

Commissioner's Spotlight: Early College

June 17, 2025

Today's Presenters



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Spotlight Overview

- 1) **Introduction:** Provide an overview of Early College in Massachusetts, including the principles that guide the initiative, current scope, and impact thus far.
- 2) **Student Perspective:** Hear from an Early College student about her lived experience.
- 3) **Path Forward:** Demonstrate the alignment of Early College with our DHE/BHE strategic priorities, preview the strategic goals to be shared by the Office of Early College at tomorrow's Early College Joint Committee meeting, and discuss the topics that DHE will continue exploring to enhance and expand Early College and broader Dual Enrollment programming.

Massachusetts and the Promise of Early College: Our 2016 Vision

Proven Model

Early College represented a **nationally proven model** demonstrating the effectiveness of thoughtfully designing high school pathways with college coursework embedded in the curriculum.

Shared Commitment

Educators — faculty, teachers, staff, program leads, and leadership — Presidents, Superintendents, and others all **shared a commitment and ambition to develop more thoughtful, proven models** to better serve our MA students.

Organic MA Roots

Even before the Early College Initiative's formal outset in MA, there was **existing partnership, collaboration, and innovation** among colleges and universities in the state piloting thoughtful dual enrollment and early college models.

Growth Potential

State leadership held a shared vision to pursue a statewide strategy to expand Early College statewide and provide **state support and oversight to dramatically expand the scale of the Early College model** and ensure greater access across MA.

Improved Outcomes

At the core of the initiative, all involved sought out to **drive and encourage students to pursue and meet a new challenge** and the rigor of college coursework, ultimately driving improved outcomes.

Early College programs in Massachusetts are guided by five design principles



Equitable Access

reaching underrepresented students in higher education



Academic Pathways

that are well integrated and aligned with college and career



Enhanced Student Support

in both academics and advising



Connections to Career

through workplace and experiential learning experiences



High-Quality & Deep Partnerships

between high schools and colleges

In practice: Early College programs are designed to help enable positive outcomes for students



Partnerships between institutions of higher education and secondary schools set the foundation for the Early College model.



Early College programs are intentionally designed to remove barriers to matriculation, **empower students to see themselves as college-going students**, and expose them to the college experience.



Participating students benefit from **holistic supports** including academic and career advising to help set them up for success in rigorous postsecondary coursework and careers.



Early College can offer participants the **opportunity to accumulate credits toward postsecondary credentials, while also exploring** a wide range of topics and **career pathways**.

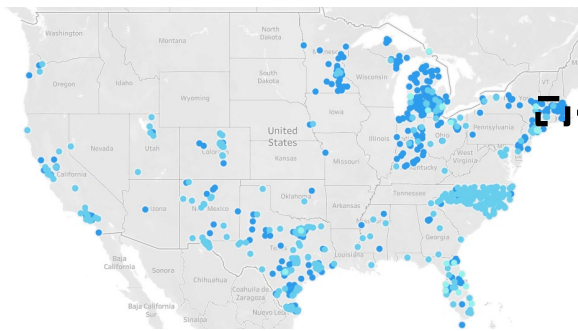


The ability to accumulate credits during Early College can help **reduce the cost and time required to obtain a postsecondary credential**.

Massachusetts Early College Initiative — Key Milestones

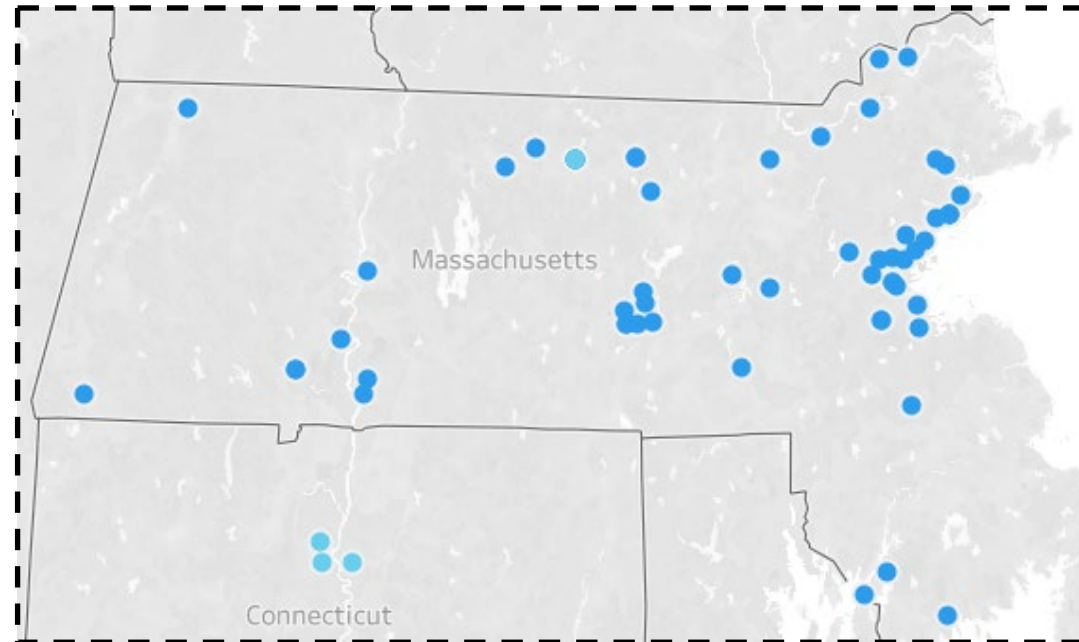
- **January 2017** — Early College Joint Committee (ECJC) created, EOE, DHE, and DESE staff collaborate to develop draft designation criteria, meeting with ECJC to refine.
- **June 2017** — ECJC endorses first Massachusetts Early College Designation Criteria, subsequently approved by BHE and BESE, first application process launched in two phases.
- **April 2018** — First five Early College programs approved for Designation by the ECJC.
- **Summer 2018** — First Early College specific legislative appropriation, first full time EC staff hired at DESE.
- **2018-2022** — Consistent yearly growth in program designations and enrollments, staffing growth at DESE, development of learning communities and support systems for programs, initial data analysis.
- **2019** — Early College is pilot test case for E2C longitudinal data efforts, significant work to connect commonwealth data systems to understand program growth and effectiveness.
- **2022** — Office of Early College established at DESE, Parthenon Strategic Review of Early College, MA4EC is launched.
- **2024-2025** — Key processes currently led by OEC in collaboration with DHE and EOE—Strategic Planning, Designation Criteria update and redrafting, Evaluation Plan Development, New Designation Implementation and Design Plan proposal, Student Recruitment Plan, Fiscal plan analysis.

