



PROJECT # S411B210027

PROJECT MANUAL

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Purpose of EEDW

The Extending Equity into the Digital Workforce (EEDW) project aims to explore strategies for increasing student interest and enrollment in higher education courses in specific fields. With Information Technology (IT) as the focal area, the project seeks to understand how targeted outreach, enhanced support systems, and improved awareness among key stakeholders can encourage dual-credit enrollment in IT courses.

Key Objectives

- Increasing student understanding of how technology applies across a wide range of career fields, not just IT-specific roles.
- Enhancing school counselors' and staff's knowledge about higher education course offerings, including those from institutions beyond their immediate local partnerships.
- Overcoming student hesitancy to enroll in IT courses due to misalignment with their career pathways.
- Fostering a mindset among school staff to actively encourage IT course enrollment as an opportunity for all students.
- Strengthening communication and collaboration between Early College High Schools (ECHSs) and partnering higher education institutions (IHEs).
- Increasing connections between ECHS students and industry or professional representatives to help students gain a deeper understanding of industry needs, develop personal skills that lead to job success, and build excitement for exploring IT courses that will benefit them in their future careers.



Success Measures

The project will measure success primarily through

- Increased enrollment in IT courses among targeted (“encouraged”) students, compared to their peers in the control group.
- Broader IT course enrollment across the entire student body at participating sites.

Qualitative measures of success will include

- Improved counselor understanding of how IT relates to a variety of career fields.
- Shifts in student and counselor attitudes toward the value of IT education.
- Expansion of available IT courses for students.

- Enhanced collaboration between ECHS and IHE partners to support course offerings and student needs.
- Feedback from students on the value of industry connections in shaping their academic and career decisions.

Significance

Through its targeted interventions and research, the project will generate insights that help school partners design future opportunities tailored to local economic needs, expand students' career options, and equip them with robust, transferable skills for long-term success. An example of this impact includes increasing awareness among counselors and administrators about students' ability to enroll in online courses from any IHE in New Mexico, enabling the formation of new partnerships and expanding course options for students.

General EEDW Project Methodology

The EEDW project employs a structured methodology to identify effective strategies for increasing dual-credit IT course enrollment. Key components of the methodology include randomization, targeted outreach, evaluation, and support systems.

Student Randomization and Grouping

- Parents of all students are notified about the study and given the opportunity to opt-out their children.
- Remaining students, identified only by their student IDs, are randomized by evaluators at RAND Corporation into two groups:
 - Encouraged Group (treatment): Receives targeted outreach and support.
 - Business-as-Usual Group (control): Proceeds without additional interventions.
- While some activities, such as industry Q&A sessions, are open to all students, most efforts focus on the Encouraged Group.

Targeted Outreach Strategies

Encouraged students benefit from

1. Regularly scheduled text messages about IT courses, career opportunities, and their relevance.
2. Semester-based direct mailers highlighting IT course availability and the importance of IT education.
3. Participation in the **Student Tech Summit**, designed to spark interest in IT fields.
4. Asynchronous engagement with industry representatives and peers through an online professional platform.

5. Focused encouragement and guidance from school counselors, including specific advice about IT courses and enrollment assistance.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The effectiveness of these strategies is monitored through

- Tracking deployment metrics, such as the number of students reached through various outreach efforts.
- Feedback from counselors via per-semester surveys.
- Comprehensive analysis of student enrollment data by RAND evaluators to identify differences between the Encouraged and control groups.
- Focus group interviews with counselors and students to gather qualitative insights.

Resources and Tools

- **Text Messaging Platforms:** Schools use customized systems to deliver outreach message with personalized details.
- **Counselor Resources:** Flyers, white papers, and information packets are distributed to counselors and made available through the EEDW website and online communication platforms.
- **Online Events:** Industry Q&A sessions are conducted via Zoom to provide accessible and interactive opportunities for all participants.

Addressing Implementation Challenges

The EEDW project addresses common challenges, such as timely message delivery and data collection, through the following strategies:

- Providing schools with resources to answer key student questions, such as “Why should I take IT?” and “What IT courses can I take?”
- Hosting start-, mid-, and end-of-year meetings with administrators and counselors to clarify implementation details and address concerns.
- Working directly with counselors to build partnerships with IHEs and expand course options for students.
- Hosting **The Gathering** and the **Ed Tech Summit** to strengthen collaboration between ECHS and IHE staff and promote the value of IT education.
- Funding each ECHS annually to ensure students have the resources and support needed to engage in and succeed in IT courses.
- Providing a **Counselor Support Specialist** to assist counselors in streamlining their efforts, providing individualized student support, and increasing their effectiveness in encouraging IT course enrollment.

