

# Case Study: Akron Early College High School

Akron, Ohio

## Early college is for anybody.

*Akron Early College High School truly demonstrates the power of place. Situated on The University of Akron's campus, the school has been empowering students since 2007 not only to earn substantial college credit, but also to defy expectations.*

"Early college is for anybody," insists Cara Thomas, a senior with plans to attend the College of Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati, Ohio, for physical therapy. "It's not about being smart, it's about being willing."

That willingness translates not only to rigorous academic work for students, but also to changing the way they think about and approach learning. Learning to ask for help is huge on Akron's campus – the resources are there, and teachers, staff, and alumni stress the importance of taking advantage of them.

"Our students graduate knowing that any problem that they have, they can ask for help or find a way to solve it for themselves," says Lisa Andrews, a tenth grade high school biology teacher who has been with the school since 2008. "I've learned how to not just teach science. I've learned how to teach kids about everything they're going to do in life."

### Mission Statement

**Each student will achieve his fullest potential in an affirming environment driven by a student-focused community which prepares all to excel in a global environment.**

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## Students see, students do.

Though the original plan was to keep all of the high school classes in one building on The University of Akron's campus, there just wasn't enough space. And according to Tom Forbes, an EDWorks coach and former and founding principal of the early college, that was an unexpected boon.

"From the very beginning as freshmen, students had to get acclimated to being on a college campus," says Forbes. "And because they wanted to look like college students, they began to act like college students."

The first students on campus were quick to immerse themselves, and it wasn't just about dressing the part or abandoning the bulky backpack. Forbes points to the cafeteria in the high school as a powerful example. Because it's located on a college campus, just like all of their classes, it looks nothing like a typical high school cafeteria.

*"When you think about a high school cafeteria, you imagine the fights: the pushing, the shoving, the goofing around. But a college cafeteria? You'd picture students quietly working, and that's what you see in Akron."*

Kelly Herold, Assistant Dean in the College of Applied Science and Technology at the University of Akron, insists she can't tell the difference between an early college student and a college student anymore.

"Our students mirror the behavior they see," says Herold.



## Akron Early College High School (AECHS)

Akron City School District  
Akron, Ohio

[akronschools.com/school/Akron+Early+College+High+School](http://akronschools.com/school/Akron+Early+College+High+School)



Located on **The University of Akron campus**, AECHS is **1 of 9** high schools in the district. It officially opened in **2007**.

318 Total enrollment  
54% Total minority enrollment (% of total)  
>95% Total economically disadvantaged (% of total)

Source: <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/>

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## A climate of success.

While there's certainly an opportunity for Akron's early college students to grow and mature more quickly than their peers in a traditional high school setting, there's plenty that their fellow college students could stand to learn from them, too.

Mackenzie Miller, a senior who is busy acquiring the sponsors she needs to be accepted at West Point, cites a conversation she had with a cadet at the academy during a recent tour.

"They said with how much I've done here, I could easily handle the workload there."

Miller and her peers seem universally motivated to get a "head start" on life and learning experiences that might otherwise have been unavailable to them. Tuoa Lor, a senior and refugee whose family migrated from Thailand, remarks that his parents never had the opportunity to go to school.

"My parents always wanted us to get a better education because they never had the opportunity," says Lor. "Every day my parents ask me, 'When are you going to start your own business so we can help you run it?'"

Lor, a self-admitted former 'F' student who didn't speak much English, is now an 'A' student who intends to pursue his MA in business management. And he's not the only one turning things around at the early college. Recognized in 2013 by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan as a National Blue Ribbon School, and named a School of Promise in 2013 for the fourth consecutive year and a School of Honor by the State of Ohio in that same year, the Akron Early College High School serves a student body comprised of more than 95 percent economically disadvantaged students.

"A lot of our students may not have been successful in a traditional high school because they wouldn't have the opportunity to be themselves," says Herold.

"We see a lot of kids raising siblings. We deal with homelessness. We deal with no parental support."

But like the students they serve, the teachers and staff of Akron Early College High School rise to the challenge.



2012 graduates earned  
**\$444,295**  
in scholarships



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They were also recognized as a **School of Promise** for the fourth consecutive year and as a **School of Honor** by the State of Ohio.

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"We are a group of ten and we do it all for 400 kids," says Turner. "Every kid gets a chance."

## We believe in you.

Herold is passionate about spreading the model of success that's worked so well in Akron, and beyond believing it the duty of every public institution to offer early college, she's ready to help make it a reality.

*"We know what to do to make kids successful: The right teachers. The high standards. The wrap-around procedures," says Herold. "What message to send to your community – we believe in you. We believe in your students."*

"We know what to do to make kids successful: The right teachers. The high standards. The wrap-around procedures," says Herold. "What a message to send to your community – we believe in you. We believe in your students."

Because those students and those communities are all students, all communities. The Akron Early College High School demonstrates how a population of students can thrive no matter their background, no matter their struggle, when the right supports are in place and the expectations are high.

"I don't think there's an ideal candidate for early college. A kid's a kid," says Turner, whose passion for teaching and mentoring is easily seen both inside and outside of the classroom. "We've had a million kids with a million different situations, a million problems, but they're still ours. They're part of our family."

## EDWorks Spotlight

EDWorks coaching focuses on providing the supports needed not only to instructors but to administrators, as well, facilitating a whole-school culture that believes each and every student can achieve great things.

For teachers, EDWorks provides instructional coaching two to three times a month for:

- classroom management
- expanding and deepening teaching strategies – especially in regards to literacy and numeracy
- implementing best practice
- college collaboration
- student assessment
- academic and effective support for students
- democratic school governance

For administrators, EDWorks coaches provide guidance one to two times a month to aid schools in:

- creating and maintaining a clear and cohesive approach for students to earn and associate's degree or two years of college credit
- designing ongoing, structured support systems and small learning communities for students
- integrating high school and college course sequences



Interested in scheduling a visit to an Early College High School?  
Please get in touch with us at [info@edworkspartners.org](mailto:info@edworkspartners.org)