

The race for  
excellence: how high  
schools are missing  
the mark on college  
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## The Race For Excellence: How High Schools Are Missing The Mark On College Preparation

### Introduction

For a high school graduate, the cap and gown are the finish line, and they have finally achieved the prize that they have been working towards for four hard years: the diploma. Upon receiving this, high school students know how to plug numbers into an equation, how to use Pythagorean's theorem, and how to diagram a sentence. They may feel that their race is finished. But in reality, their race for excellence is only in its beginning stages. As students embark on the next stages in their education, we must ask ourselves a question: Is what high schools and parents equip their students with for college what they need to excel?

Incoming college freshmen are not properly prepared for college in many ways. The things colleges expect out of freshmen and what high schools expect of graduating seniors are two different things ("Closing the Gap," n.d). The expectations put forth by colleges on incoming students are sometimes hard to navigate if a student is used to being tested on their knowledge in a particular way, or being treated a certain way by their teachers. As they make the important step forward into college life and beyond, they must learn to adapt to the different challenges thrown their way—including the responsibilities of managing their own time, adjusting to new and difficult academic environments, and understanding the grades given to them based on their work. College is a completely different atmosphere not only academically, but also socially, emotionally, and

domestically. Our purpose in this project is to prove that high schools are not properly preparing students for college and life outside of high school and to show how educators and parents can improve on helping future students. By sharing the results of our project with educators and parents, we hope to create change with the people who impact students the most during their high school careers.

### Overview of the Issue

In a report put out by the people behind the ACT, the term “college readiness” was referred to as “the level of preparation a student needs to be ready to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a two-year or four-year institution, trade school, or technical school” (Crisis At The Core, 2005, p. iii). The issue of college readiness is not a new issue. As far back as 2005, articles were already being written to alert people that high schools are not preparing their students for college (Rigoglioso, 2005). High school students are not college-ready for several reasons, a major one being that high school students are not being taught life skills, but rather how to get a good score on a test (“Closing the Gap,” n.d, p. 4). Heller (2010), the director of Penn State’s Center for the Study of Higher Education, agrees that a main issue of why students are not prepared for college is schools’ focus on getting a good grade on tests. He notes, “[that] ultimately, current classroom performance is what prepares a student for admission—and test day—better than cramming or retesting to boost scores” (para 1). High schools are myopic in their goals, as they do not look beyond the goal of having their students achieve excellent scores on tests

and try to achieve the goal of developing young people who are prepared to face life's challenges whether they be in college or in the workforce.

High schools should be a place where young students learn skills they can develop for the rest of their lives. Such skills may include how to make a budget, how to take care of basic household chores like cooking and cleaning, and how to effectively interact with other people. No matter the stage of life, students will always have to interact with others, whether it be working on a group project in college, a presentation for work, or putting a puzzle together in a retirement home. Why wait to prepare students for life until they are expected to know how to navigate life with all the necessary skills?

According to a Hechinger Report investigation, a majority of students enrolling in college classes are not properly prepared or ready for college-level courses. Many students have to be placed in remedial courses, forcing colleges and students to spend their time and money taking these courses, just to catch up to college standards (Butrymowicz, 2017). Time and money are precious, to anyone, especially to college students who are trying to get a degree and pay off the seemingly ever-accumulating debt. The desire to make it out of college with a degree can diminish when students are discouraged by having to take courses that do not progress them further into their programs but instead just bring them to the point where they can begin. This causes stress not only with their education but financially too. Part of this stressfulness and discouragement can be remedied by preparing high school students for college before they start, so they will not have to spend time and money on remedial courses (Butrymowicz, 2017).

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## Methods

To support our claim that high school students are not ready for life outside of high school, we conducted a total of three electronic surveys between the dates of September 19, 2019, until October 3, 2019. Gathering the opinions of students, parents, and high school educators respectively, we asked each party about their take on how high school prepared them or their students for the college experience. We received a total of 25 responses, with 10 from students, 10 from parents, and 5 from educators. On average it took students two minutes to complete their survey, and only one minute for parents and high school educators to complete their survey(s).

We asked them the following questions:

Students (Survey #1):

1. How well did your high school experience prepare you for college?

For this question, we had different areas where the student could rate anywhere from strongly disagree to strongly agree on how they prepared they felt for different aspects of college life.

2. Are there any other ways your high school experience left you unprepared for college (socially, housekeeping, etc.)?

For this question, we had a text box that students could write any other ways they felt unprepared for college.