Massachusetts has a growing concentration of programs across all regions of the commonwealth, part of national growth of over 1,400 Early College programs spanning the majority of US States



Designation and School Model

- Early College College-Based
- Early College Whole School
- Early College Within School Program



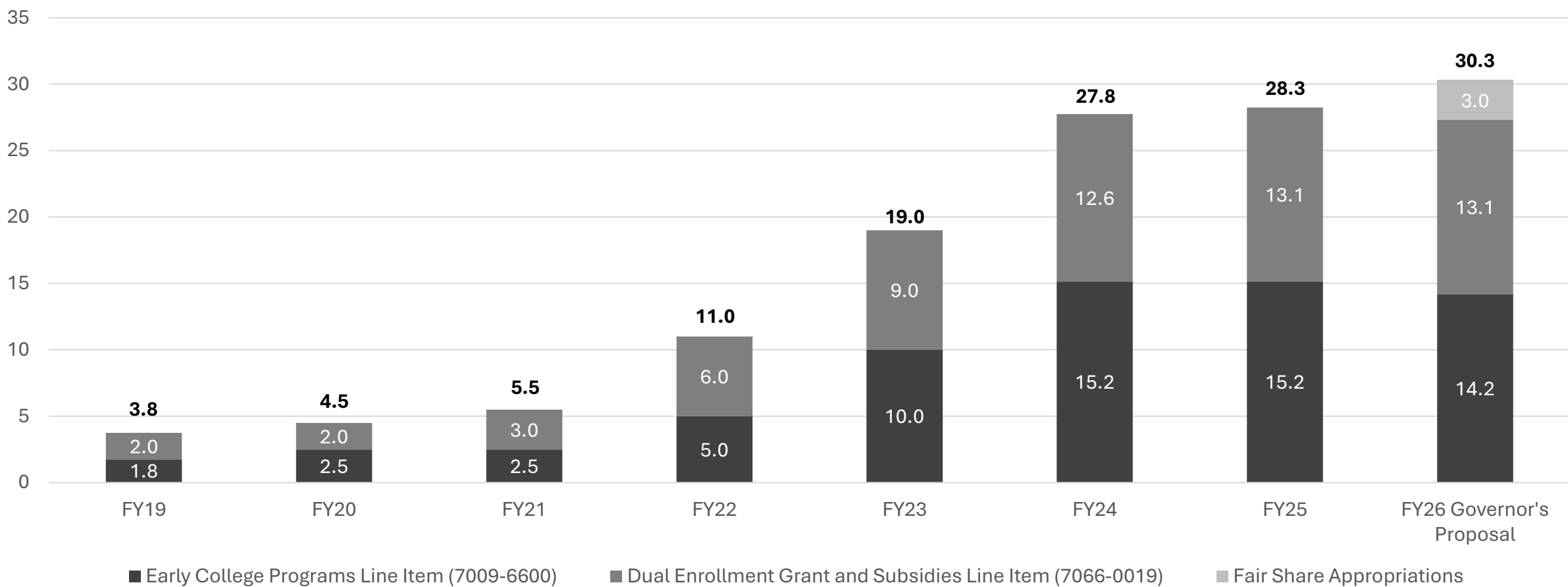
- **55 programs**, with 20 more recommended for designation this year.
- **Programs from 20 MA public higher education institutions** (3 more recommended for designation this year), 1 municipal community college, and 7 private IHE's (1 more recommended to be designated this year).
- **62 high schools participating**, with ongoing growth in HS count.
- **Early College has expanded to 18 of 26 gateway cities**, 2 more recommended for designation this year.

Note: AIR continuously updates the programs included in its interactive map, but no information was found with the specific date of the last update. Screen capture taken on June 4, 2025. Visualization does not show programs in Hawaii and Alaska for visualization purposes. Schools are color-coded based on their designation and school model – Early College, College-Based: Early College program that is based out of a college campus and does not have a physical high school location. Students participating in college-based programs may come from multiple high schools; Early College, Whole School: Early College program that serves all students within a school; Early College, Within School: Early College program that is housed within a traditional high school and does not serve all students within the school.

Source: American Institutes for Research (AIR)