Q&A Sessions and Industry Interactions

The EEDW project incorporates Q&A sessions with industry representatives to help students understand the diverse career options available in IT and learn about the IT skills valued by employers across various fields. These sessions aim to spark student interest in IT, encouraging them to explore IT courses that align with their career aspirations.



Structure of the Sessions

- **Audience:** Open to all students at participating ECHSs.
- **Format:** Sessions last 45 minutes to 1 hour and are conducted via Zoom.
- **Facilitation:**
 - Schools propose a date and time when student attendance is guaranteed.
 - EEDW staff coordinate with 1–2 industry representatives to participate.
 - Students are encouraged to prepare questions in advance, while EEDW staff facilitate discussions with sample questions to maintain engagement.
- **Frequency:** Each school schedules at least one targeted Q&A session per semester, ensuring all students have opportunities to participate in sessions aligned with their interests. Other schools are invited to attend these sessions as well.

Selection of Industry Representatives

Industry representatives are chosen based on their use of IT in their careers and their relevance to the career pathways offered at the ECHS. This approach ensures discussions are relatable and meaningful for students, fostering greater interest in IT education.

Tools and Resources

- **Platform:** Sessions are hosted on Zoom, enabling easy access and participation for all students.
- **Group Participation:** Students typically attend as a group, which allows for dynamic discussions and shared learning experiences.

Potential Follow-Up Activities

Although no formal follow-up activities are currently implemented, EEDW is exploring options to

- Collaborate with counselors and teachers to integrate session content into coursework.
- Develop mini-projects or reflective assignments for students to reinforce their learning.

Student Ed Tech Summit

The Student Ed Tech Summit is a 1.5-day event designed to immerse “encouraged” students in activities that showcase how IT skills apply across career fields. The Summit aims to spark interest in IT, build confidence in learning IT skills, and ultimately increase enrollment in IT courses. Additionally, it fosters collaboration, self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging within a larger purpose-driven community.

Goals

- Demonstrate the relevance of IT skills across diverse career pathways.
- Build student confidence and excitement for learning IT skills.
- Create a “multiplier effect,” encouraging attendees to share their experiences with peers and inspire broader interest in IT.



Participation

- The Summit is exclusively for “encouraged” students, with schools selecting up to 10 participants.
- Priority is given to students in non-IT career pathways to emphasize the cross-disciplinary value of IT skills.
- Students are selected by counselors and administrators, focusing on those who might not otherwise consider IT courses.

Activities and Sessions

1. **Collaborative Research and Presentations:** Students work in teams to research and present the use of IT in an assigned career field.
2. **Keynote Address:** An IHE partner discusses strategies for success in higher education, focusing on dual-credit and college students.
3. **Industry Panel Discussion:** Representatives from various industries share insights into IT applications and career opportunities.
4. **Robotics Workshop:** Students build and code robots in small teams, engaging in hands-on learning.
5. **Interactive Presentations:** IHE and industry representatives guide students in exploring IT skills, careers, and practical applications.

- 6. Human-Tech Interaction Experience:** A live demonstration highlights how technology integrates with daily life, showcasing its impact and accessibility.

Logistical Support

- **Lodging and Meals:** Provided for students and their accompanying adult at the conference center.
- **Transportation Costs:** Fully reimbursed by the EEDW project.
- **Materials:** Students are expected to bring laptops for use during activities.

Key Outcomes

The Summit aims to achieve the following

- Increase student confidence, skills, and excitement about IT.
- Foster collaboration and teamwork, simulating real-world job experiences.
- Instill a sense of being part of something larger, preparing students for success in IT courses and beyond.

Counselor Support

The EEDW project recognizes the role of counselors in guiding students toward dual-credit IT courses. To enhance their effectiveness, the project provides targeted support through a dedicated **Counselor Support Specialist** who addresses counselors' needs and facilitates collaboration among them.

