Exploring Postsecondary Opportunities in Grand Valley State University Charter Schools

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This report uses publicly available student enrollment and course participation data from the State of Michigan to examine postsecondary opportunities in GVSU-authorized charter schools.

Key findings include:

- Students' access to dual enrollment opportunities in GVSU schools has increased since 2019-20; the share of GVSU schools serving as an Early Middle College will increase to 41 percent in 2023-24.
- A larger share of students in GVSU schools participated in advanced courses in 2022 as compared to demographically similar schools.
- Between 68 to 71 percent of students in GVSU schools have not participated in advanced courses, suggesting there is continued opportunity to increase students' access to and participation in postsecondary opportunities.

Recommendations include:

- Develop pathways for high school faculty to qualify for teaching advanced courses.
- Prioritize the recruitment of middle-achieving students for dual enrollment opportunities.
- Offer precollege experiences to low- and middle-achieving high school students and middle school students.

Introduction

High school students participating in postsecondary opportunities – dual enrollment (DE), Early Middle College (EMC), Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) – are more likely to graduate, enroll at a postsecondary institution, and receive an associate degree within six years of finishing high school (Berger et al., 2014). Students participating in postsecondary programs have also been shown to have higher grade point averages as college freshmen and graduate from two- and four-year institutions at higher rates than comparable peers (Jones, 2014). Locally, participating in DE or EMC programs is correlated with higher four-year graduation rates and college degree attainment (Michigan Department of Education, 2023). Recognizing the significant academic benefits postsecondary opportunities provide high school students, the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Charter School Office (CSO) has placed considerable emphasis on promoting these opportunities in authorized schools. This report seeks to understand postsecondary opportunities available to students in GVSU-authorized charter schools and how these opportunities compare to demographically similar traditional public schools. Results will inform how the CSO can better support schools in providing students with access to postsecondary opportunities.

Research Questions

This report examines the following research questions:

1. What types of postsecondary opportunities are available to students in GVSU schools?

2. How do postsecondary opportunities in GVSU schools compare to those in traditional public schools?

Results

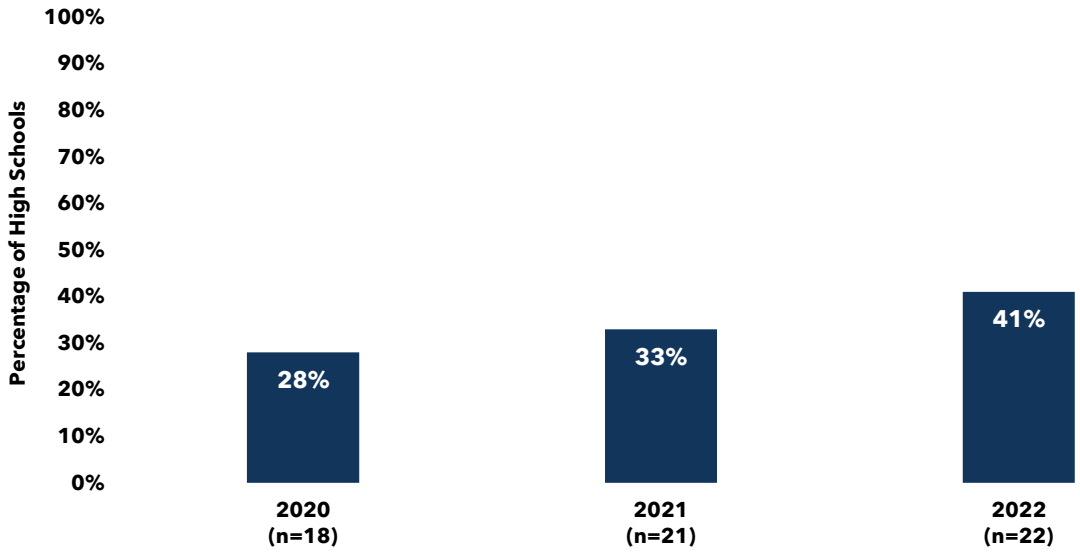
1 | What types of postsecondary opportunities are available to students in GVSU schools?

We explored postsecondary opportunities available to students in GVSU high schools (henceforth titled "GVSU schools") from 2019-20 (henceforth titled "2020") to 2021-22 (henceforth titled "2022") to address this research question. Basis researchers used the publicly available Educational Entity Master (EEM) file and the GVSU school enrollment roster to identify schools supporting students in grades 9, 10, 11, or 12. The sample includes students enrolled in schools identified as "Elementary-High Schools", "Middle-High Schools", or "High Schools". Grand Valley State University authorized between 18 to 22 schools supporting high school students from 2020 to 2022. We use publicly available DE participation, EMC location, and a combined measure of participation in advanced courses to answer this research question. We report on descriptive trends since 2020[1]. A more detailed description of the sample and analytic strategy is included in Appendix A.