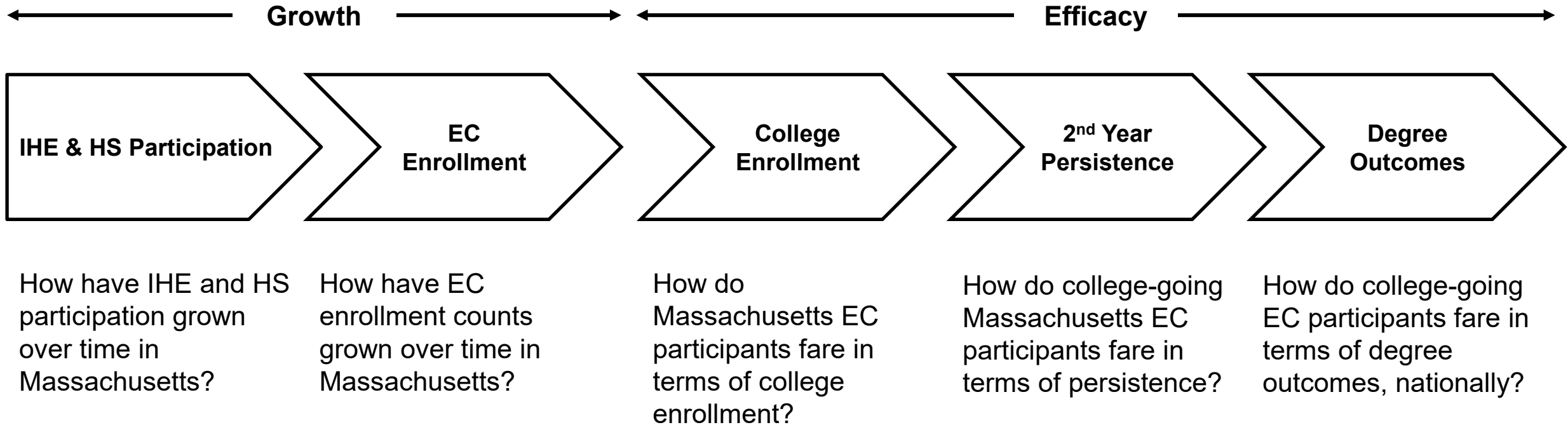
Early College has received significant and increasing state budget allocation since the launch of the Early College Initiative

Early College State Funding (\$M)



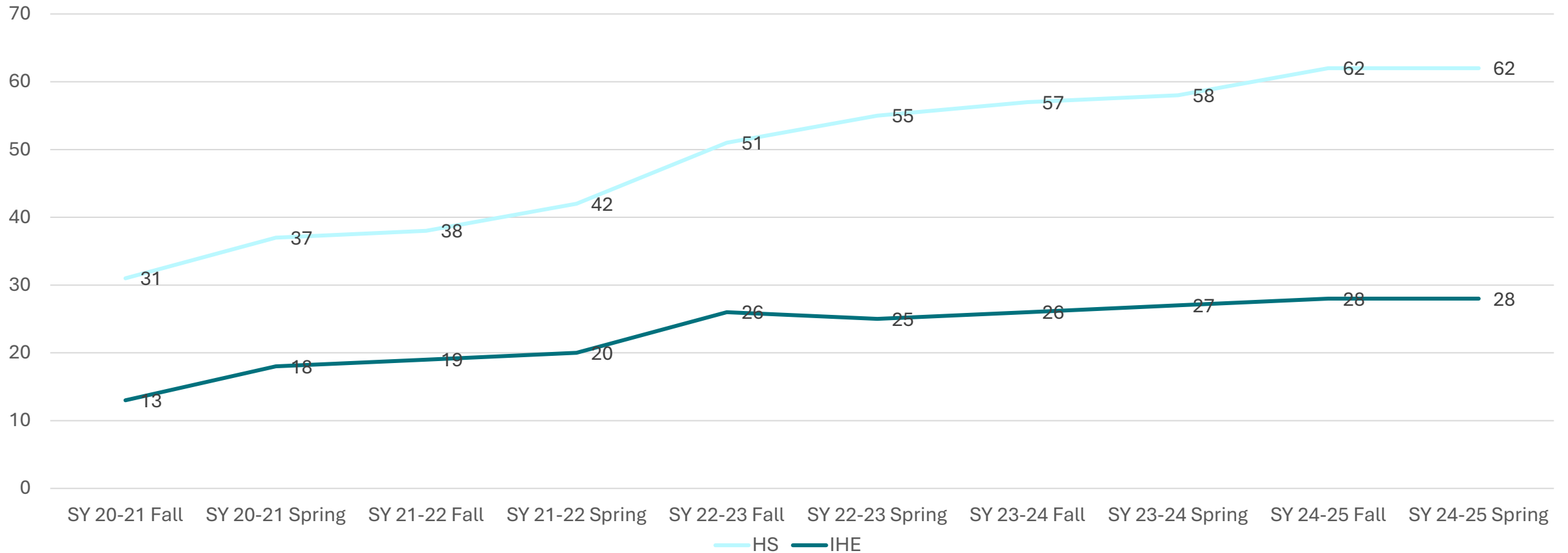
Note: The visualization does not include funding from sources not included within the line items shown. As a result, funding from private sources in early years is not included. The visualization also does not include funding pulled from revenue generated by the Fair Share amendment in FY24 and FY25, some of which was used to support Early College programs.
Sources: Massachusetts General Court website

We now want to share Early College's outcomes, both in terms of growth and efficacy