Role of the Counselor Support Specialist

The Counselor Support Specialist serves as a vital resource for school counselors by

- Responding to counselors' needs for information, support, and resources.
- Acting as a communication conduit between local ECHS counselors and EEDW staff to ensure localized needs are addressed.
- Developing and maintaining a **Professional Learning Community (PLC)** for counselors to foster peer collaboration, resource sharing, and mutual support.



Support Provided

The specialist offers

- **Information and Resources:** Guidance on dual-credit programs, IT course offerings, and effective management of dual-credit processes.
- **One-on-One Engagement:** Annual on-site meetings with each counselor, supplemented by regular follow-ups through emails, phone calls, and asynchronous communications.
- **Online Platform:** A digital space for sharing resources, hosting discussions, and facilitating asynchronous collaboration among counselors.

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

- **Asynchronous Discussions:** Counselors can ask questions, share ideas, and upload resources on the online platform.
- **Facilitated Sessions:** The specialist leads a dedicated session for counselors during **The Gathering** each spring, providing further opportunities for professional growth and collaboration.

Future Opportunities

EEDW is exploring the possibility of hosting live, online meetings each semester, facilitated by the specialist, to provide additional touchpoints for training, support, and updates.

Project Administration

Effective administration of the EEDW project ensures smooth implementation, compliance, and alignment with the project's goals. Key administrative tasks include performance reviews, budget management, and collaboration with stakeholders, all designed to support student enrollment in IT courses and overall project success.

Key Administrative Tasks

- **Performance Reviews:** Annual evaluations to assess progress and refine strategies.
 - **Contracts and MOUs:** Establishing and managing service contracts in compliance with procurement requirements and formalizing project participation through Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with school administrators.
 - **Budget Management:** Tracking expenditures using budget management software and making strategic financial decisions to align with federal funding categories.
 - **Staff Management:** Providing ongoing direction and support for project staff to ensure effective implementation.
 - **Compliance Oversight:** Ensuring participating schools meet their obligations through regular
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communication and fostering awareness of the project's value. Schools may be removed from the project for continued non-compliance with MOU agreements.

- **Data Collection:** Collaborating with schools to gather enrollment and participation data, which is critical for evaluating project effectiveness.
- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Monthly meetings with the evaluation team to assess implementation strategies and quarterly meetings with the federal program officer to report progress and discuss improvements.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

1. Project Director

- Establishes the project vision and oversees all implementation and activities.
- Manages contracts, provides direction for staff and contractors, and facilitates collaboration with stakeholders.
- Leads the project advisory team.

2. Business Engagement Coordinator

- Develops and maintains relationships with industry partners.
- Schedules and facilitates Q&A sessions and panel discussions with industry representatives.
- Gathers insights from industry partners about IT needs and new-hire expectations.
- Facilitates the industry advisory team.



3. ECHS Coordinator

- Oversees site-based implementation and relationships with schools.
- Assists schools in project budgeting and compliance with activity and data requirements.
- Manages school rosters for evaluation purposes.
- Provides updates to the evaluation team.
- Assists in identifying relevant higher education courses and fostering partnerships with IHEs.

4. Higher Education Coordinator

- Collaborates with higher education partners to expand IT course options for ECHS students.
- Facilitates the higher education working group.
- Builds new relationships between IHEs and ECHSs to increase course offerings and support systems.

Note: After the project's start-up period, the ECHS Coordinator and Higher Education Coordinator roles were merged into a single position to streamline operations.

5. Counselor Support Specialist (Contractor)

- Provides counselors with the information, support, and resources needed for project success.

- Serves as a communication channel for sharing school-specific needs, challenges, and assets with project leadership.

6. Administrative Systems Support (Contractor)

- Assists school and district administrators in establishing processes for communication and staff buy-in.
- Helps create leadership environments that sustain improvements in dual-credit access and support systems.

Tools and Processes

- **Project Management Software:** Tracks task priorities and keeps implementation on schedule.
- **Budget Management Tools:** Monitors expenditures across federal funding categories.
- **Shared Staff Calendars:** Ensures coordinated planning and timely communication.
- **Virtual Platforms (e.g., Zoom):** Facilitates collaborative meetings with staff, contractors, and participating sites.

Focus on School Counselors

The project team, in collaboration with evaluators, identified school counselors as the cornerstone of site-based implementation. A positive and collaborative relationship with counselors is fundamental to the success of the project, particularly in fostering student enrollment in IT courses. This focus includes providing targeted resources, maintaining regular communication, and emphasizing the added value the project offers to schools.

