



Can I Get a Little Advice Here?



How an Overstretched High School Guidance System
Is Undermining Students' College Aspirations

CAN I GET A LITTLE ADVICE HERE?



By Jean Johnson and Jon Rochkind with Amber N. Ott and Samantha DuPont

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INTRODUCTION

- > Deciding whether to go to college, choosing the right school and finding the resources to pay for it—these are pivotal decisions in any young person’s life. Many parents try to help their children make good choices and help them find the financial wherewithal to continue their education. But even well-educated, well-informed parents often find themselves turning to high school guidance counselors for advice on college options, information about loans and scholarships and help with the college application process. For young people whose parents have themselves not had the benefit of higher education, talking with an attentive, well-informed guidance counselor is even more essential.

Unfortunately, recent studies of the guidance system as it operates in public schools today indicate that counselors are often overworked and underprepared when it comes to helping students make the best decisions about their lives after high school. A new survey of young adults aged 22 through 30 conducted by Public Agenda for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation offers disturbing confirmation that, at least in the eyes of students themselves, the system is failing (see http://www.publicagenda.org/theirwholielivesaheadofthem?qt_active=1 for details on the study). Even students who later successfully complete college are surprisingly critical of high school guidance as it operates today.



Most young adults who go on to college believe that the advice of their high school guidance counselors was inadequate and often impersonal and perfunctory. When asked about their experiences with their counselors in high school, about half say that they felt like “just another face in the crowd.”

Most troubling, and potentially significant for policymakers, is that young people who characterized their interactions with guidance counselors as anonymous and unhelpful were less likely to go directly from high school into a postsecondary program—a decision that is known to reduce their chances of successfully completing a degree or certificate. These young people were also less likely to say that they had chosen their college or university based on explicit criteria such as its academic reputation, the availability of financial aid or the likelihood that it would help them get a good job after graduation.

A COUNSELING SYSTEM UNDER STRESS

Responses from the more than 600 young adults surveyed by Public Agenda, all of whom had begun some form of higher education, suggest that the existing high school guidance system is a perilously weak part of the nation’s efforts to increase college attendance and ramp up degree completion. As the survey demonstrates, the judgments young people make about their high school counselors are often harsh, considerably harsher than the judgments they make about their high school teachers or their advisers at the

postsecondary level. But before we discuss the details of the survey, it is useful—and only fair to those who work as high school guidance counselors—to present some context about the challenges facing the counseling system nationwide.

Although professional groups such as the American School Counselor Association say that a student–counselor ratio of 100 to 1 is optimal, this is far from the typical state of affairs in most public schools. In California, the ratio is closer to 1,000 students for every counselor available. In Arizona, Minnesota, Utah and the District of Columbia, the ratio is typically more than 700 to 1. Nationwide, the average is 265 to 1.¹

It is also important to remember that advising students on higher education choices is just one of many things that guidance counselors do. Studies of how counselors spend their time show that much of their effort is devoted to discipline issues and sorting out scheduling and other administrative mix-ups within the high school. In some districts, counselors supervise standardized testing programs.² They also sometimes fill in as substitute teachers or assist with other staffing shortages.³

Dramatically increasing the number of counselors and giving them more time to confer with students would seem to be imperative, but according to some recent analyses of the profession, doing so may not be enough. Many degree programs for guidance counselors do not offer coursework on helping students make the best postsecondary choices or on aiding them and their

¹ Clinedinst, M., & Hawkins, D. “State of College Admission,” Alexandria, VA: National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2009.

² McDonough, P. “Counseling and College Counseling in America’s High Schools,” National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2005.

³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. “The Condition of Education,” Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004.

families to navigate the complicated world of financial aid and college loans.⁴ Although teachers—and principals and superintendents—are required to stay abreast of new trends and information in their fields, most states and districts do not require professional development for guidance counselors.⁵

Today's high school counselors operate in an educational and economic landscape that has changed immensely and continues to do so. A few decades ago, a high school diploma was an adequate gateway to a good job in manufacturing or in respected fields like firefighting and police work. Only a subset of academically oriented students went on to college. Today, however, most good jobs require a college degree or certification of some kind, and the vast majority of families want their children to continue their education beyond high school.⁶

What's more, the higher education system now offers a potentially bewildering array of choices of schools and programs. A student completing high school in New York City who wants to go to college within 25 miles of home has over 200 institutions to choose from—two- and four-year schools, public and private schools, and

institutions ranging from Columbia and City University of New York to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and the Swedish Institute, A College of Health Sciences.⁷ But even students in smaller cities have available to them an array of higher education options. Students from Jackson, Mississippi, Falmouth, Maine, or Albuquerque, New Mexico, all have more than a dozen institutions of higher education to choose from in their local areas. And none of this is to mention the more than 3,000 possibilities nationwide.⁸ The recent increase of for-profit colleges, which began in the 1990s, adds to the prospective student's mix of choices.⁹

Just as postsecondary education is more necessary than it was in the past, so too is it likely to be more costly.¹⁰ The college and university system, especially its financial side, can seem opaque and convoluted to many students and their parents, especially those from lower-income and less well-educated backgrounds. And unfortunately, it is at this moment when many people need more help plotting a course through this world that the professionals charged with assisting them feel most besieged and overwhelmed. It's hardly surprising that they are often not able to keep up with the demands and expectations placed upon them.

⁴ McDonough, P. "Counseling Matters: Knowledge, Assistance, and Organizational Commitment in College Preparation," 2004.

⁵ Clinedinst, M., & Hawkins, D. "State of College Admission," Alexandria, VA: National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2009.