The share of GVSU schools with students participating in DE programs has increased by 13 percentage points since 2020.

Dual enrollment grants local high school students the opportunity to take up to 10 academic courses[2] at an eligible Michigan postsecondary institution. Figure 1 displays the percentage of GVSU schools[3] with students participating in DE. Forty-one percent of GVSU schools had at least one student participating in DE in 2022. This represents a 13 percentage point increase when compared to the share of GVSU schools with students participating in DE in 2020.

Figure 1: Percentage of GVSU schools with students participating in DE programs.



Source: Publicly available data retrieved from MISchoolData.com; authors' calculations.

[1] Data from 2022-23 and 2023-24 is referenced when discussing Early Middle College results in GVSU schools. This is due to the CSO providing Early Middle College agreement data for these years. We do not discuss data from 2022-23 or 2023-24 beyond Early Middle College results.

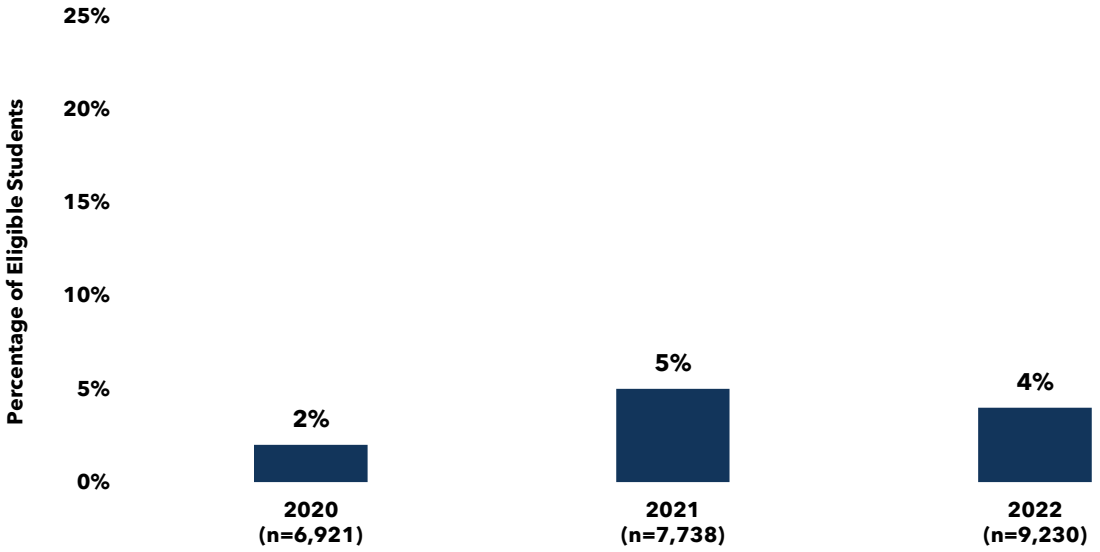
[2] The 10-course limit is standard for all districts with participating students unless a district has a written agreement with the postsecondary institution allowing for students to take more than 10 courses.

[3] The sample changes year over year due to an increase in the number of schools the GVSU CSO authorizes in a given year.

The percentage of students participating in DE has increased by two percentage points since 2020.

Figure 2 displays the percentage of students in GVSU schools participating in DE. Results compare the number of students participating in DE initiatives to the number of students enrolled in GVSU schools by year. This is the same approach used by the State of Michigan to calculate the percentage of students participating in DE statewide (see MiSchoolData DE Report). Results indicate the percentage of GVSU students participating in DE has increased by two percentage points since 2020. When disaggregated by GVSU schools, we find the percentage of students participating in DE in Canton Preparatory High School, Grand River Preparatory High School, and Taylor Preparatory High School increased by between five to eight percentage points since 2020. Additionally, when investigating participation by grade level, we find a larger share of eligible 11th and 12th grade students participated in DE as compared to 9th and 10th grade students. Finally, students in GVSU schools participating in DE averaged 2.7 postsecondary courses per academic year.

Figure 2: Percentage of eligible students participating in DE.



