

Senior Secondary School Education: The Backbone to Prepare Students for Academic Success in Higher Education

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Abstract

At this moment total population of India is near about 121.09 million (2011 census report). A large portion of the Indian population is unemployed, 7.93% in urban areas and 7.44 in rural areas (CMIE on 1st March 2023). India is undoubtedly a land of opportunity with millions of aspirants competing for a handful of seats. The number of candidates appearing for different competitive exams is increasing rapidly. To differentiate the deserving applicants from the rest for various esteemed institutions and job positions, an egalitarian method was devised to select deserving candidates, which is now deemed as competitive exams.

With the rapidly changing technological scenario in the context of ever-increasing global connectivity as well as competitiveness in modern times, the role of technical education in economic development has become very significant and challenging. Also, as a consequence of intensive technological developments, the concerns of sustainability, environmental degradation, resource depletion, and inclusive growth have become more relevant. The need for well-qualified engineers/ professionals is more critical with complex problems that affect the quality of life of everyone, everywhere for businesses seeking well-rounded engineers and professionals who face global challenges. Further, the concerns about making the educational curricula and training more conducive to the national needs are becoming a top priority.

Keyword: professional programme, unemployment rate, modern education system, academic success, college admission

Introduction:

Not only is this American dream of equal opportunity for those who work hard in jeopardy, it is eroding very quickly. There is now less social and economic mobility in the U.S. than there was twenty years ago, and we lag behind many other developed nations in providing opportunities for economic advancement, including France, Germany, Denmark, and a whole list of European countries. According to Haycock and her colleagues, the reason for this sorry state of affairs is education – or, more precisely, the lack of education. “In the Information Age, education — particularly higher education — is key to a healthy income. Almost no amount of hard work will make up for the lack of it.” (Haycock, 2006).

Certainly, skilled workers and those in the trades can still earn a comfortable living. But those jobs are also changing rapidly as electronics become more complex, sophisticated computer software and

applications dominate business environments, new building materials require very specialized knowledge for their use, and the sophisticated technology in most automobiles far surpasses that found in the Apollo space missions. Fewer and fewer occupations, and certainly not the highest paying ones, can be mastered “on the job.” Post-secondary education and continuous training have become the new standards for full participation in a global economy.

1. Urban and rural high schools that don’t even offer the courses students need to be admitted to many colleges, much less succeed in them.
2. Rapidly escalating college costs, without the commensurate increases in student aid necessary to help low-income families pay those costs.
3. A Byzantine financial aid system, which is especially hard for first-generation college students to navigate.
4. And many federal and state policies that reflect the view it is more important to use available dollars to support the interests of middle- and upper-class college students and their families, rather than making college affordable for low-income students.

The table below shows how college access is distributed over different income groups, regardless of a student’s achievement level. In essence, the ability to succeed may have less to do with college attendance than the ability to pay.

College Going Rates by Income and Achievement Level:

Achievement Level (Quartile)	Low-Income Students	High-Income Students
First (Low)	35%	78%
Second	51%	85%
Third	64%	91%
Fourth (High)	78%	98%

Source: Data compiled and calculated by author.

Some communities have attempted to mediate these fears by engaging the entire family in the college orientation process, including carefully structured visits to college campuses while accompanied by counselors and familiar school staff. These have been particularly effective when coordinated with local college recruitment and admission personnel who can help reassure both potential students and their families about both the opportunities that abound in college and steps that can be taken to keep students connected with their families and home communities.

Fortunately, very recent changes in federal student aid programs may reverse this trend. However, the thought of trying to accumulate thousands of dollars to cover the cost of college is still daunting, especially for parents who have low-paying jobs or find it difficult to pay their expenses every month.

The bad news is that some of the problems – particularly those dealing with costs and how financial aid is distributed – are well beyond the control of the school. The good news is that the research on college-going can be heartening as well. There is considerable evidence that schools and the adults who work in them may exercise serious influence on whether a student attends college (or some other form of post-secondary education) and if she succeeds when she gets there.