3. Were there any other ways you felt prepared for college?

For this question, we had a text box where students could write any other ways they felt prepared for college.

Parents (Survey #2):

1. Do you feel your student/child was properly prepared for college?

For this question, we had a range of “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” for the participants to answer from.

2. What if any basic life skills did you try to instill in your student/child?

For this question, we provided the following multiple-choice answers for the participants to pick all that applied. The options included: “how to cook,” “how to clean,” “how to do laundry,” “how to manage their own time,” as well as an “other” option for them to fill in something specific that was not listed.

3. What is one thing you wish you or high school taught your child?

For this question, we had a blank for the participants to provide a short answer.

High School Educators (Survey #3):

1. What were the biggest things you emphasized in your classroom?

For this question, we had multiple-choice where the high school educators could click whatever options they emphasized in their classroom. We also provided another box where they could write what they emphasized in their classrooms in case we did not include it in our options.

2. Do you think your students were prepared for life in college?

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For this question, we had different areas they thought their students would be prepared for college with a range from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

### Findings

In the results of our student surveys, we found that academically, 75% felt “ a great deal” prepared, 37. 5% felt “ a lot” prepared, and 12. 5% felt “ not at all” prepared. Socially, 25% felt “ a great deal” prepared, 50% felt “ a lot” prepared, 22. 22% felt “ a moderate amount” prepared, and 37. 5% felt “ a little” prepared. Emotionally, 37. 5% felt “ a great deal” prepared, 33. 33% felt “ a moderate amount” prepared, 37. 5% felt “ a little” prepared, and 12. 5% felt “ not at all prepared.” In finances, 25% felt “ a little” prepared and 87. 5% felt “ not at all” prepared. With time management, 12. 5% felt “ a great deal” prepared, 12. 5% felt “ a lot” prepared, 77. 78% felt “ a moderate amount” prepared, and 12. 5% felt “ a little” prepared.

In the results of our parent survey, we found that 50% of parents answered “ agree” and felt that their children were prepared for college, with 30% split evenly—10% each—between the “ strongly disagree,” “ disagree,” and “ neutral” categories. Only 20% responded with “ strongly agree” as their answer to this question. The parents also reported life skills they tried to instill in their children before college. Based on their responses, 90% tried to instill time management into their children’s lives, 60% focused on laundry as a basic life skill, 50% emphasized cooking, 40% tried to teach their children to clean, and 30% chose to answer “ other,” specifying with responses including money management and the ability to read books as

their chosen basic life skill. When asked what they wish their students were taught by their high school, parents responded with a range of things. Included were examples involving finances and investing, the idea that “college is not necessary to be successful in life,” “how to gain the best education in the course taken,” the idea that “life is not fair but it is good,” and “basic adult skills.”

In the results of our high school educators survey, we found that most high school educators, that is 85.71%, focused on helping their students develop a strong work ethic, 85.71% focused on helping their students think critically, 71.43% focused on the concepts specific to the unit, 71.43% focused on the importance of respect for peers and authorities, 28.57% focused on teaching their students how to interact with peers, 14.29% emphasized the importance of coming to class, and 0% emphasized the importance of passing the class. When asked how prepared high school students are for college, high school educators responded in several ways. 71.43% agreed that high school students are prepared academically, while 28.57% strongly agreed. 85.71% agreed that high school students are prepared socially while 14.29% were neutral. 57.14% of high school educators agreed that high school students are prepared emotionally for college, while 28.57% are neutral, and 14.29% disagree. 28.57% of high school educators agreed that high school students are prepared financially for college, while 42.86% were neutral, 14.29% disagreed, and 14.29% strongly disagreed. 42.86% of high school educators agree that high school students are prepared domestically for college, while 42.86% are neutral, and 14.29% disagree.



## Mode of Delivery

Because our audience is high school students, parents, and educators, we have decided to deliver this information through the use of a website. We plan to send this link out through the official high schools and university social media pages at the beginning of the school year so that schools and educators can employ better preparation methods for their students during the academic year.

To establish credibility, we plan to use ethos by including visual aids, such as charts and graphs. The charts and graphs we will use will come from the surveys we conducted. Using those charts and graphs will establish our ethos by showing our audience that we are basing our claims on evidence and feedback from other people. We can remove a sense of bias by showing data collected from our surveys that do not support our original claims. We will also use videos as another source that corroborates our message.