Early College continues to expand to new high schools and IHEs in MA

Number of HS and IHE partners by semester

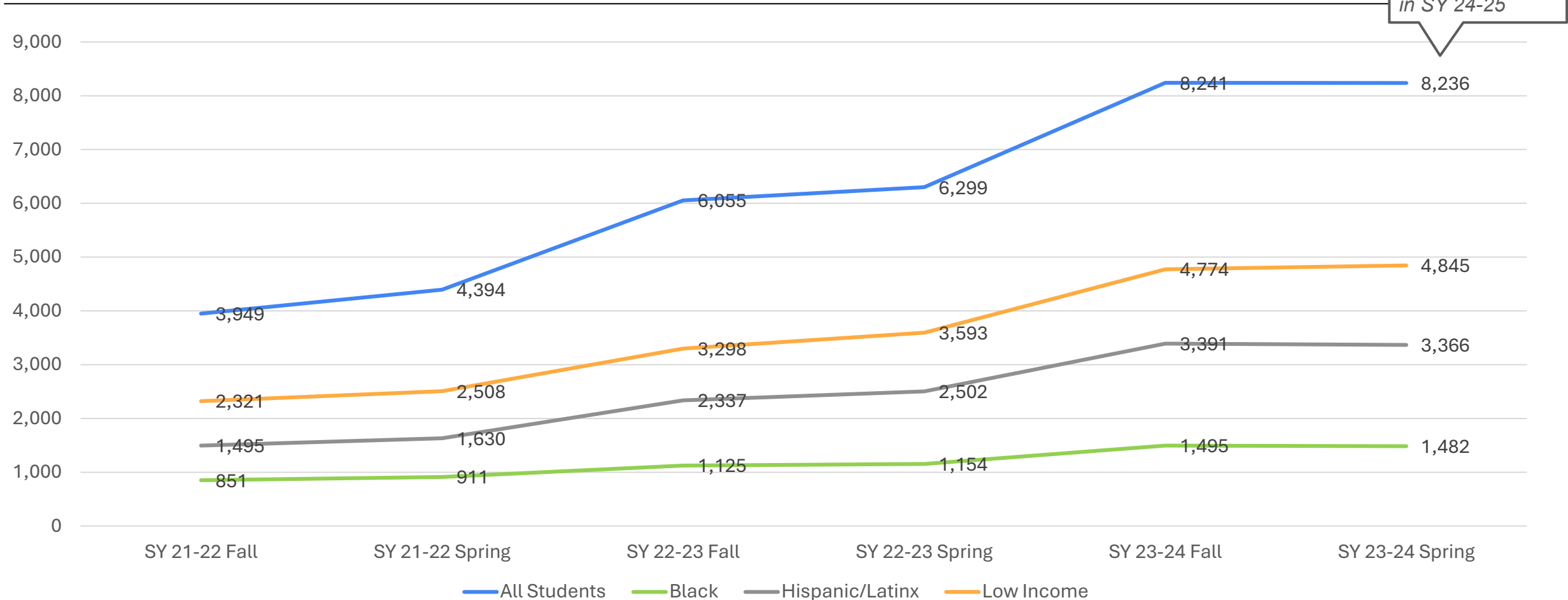


Note: The Early College Data Dashboard was created as a collaboration led by the Massachusetts Education-to-Career Research and Data Hub, a joint endeavor of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Higher Education, and Department of Early Education and Care.

Source: Massachusetts Early College Dashboard, 2025 (to be released publicly in the upcoming months)

Early College participation in MA continues to rise overall, with particularly notable gains for low-income and Hispanic/Latinx students

Early College participants by semester

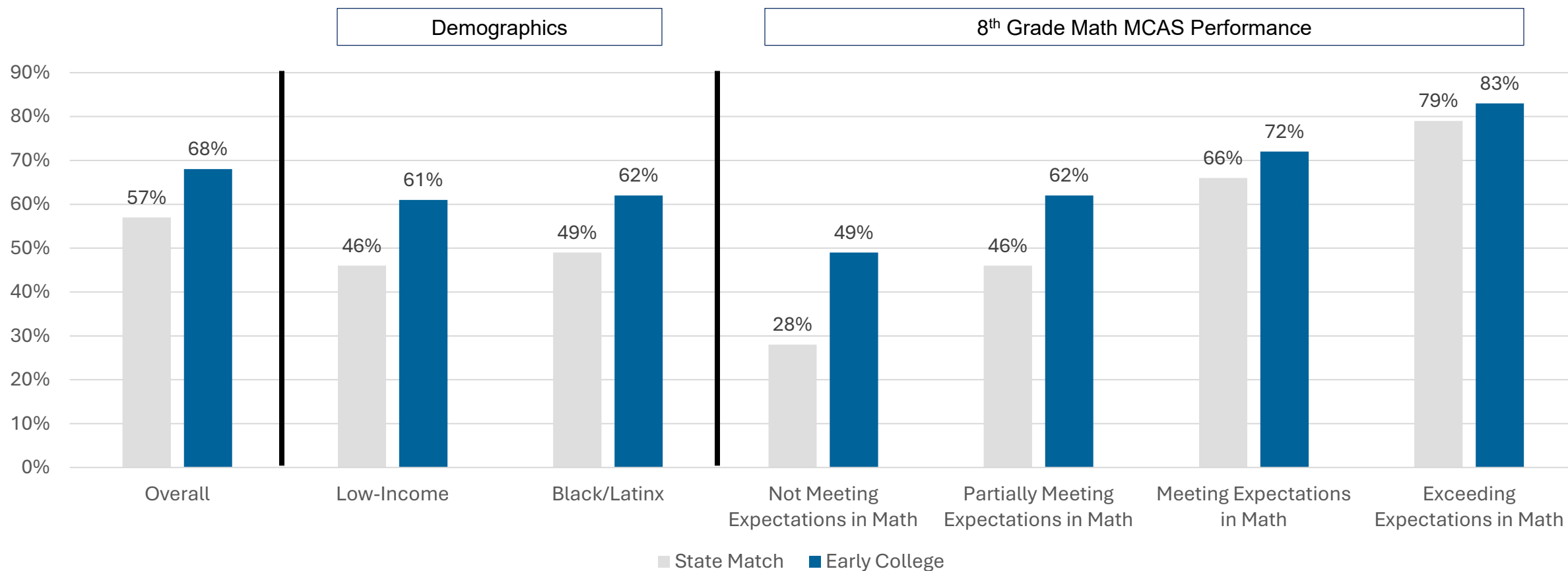


Note: The Early College Data Dashboard was created as a collaboration led by the Massachusetts Education-to-Career Research and Data Hub, a joint endeavor of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Higher Education, and Department of Early Education and Care.