Private and Government School Education:

Private schools offer an option for parents who are dissatisfied with public schools or have other reasons for enrolling their children. Parents can choose from a variety of religiously affiliated and nonsectarian

schools in the private sector, provided they can afford tuition or receive financial help. Not all private schools are highly selective in their admissions process. In 1993, 9% of pupils in grades 3-12 attended private schools.

Parents of public school kids may have some control over their children's schooling. As of 1993, 11% of children in grades 3-12 attended a public school chosen by their parents. Additionally, parents can indirectly select public schools for their children, similar to how they choose where to reside. In 1993, 80% of public school students in grades 3-12 attended an assigned school, but 39% of parents reported that their choice of residence was influenced by their children's school attendance. Just under half (41%) of students in grades 3-12 attended assigned public schools without parental choice.

Higher family income enables public and private school selection. Private schools typically charge tuition, thus only those with sufficient wealth or financial aid can choose them. Thus, 1993 private school enrollment rose with family income. As housing alternatives are influenced by family income, the percentage of parents whose choice of residence was influenced by their children's school attendance also grew.

Public school attendance was higher among children from low-income families (less than \$15,000) compared to those from families with incomes exceeding \$30,000. The study found that children from families earning over \$50,000 were less likely to attend an assigned public school over which they had no option.

Parents of students in grades 3-12 who attended private schools were more satisfied with their children's school overall and specific features, including teachers, academic standards, and discipline, compared to public school parents.

Parents with children attending a chosen public school were more satisfied than those with children at an assigned school in the public sector. Additionally, parents with children attending assigned public schools who chose their domicile for school-related reasons were more satisfied than those who did not. Parents with children attending public schools and those who chose their domicile for school-related reasons were equally satisfied with their children's schools.

Various disparities between public and private schools stem from their student populations. Students may have varying racial/ethnic, language, and personal/family issues that impact their learning abilities.

Teachers and administrators consider these traits while managing schools, planning curricula, and providing support services. Thus, as public and private school students differ, so should their schools. The section on school climate discusses other student characteristics, such as attitudes toward learning and teacher behavior, which are influenced by the school environment and students' backgrounds.

Racially and ethnically diverse schools enhance student and teacher experiences in various ways. However, a diverse school population presents challenges for teachers and administrators, who must be sensitive to cultural differences and relationships between students and teachers. In 1993, 28% of public school pupils in grades 1-12 were black or Hispanic, compared to 17% in private schools. Private schools are evolving, as indicated by the rise in black and Hispanic enrollment between 1985 and 1993. Limited English proficiency pupils require additional resources and teacher training, which are not present in schools without such students. In 1993-94, 5% of public school pupils and 9% in core cities had limited English proficiency, whereas only 1% of private school students did.

Programs that Work:

Some communities have attempted to mediate these fears by engaging the entire family in the college

orientation process, including carefully structured visits to college campuses while accompanied by counselors and familiar school staff. These have been particularly effective when coordinated with local college recruitment and admission personnel who can help reassure both potential students and their families about both the opportunities that abound in college and steps that can be taken to keep students connected with their families and home communities.

Discussion:

The bad news is that some of the problems – particularly those dealing with costs and how financial aid is distributed – are well beyond the control of the school. The good news is that the research on college-going can be heartening as well. There is considerable evidence that schools and the adults who work in them may exercise serious influence on whether a student attends college (or some other form of post-secondary education) and if she succeeds when she gets there.

In one of the most comprehensive and rigorous studies ever undertaken, Tierney and his colleagues (2009) reviewed nearly 30 years of research on factors affecting college attendance. More important, they focused explicitly on the actions that high schools can take to help prepare students for and facilitate college attendance. In addition to the recommendations, they indicate the strength of the evidentiary base for each one – in other words, which recommendations are most thoroughly supported by the research. According to their report, these recommendations have sufficient research support to merit the attention of high school leaders.