⁶ More than 6 in 10 parents say that a college education is necessary to succeed, and similar numbers say it is very likely that their child will attend college (another quarter say it is somewhat likely). Public Agenda, "Squeeze Play: How Parents and The Public Look at Higher Education Today," New York: Author, 2007.

⁷ <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?s=NY&zc=10016&zd=25&of=3&pg=2>.

⁸ <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>.

⁹ Public Agenda, "Squeeze Play: How Parents and The Public Look at Higher Education Today." New York: Author, 2007.

¹⁰ The College Board. "Trends in College Pricing 2009." Retrieved from: http://www.trends-collegeboard.com/college_pricing/pdf/2009_Trends_College_Pricing.pdf.



Finding One: Most students, even those who successfully complete college, give their high school guidance counselors fair or poor ratings

Television's *The Simpsons* seems to have found a niche depicting the frustrating and degrading situations many of us experience in contemporary life. In one episode, Homer Simpson recalls a lackluster meeting with a guidance counselor who describes his job as advising any student whose name begins with a letter from "N" to "Z."

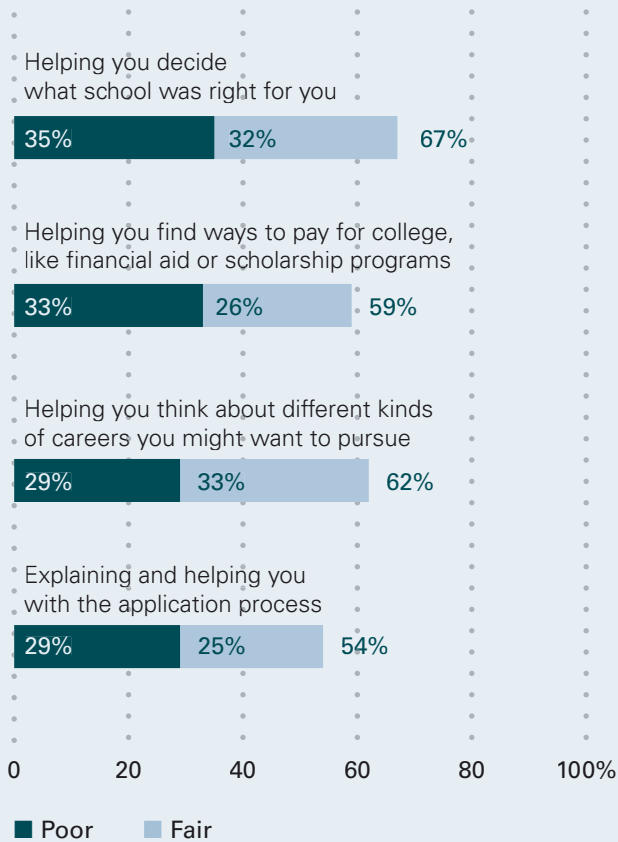
Sad to say, Homer's less-than-inspiring conversation with his counselor doesn't appear to be unusual in today's high schools. Many of the young adults surveyed by Public Agenda have little good to say about the counseling system, and they give their guidance counselors stunningly poor reviews in some crucial categories connected with higher education.

The guidance system does at least function at a basic level. When asked about their experiences with guidance counselors in high school, just 2 percent of those surveyed told us that they didn't have a guidance counselor in high school or never met with one to discuss their plans. But "having the meeting" clearly doesn't mean that the counselors fulfilled the students' needs and expectations.

Among young adults who graduated from high school and started some form of postsecondary education, fully 6 in 10 give their high school guidance counselors "fair" or "poor" ratings for helping them think about different careers. Over two-thirds give them "fair" or "poor" ratings for helping them decide which school to go to, with 35 percent giving them the lowest possible rating of "poor." The ratings are similarly dreary on giving them advice about ways to pay for college or helping them

Most young adults give high school guidance counselors fair or poor ratings for their college advice

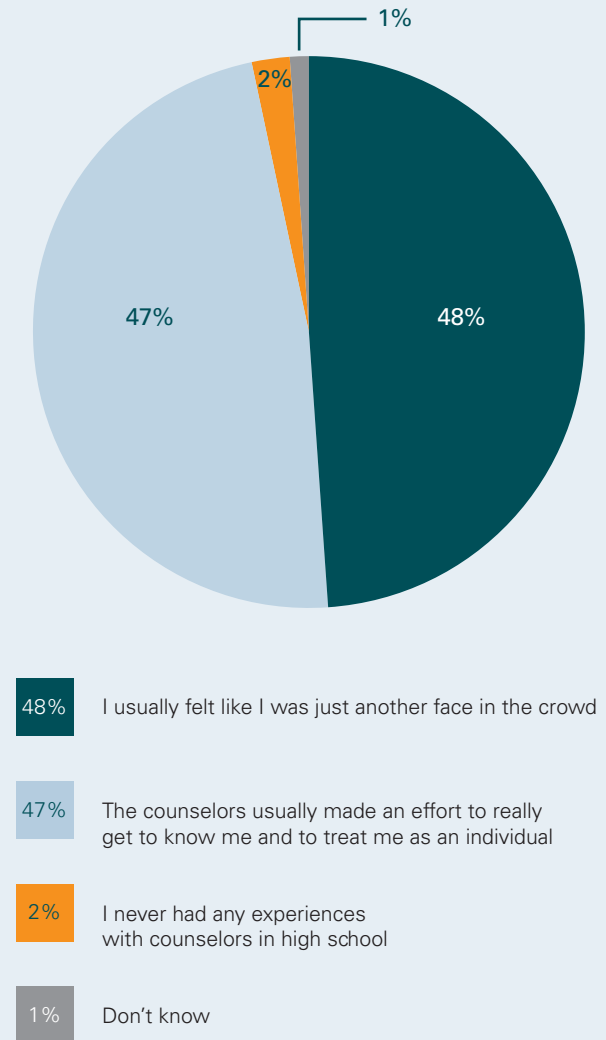
How would you rate your high school guidance counselors in the following areas? Would you say they were excellent, good, fair or poor?