Source: Massachusetts Early College Dashboard, 2025 (to be released publicly in the upcoming months); DESE School and District Profiles

Early College graduates in Massachusetts are more likely to enroll in postsecondary pathways: overall, across demographics and across academic readiness levels

Percentage of Students Enrolled in Postsecondary Pathways

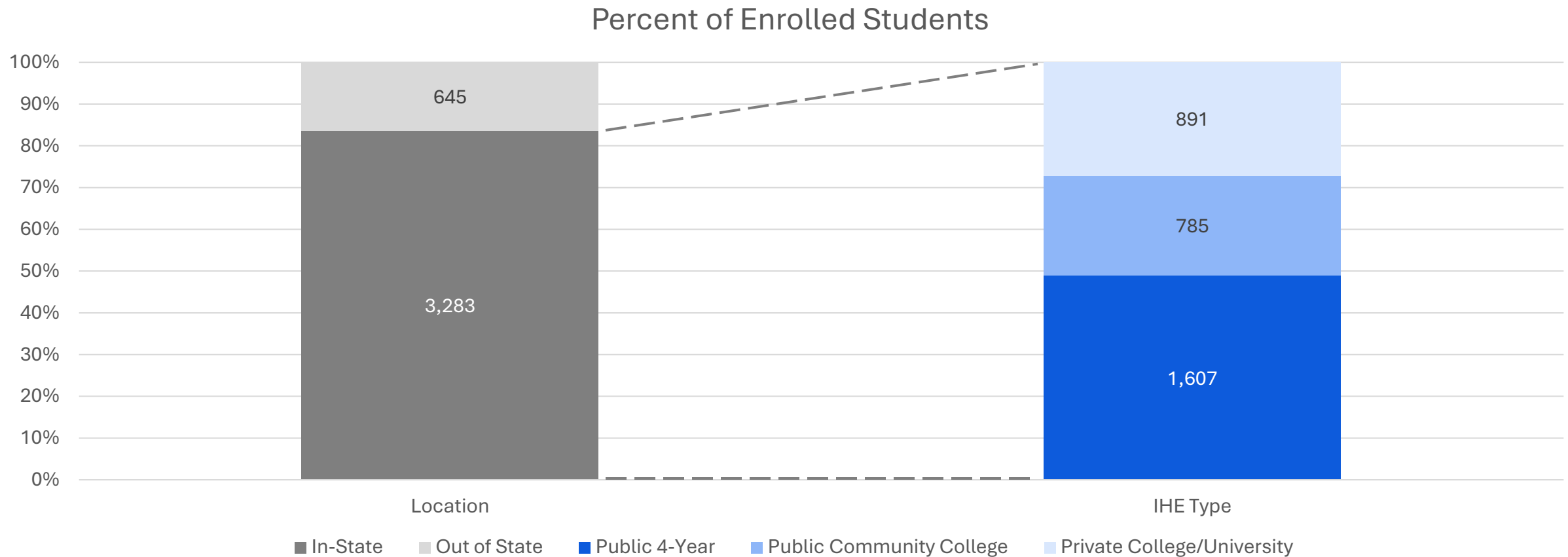


Note: All comparisons shown are statistically significant, with p-value < .01 for all comparisons except for students exceeding expectations in math (p-value < .05). These data are for 12th graders from graduating classes of 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. Thus, the results as shown do not include the outcomes of students who have participated in Early College in more recent years

Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Early College Joint Committee, March 2023

Early College graduates in Massachusetts are more likely to stay in-state and attend public IHEs

Attendance by IHE among Early College graduates who enroll in postsecondary pathways

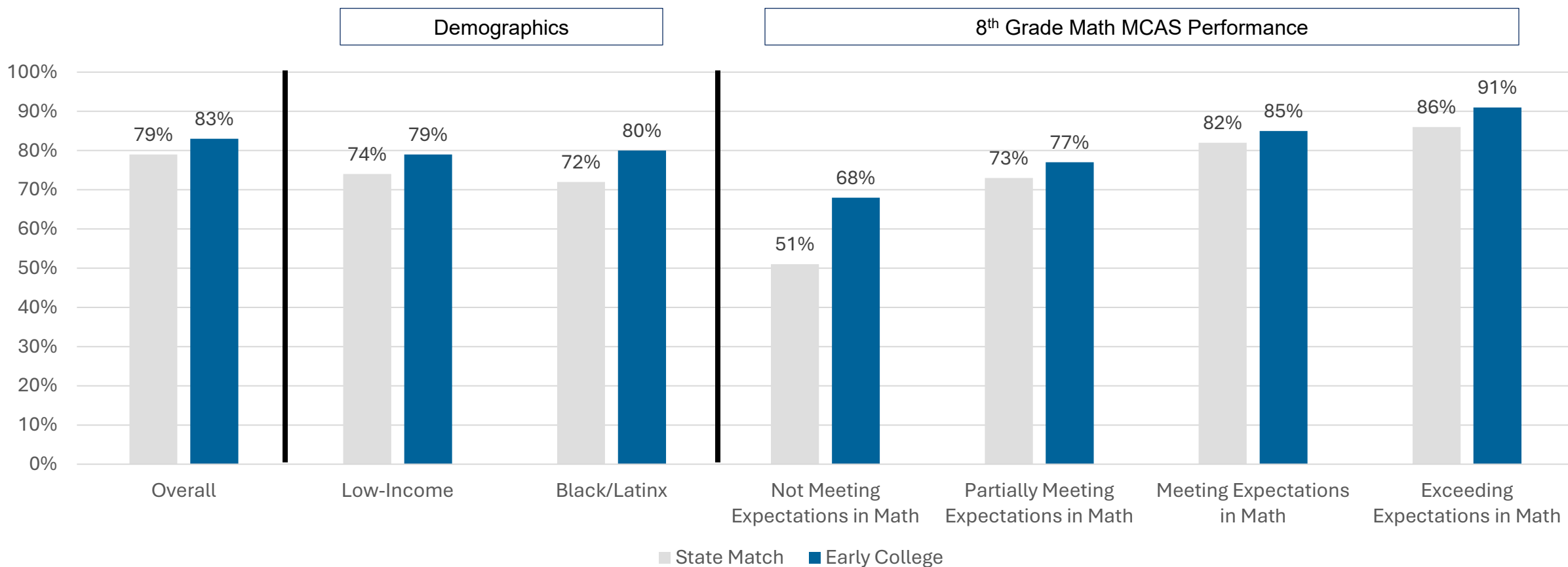


Note: The Early College Data Dashboard was created as a collaboration led by the Massachusetts Education-to-Career Research and Data Hub, a joint endeavor of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Higher Education, and Department of Early Education and Care. Data shows results for 12th grade participants from 2021 to 2023 for postsecondary enrollment.