Other researchers (Chenoweth and Galliher, 2004; Yan, 2002; Grimard and Maddaus, 2004) have uncovered similar conditions affecting rural students' attendance and ultimate success in college. Among the most pressing of these issues is the culture of rural life itself. Rural students tend to imagine their futures as intimately connected to their community, and, because of limited professional employment opportunities in many rural communities, have a fear that going away to college means going away for good. It is a fear shared by parents as well. In one study (Grimard and Maddaus, 2004) this fear becomes very real and affects students' willingness to participate in a college bound program in their community. "Some students felt the social pressure from family and friends to drop out of the Upward Bound program before completion. During the interviews, some students indicated that the idea of being away for six weeks (even with most weekends back home) was terrifying, especially if the student had never been away from his or her small rural community. Parents echoed similar reasons: being away from family (54.1%) and being too far from home (24.3%) as concerns for their children in applying to the Upward Bound program." (p. 33)

Not only do college graduates earn more money in the course of their careers, they are less susceptible to lay-offs, down-sizing, and other vagaries of the workplace. College graduates also enjoy "softer" benefits as well, including better health, higher levels of "happiness," and more job fulfillment.

More important, college seems to benefit disadvantaged youth the most. A recent study by Jennie Brand and Yu Xie (2010) reported in *Education Week* found "that college graduates whose demographic and academic backgrounds suggested they'd be among the least likely to go to college – including black, Latino and low-income students, and those whose parents did not attend postsecondary education – got the biggest bump in income from their degrees."

Many districts and state agencies promote college attendance with direct mailings to students and parents. One of the best examples is from rural South Dakota, where every 8th grade student receives an attractive and very clear message from the state Board of Regents. It tells students:

1. “You need to go to college,” and supports that claim with earnings and unemployment information based on level of education in South Dakota.
2. “You must take the right courses,” and provides a list of courses to be taken during each year of high school.
3. “You can afford it,” and proves its point by showing the actual cost of college for a South Dakota resident along with sources of financial aid.

Although the brochure is sent to 8th graders, the message is also focused on parents. It helps them begin to understand that their child’s future depends on securing a postsecondary education and that higher education is within reach, as long as their child works hard and plans early for his or her academic success. To fulfill these roles, mentors need to communicate regularly with students. The panel recommends that mentors communicate or meet at least monthly with first year and sophomore students, and at least weekly with juniors and seniors who are engaged in the college application and selection processes. High schools also can schedule social events or recreational activities that bring together mentors and students. An initial mentor training can prepare mentors for their role. Providing examples of activities for mentors and students to complete together can support the mentoring relationship. In addition, high school staff should monitor mentor relationships by checking in with students and mentors to ensure that mentoring relationships are supporting students.

Suggested Approach:

Financial aid officers in local colleges will be knowledgeable about financial aid and can be invited to assist students during a workshop or through one-on-one sessions. High schools also could invite the financial aid officer to train teachers on financial aid and the application process so that they can assist students.

The panel suggests that high schools identify and train staff at the school who are willing to learn about financial aid and to serve as a resource for students. Math teachers or family consumer science teachers may have backgrounds that are useful for understanding the financial aid process. Establishing contacts with financial aid staff at local colleges can make it easier for teachers to stay current with information on college costs. The financial aid staff from local colleges could be useful for training teachers and other staff at the high school on financial aid topics.

Academic Preparation for College:

Studies of successful college students show that their academic preparation in high school is linked clearly to college performance. This includes providing courses required for entry into a two- or four-year college and rigorous academic coursework that prepares students for the demands of college. Table 1 presents examples of college preparatory course requirements recommended by six college-attendance support programs. Although there are slight differences in the requirements, all include four years of English, at least three years of mathematics, two to three years of science and social studies, and one to two years of a foreign.

Because college preparatory course requirements have not changed much in the last decades, these recommendations are generally familiar to most educators, college-educated parents, and students who have been advised to pursue college throughout their K-12 education. These requirements are likely to be much less familiar to first-generation college-bound students or those from impoverished backgrounds where college attendance may be little more than a vague dream.

Conclusion:

There are hundreds of innovative and effective strategies being used by schools across the nation to promote college attendance and student success. The resources that follow provide a goldmine of these strategies and good descriptions of how they are used in real schools. Use them to think comprehensively and systematically about how you will help the kids who need it most create their pathway to college.

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