Base: Asked of young adults aged 22–30 who had some postsecondary education.

Nearly half felt their counselors saw them as a face in the crowd

Which of these comes closer to describing your own experiences with the counselors in your high school?



Base: Asked of young adults aged 22–30 who had some postsecondary education.

weave their way through the college application process. Nearly half (48 percent) say they usually felt like “just another face in the crowd” in dealing with their guidance counselor; 47 percent say that their counselors tried to get to know them and work with them personally.

In focus groups conducted as part of the project, young people often characterized their meetings with counselors as dispiriting and unhelpful, especially if the student happened to be one who didn’t stand out as “college material.” One young New Yorker suspected that his guidance counselors prioritized their time based on which students seemed most likely to go to college: “[My guidance counselors] didn’t care [about me]. You could see other kids getting called in and being [asked], ‘What are you going to do [after high school]?’ Those kids would come [for college day] with suits and ties and their parents would come with them. Then there was everybody else.”

Another young woman told this story: “We had to take a test [that] asked [about] all these scenarios and how you would react or what your preference was on a certain topic. It was terrible because it told me I should be a bus driver. They looked at that when you sat with your guidance counselor.” Another student, also from New York, shared his experience with his high school guidance counselors: “[It was] a mandatory meeting. ... [T]hey’d look at your grades and then say, ‘Oh, you can get into these schools.’ ”

Finding Two: Students who get perfunctory counseling are more likely to delay college and make more questionable higher education choices

Most parents today want their children to go to college, but students from college-educated families start with some undeniable educational advantages, among them that their parents typically have experience planning for college. Well-educated, affluent families often invest considerable energy in helping their children look at different colleges and universities and accumulating the needed financial resources. For some, college planning is a major parental enterprise that can begin from the moment a child is born. And it pays off: In our survey, students whose parents had a four-year degree were much more likely to themselves be successful in a four-year college or university.

But nationwide, nearly 6 in 10 public school students are from families where neither parent has completed college.¹¹ Analysis from this survey shows that among other things, parental income and education level are strongly correlated with student success in completing a college degree. Among students who complete a two- or four-year degree or certificate, about half say that when they were living at home, their family had money left over at the end of the month, and nearly 7 in 10 say their parents had at least some college education. Among those who fail to finish college, 56 percent come from families that just barely made ends meet or had trouble getting by; 4 in 10 (41 percent) have parents whose highest degree is a high school diploma or less.

¹¹ Herrold, K., and O’Donnell, K. Parent and Family Involvement in Education, 2006–07 School Year, From the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007 (NCES 2008-050). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC, 2008.

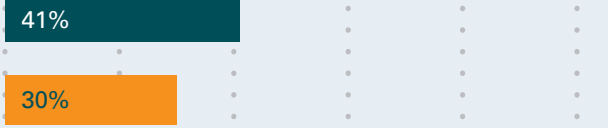
Young adults who fail to complete college are more likely to come from families with lower incomes and levels of education

Percent who say that:

Their parents generally did not have money left over after paying monthly expenses or had trouble getting by



Their parents' highest degree is a high school diploma or less



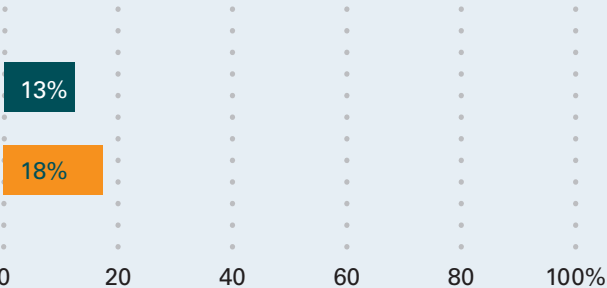
0 20 40 60 80 100%

- Students who failed to complete college
- Students who completed a degree

Base: Asked of young adults aged 22–30 who had some postsecondary education.

Nearly 1 in 5 young adults who believe they were badly counseled delay going to college

Percent of students who waited a year or more after high school before enrolling in college:



- The counselors usually made an effort to really get to know me and to treat me as an individual
- I usually felt like I was just another face in the crowd

Base: Asked of young adults aged 22–30 who had some postsecondary education.



A NEED FOR PRACTICAL ADVICE

For young people from less well-educated, lower-income families, the ability to know and talk to adults who are familiar with the higher education system can be essential. Public Agenda research has shown repeatedly that the vast majority of lower-income and less well-educated parents have high educational aspirations for their children.¹² Even so, these families may not have enough in-depth practical knowledge about how the system works to give their children the best advice.¹³ In such cases, access to an attentive and knowledgeable guidance counselor can be decisive.

So what happens to students who don't have constructive and helpful counseling experiences? As part of the research analysis, we compared the responses of young people who said that their counselors seemed to see them as just another face in the crowd with the responses of young people who said that their counselors really made an effort to get to know them and help them.

