From Aspiration to Graduation: Dynamics Affecting Student Success

BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation

Early Planning ▸ Apply and Select ▸ Transition ▸ Persistence ▸ Completion

Middle School | High School 9th | 10th | 11th | 12th | HS Diploma | 1st year of College | Associate's Degree | Bachelor's Degree

Dynamics Supporting Students

Academic Rigor B.1

- Make use of academic support options
- Pursue college-oriented curriculum
- Take advanced classes

Behaviors

Beliefs
- Colleges seek top performers
- Grades always matter
- Class selection is vital
- Academic obstacles can be overcome

Environment
- Many advanced courses available
- Parents monitor student performance
- More qualified teachers

Student: *I took AP and college-level courses to see what college is going to be like. My high school just focused on college, college, college.*

Positive College Expectations B.2

- Develop plan to pay for college
- Apply and challenge themselves academically
- Pursue extracurricular activities
- Prepare for standardized tests

Behaviors

Beliefs
- College leads to a brighter future
- College is affordable
- There are plenty of college options
- Helpful resources are abundant

Environment
- Family and friends act as college-going role models
- Parents plan to finance college early
- Quality teachers and counselors reinforce college value
- Career and academic planning tools

Parent: *We want the kids to go to college; it's always been that way. You're not finished with your education until you've gone to college.*

Admissions Process Know-How B.3

- Seek help from teachers, counselors and friends
- Build a college resume
- Develop college criteria and wish list
- Take standardized tests
- Visit colleges
- Apply on-time
- Begin executing financial plan

Behaviors

Beliefs
- College is affordable
- Selecting the right college is important
- Exceptional students have more options
- Grades always matter
- Start the application process early

Environment
- Family and friends act as college-going role models
- Family understands and participates in the process
- Counselors are proactive and accessible
- Family will help finance college

Counselor: *They know what they're doing. They've been told what to do. I'd say every year that I've been getting better at this, the kids have gotten better as well.*

High-Income Students A.1

Family Income: > $100,000 | Mean: $230,370

Parents' Education: High School Diploma or less: 18%; Some College: 14%; Associate's Degree: 9%; Bachelor's Degree or more: 59%

Ethnicity: White: 80% | Black: 6% | Hispanic: 6% | Other: 8%

Low-Income Students A.1

Family Income: < $40,000 | Mean: $17,330

Parents' Education: High School Diploma or less: 63%; Some College: 18%; Associate's Degree: 8%; Bachelor's Degree or more: 11%

Ethnicity: White: 54% | Black: 20% | Hispanic: 21% | Other: 5%

More than 80% of higher income students expect to go to college, whereas only 60% of lower income students expect to go. A.5

Math proficiency correlates with college completion. 72% of higher-income students have access to a calculus class, compared to 44% of lower-income students. A.6

Affluent students rely on several information sources, know more about college costs, include a wider geographic range, consider higher-quality institutions, and have parents who saved for college. A.7

32% of high school teachers in 2009 said that students should graduate college-ready, whereas 59% felt that there should be a separate track for non-college-bound students. A.10

Schools with high college acceptance rates have a 390:1 student-to-counselor ratio; statewide averages for low-income schools approach 1,056:1. A.11

67% of 2007 Chicago Public School graduates attended only seven institutions. A.12

608,000 A.4 — 598,000

1,140,000 — 844,000

95% Aspire to Attend College A.2

93.5% Graduate High School A.3 70.3%

Campus Life Integration B.4

- Complete summer orientation activities
- Live on campus
- Easily create new social networks
- Get involved with student organizations
- Seek support when needed
- Work (if at all) is part-time

Behaviors

Beliefs
- Living independently is exciting
- New friendships will be established
- College is an opportunity for personal growth

Environment
- Family encourages transition to college
- Surrounded by classmates from similar backgrounds
- Parents cover at least part of college costs
- Family and friends provide emotional and practical support

College Admin: *It helps if students feel connected to the institution – feel they're making a difference, or that someone appreciates them. I just think a sense of belonging is so important.*

Academic Confidence B.5

- Meet with academic advisor
- Use advanced cognitive and study skills
- Seek support services
- Identify a program of study early

Behaviors

Beliefs
- Overcoming academic obstacles is possible
- Classes align with career goals
- Finishing college on-time is important
- School is more important than part-time work

Environment
- High school academic rigor prepared them to succeed
- Several academic support services are available
- The college matches the student's academic ability

Student: *I went to my college's academic success center a lot during my freshman year. I love it there. It's a really good support system for any student whether they're doing poorly in school or they need help with non-academic stuff.*

Career Exploration B.6

- Establish career aspirations early
- Find summer internships
- Build professional network