The Gathering

The **Gathering** is an annual event held in the early spring semester that brings together **Early College High School (ECHS) leadership, counselors, and their higher education institution (IHE) partners**. The event serves as a platform for fostering collaboration, strengthening student support systems, and expanding course opportunities for students.

Goals of The Gathering

- Strengthen collaboration between ECHS and IHE representatives to improve student access and support.
- Facilitate discussions on student course needs and opportunities for expanding dual-credit IT offerings.
- Align school systems with student enrollment and success goals, ensuring that dual-credit opportunities meet student



and workforce needs.

- Provide insights from industry professionals on IT applications and workforce expectations.

Event Structure

The **one-day event** includes

- **Breakout Sessions:** Separate sessions tailored for counselors, principals, and higher education representatives to address their unique challenges and roles.
- **Joint Collaborative Meetings:** Cross-sector discussions between ECHS and IHE teams to develop actionable strategies for student success.
- **Industry Panel Discussion:** Industry representatives share insights on skills and job market expectations for new employees, including
 - The role of technology in various careers.
 - The types of technology skills needed in the workforce.

Participation

- Attendance is **optional**, but participation is strongly encouraged.
- Typical attendees include **ECHS principals, counselors, and IHE dual-credit advisors**.
- The event is promoted as a key strategy to align school systems with student enrollment and success goals, making it a valuable opportunity for institutional partners.

Expected Outcomes

- **New partnerships** between ECHSs and IHEs to expand course offerings.
- **Improved communication** among partners, leading to more effective student support.
- **Actionable knowledge** for ECHS representatives to help students navigate and enroll in dual-credit IT courses.

Industry and Student Videos

The EEDW project publishes a series of short videos featuring industry professionals and college-aged students who discuss various topics related to information technology. Industry professionals focused on their uses of technology, their roles in IT, and their interest in the field. College students, who are closer in age and experience to ECHS students, discussed why they are taking IT courses and their experiences in college-level coursework.

Goals

- Increase students' interest in studying computer science and IT as a career.

- Encourage students to take dual credit IT courses, and improving their sense of efficacy.
- Expand students' understanding of various IT applications across careers.

Process

- Identify potential interviewees
- Establish the video interview questions, format, and structure.
- Contract for videography and editing.
- Publish to the EEDW web site.

Strategy for Student Engagement

- Industry videos were published and various communications, including the EEDW newsletter announced their availability. Engagement was low with this format.
- Student videos were published one or two at a time on a monthly schedule, with promotions of new, featured videos promoted through the EEDW newsletter. Direct messages to students also promoted the videos.

Keys to Success

The success of the EEDW project is built upon intentional strategies that foster collaboration, engagement, and alignment with the needs of schools, students, and stakeholders. The following key factors have been identified as critical to successful implementation across all project components.

Building Strong Collaborative Relationships

- **Counselor Engagement:** Establishing strong working relationships with counselors is essential. The **Counselor Support Specialist** plays a key role in providing targeted support, answering questions, and ensuring counselors see the value in their participation.
- **Involving School Leadership:** Ensuring that both school leadership and counselors are well-informed and involved in planning leads to stronger engagement and alignment with school priorities.
- **Tailoring Support to School Needs:** Each intervention and activity is designed to be flexible and responsive to the unique needs of each participating school, making the program more relevant and valuable.



Effective Strategies for Q&A Sessions and the Student Ed Tech Summit

- **Q&A Sessions:** The most effective approach is allowing schools to determine career areas of

interest and schedule sessions at optimal times for student participation. Industry professionals are then selected based on their relevance to these career fields, making discussions more engaging and meaningful for students.

- **Student Ed Tech Summit:** Several key elements contribute to its success:
 - Covering a diverse range of careers beyond IT to emphasize the role of technology in various industries.
 - Featuring hands-on and engaging activities, such as building robots, to generate excitement.
 - Involving higher education representatives to help students develop strategies for success in both dual credit and postsecondary education.
 - Covering all travel costs and hosting the event at a high-profile conference facility to make students feel valued and inspired.

