

# Hamilton County Schools, Case Study

Summer 2022

Districts in Tennessee that received funding through the Innovative High School Models Grant have shared summaries of their work along with lessons learned along the way.

### The Innovation

In partnership with Chattanooga State Community College, Hamilton County Schools (HCS) began developing a microcollege last school year as part of their effort to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students. Previously, the district's equity audits revealed that students' access to early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs) varied greatly across high schools. The initial goal of the microcollege was to provide a small cohort of students at three target high schools the opportunity to take dual enrollment courses. However, this idea did not fully align with Hamilton's vision for ensuring all students have equitable access to advanced coursework. The goal of the microcollege evolved into ensuring all students at each target high school could take at least five dual enrollment courses before graduation. Once the microcollege program is fully established at the three target high schools, HCS plans to expand the program to all its high schools.

HCS used funds from the Innovative Schools Model grant to pilot a microcollege program at three high schools.

- **Time And Space:** All students can earn at least 15 hours of college credit before graduation by taking a core set of courses across five subject areas (English, math, science, history, and an elective CTE course). Some students will earn as many as 30 hours of college credit. Students take their dual enrollment courses during the regular school day on their high school campus. All dual enrollment courses count toward the high school graduation requirements. Students take most of their dual enrollment courses by the end of junior year to ensure they have enough flexibility in their senior schedule to participate in work-based learning opportunities.
- **Partnerships:** HCS collaborates weekly with Chattanooga State Community College to ensure the microcollege programming is successful. Additionally, HCS has partnered with the STEM School Chattanooga and the [Global Center for Digital Innovation](#) to develop a microcredentialing Program. This program provides students with organic opportunities to earn industry credentials outside of traditional CTE courses.
- **Modes Of Learning:** Courses are taught by professors from Chattanooga State. Students receive additional advising and progress check-ins from Chattanooga State and HCS faculty throughout a semester.

## The Grant

HCS received \$2 million for this innovation. The district has allocated funds to:

- Hire an EPSO coordinator
- Cover dual enrollment course costs (course textbooks)
- Provide staff professional development
- Establish a microcredentialing program
- Provide transportation for biannual student trips to Chattanooga State Community College

## Lessons Learned

HCS learned several important lessons during their first year piloting the microcollege program, including how to set the best timeline for expanding the program, the importance of effective collaboration with partners, and remaining flexible in the face of unforeseen challenges.

- **Learn and scale by finding the right balance between “going slow” to learn from the pilot of a new program and “going fast” to expand the program.** HCS spent considerable time auditing current practices and identifying gaps in their current programming before launching the microcollege program. This process required a commitment to honest reflection and discussion among leaders. In retrospect, HCS has noted that it would have been helpful to allocate an entire year to the audit process before launching their programming. Even if this amount of time is not possible, it is important to consider the best timeline for expanding a new program.
- **Prioritize partnerships by establishing and sustaining effective partnerships at the district level.** Prior to launching the microcollege, HCS permitted individual principals to identify and establish partners for their high school. Shifting the management of partnerships to the district level is a process that requires dedicated staff time. As part of launching the microcollege, leaders from HCS and Chattanooga State Community College began meeting on a weekly basis to discuss curriculum, teacher training, and student supports. This regular touch point has been critical to the success of the project.
- **Remain flexible and willing to adjust to accomplish the goals of the project.** When HCS launched their microcollege program, they anticipated being able to use grant funds to cover dual enrollment tuition costs. It turned out that funds could not be used this way. As a result, leaders had to pivot and find new ways to allocate the grant funds.

## Sustaining The Work

HCS has prioritized establishing processes and procedures that will enable them to scale their microcollege program to all high schools. By setting a bold vision for ensuring all students have access to advanced coursework and by centralizing decisions around course offerings, partnerships, and student supports, HCS hopes to make it easier for individual high schools to adopt the microcollege program in the future. Moving forward, HCS plans to rely heavily on funding from [Tennessee’s Dual Enrollment Grant Program](#) to sustain their programming financially.

## Learn More

To learn more, contact [Olivia Bagby](#).