Source: Publicly available data retrieved from MISchoolData.com; authors' calculations

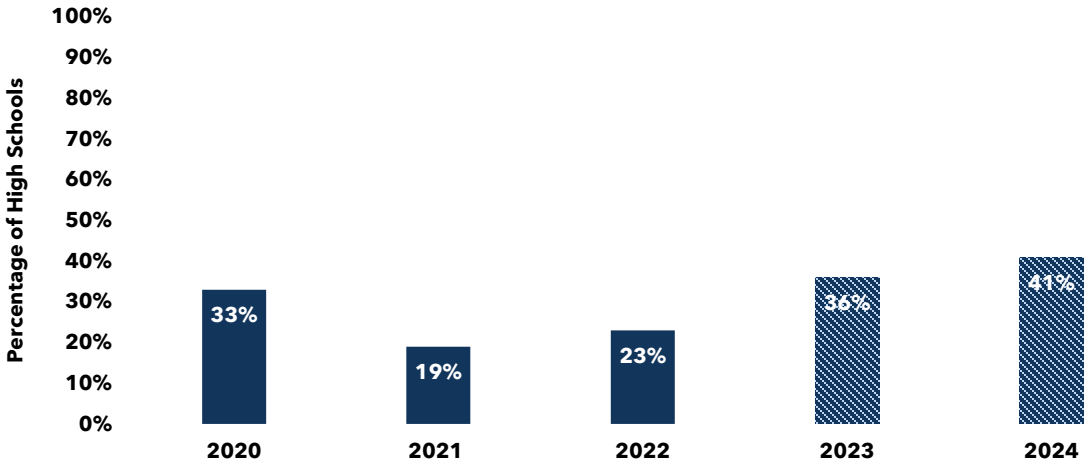
The percentage of GVSU schools serving as an EMC will increase to 41 percent in 2024.

Early Middle College is a Michigan Department of Education-approved five-year program that provides students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and at least one of the following: 60 college credits, an associate degree, a professional certification, a technical certificate, or a registered apprenticeship. A high school may be an EMC school, in which all students participate in EMC, operate an EMC program, or participate in an EMC consortium. EMC differs from DE in that it provides students with a structured program of study that leads to a specific degree or certificate, whereas DE offers students more flexibility in the courses they take and does not lead to a degree or certificate.

Figure 3 displays the share of GVSU schools serving as an EMC location since 2020. While most of this report presents results from 2020 to 2022 due to the availability of public data, the GVSU CSO provided Basis researchers with schools EMC agreements through 2024. Thus, we are able to calculate the share of

schools who served as an EMC in 2022-23 (henceforth titled "2023") and will serve as an EMC in 2023-24 (henceforth titled "2024"). Forty-one percent of schools will serve as an EMC in 2024 which represents an eight percentage point increase since 2020. Further, the noticeable increase in percentage of schools serving as an EMC since 2022 is attributed to the Michigan Department of Education approving (a) University Preparatory (UPrep) Academy High School, UPrep Art & Design High School, and UPrep Science and Math High School to start an EMC consortium in 2023 and (b) the Greenspire School to serve as EMC location starting in 2024.

Figure 3: Percentage of GVSU schools serving as an EMC location.

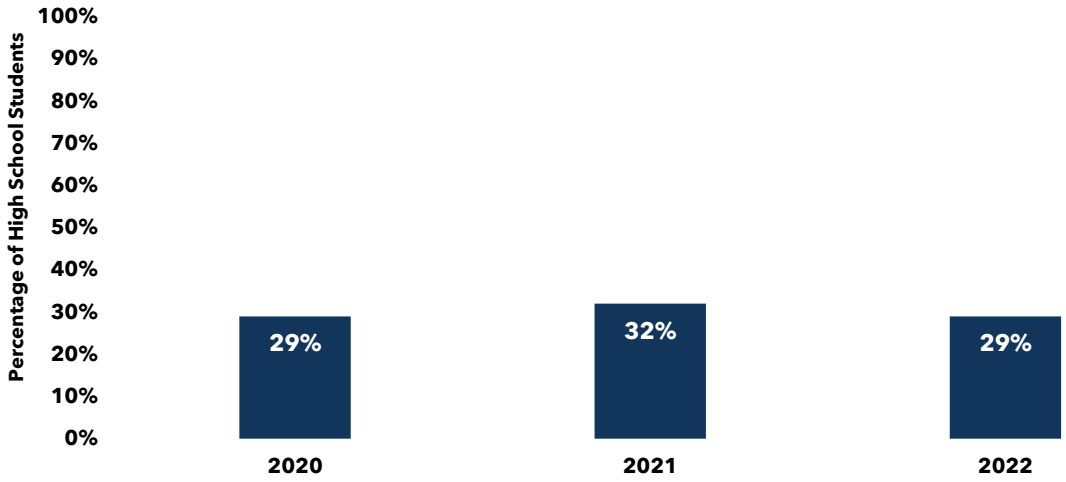


Source: Publicly available data retrieved from MISchoolData.com; authors' calculations

Between 29 to 32 percent of students in GVSU schools have participated in advanced courses since 2020.