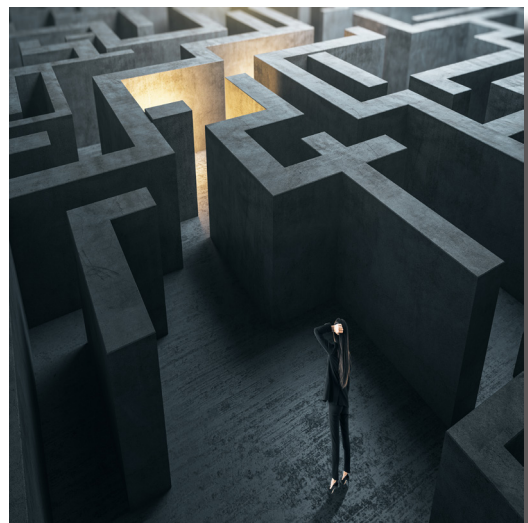
Increasing Student Interest and Enrollment in IT Courses

While research is ongoing to determine the most effective interventions, several strategies show promise:

- **Counselor Education & Advocacy:** Helping counselors understand how technology applies to different career pathways and expanding their awareness of higher education technology course offerings.
- **Higher Education Engagement:** Encouraging partnering institutions to proactively reach out to schools and promote IT courses directly to students.
- **Industry-Specific Q&A Sessions:** Demonstrating the role of technology in specific career fields has proven to be a strong motivator for students to enroll in dual-credit IT courses.

Overcoming Challenges

- **Securing Counselor Buy-In:** The most significant barrier has been ensuring that counselors actively promote higher education technology courses. This challenge is addressed by providing tailored resources that align technology courses with career pathways offered at each school.
- **Clarifying Project Scope & Value:** School leadership and counselors often require a deeper understanding of the opportunities, expectations, and benefits of participating in EEDW. Hosting beginning, middle, and end-of-year meetings with administrators, counselors, fiscal staff, and teachers has been instrumental in improving clarity and engagement.
- **Aligning with School Priorities:** The most critical factor in overcoming resistance is demonstrating how EEDW aligns with the school's own goals and priorities. Once schools recognize the project as an asset to their existing efforts,



Overview of ECHS Participation in EEDW

A. Project ECHS Set Up

1. Review, sign, and adhere to an MOU with REC-1 for participation
2. Provide student rosters, parent contact information
3. Provide base-line enrollment data for all students enrolled in dual credit IT/Tech courses
4. Principal and counselors participate in start-up meeting with EEDW staff
5. Set up messaging / contact groups for identified students
6. As needed, establish partnerships with IHEs providing IT courses

B. Ongoing activities

1. Dual Credit Enrollment
 - Actively encourage identified students to enroll in dual credit IT courses
 - Assist students in enrolling in dual credit IT courses
 - Coordinate with IHE partners on course options and enrollment
 2. Messaging
 - Customize and deliver messages to identified students on an established schedule
 - Include evaluators and EEDW staff on distribution list
 3. Q&As
 - Collaborate with EEDW staff to schedule Q&A sessions with industry
 - Ensure students attend, prepared to ask questions and discuss topics
 4. Student Support Budgeting
 - Provide EEDW staff with expenditure needs to support student participation and success in dual credit IT courses, for EEDW review and approval
 - Make expenditures and submit documentation and invoice for reimbursement
 5. Event Participation
 - Register students and provide support for attendance at the Student Ed Tech Summit
 - Principal and Counselor attend the annual Gathering
 6. School Enrollment Data
 - Provide student updated rosters annually for identification of new students
 7. Support Services
 - Communicate and collaborate with Counselor Support Specialist on challenges and needs,
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participating in peer discussion and other opportunities for support

- Communicate and collaborate with Leadership Support Specialist on ECHS systems integration, internal alignment of practices and policies, and sustainability
8. On-going Collaboration with EEDW
- Participate in Beginning, Middle, and End-of-year meetings with EEDW staff
 - Maintain on-going communications for information, resources, and support

C. Research participation

1. Provide enrollment data in dual credit IT courses, per semester
 2. Respond to activity survey from evaluators, per semester
 3. Participate in focus group interviews at The Gathering and Ed Tech Summit
 4. Host and facilitate an on-site visit by evaluators, annually
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Four Corners Regional Education Cooperative #1 is an independent state education service agency, serving 6 member districts, San Juan College, and students across New Mexico.

