold on college. "My goal was to get out of high school, get a job as soon as possible, and help my parents out," she explains. But the more she heard, the more her aspirations began to shift.

"They were telling us how these college credits would help you be able to pay off some money for your degree," she says. "That opened my eyes."

Melanie's first summer of early college coursework took place virtually the summer before she began 9th grade. The days were long and challenging, and with the COVID-19 pandemic raging, it was often difficult to stay motivated. But she showed up every day and was surprised by her own success.

In high school, Melanie has continued taking college courses as a part of a full course load. "It's changed how I man-

age my time," she says. "I would leave things last minute. Now, I have to set out a whole schedule." Melanie has also learned to speak up in class and reach out for support. "You can actually talk to professors," she says. "You can ask questions. Like, no one's gonna judge you."

Heading into her senior year at Framingham High School, Melanie has already completed 37 college credits in the STEM/BioTech pathway. "My goal by the end of high school is to have an Associate's degree," she says—a goal that is entirely within reach.


Her current plan is to use her Associate's degree to get a well-paid job right out of high school, while she continues to pursue a Bachelor's.

Melanie's parents are proud of how much their daughter has accomplished, as is she. She has become a big proponent of MetroWest Scholars, speaking at statewide events and to her younger peers. "It doesn't matter what circumstances that you are in," she tells them. "If you have a dream to go to college... and if you put in your own effort, this program will really, really help you."





Our **four** design strategies



The MetroWest Scholars Early Start program is highly intentional—especially in areas that we know matter deeply for student outcomes. Their thoughtful design is beneficial not only for local students but also for the statewide early college movement.”

Erika Giampietro
Massachusetts Alliance
for Early College

MetroWest Scholars Early Start has developed a highly intentional approach to early college that is grounded in almost a decade of experience providing college access programming in our region. We know MetroWest students and families, and we knew that if we wanted to make early college accessible for all students, we’d need to build a program that met them on their own terms.

Four features emerged as non-negotiables for our early college design. While these strategies aren’t entirely unique to MetroWest Scholars—a number of early colleges across the country implement variations of these ideas—we treat them as cornerstones of our model, worthy of sustained investment. Together, these four strategies make up the “secret sauce” of our program’s success.



1

Middle School On Ramp

We begin
in 8th grade,
when students'
options and
mindsets are
more open.

.....



2

Intensive Family Engagement

We make
families full
partners and
allies in their
students'
success.

.....



3

Data-Driven Supports

We constantly
review data
to identify
unmet needs
and then
design supports
to meet them.

.....



4

Career Apprenticeships

We go beyond career exploration to
offer meaningful, paid career
opportunities in each pathway.

.....

1

Middle School On Ramp

HIGH SCHOOL IS SIMPLY TOO LATE TO BEGIN PREPARING FOR COLLEGE.

That's a lesson we learned the hard way through years of providing college access and application support in local schools. By sophomore or junior year, students—especially those from underserved backgrounds—are likely to have already made decisions that limit their ability to get on a college path. Most of those decisions are made in middle school, often without students' or families' active consent.

That's why we decided from the outset that our early college process would need to begin earlier. Our middle school on ramp creates the time and space for students to begin exploring a college and career identity sooner, and it allows us to advise them and their families on choices (like which math course to take in 9th grade) that set them up for success. Middle schoolers, we've learned, are also more malleable and more connected to their adult caregivers; it's a great time to forge relationships that can sustain their success.

Early On Ramp Timeline

September/October

Coordinate family outreach with middle school staff

October/November

Community education fair

November/December

Family info sessions and phone calls

December/January

Applications due

January

New cohort accepted and enrolled

February through June

Monthly after-school workshops

June

8th graders make an initial pathway selection

July/August

First college course

September

Enter high school on an early college path



How It Works

At each local middle school, we work closely with a designated faculty liaison to promote our program to families. The liaison, who receives a stipend for their work, must be someone who families trust and who shares our vision of equitable access to college. That trusted adult is often our first “in” with families.

During the fall of 8th grade, we work with our middle school partners to send out emails and flyers, and we host a big education fair (see Strategy 2) where we connect directly with families. We then invite families to a workshop where they can learn more, in multiple languages. We follow up with phone calls, making sure anyone who is interested gets the support they need to meet our application deadline. Any 8th grader who completes an application with a caregiver's support is accepted.