Through a pathos appeal, we will use real students' own experiences and struggles in their transition into college to give our project a more emotional appeal besides the numbers and facts from the surveys. We also will be using pictures, images, and videos that help support our findings.

We plan to use logos by appealing to our audience's reasoning to support our claim and including actual facts we have found from secondary research, and also from primary research.

We plan to use kairos, because we will be presenting our multimodal via a website which will be posting through Oakland's official mailing list.

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Therefore, almost all if not all students would be alerted of a problem that has affected them, and affect rising freshmen they may know.

### Recommendation

The pattern of not preparing students for college does not have to continue. Through the help of parents, high school teachers, or even older college students, we can help the next generation of college students achieve their own goals and expectations, and the goals and expectations of others, specifically their college professors.

Helping the younger generation of college students be prepared to thrive throughout their college experience does not have to be a totally paradigm-shifting project. Instead, helping prepare the next generation can be as simple as older students who have already navigated through college, sharing some effective study strategies, or even suggesting which professors to pick for class. Parents could also take some time and show their children how to do their own laundry, set up a budget, and help their children learn how to better manage their own time.

High school educators and administrators can help the next generation of college students thrive in a slightly more dramatic way. They can help the next generation of college students by “ exposing high school students to the college experience.” What better way is there to show students what college will be like, than giving them a taste of what college will be like through AP classes or dual enrollment, among other ways (Closing the gap, n. d.)?

## References

Butrymowicz, S. (2017). Most colleges enroll students who aren't prepared for higher education. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/colleges-enroll-students-arent-prepared-higher-education>

In this article, Butrymowicz discusses the statistics of students enrolling in colleges who are not properly prepared and have to be placed in remedial courses just to catch up to college standards.

Closing the gap between high school and college . (n. d.). Retrieved from [http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty\\_staff/faculty/center-for-faculty-development/resources/Documents/3BbInst\\_Closing%20the%20Gap%20between%20High%20School%20and%20College.pdf](http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/center-for-faculty-development/resources/Documents/3BbInst_Closing%20the%20Gap%20between%20High%20School%20and%20College.pdf)

“ Closing the gap between high school and college” is a very helpful source for the topic of college preparedness. It explored the problem of why students often do not graduate from High School, and still more frequently do not graduate from college. It not only listed some causes, but it also identified several strategies that can help fix the problem.

Crisis at the core. (n. d.) . Retrieved from <http://www.csun.edu/~rinstitute/Content/policy/Crisis%20at%20the%20Core.pdf>

In “ Crisis at the Core,” the people behind ACT outline their goals and methods of helping students get ready for college. Included is a letter from the CEO, a preface which defines the term “ college readiness,” and a call to action to reform the current core curriculum students are being taught from.

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Heller, D. (2010). Standardized tests not always best indicator of success .

Retrieved from [https://news.psu.](https://news.psu.edu/story/165456/2010/08/23/standardized-tests-not-always-best-indicator-success)

[edu/story/165456/2010/08/23/standardized-tests-not-always-best-indicator-success](https://news.psu.edu/story/165456/2010/08/23/standardized-tests-not-always-best-indicator-success)

In “ Standardized Tests Not Always Best Indicator of Success,” Heller provided helpful quotations regarding the issue of tests determining students’ success in college, but he did not just present one side of the coin. He included quotations and notes that the preparation for standardized tests can be helpful, and he noted and included quotations about how standardized tests can not determine whether a student will succeed in whatever college or career path they pursue.

How is college different from high school. (n. d.). Retrieved from [https://www.smu.](https://www.smu.edu/provost/sasp/NeatStuffforNewStudents/HowIsCollegeDifferentFromHighSchool)

[edu/provost/sasp/NeatStuffforNewStudents/HowIsCollegeDifferentFromHighSchool](https://www.smu.edu/provost/sasp/NeatStuffforNewStudents/HowIsCollegeDifferentFromHighSchool)

“ How Is College Different From High School” is a helpful resource of information, detailing specifically how high school and college differ. They use a chart to compare and contrast the different areas students face, such as rules, classes, educators, tests, and grades.

Rigoglioso, M. (2005). High schools fail to prepare kids . *The Stanford Report*.

Retrieved from <https://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/august24/college-082405.html>

“ High schools fail to prepare kids” outlines a study done by the Stanford Report in 2005 that shows high schools were not properly preparing their kids for college. At the end of the article, the author warns against community colleges, as this will lead to even less preparation on the high schools’ part for their students in the future.