The results are sobering, and some suggest that a lack of good counseling may have a long-lasting effect on students' lives and prospects. Students who are poorly counseled are less likely to go directly from high school into a college program—a step that research shows is highly correlated with dropping out of college.¹⁴

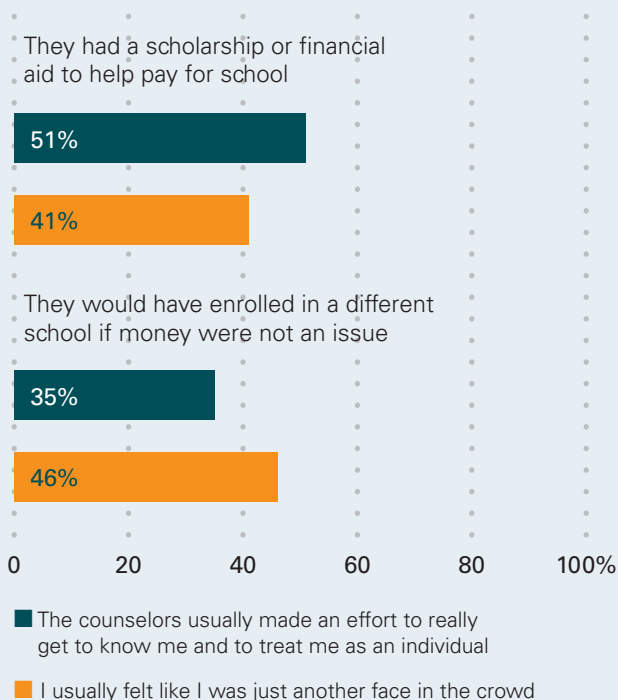
¹² Though parents of all backgrounds are evenly split as to whether a college education is necessary, or whether it's possible to be successful without a college degree, large majorities say that it is likely that their own child will attend college. Public Agenda. "Squeeze Play: How Parents and The Public Look at Higher Education Today, New York: Author, 2007.

¹³ Among all parents, African-Americans and Hispanics of all income levels are more likely than white parents to believe that qualified students—especially members of minority groups—will be unable to get a college education. This anxiety persists even among those minority parents who are financially well-off. Public Agenda, "Squeeze Play: How Parents and The Public Look at Higher Education Today," New York: Author, 2007.

¹⁴ See, for instance: Ahlburg, D., Mccall, B. & Na, I., "Time to Dropout From College: A Hazard Model with Endogenous Waiting," Industrial Relations Center, University of Minnesota, 2002.

Young adults who believe they were badly counseled were less likely to receive financial aid and more likely to be disappointed in their college choice

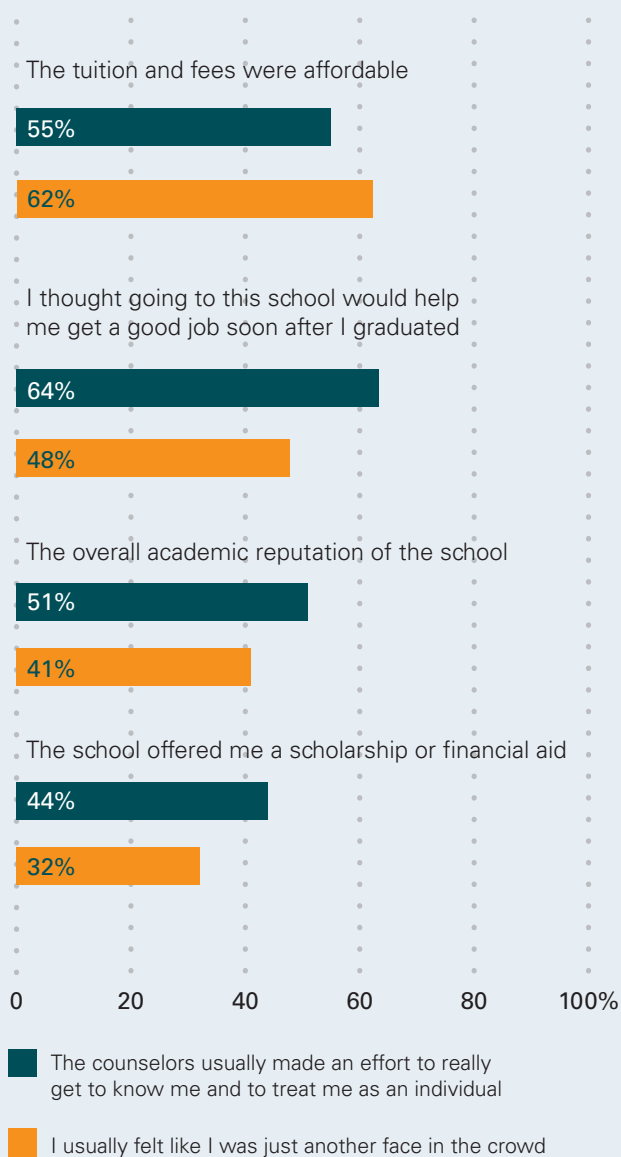
Percent of students who say:



Base: Asked of young adults aged 22–30 who had some postsecondary education.

Young adults who believe they were badly counseled were less likely to choose a college based on academic reputation or financial aid offers

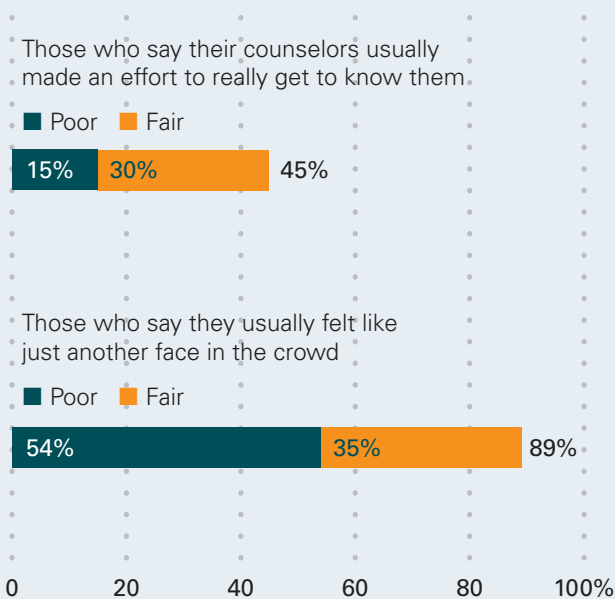
Percent who say the following is a major reason they selected their school:



Base: Asked of young adults aged 22–30 who had some postsecondary education.