Beginning in February, students participate in monthly after-school workshops and field trips that expose them to the world of college. We also engage students in hands-on activities where they learn about our four career pathways and begin to explore their own career interests. Students take their first college course the summer before 9th grade. By the time they enter high school, they've made an initial career pathway selection and are ready to hit the ground running.



It's important to get students thinking about college as early as possible because then they have time to practice skills and abilities that are vital to thrive in higher education and beyond. Many of my students sign up for MetroWest Scholars because they want to succeed in life. This program is opening a door that previously was not attainable.”

Nelia Patrick

Faculty Liaison,
Walsh Middle School

2

Intensive Family Engagement

METROWEST SCHOLARS TAKES A WHOLE-FAMILY APPROACH TO STUDENT SUCCESS.

Many Points Of Contact

Families typically interact with our staff many times over the course of a school year. We maintain an open-door policy and build connections through multiple forms of outreach.

- Fall education fair
- Spring education fair
- June graduation party
- Monthly Fun Fridays
- Town Halls (3x per year)
- Regular text messages (multilingual)
- As-needed phone calls
- Family Council



Students need a web of support to rise to the challenge of early college. We involve parents and caregivers early, understanding that they are essential allies in our ambitious, multi-year mission.

For many families in MetroWest, college is a relatively unfamiliar concept. Many assume it is unaffordable and out of reach. We start by meeting families on their own turf, providing them with valuable information about college and career opportunities and the cost savings our program provides. Over multiple conversations, we answer questions, unpack common myths and misgivings, and empower families to make the best decision with their child. Once students are enrolled, we remain connected with caregivers. This ongoing contact is especially important for immigrant families who are frequently sidelined in their children's education. The trust we build ensures that students have a powerful, unified support system sustaining their success.

How It Works

We don't treat family engagement as one-off activity or an isolated role. Our entire team prioritizes time with families. A first point of contact is often an education fair. We host these twice-annual, family-friendly events on Sundays in each of our partner communities, selecting an accessible location, like a community center or a church. We provide food, music, giveaways, activities for younger children, and stations where families can speak with staff and college faculty, get help with financial aid forms, and more. The fairs have become can't-miss events that attract a multi-generational crowd, including families of current scholars and new families who are learning about our program for the first time.

We continue to engage caregivers from that point forward, via informational workshops, calls home to share great news and opportunities to collaborate for growth, and monthly "Fun Fridays" when we invite families to pick up a pizza and hang out with us in a safe outdoor location. (It's a pandemic tradition that stuck.) We also host virtual town hall events three times a year with our Family Council where we share our work and solicit family input. At every event, our multilingual staff and others provide translation.



I got to know MetroWest Scholars when my children were still in middle school. The whole team was always very attentive, and I had all questions answered from the first meeting. For me, the most important events are those related to university guidance. In fact, it was through these events that Mariana made her choice to pursue a career as a lawyer. She is very happy with this decision.”

Karolline Leal

MetroWest Scholars parent
(translated from Portuguese)

3

Data-Driven Supports

WE START WITH THE BELIEF THAT EVERY STUDENT CAN SUCCEED AND ORGANIZE OUR WORK TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

50%

of English learners
move into
college classes
after five months
of intensive
academic
bridge study



Our accelerated early college course load is (no surprise) very challenging for many students. That's why we review student learning data often to identify students in need of intervention and to monitor trends that help us design wrap-around academic supports for small groups or entire cohorts.

We also use student-learning data to build support with our higher education partners and other stakeholders. The data show our students succeeding at levels many folks never imagined possible. We present the data regularly to reframe perspectives, secure new allies, and make a case for expanded classes and other resources for our program.

How It Works

Our deep dives into data typically begin with an alert. A college faculty member or teaching assistant sends a list of students who are falling behind. We drill deeper into those students' data, past and current, looking for patterns: Which students are struggling and which are doing well? Do we notice a trend among English language learners (ELLs) or students from one particular middle school? Are we noticing trends by gender or another factor?

The expanded data analyses become a starting point for conversation. Instead of jumping to conclusions, we gather our team and school site directors to better understand underlying issues and design interventions that address them. We may go back to a feeder middle school with feedback on their current math curriculum. Or we might set up a homework support group for an especially challenging college course. When we saw that our ELLs, particularly the newest arrivals, were struggling with the academic vocabulary in certain college courses, we designed a bridge course for students to build vocabulary in the subject area and learn tools for approaching challenging texts.