The percentage of students participating in advanced courses is a composite measure of 11th and 12th grade students participating in any form of postsecondary courses, including AP classes, IB courses, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, EMC classes, and DE classes (Michigan Department of Education, 2023). We intended to disaggregate participation in advanced courses by student race and ethnicity, but the extensiveness of missing or cell-suppressed data precludes us from conducting this type of analysis in GVSU schools. Results in Figure 4 reveal that between 29 to 32 percent of students in GVSU schools have participated in advanced courses since 2020. The percentage of students participating in advanced courses remained the same in 2020 and 2022. Further, the percentage of students participating in advanced courses in GVSU schools in 2022 ranges from between 5 to 83 percent in the past year. Black River Public School Middle/High School, Grand River Preparatory High School, Canton Preparatory High School, and Taylor Preparatory High School all had over 65 percent of students participating in some type of postsecondary opportunity.

Figure 4: Percentage of students participating in advanced courses.



Source: Publicly available data retrieved from MISchoolData.com; authors' calculations

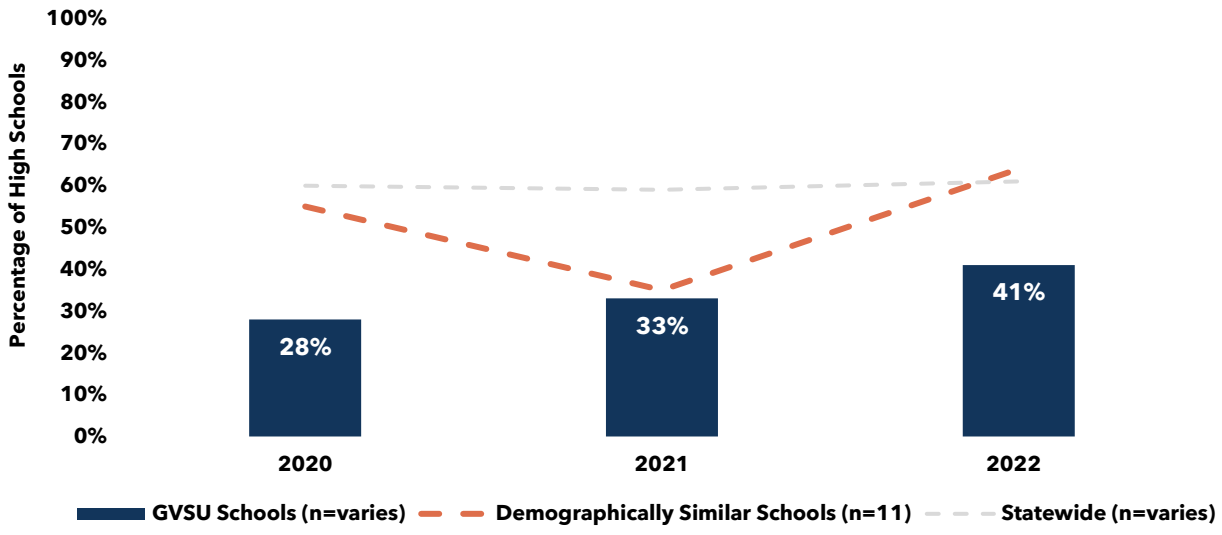
2 | How do postsecondary opportunities in GVSU schools compare to postsecondary opportunities in traditional public schools?

Basis researchers used publicly available school demographic data to identify demographically similar traditional public high schools (henceforth titled "demographically similar schools"). The data used to identify demographically similar schools included ISD/ESA location, school level (e.g., Elementary-High School, Middle-High School, High Schools), school type (e.g., general education or alternative education), race/ethnicity distribution, percentage of students receiving Special Education services, and percentage of economically disadvantaged students. We identified 11 demographically similar schools. The share of demographically similar schools by school level and type is comparable to GVSU schools. We discuss the process for identifying demographically similar schools in Appendix A.

The increase in percentage of GVSU schools with students participating in DE outpaced demographically similar schools by four percentage points since 2020.