Even young adults who say their counselors took an interest in them give their counselors mixed ratings

How would you rate your high school counselors when it comes to helping you decide what school was right for you?



Base: Asked of young adults aged 22–30 who had some postsecondary education.

There is also evidence of a pronounced negative financial effect. Students who believe that they have been poorly counseled are more likely to say they would have attended a different school if money were not an issue, by a 46 percent to 35 percent margin. They are also less likely to say that they received a scholarship or financial aid for college; only about 4 in 10 got this kind of help compared with more than half of those who believe that they received better counseling.

Finally, students who come from families with less education are more likely to rate their guidance as “fair” or “poor” when it came to helping them decide which college was right for them.

BETTER ADVICE WOULD BE WELCOME

When the survey asked young people to rate a dozen different ideas that might help them to successfully complete college and other postsecondary programs, 72 percent said that “the opportunity to talk with advisers who know all about the different college and job-training programs so you can make a good choice” would help “a lot.” Those numbers rise to 91 percent among young African-Americans and 82 percent among young Hispanics. Young people identify a number of reforms and proposals that could help them (see “With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them” for entire list: http://www.publicagenda.org/theirwholivesaheadofthem?qt_active=1), but it is noteworthy that improved advice and counseling in high schools ranks at least as high as ideas like having better access to student loans, providing day care for college students and improving teaching at the college level “so that the classes are more interesting and relevant.”

Finding Three: High school counselors are viewed as less helpful than teachers

The dismal ratings young people give their high school counselors would be disturbing under any circumstances, but the fact that young people typically give their teachers and mentors better ratings in this area is notable. It suggests that, at least as the young people themselves see it, a malfunctioning counseling system is a particularly conspicuous gap.

Based on what high school students and young adults report in this and other research conducted by Public Agenda, educators overall are playing a remarkably positive role in motivating young people to go on to college and continue learning. Solid majorities of young adults from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds report that they had a “teacher who really took an interest in them personally and encouraged them to go to college.”¹⁵ Most say that they had a teacher or coach who “really inspired them and motivated them to do their best.” One young man from St. Louis interviewed for this project specifically mentioned that his teachers were more helpful than his guidance counselors, who “really don’t care about you.” He turned instead to his advanced biology teacher because “some teachers, they care. ... You can just tell.”

Not only have educators done a good job of encouraging young people to adopt college as a goal, but they, along with parents and others, have also convinced most students that knowledge and know-how are valuable assets in today’s world. Most young people say their parents actively encouraged them to attend college.¹⁶ More than 8 in 10 of those surveyed here say that even if they knew there were lots of good jobs for people without degrees, they would “still make the decision to go to school because what you learn there is so important.”¹⁷

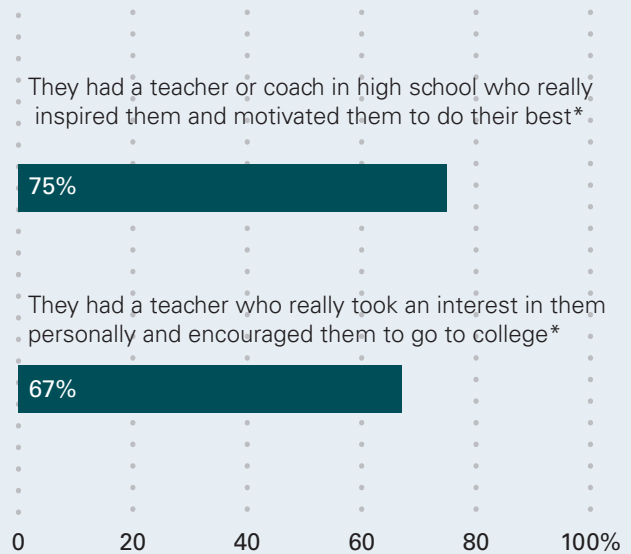
¹⁵ Public Agenda. “Life After High School: Young People Talk about Their Prospects,” New York: Author, 2005.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Public Agenda. “With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them,” New York: Author, 2009.

Young adults got good support from their high school teachers and coaches

Percent of young adults who say that:



* Source: “Life After High School,” Public Agenda, 2005.

Base: Asked of young adults aged 18–25.



Finding Four: Advisers at higher education institutions get better ratings, but there’s room for improvement

The young people surveyed here give somewhat more positive reviews to the advisers and counselors they encounter at the postsecondary level. Six in 10 give their college advisers “good” or “excellent” ratings for helping them decide what classes to take. The numbers are somewhat less positive for helping them understand how to get loans and scholarships; roughly half of the respondents give their counselors “good” or “excellent” ratings in this area, while 4 in 10 rate them “fair” or “poor.”

Colleges and universities also perform reasonably well. Eighty percent of the young adults give their schools “good” or “excellent” ratings for offering interesting courses, and 75 percent give the schools “good” or “excellent” ratings for their remedial programs. One result that should prompt some further research is that young people who do not believe they were well counseled in high school are considerably less likely to give their college good reviews on remedial courses. Whereas 59 percent of the well-counseled students rated their college-level remedial programs as “excellent,” just 1 in 5 of the poorly counseled students say the same. It is not clear from this study whether these poor reviews stem from a mismatch between the student and the school—something that might be mitigated by better counseling—or whether these students have more severe academic shortfalls, something that counselors have limited powers to address.