Source: Massachusetts Early College Dashboard, 2025 (to be released publicly in the upcoming months)

Early College graduates in Massachusetts are also more likely to persist to a 2nd year of college: overall, across demographics and across academic readiness levels

Percentage of Enrolled Students that Persist to a 2nd Year of College

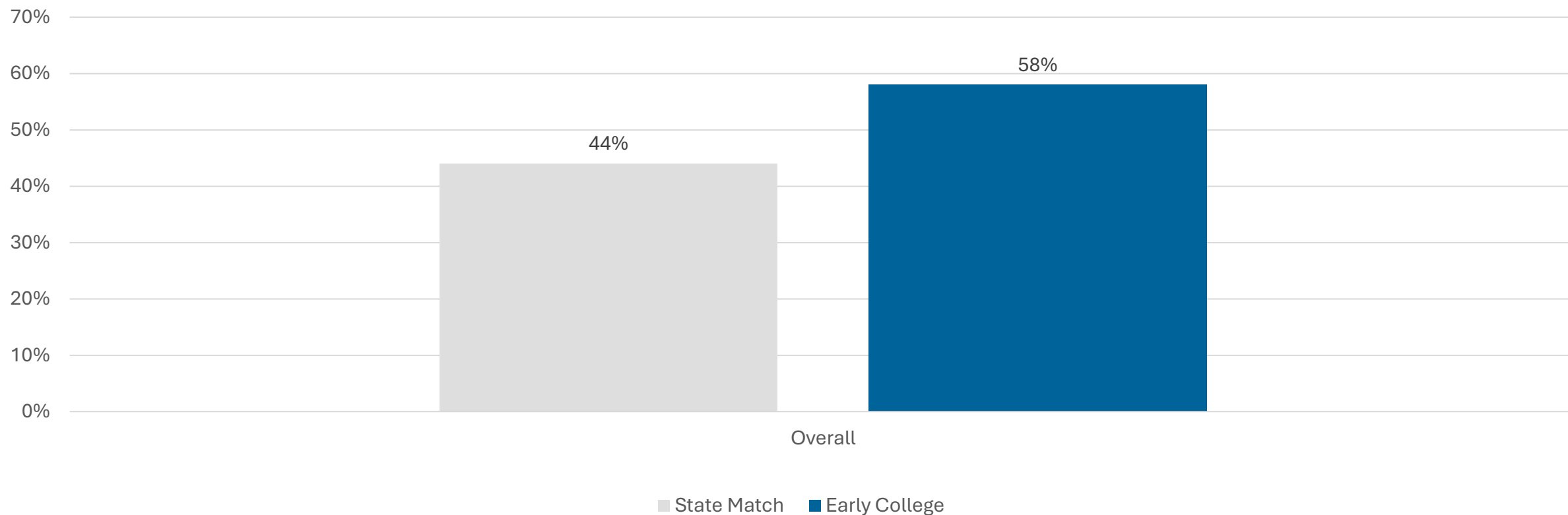


Note: Most differences are statistically significant, with p-value < .01 overall and for Black/Latinx students and with p-value < .05 for Low-Income students, those not meeting expectations in math, and those exceeding expectations in math. Results were not statistically significant, however, for those partially meeting expectations in math nor for those meeting expectations in math. These data are for 12th graders from graduating classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021. Thus, the results as shown do not include the outcomes of students who have participated in Early College in more recent years

Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Early College Joint Committee, March 2023

College enrollment and persistence impacts compound: Combining these effects, EC students are 14 percentage points more likely to persist to high school than peers

Percentage of Students that Persist to a 2nd Year of College



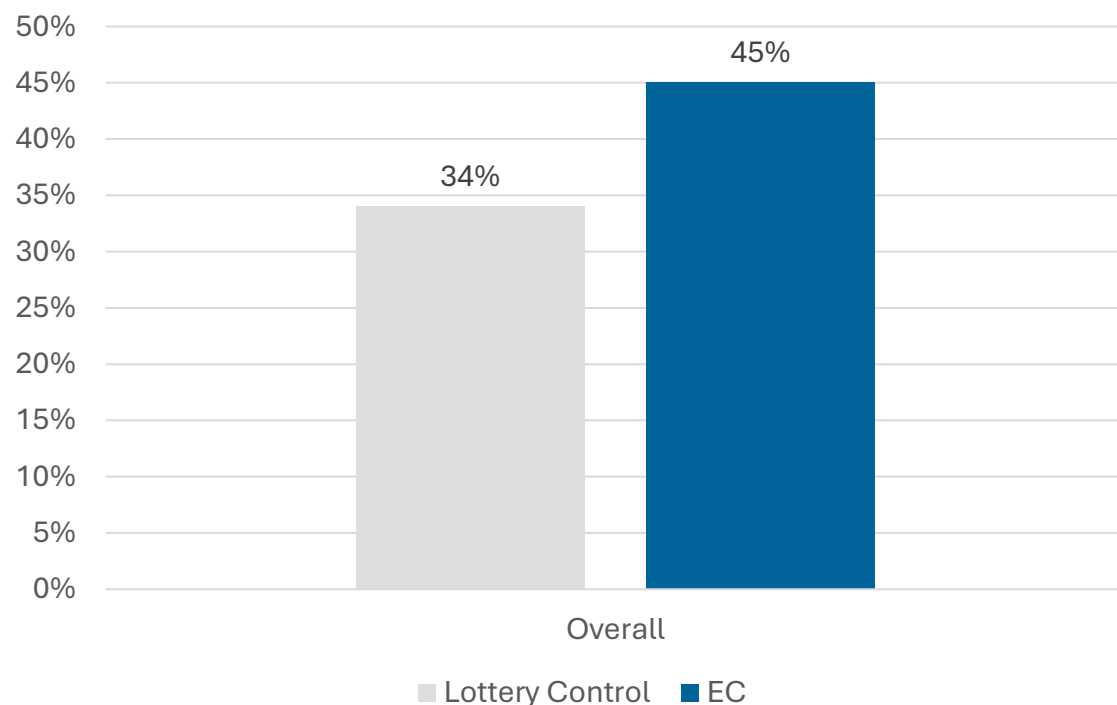
Note: Differences are statistically significant with p-value < .01. Data shows results for 12th grade participants from 2019 to 2021 for 2nd year persistence. Thus, the results as shown do not include the outcomes of students who have participated in Early College in more recent years. Due in part to rounding, values shown differ slightly from the results of enrollment rate values multiplied by persistence values