Figure 5 displays the percentage of GVSU and demographically similar schools with students participating in DE since 2020. We include the percentage of high schools statewide with students participating in DE to serve as a reference point against which we compare GVSU and demographically similar schools' results. The percentage of demographically similar schools with students enrolling in DE has increased by nine percentage points since 2020. The percentage of GVSU schools with students enrolling in DE has increased by 13 percentage points in the same time period. Consequently, the initial 27 percentage point gap between GVSU and demographically similar schools has been reduced by 4 percentage points since 2020. Finally, the increase in percentage of GVSU schools with students participating in DE since 2020 deviates from the statewide trend that had a one percentage point increase in the same time period. The gap in percentage of GVSU schools with students participating in DE as compared to the statewide average narrowed by 12 percentage points in the past three years.

Figure 5: Percentage of GVSU schools, demographically similar schools, and high schools statewide with students participating in DE.

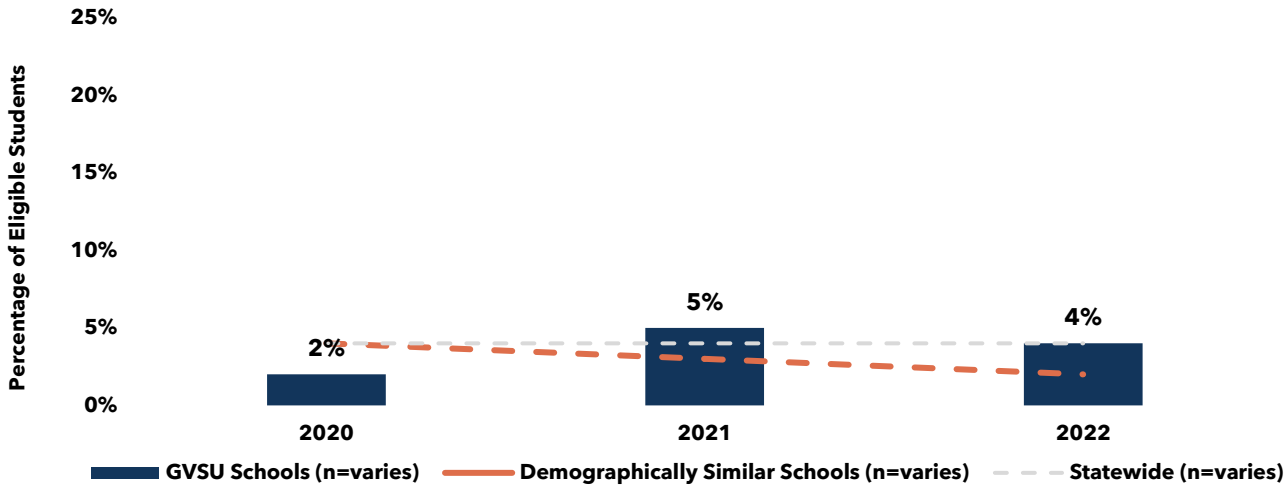


Source: Publicly available data retrieved from MISchoolData.com; author's calculations

A larger percentage of students in GVSU schools participated in DE in 2022 as compared to demographically similar schools.

We also compared the percentage of eligible students participating in DE programs in GVSU and demographically similar schools since 2020. Results in Figure 6 reveal a two percentage point decline in demographically similar schools since 2020. In contrast, the percentage of students participating in DE in GVSU schools has increased by two percentage points in the same time period. Consequently, a larger percentage of students in GVSU schools participated in DE in 2022 as compared to demographically similar schools. Additionally, the initial two percentage point gap in eligible students participating in DE in GVSU schools and schools statewide has been closed.

Figure 6: Percentage of eligible students participating in DE programs.