WHY TACKLE THIS PROBLEM NOW

President Barack Obama is one of many leaders in government, business, education and the nonprofit sector who has stressed the need for the United States to increase the number of Americans with college degrees and certificates and has urged a concerted effort to help students who start college successfully complete their degrees. This mission is especially urgent at the nation's community colleges, where only 1 out of 5 students has earned a degree three years after starting classes.

If the United States is to meet its higher education goals and reduce its unacceptably high college dropout rates, we need to look candidly at the various factors contributing to the problem. Clearly, academic preparation in high school is a factor, as are the financial issues that arise when college tuition costs outpace the growth in family incomes. Since 2000, tuition prices have gone up even as family incomes have stagnated or declined. Indeed, according to an analysis by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, “the financial burden of paying for college costs has increased substantially, particularly for low- and middle-income families, even when scholarships and grants are taken into account.”¹⁸

THE NEWS MAY BE HARD TO HEAR

But based on the responses here, the high school guidance system is another factor that educators and policymakers need to look at. When it comes to facilitating students' transition from high school to college or work, the current system is seriously underserving those it is intended to help. For the profession itself, the intense criticism young adults have for their guidance counselors may be hard to absorb, especially given the absurdly high student–counselor ratios in many public schools and the nerve-racking juggling act that counselors often have to perform.

But sugarcoating the reality that emerges here, or trying to hide it, does not serve the counseling field in the long run. Our hope is that this research, based on what young people themselves say about their high school experiences, will open up a broad, forthright reexamination of the high school guidance counseling system. We hope it will spur changes that will make the counselor's role more effective and more professionally fulfilling.

IS IT TIME FOR A LITTLE HELP FROM SOME FRIENDS?

We also hope the findings here will generate innovative thinking about ways other institutions and other entities could lend a hand. Perhaps higher education, business and local civic and community groups could provide trained volunteers who could help high school graduates better understand the higher education choices open to them. Maybe it's time for a higher education “eHarmony.com”—some type of online resource that introduces students to the best potential college matches for them, given their distinct skills and aspirations. Maybe social networking that brings aspiring high school students together with students and professors could play a useful role.

In the end, however, it seems obvious to us that young people who are completing high school and aspiring to go to college deserve better advice. At the very least, they deserve the opportunity to talk seriously with adults—counselors, teachers, family members and others—who take a strong personal interest in their futures and have the time and skill to guide them through this period of decision and change.

¹⁸ The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. “Measuring Up 2008: The National Report Card on Higher Education.” Retrieved from: <http://measuringup2008.highereducation.org/print/NCPPEMUNationalRpt.pdf>, 2008.



ABOUT THE STUDY

- > “Can I Get a Little Advice Here?”; the second in a series of reports based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of 614 22-to-30-year-olds with at least some postsecondary education. Interviews were conducted from May 7 to June 24, 2009, using both landline and cellular telephones, and respondents had the choice of completing the interview in English or Spanish. The margin of error for the report is plus or minus 4.8 percentage points. However, it is higher when comparing subgroups or question items that weren’t asked of all respondents. The survey was preceded by five focus groups conducted in sites across the country.

For more information about the study’s methodology, visit <http://www.publicagenda.org/theirwholelivesaheadofthem/methodology>.

For other reports in the series, visit http://www.publicagenda.org/theirwholelivesaheadofthem?qt_active=1.



COUNSELING

Results of less than 0.5 percent are signified by an asterisk. Results of zero are signified by a dash. Responses may not always total 100 percent owing to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between numbers in these survey results and numbers in the report.

Total
n=614
%

S1. Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going for you and your family today?	
Satisfied	80%
Dissatisfied	19%
Don't know/Refused	*
[Note: There is no Q1-7.]	
Q8. What are you studying now, or what did you study previously?	
Business administration/Accounting/Marketing	18%
Education/Early childhood education/Child care	8%
Liberal arts	5%
Art/Fine arts/Performing arts	5%
Nursing	6%
Health care	7%
Computer science/Information technology	5%
General studies	4%
Science	4%
Psychology	3%
Criminal justice/Criminology	2%
Engineering	3%
Social sciences (anthropology, geography, history, political science and sociology)	3%
Religious studies	1%
Cosmetology	1%
Culinary arts	1%
Environmental studies	1%
Communication	4%
Counseling	0%
Economics/Finance	3%
Law	2%
Social work	2%
Agriculture	1%
Skilled trades	0%
Other	8%
Don't know	3%

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total
	n=614 %
Q9. Being as realistic as you can, which do you think is more likely to happen in the next 10 years?	
I will be on track toward a successful career	88%
I am not sure if I will be closer to a successful career	10%
Don't know	2%
Q10. I am going to read you a list of statements that describe what some people say about going to college. Please tell me if you agree or disagree with each statement.	
In the long run, you will make more money if you have a college degree	
Strongly agree	64%
Somewhat agree	22%
Somewhat disagree	8%
Strongly disagree	4%
Don't know	2%
College is not for everyone—some people just don't like school	
Strongly agree	50%
Somewhat agree	39%
Somewhat disagree	6%
Strongly disagree	5%
Don't know	*
I know many people who make a good living who do not have a college degree	
Strongly agree	41%
Somewhat agree	37%
Somewhat disagree	14%
Strongly disagree	7%
Don't know	1%
[Note: There is no Q11.]	
Q12. Please tell me which comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.	
In this economic climate, it is really essential to have a college degree	54%
Because of the economic climate, everyone is having a hard time getting a job, so having a college degree doesn't really help that much	45%
Don't know	1%

