

## Transitioning Out of High School: A Quick Stats Fact Sheet

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*“Whether bound for job or college, all students need high level academic knowledge and skills associated with college preparatory studies.” (Somerville & Yi, 2002, p. 2)*

The transition from high school into college or the workforce is a key turning point in the lives of young people. Regardless of their chosen careers or academic paths after high school, young people must have the capacity to grapple with complex problems in order to maximize their potential for professional and personal success. Far too many students are not receiving an education that adequately prepares them for life following high school, especially at-risk, special education, and minority students.

The following statistics highlight some of the challenges and opportunities facing high school students after graduation.

### **Unprepared for College and Work**

- There is a gap between teenagers' expectations to go to college and the reality that many are unprepared and therefore do not graduate with a degree.
  - From 1990 to 2002, the percentage of 10th-graders expecting to go to college increased from 59% to 72%. (Ingels et al., 2005).
  - During that same time, there were only marginal increases in the percentage of Americans ages 25 to 29 with a bachelor's degree (from 23% to 29%) (Snyder et al., 2004).
- Many students who enter the workforce immediately upon high school graduation now need at least the same level of skills and knowledge as students entering college, as both universities and employers seek the same core abilities. For example, colleges and workforce training programs alike expect high school graduates to demonstrate comparable levels of readiness in reading and mathematics (ACT, Inc., 2006).
- Business leaders, college instructors, and high school graduates indicate that high school graduates are not prepared for life after high school, often citing deficiencies in mathematics, English, reading comprehension, and writing (National Association of Manufacturers, Manufacturing Institute's Center for Workforce Success, & Deloitte Consulting, 2005; Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2005; Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).
  - For example, slightly less than half of freshmen enrolled in the California State University system in 2006 met proficiency standards for English *and* mathematics – a figure that, over the past four years, has remained constant and continues to fall far below the university's goals (California State University, 2007).
  - Furthermore, nearly half (46%) of high school graduates believe they are lacking the full spectrum of skills and abilities needed to secure future (non-entry level) jobs; employers support this estimate. Four in ten students surveyed reported they were not fully prepared for college-level work and jobs (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2005).

- Taking the right *number* of courses is no longer enough to guarantee graduates will be prepared for life after high school. Among students who *prepare for college* by taking four years of English, and at least three years of math, science, and social studies, only a quarter meet all four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks (ACT, Inc., 2007).
- College instructors estimate that around two in five (42%) recent public high school graduates were not adequately prepared by their prior education to meet the expectations of college-level classes (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2005).
- Four in five (84%) representatives from American manufacturing companies felt that schools are not doing a good job of preparing students for the workplace. In addition to math, science, and reading, most cite basic employability skills such as attendance, timeliness, and work ethic as the specific deficiencies of the public education system in preparing students for the workplace (National Association of Manufacturers, et al., 2005).
- Additionally, only 40% of those manufacturing representatives report that applicants with a high school degree or GED are adequately prepared to accept their *entry level* positions (National Association of Manufacturers, et al., 2005).
- There continues to be a disparity between secondary and postsecondary views of college preparedness. In a recent opinion survey, 44% of college professors indicate that students are ill-prepared for the level of writing required for college level-work; in comparison only 10% of high school teachers felt this way. Regarding mathematics, 32% of faculty members consider students ill-prepared compared to 9% of high school teachers (Sanoff, 2006).

#### ***Consequences of Inadequate Preparation for College and the Workforce***

- Students opting to pursue postsecondary education instead of or in addition to joining the workforce stand to reap relatively significant long-term rewards. “Those with the most education usually will have more options in the job market and better prospects for obtaining higher-paying jobs.” (Braddock, 1999, p. 55)
- Only about a quarter of manufacturing employers look at high schools as a potential pool for talent. When compared with high school graduates, nearly twice as many employers see candidates with two-year degrees or job-related certifications as adequate for their entry level positions (National Association of Manufacturers, et al., 2005).
- For men ages 35 to 43, 19.8% of high school graduates with no college were promoted by their employer from 1997 to 1999 compared to 32.3% of graduates with a Bachelor’s degree or more (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006).
- Yet many new and under-prepared college students must enroll in remedial coursework. At the national level, it’s estimated that the U.S.’s financial loss due to remedial education for high school graduates is \$3.7 billion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006).

- Community colleges will increasingly bear the financial burden of remediation; 61% of students who first attended a public two-year institution completed at least one remedial course at the postsecondary level compared to 25% who first attended a four-year institution (NCES 2004-0777).
- Remedial reading is a strong indicator of a student's likelihood to earn a degree. Nearly six in 10 students (58%) who take no remedial education courses earn a Bachelor's degree within eight years, whereas not quite two in 10 of students (17%) who enroll in a remedial reading course receive a B.A. or B.S. within the same time period (NCES 2004-0777).

### **Implications for Underserved Populations**

- The benefits of earning a secondary degree are clear, but minorities and persons with disabilities are disproportionately ill-prepared to enter into and succeed in higher education. For instance, while 65% of white high school graduates entered college immediately upon graduation in 2001, only 56% and 53% of African-American and Latino graduates did the same, respectively (Haycock, 2004).
- Forty percent of white students who graduated from high school in 2002 were considered "college-ready," compared to 23% of African-American students, and 20% of Latino students (Greene & Winters, 2005).
- High expectations and rigorous instruction for all students, equal access to rigorous coursework and tougher standards, and adequate support for student success are considered three pillars for adequate preparation for life after high school (Jerald, 2006). Following this model, a report from Pathways to College Network indicates that the nation is disproportionately *under*-preparing low-income and minority students:
  - While 65% of high-income and nearly half of middle-income students are participating in a college preparatory curriculum, only 28% of low-income students are enrolled in a similar program (Pathways to College Network, 2004).
  - Rigorous academics are considered key to college and workplace success, yet African-American students are also half as likely to be enrolled in "gifted" programs and three times as likely to be enrolled in Special Education as their white classmates (Pathways to College Network, 2004).
- African-American students make up 17% of the public high school population, yet represent 4% of AP exam test takers. Similarly, Latino students comprise 16% of the high school population but only 10% of AP examinations (Barton, 2003).
- Exposure to work experiences in high school has been linked to both greater success in the workforce and in postsecondary education: a report from the Center for Labor Market Studies asserts that, "a much higher fraction of the group with no high school work experience were disconnected from both the labor market and the world of post-secondary schooling in the summer of 2003." (McLaughlin, Sum, & Fogg, 2006, p. 23)
  - However, more white teens –sometimes twice as many– held summer jobs in 2006 than non-white teens; further, teens with higher family annual incomes engage more in summer employment opportunities (Sum, McLaughlin, & Khatiwada, 2006).

- A report released in April 2005 by the National Longitudinal Study 2 (NLTS-2) found that “more than three-quarters (77%) of students with disabilities were reported by school staff to have postsecondary education as a primary postschool goal.” (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005, p. 4-4)
- The same study reported that, in general, 19% of students with disabilities have enrolled in a two-year college since high school, with 10% NLTS-2 study participants doing so in 2003; this is comparable to the general population. In comparison, 9% of students with disabilities have attended a four year college after leaving high school, with 6% doing so in 2003. Though this figure is up from previous years, it is still significantly lower than the general student population (28%). (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005).

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