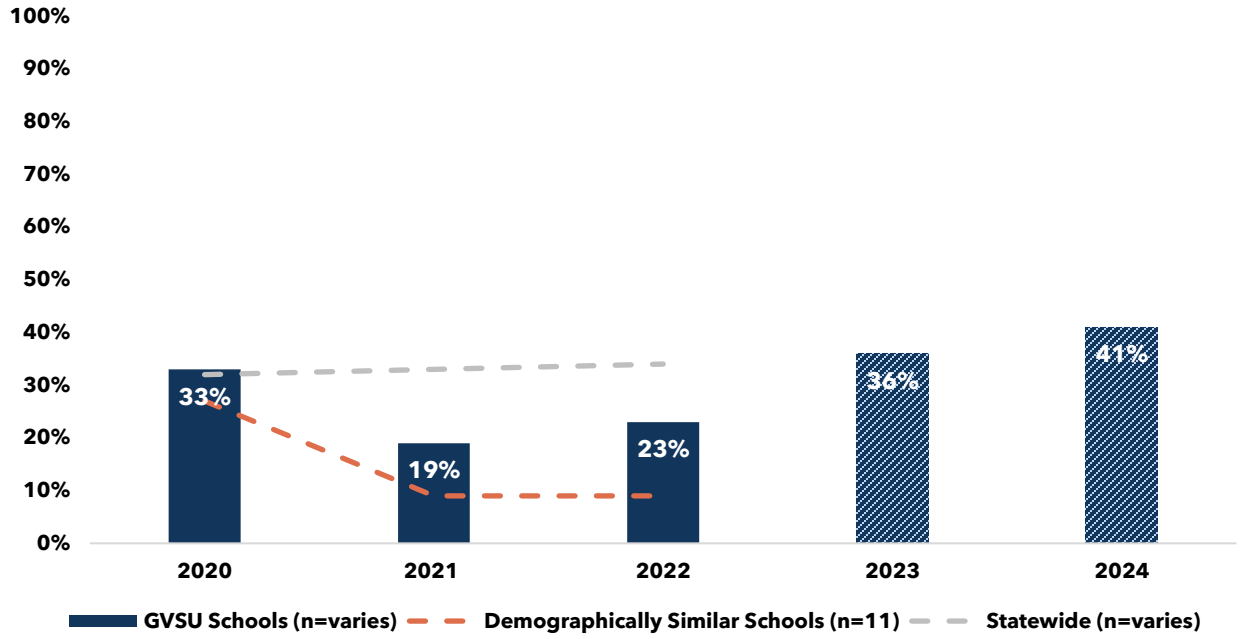


Source: Publicly available data retrieved from MISchoolData.com; author's calculations

A larger share of GVSU schools served as EMC locations in 2022 as compared to demographically similar schools.

Figure 7 displays the percentage of GVSU and demographically similar schools serving as an EMC location. Data on the percentage of schools statewide serving as an EMC in 2023 or 2024 is not publicly available. Results indicate a larger share of GVSU schools served as EMC locations in 2022 as compared to demographically similar schools (14 percentage point difference). Further, the growth of GVSU schools serving as EMC in 2023 (36 percent) and 2024 (41 percent) will likely surpass the statewide mean by between two to seven percentage points.

Figure 7: Percentage of GVSU schools, demographically similar schools, and high schools statewide serving as an Early Middle College location.

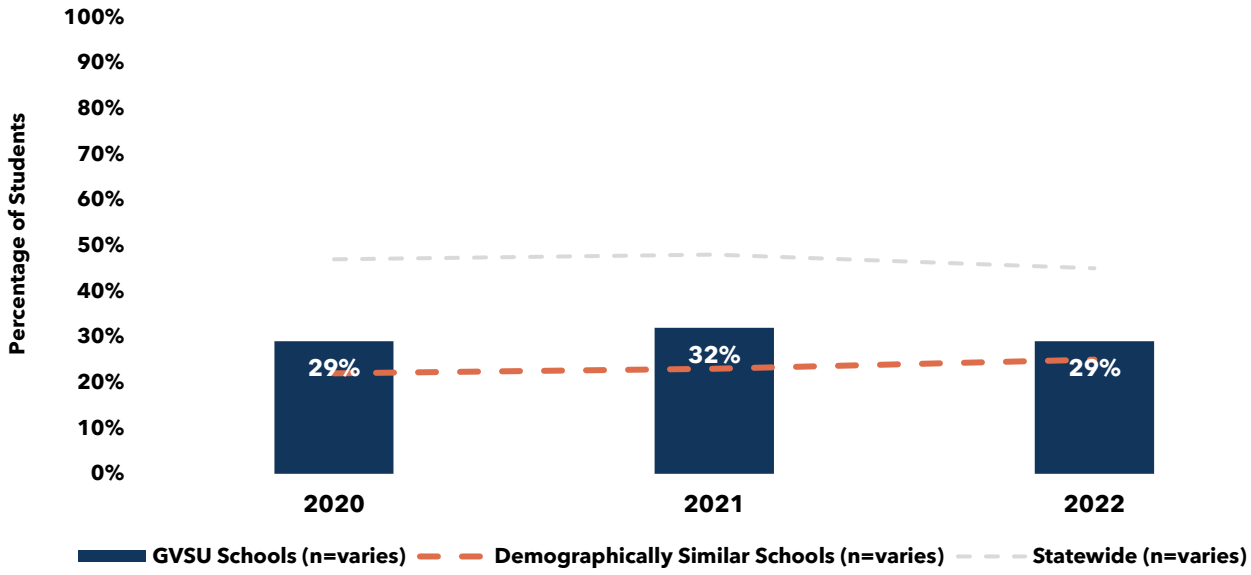


Note: Publicly available EMC data for Schools Statewide is not available for 2022-23 or 2023-24.
Source: Publicly available data retrieved from MISchoolData.com; author's calculations

A larger share of students in GVSU schools participated in advanced courses in 2022 as compared to demographically similar schools.