	Total
	n=614 %
Q13. Please tell me which comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.	
If there were plenty of good jobs available without an advanced degree, I probably would not have gone to school after high school	14%
I would still make the decision to go to school because what you learn there is so important	86%
Don't know	1%
[Note: There is no Q14.]	
Q15. Do you think that currently, the vast majority of people who are qualified to go to college have the opportunity to do so, or do you think there are many people who are qualified to go but don't have the opportunity to do so?	
Have the opportunity to go	34%
Do not have the opportunity to go	62%
Don't know	3%
Q16. In your circle of friends, do you think most people are really impressed by someone who graduates from college, is it something they look down at, or is it just something routine and expected?	
Most people are really impressed	33%
Something they look down at	3%
Just something routine and expected	62%
Don't know	2%
Q17. Which of the following applies to you? For my career goals...	
My degree is all I need	29%
I need another degree besides the one I have	61%
I don't even need my degree	9%
Don't know	1%
Q18. Here are some statements that may or may not describe your own reasons for continuing your education after high school. Please tell me how close each comes to describing you.	
I went there because I really enjoy being in school	
Very close	32%
Somewhat close	36%
Not too close	11%
Not close at all	21%
Don't know	—

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total
	n=614 %
I went there because my parents always instilled in me the importance of higher education	
Very close	51%
Somewhat close	26%
Not too close	9%
Not close at all	14%
Don't know	—
I went there because I really didn't know what I wanted to do after high school	
Very close	22%
Somewhat close	23%
Not too close	14%
Not close at all	41%
Don't know	*
I went there because the career I want specifically requires it	
Very close	50%
Somewhat close	22%
Not too close	10%
Not close at all	18%
Don't know	*
I went there because most of my friends were going	
Very close	9%
Somewhat close	13%
Not too close	17%
Not close at all	60%
Don't know	*
I wanted to learn more about the world, and college is the place to do it	
Very close	31%
Somewhat close	35%
Not too close	13%
Not close at all	21%
Don't know	*

	Total
	n=614 %
Q19. If you attended more than one school, please think about the first one you attended. To start, which type of school was that? Was it a...? [Base: Those who attended more than one type of school after high school.]	
Trade or vocational school or program	9%
Two year or community college (associate's degree)	53%
Four-year college (Bachelor of Arts or Science degree)	38%
Don't know	*
Q20. Was this a public or a private school?	
Public	79%
Private	20%
Don't know	1%
[Note: There is no Q21.]	
Q22. Which comes closer to your view: [Base: Those who waited a year or more to begin school.]	
It would have been easier for me overall to have started classes immediately after high school	50%
Waiting before starting classes was the right choice I would not have been ready for it	49%
Don't know	1%
[Note: There is no Q23.]	
Q24. There are many reasons you might have picked the school you picked. Still thinking about the first school you went to after high school, please tell me if each of the following is a reason why you selected this school.	
The overall academic reputation of the school	
Major reason	46%
Minor reason	27%
Not a reason at all	27%
Don't know	*
Recommendations from friends or family members	
Major reason	26%
Minor reason	32%
Not a reason at all	42%
Don't know	*
It was conveniently located to where I lived or worked	
Major reason	53%
Minor reason	20%
Not a reason at all	27%
Don't know	—

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

		Total
		n=614 %
The tuition and fees were affordable		
Major reason		57%
Minor reason		23%
Not a reason at all		19%
Don't know		—
I could specialize or major in the exact subject I was interested in		
Major reason		54%
Minor reason		22%
Not a reason at all		23%
Don't know		*
It had a class schedule that worked with my schedule		
Major reason		44%
Minor reason		23%
Not a reason at all		33%
Don't know		*
I wanted to live away from home		
Major reason		19%
Minor reason		27%
Not a reason at all		54%
Don't know		—
I was sure that I wouldn't have any problems getting admitted		
Major reason		41%
Minor reason		30%
Not a reason at all		29%
Don't know		—
The school offered me a scholarship or financial aid		
Major reason		38%
Minor reason		18%
Not a reason at all		44%
Don't know		—

	Total
	n=614 %
The school had a sports program or other non-academic program that was important to me	
Major reason	15%
Minor reason	17%
Not a reason at all	68%
Don't know	*
I thought going to this school would help me get a good job soon after I graduated	
Major reason	56%
Minor reason	25%
Not a reason at all	20%
Don't know	—
Q23R. In your own words, what would you say is the main reason you chose this school? [Recorded verbatim response]	
Convenient/close to home/work	25%
Offered the major/program I want	14%
Good/quality education/teachers/reputation	10%
Liked it/felt right for me/atmosphere	10%
Location	9%
Affordable	8%
Family members/friends attend(ed)/family connection/parents' choice	5%
To better myself/my job opportunities	5%
Have a scholarship/"free ride"	4%
Where I was accepted/only option	4%
Other	3%
As a stepping-stone to a four-year/another college	2%
Good sports program/to play a sport	2%
Q25. Still thinking about that first year in school, please tell me if this describes you a lot, a little or not at all.	
I was overwhelmed by the amount of studying I had to do	
A lot	14%
A little	34%
Not at all	52%
Don't know	—

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total
	n=614 %
I had a hard time writing college papers	
A lot	11%
A little	24%
Not at all	64%
Don't know	—
I found it hard to live away from home	
A lot	6%
A little	15%
Not at all	79%
Don't know	*
I had to work as well, and it was too stressful trying to do both	
A lot	29%
A little	28%
Not at all	43%
Don't know	—
I spent too much time socializing and not enough time studying	
A lot	18%
A little	30%
Not at all	52%
Don't know	*
I found it hard to pay attention in class	
A lot	12%
A little	27%
Not at all	61%
Don't know	—
I was not used to having so much freedom	
A lot	15%
A little	28%
Not at all	57%
Don't know	—