Many of the data-driven interventions that we've developed for one student or group of students—for example, the ELL bridge course—have been so successful that we've built them into our regular programming, anticipating the needs of students to come. We will continue reviewing data, refining supports, and designing new interventions until every student succeeds.



I am so happy because I have been able to improve my English, and now I am dedicating my time to achieving my dreams. I started college classes. This is the class [where] I have learned more than any other.”

Nathaly Gian

Framingham High School,
ELL Bridge



Career Apprenticeships

OUR FOUR CAREER PATHWAYS GIVE STUDENTS A HEAD START ON A DEGREE AND A REWARDING CAREER.

MetroWest Scholars' Career Pathways

- STEM/Biotechnology
- Business
- Education
- Sociology/Criminal Justice



The pathways are built around in-demand career clusters in our region—fields in which our graduates can confidently secure well-paid jobs with opportunities for advancement.

From the time they enroll as 8th graders, students know they are on a path to earn stackable credentials, participate in real-world internships, and obtain a paid apprenticeship. These opportunities serve as a concrete motivator throughout high school and a source of pride as students master valuable career skills. Successfully completing the sequence gives students an edge in the job market upon graduation, leading to higher-paid positions and a secure economic future for themselves and their families.

How It Works

We introduce career exploration right away in 8th grade workshops and through field trips and other exploratory activities throughout high school. We ask students to investigate their own interests and make an initial career pathway selection that becomes a commitment at the end of 10th grade. Through hands-on projects, work site visits, and other engaging experiential learning opportunities, students find connections between the curriculum and the real-life topics that deepen their engagement with learning. Once students have completed their foundational college course work, they take 4-6 college courses within their selected pathway. We've deliberately chosen classes that will meet Associate's degree requirements and that are embed workforce credentials valued by employers.

We've established relationships more than a dozen companies in our region who have agreed to offer paid summer internships (up to 15 hours per week) for current scholars and full-time apprenticeships for seniors upon graduation. We've worked with these partners to waive typical requisites for these role (e.g., age, prior employment) and supplement employer stipends with grant funds, ensuring that these opportunities are not only higher prestige than a typical teen job but also higher paying. We anticipate that many of our graduating seniors will use their apprenticeships as a launch pad to more advanced roles in their field as they continue their studies.



South Shore Health is committed to build the necessary pipelines for the future healthcare workforce. Partnering with a high school offering an early college program gives us the benefit of meeting students who not only have an interest in healthcare careers but are demonstrating the motivation, initiative, and commitment needed to succeed in their chosen field.”

Amy Parker

Manager, Workforce
Programs and Volunteer
Services,
South Shore Health



The early college commitment

EARLY COLLEGE IS A POWERFUL MODEL FOR
EXPANDING COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS FOR
STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES.

But it is hard work. We're proud of how far we've come in designing an effective early college model for the youth of MetroWest, and we're excited about the work the lies ahead. The four core strategies we've presented in their report will remain our guideposts going forward, and we welcome the opportunity to share what we're learning with our peers across the state.

Designing a truly equitable early college program takes intentional design, sustained investments, and a relentless commitment to the success of all students. We look forward to seeing more early college models develop across Massachusetts and to the exchange of ideas as we discover what works together.

Learn More ● ● ● [**metrowestcpc.org/mwscholars/**](https://metrowestcpc.org/mwscholars/)

METROWEST SCHOLARS COMMUNITY

MetroWest Scholars Early Start is a program of the MetroWest College Planning Collaborative and a collaboration of Massachusetts Bay Community College and Framingham State University. Many individuals and institutions have invested time and expertise in bringing the early college mission to life for MetroWest youth. We are grateful for all of their contributions.

CORE PARTNERS

Framingham State University
Massachusetts Bay Community College
Framingham Public Schools

- Framingham High School
- Cameron Middle School
- Fuller Middle School
- Walsh Middle School

Milford Public Schools

- Milford High School
- Stacy Middle School

Waltham Public Schools

- Waltham High School
- John F. Kennedy Middle School
- McDevitt Middle School

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Massachusetts Department of
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Massachusetts Department of Higher Education

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