Source: MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Early College Joint Committee, March 2023

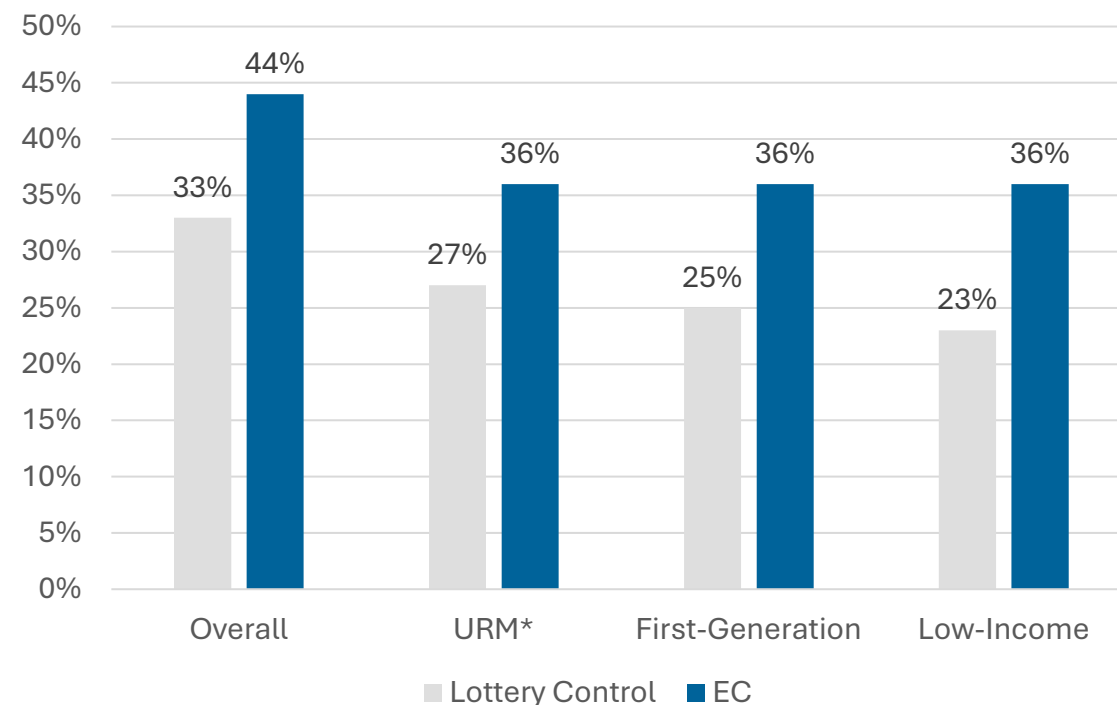
Beyond enrollment and persistence gains, national gold standard RCT evaluations show that Early College improves postsecondary degree outcomes

Percentage of Students Earning Any Postsecondary Degree

American Institutes for Research



SERVE Center



Note: *Leverages the nomenclature of the study, which does not match the latest nomenclature used in Massachusetts. Figures shown are 6 years after high school graduation. The AIR sample for both the original impact study and the follow-up study included 10 ECs that (1) enrolled students in Grades 9–12, (2) had high school graduates by 2011, (3) used lotteries in their admission processes for at least one of three incoming student cohorts (i.e., students who entered ninth grade in 2005–06, 2006–07, or 2007–08), (4) retained the lottery records, and (5) implemented the EC as a whole-school program. Eight of these ECs partnered with 2-year colleges, and two partnered with 4-year colleges. The SERVE sample includes students who applied to 19 early colleges over a series of 6 years. The first cohort was in ninth grade in 2005–2006 and the final cohort was in ninth grade in 2010–2011. The early colleges in the sample span rural and urban settings in all regions of North Carolina. Schools in the study had to agree to use a lottery to select their students.

Source: AIR, Early College Continued Success: Longer Term Impact of Early College High Schools, 2019 (N = 2,458; 1,044 EC, 1,414 control); Julie Edmunds, "What Happens When You Combine High School and College? The Impact of the Early College Model on Postsecondary Performance and Completion," 2020 (N = 4,054)

Summary of Early College Growth & Efficacy Outcomes

IHE and HS participation has continued to increase over time, with high IHE participation rates across segments.

Student enrollment has continued to increase over time, including among historically under-represented cohorts.

College enrollment outcomes are stronger for Early College graduates as compared to peers of similar profiles: overall, across demographics, and across levels of academic readiness; moreover, IHE attendance for Early College graduates skews more heavily to in-state and public institutions relative to non-EC peers.

Persistence outcomes are stronger for Early College graduates as compared to peers of similar profiles: overall, across demographics, and across levels of academic readiness.

Degree outcomes are stronger for Early College graduates per RCT lottery-based national evidence.

Student Perspective: Melanie Cerin Aldana



- **Hometown:** Framingham, MA
- **High School:** Framingham High School, Class of 2024
- **Early College Institution:** MassBay Community College & Framingham State
- **Postsecondary Institution:** MassBay, Expected Class of 2026
- **Major:** Biotechnology

Tomorrow, the OEC will present 3 draft strategic goals for 2030 to the ECJC

Goal 1

Increase Early College enrollment to 22,000 high school students by October 2030, with at least 70% of student participants statewide from groups underrepresented* in higher education.