Behaviors

Beliefs
- Earning a degree is only the beginning
- Professional experience must complement a diploma
- College is an opportunity for professional growth
- College helps establish a professional network

Environment
- Vast alumni base
- Family network of professionals
- High quality Career Services department

Student: *There is always the option to do something that will make you a lot of money or something that will make you happy. I would rather wake up every morning excited to go to work.*

539,000 — 527,000

84.2% Enroll in College 41.4%

82.4% Graduate College 8.3%

497,000 — 100,000

High-income students are 20% more likely to participate in study groups and 35% more likely to join school clubs than their low-income counterparts. A.8

Higher income students are twice as likely as lower income peers to work during school as a way of gaining professional experience. A.9

Low-income and first-generation students tend to lack study and time management skills, have less confidence in their academic abilities, and experience more difficulty in navigating college bureaucracy. A.13

Lower income students are almost twice as likely as their higher income peers to work as a way to pay for tuition and living expenses. A.14

Low-income students are less likely to attain a postsecondary degree because they earn fewer credits in the first year, take more remedial courses, and are more likely to repeat courses. A.15

Dynamics Inhibiting Students

Inadequate Academic Infrastructure C.1

- Reading and math skills are below grade level
- Take classes that don't meet admission requirements

Behaviors

Beliefs
- School isn't relevant
- Reading isn't fun
- Grades don't matter
- Math and science are too hard

Environment
- Few advanced courses available
- High student-to-counselor ratio
- Fewer qualified teachers
- Limited career and college planning activities

Student: *My high school teachers never asked, 'Have you thought about what you want to do after high school?' They don't talk about it enough at school. It's all about passing the state tests, getting your grades up, and graduating.*

Reduced College Expectations C.2

- Don't apply themselves academically
- Poor attendance
- Resist seeking help
- Drop out

Behaviors

Beliefs
- Unable to catch up academically
- Formal education won't lead to a brighter future
- College is too expensive
- Student loans are debt, not an investment
- Asking for help is a sign of weakness

Environment
- Lack of college-going role models
- Family may not support college aspirations
- Friends don't plan to attend college
- Limited access to counselors
- Faculty are focused on high school completion

Student: *I know people who got full-ride college scholarships, but they don't really want to go because they never had the right people push them.*

Delayed Admission Activities C.3

- Take SAT/ACT without preparation
- Overly constrain college search
- Apply to less selective colleges late
- Enroll in a "mismatched" college
- Scramble to develop financial plan

Behaviors

Beliefs
- College is not affordable
- Staying close to home saves money
- Financial aid is overwhelming
- Preparing for the SAT/ACT is unnecessary
- There is ample time to complete applications
- The application process is too hard

Environment
- Family provides limited support
- Parents lack experience with admissions process
- Schools don't reinforce college aspirations
- Limited access to counselors

Student: *I did apply to one college and I did get admitted to it, but it wasn't the college I wanted to go to. I waited so long that the admission deadline had passed for the college I actually wanted to go to.*

Struggling to Adjust and Connect C.4

- Difficulty meeting people from similar backgrounds
- Easily distracted
- Unable to navigate college bureaucracy
- Fail to seek support services

Behaviors

Beliefs
- Attending college means abandoning friends and family
- Don't belong here
- The school doesn't understand my needs
- Not prepared to be independent
- Not college material

Environment
- Academically unprepared
- Few classmates from similar backgrounds
- Professors may be unsupportive

Student: *I didn't know how to seek help or who to go to, but I knew I needed to take the right classes. The beginning of my college years was just trial and error.*

Competing Priorities C.5

- Live with family
- Work to support self/family
- Take classes part-time
- Constantly concerned about finances
- Drop out to make more money now

Behaviors

Beliefs
- There is limited help to pay for college
- Honoring commitments to family and friends is important
- Passing classes requires a lot of time and effort
- Avoiding distractions is difficult

Environment
- Family is unable to help with costs
- Family and friends don't understand college demands
- Schools fail to help solve non-academic challenges
- Insufficient financial aid

Student: *I had my baby a year ago so I had to quit my job. It was either school or the job. You just have to decide what is more important in the long run.*

Lower Academic Resiliency C.6

- Take remedial classes
- Have to study more to keep up
- Earn lower GPAs
- Retake classes
- Fail to seek support services
- Disengage from school
- Complete fewer credit hours

Behaviors

Beliefs
- College classes are more difficult than expected
- Missing the skills needed to succeed
- Asking for help is not ok
- There is no one to help

Environment
- Unprepared for academic demands
- Few advanced courses available in high school
- Faculty may not be responsive to student needs

Student: *I withdrew. I wasn't going to keep wasting my time. Tutoring didn't work for me. I felt embarrassed and too stupid for this. If you don't think you're strong enough or smart enough, you're not going to succeed.*

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