Lastly, we explored the percentage of students in GVSU and demographically similar schools participating in advanced courses since 2020. Results in Figure 8 indicate the share of participating students in GVSU schools exceeded the share of participating students in demographically similar schools by four percentage points. However, we do find that the share of students participating in demographically similar schools increased by two percentage points since 2020 while remaining the same in GVSU schools. Finally, we find the initial 18 percentage point gap between participating students in GVSU schools and schools statewide has been reduced by 2 percentage points since 2020.

Figure 8: Percentage of students in GVSU schools, demographically similar schools, and high schools statewide participating in advanced courses.



Source: Publicly available data retrieved from MISchoolData.com; author's calculations

Discussion and Recommendations

This descriptive study explored postsecondary opportunities in GVSU schools and how they compare to opportunities in demographically similar schools. Students' access to postsecondary opportunities have increased in GVSU schools since 2020. The share of GVSU schools with students participating in DE has increased by 13 percentage points while the share of schools serving as an EMC location will increase to 41 percent in 2024. Further, a larger share of students in GVSU schools participated in DE and advanced courses in 2022 as compared to students in demographically similar schools. Despite increased access to postsecondary opportunities in GVSU schools, between 68 to 71 percent of students did not participate in advanced courses, suggesting there is continued opportunity to increase students' access to and participation in postsecondary opportunities. Given this, we recommend the CSO and GVSU schools consider the following six recommendations to improve participation in postsecondary opportunities.

1 | Develop pathways for high school faculty to qualify for teaching advanced courses.

Prior research has demonstrated that high schools with large numbers of students from historically marginalized groups are less likely to offer advanced courses because of underrepresentation of faculty qualified to teach these courses (Williams and Perry, 2020). Furthermore, economically disadvantaged and urban schools with lower achievement have historically experienced high staff turnover and overreliance of hiring inexperienced teachers that do not qualify for teaching advanced courses (Hooper and Harrington, 2022). Consequently, developing pathways for faculty to qualify for teaching advanced courses is necessary to increase the percentage of students participating in these opportunities. Frequently cited strategies for increasing the supply of qualified high school teachers include offering financial aid for high school teachers to complete necessary coursework or training, offering stipends or bonuses for participating in professional development, and prioritizing recruitment efforts that raise awareness of graduate or certification program options (Horn et al., 2018). Alternatively, the CSO might consider future United States Department of Education Teacher and School Leader grant competitions, which have funded programs for teachers to pursue graduate degrees or advanced course certification.

2 | Prioritize the recruitment of middle-achieving students for DE opportunities.

Advanced course opportunities are typically perceived as only available to high achieving students (Boswell, 2000). Consequently, high school students and families might not be aware of advanced course opportunities they are eligible for, or the long-terms benefits associated with these opportunities (Firk and Jenkins, 2021). Broadening advanced course opportunities, particularly DE, to middle-achieving students or college-ready students who are uncertain about postsecondary plans has been cited as a promising practice for increasing the number of students participating in advanced courses (Zinth & Barnett, 2018). Thus, administrators, teachers, and counselors might tailor advanced course communication and recruitment materials to middle-achieving students with an emphasis on eligibility, support provided, and long-term benefits of participation.

3 | Offer precollege experiences to (a) low- and middle-achieving high school students and (b) middle school students.

Providing middle- and lower-performing high school students with precollege experiences in 9th or 10th grade could promote awareness of advanced course eligibility and garner interest in pursuing postsecondary opportunities (Zinth & Barnett, 2018). Additionally, precollege experiences for middle

school students that promote the benefit of pursuing advanced course opportunities in high school could raise awareness, garner interest, and inform students' academic path in high school. One possible strategy would be for the CSO to connect the largest colleges or universities in Michigan that serve EMC or DE students – Henry Ford College, Macomb Community College, Grand Rapids Community College, Mott Community College, Lansing Community College – with nearby GVSU schools to actively partner in providing students with precollege experiences, including offering campus tours and hosting alumni panels.

4 | Offer school counselors professional development focused on supporting students pursuing advanced courses.

Existing literature has cited a lack of advising and support in high schools as an impediment to increasing the number of students participating in advanced courses, particularly for students from historically marginalized groups (Hooper & Harrington, 2022). For instance, Weissman (2020) identified administrative tasks and demands and lack of training as impediments to effectively supporting students from historically marginalized groups in their pursuit of and participation in advanced course opportunities. Consequently, the CSO might consider developing a series of professional learning opportunities for school counselors focused on (a) recruitment and onboarding strategies for students considering advanced course opportunities and (b) effective support for middle-achieving students participating in advanced course opportunities.