Goal 2

Promote high quality programs that achieve the outcomes outlined in the Designation criteria, including graduating the majority of students with a minimum of 12 college credits that are transferable to a Massachusetts public college or university.

Goal 3

At least 65% of all students in each program matriculate immediately to college, and at least 75% of these students persist to a second year.

* For the purposes of this goal and for Early College data collection purposes, underrepresented students refers to groups of students currently underrepresented in higher education and includes but is not limited to: Students from low-income backgrounds, Black and/or Hispanic students, English Language Learners, and Students with Disabilities.

Beyond the OEC goals, Early College can serve as a key enabler to achieve our BHE/DHE strategic priorities and broader equity vision

Strategic Priorities

A

Student Success and Financial Aid

Roll out and sustain a compelling set of clear and consistent state financial commitments to making college affordable for students & well-supported to raise success

B

Economic Mobility

Significantly increase the economic mobility benefits of postsecondary participation in Massachusetts

C

Public Good

Improve alignment between postsecondary education opportunities and Massachusetts public good

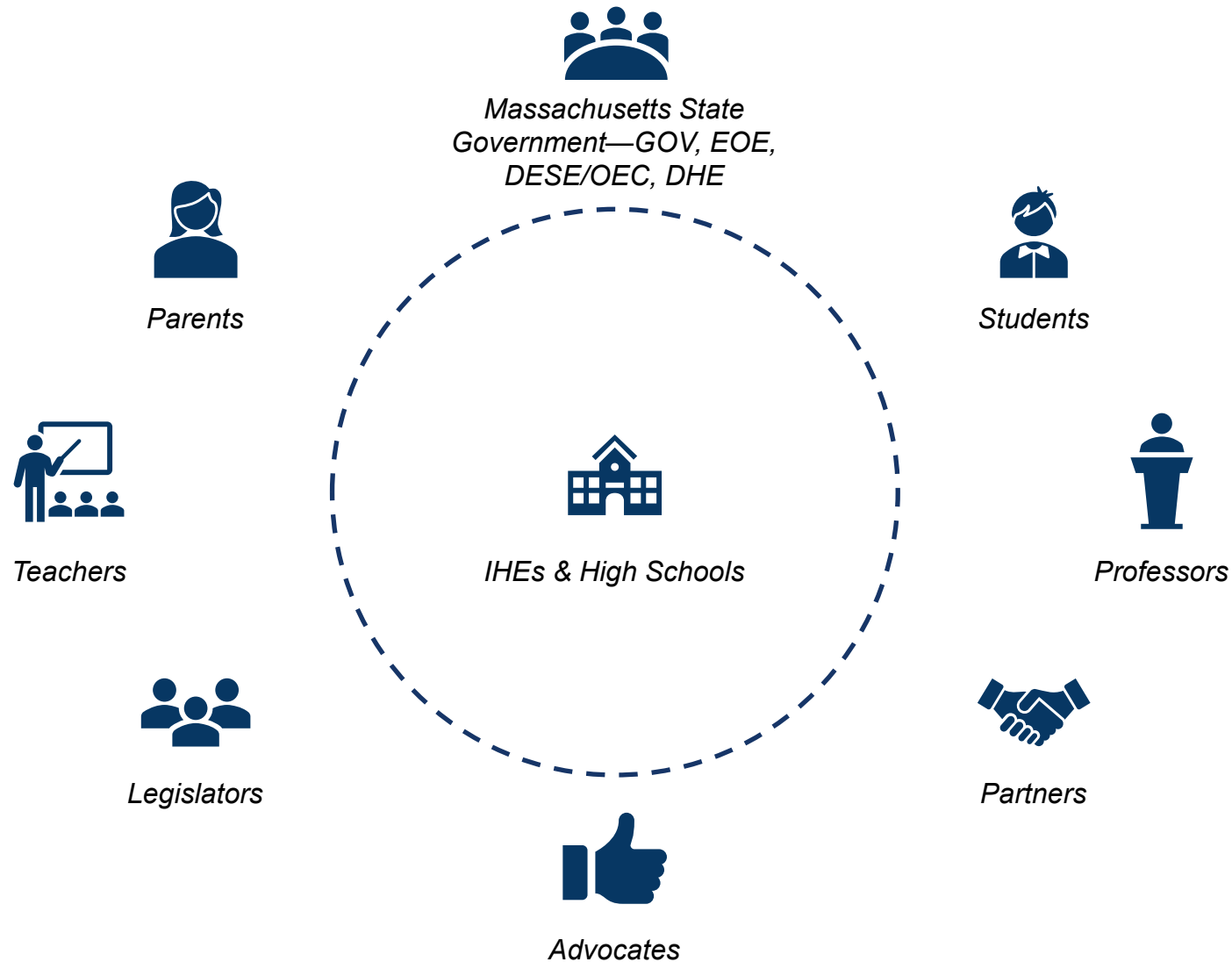
D

Innovation

Expand the role of the Board and Department in facilitating and fostering high-impact innovation among IHEs and our system through advancing new approaches to postsecondary opportunity and success for the full range of potential learners

All toward reducing disparities that persist in the provision of postsecondary access, opportunity, and success

We know it will take a village to drive lasting impact for Early College, with DHE representing one of many key collaborators in the process



NOT EXHAUSTIVE

Moving forward, we will continue to work with our colleges and universities and our interagency colleagues supporting the growth and vitality of Early College

Create the conditions



Reach more students



Improve outcomes



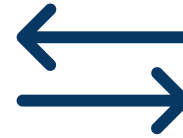
*HS-College
student pipeline*



*Course sequences,
offerings & capacity*



*Credit
expansion*



*Transferability
& applicability*



*Instruction quality
& delivery modalities*



*Innovative
models*



*Funding
models*



*Broader Dual
Enrollment policies*



*DHE support for IHE's
in the ecosystem*



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