5 | Offer eligible students financial assistance to defray costs associated with pursuing advanced courses.

The financial costs associated with advanced courses impede students' access to and participation in these opportunities (Mangan, 2019). Economically disadvantaged students typically do not pursue or participate in advanced courses due to financial concerns (Gilbert, 2017). However, prior research has demonstrated that eliminating the cost of advanced courses increases participation for students from historically marginalized groups, particularly those who identify as economically disadvantaged (Roach et al., 2015). In Michigan, students participating in DE are responsible for costs associated with attendance beyond what districts provide, including transportation fees, parking costs, and activity fees. It is possible these fees serve as impediments to eligible students pursuing DE programs. Thus, we recommend the CSO consider (a) identifying sources of financial assistance eligible students could access and disseminating this information to schools or (b) allowing schools to use a portion of the academic grant to support eligible students in defraying costs associated with pursuing advance courses.

6 | Consider whether advanced course eligibility requirements impede students' access to postsecondary opportunities.

Eligibility parameters have historically excluded students from participating in advanced courses, particularly students from historically marginalized groups (Mehl et al., 2020). For instance, minimum GPA requirements and testing prerequisites could impede students' pursuit of and access to advanced courses (Liu et al., 2020). We recommend schools audit local eligibility requirements, consider whether they enable or impede students' access to advanced courses, and determine if alternative requirements would increase the number of eligible students.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Methods

Data Sources. The study findings are based on data provided by the GVSU CSO and publicly available data from MI School Data (mischooldata.org). The GVSU CSO provided a directory of authorized schools by year, including school names and campus identifiers. The Basis research team downloaded publicly available school-level demographic, assessment, and advanced courses data from 2019 to 2022. Demographic data provided student and staff information, including student enrollment, race/ethnicity distribution, economically disadvantaged status, Special Education status, and Limited English Proficiency status. Assessment data included mean scale scores and percentage of students meeting grade-level proficiency by grade and subject. Advanced courses data included the counts of students eligible for DE, a list of schools offering EMC, and the percent of students participating in advanced courses (i.e., DE, EMC, or Advanced Placement courses). The research team linked the data across schools using campus identifiers.

Sample. The GVSU CSO authorized between 18 to 22 high schools from 2020 to 2022. We identified 11 demographically comparable traditional public schools to serve as demographically similar schools. We discuss the identification process in the analytic strategy section below.

Measures. Basis researchers calculated (a) the percentage of schools with DE opportunities for students, (b) the percentage of eligible students participating in DE, (c) the number of college credits offered to students participating in DE, (d) the percentage of schools serving as an EMC location, and (e) the percentage of students participating in advanced courses to answer this research question.

Analytic Strategy. Below we describe the analytic strategy for each research question included in this report.

1 | What types of postsecondary opportunities are available to students in GVSU schools?

We aggregated results for all GVSU high schools for each measure. We report on descriptive trends since 2020.

2 | How do postsecondary opportunities in GVSU schools compare to those in traditional public schools?

Basis researchers used publicly available school demographic to identify demographically comparable traditional public high schools. The data used to identify demographically similar schools included ISD/ESA location, school level (e.g., Elementary-High School, Middle-High School, High Schools), school type (e.g., general education or alternative education), race/ethnicity distribution, percentage of students receiving Special Education services, and percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

We identified 11 demographically similar schools. The share of demographically similar schools by school level and type is comparable to GVSU schools. Table A1 summarizes descriptive statistics from 2020 to 2022 for GVSU high schools and demographically similar schools. The schools were comparable across most demographic characteristics except for GVSU schools having larger student enrollments.

Table A1: Aggregate school characteristics from 2020 to 2022

School Characteristics	GVSU High Schools (n=24)	Demographically Similar Schools (n=11)
% Economically Disadvantaged	77.0	80.0
% Special Education	13.0	14.0
% Hispanic or Latino	11.0	10.0
% Black or African American	62.0	61.0
% White	22.0	23.0
Student Enrollment	391.0	299.0

Source: Publicly available data downloaded from the MI School Data
Note: The authors' linked school codes provided by GVSU CSO with MI School Data

We used the same analytic approach described in the first research question to compare results for GVSU schools and demographically similar schools.

About This Report

This research was conducted by Basis Policy Research. Basis conducts applied public policy research, primarily in the field of education; provides technical assistance to state departments of education, districts, and schools; and supports policymakers by providing the data they need to make sound decisions. For more information visit our website at www.basispolicyresearch.com.