	Total
	n=614 %
The cost of textbooks and other fees besides tuition affected me financially	
A lot	28%
A little	31%
Not at all	41%
Don't know	—
Q26. Still thinking about your first year in school, did you take any remedial courses or not?	
Yes	16%
No	83%
Didn't go to college/was in a vocational/technical school or program (VOL)	*
Don't know	1%
Q27. Thinking overall about the first school you went to after high school, how would you rate each of the following:	
The advisers in helping you decide what classes to take	
Excellent	25%
Good	34%
Fair	26%
Poor	13%
Don't know	1%
The school in offering courses that were interesting to you	
Excellent	35%
Good	45%
Fair	18%
Poor	2%
Don't know	*
The financial aid advisers in helping you understand how to get loans and scholarships	
Excellent	19%
Good	31%
Fair	25%
Poor	15%
Don't know	7%

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total
	n=614 %
The remedial classes in preparing you for future college work [Base: Those who have taken any remedial courses.]	
Excellent	40%
Good	35%
Fair	17%
Poor	8%
Don't know	—
Q28. If money was not an issue, would you have enrolled in the same school you did, or would you have enrolled in a different school?	
Same school	57%
Different school	41%
Don't know	2%
[Note: There is no Q29 or Q30.]	
Q31. Did you have any of the following to help pay for school after high school?	
A scholarship or financial aid	
Yes	45%
No	54%
Don't know	*
Loans of some sort	
Yes	45%
No	55%
Don't know	—
Parents or other relatives	
Yes	55%
No	45%
Don't know	—
Q32. Did your parents or other relatives pay for all of your tuition, some of it, only a little, or did they pay for some other costs of school but not for tuition? [Base: Those whose parents or other relatives helped pay for school.]	
All	35%
Some tuition	35%
Only a little	14%
Some other costs of school but not for tuition	15%
Don't know	1%

	Total
	n=614 %
Q32B. Are you responsible for paying off your loans, or are your parents the ones who will pay them off? [Base: Those who had loans to help pay for school.]	
I am paying off the loans	86%
My parents are paying them off	7%
Both/neither (VOL)	6%
Q33. Thinking about any loans you took out for school, would you say... [Base: Those who had loans to help pay for school, who have completed their program and are personally responsible for paying back loans.]	
You have a long way to go before your loans are paid off	33%
You think they will be paid off in the next few years	45%
They are already paid off	20%
They will never be paid off (VOL)	1%
Don't know	*
Q34. Thinking over your high school years, would you say that you worked hard to learn as much as you should have, or do you think you could have paid a lot more attention and worked harder?	
Worked hard to learn	34%
Could have paid a lot more attention and worked harder	64%
Don't know	1%
Q35. When you were in high school, did you always know you were going to continue on to higher education?	
Yes, I always knew was going to continue on to higher education	77%
No	23%
Don't know	*
[Note: There is no Q36.]	
Q37. Which of these two statements do you think is most accurate about your experience?	
My teachers and counselors in high school probably thought I would go to college right after high school	78%
My teachers and counselors probably thought I was not going to college after high school	21%
Don't know	1%
Q38. How would you describe your friends in high school? Would you say that nearly all of them studied hard in school, most of them studied hard or only a few of your friends studied hard in school?	
Nearly all of them studied hard	16%
Most of them studied hard	46%
Only a few of them studied hard	37%
None studied hard (VOL)	1%
Don't know	1%

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total
	n=614 %
Q39. For each description that I read, please tell me if you think it applied to you in high school or not.	
A very good student	
Definitely applied to me	46%
Somewhat applied to me	44%
Did not apply to me	10%
Don't know	—
A bit of a teacher's pet	
Definitely applied to me	12%
Somewhat applied to me	31%
Did not apply to me	56%
Don't know	1%
A good athlete	
Definitely applied to me	30%
Somewhat applied to me	33%
Did not apply to me	37%
Don't know	—
Someone who liked to have a good time	
Definitely applied to me	48%
Somewhat applied to me	42%
Did not apply to me	10%
Don't know	—
A bit of a daydreamer	
Definitely applied to me	22%
Somewhat applied to me	38%
Did not apply to me	40%
Don't know	—
Someone who did not like sitting in class	
Definitely applied to me	23%
Somewhat applied to me	32%
Did not apply to me	45%
Don't know	*

	Total
	n=614 %
A bit of a troublemaker	
Definitely applied to me	11%
Somewhat applied to me	18%
Did not apply to me	71%
Don't know	—
Q40. Which of these comes closer to describing your own experiences with the counselors in your high school?	
The counselors usually made an effort to really get to know me and to treat me as an individual	47%
I usually felt I was just another face in the crowd	48%
I never had any experiences with counselors in high school (VOL)	2%
Don't know	1%
Q41. How would you rate your high school counselors in the following areas? [Base: Those who had experiences with counselors.]	
Helping you think about different kinds of careers you might want to pursue	
Excellent	14%
Good	22%
Fair	33%
Poor	29%
Don't know	2%
Helping you decide what school was right for you	
Excellent	13%
Good	17%
Fair	32%
Poor	35%
Don't know	2%
Explaining and helping you with the application process	
Excellent	18%
Good	25%
Fair	25%
Poor	29%
Don't know	2%

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total
	n=614 %
Helping you find ways to pay for college, like financial aid or scholarship programs	
Excellent	15%
Good	22%
Fair	26%
Poor	33%
Don't know	4%
Q42. Now I am going to read some statements that may or may not describe your high school teachers as well as the teachers you had after high school. For each of the following, please tell me if it applies more to your high school teachers, more to teachers you had after high school or whether they were about the same.	
I could talk to them easily when I had a question about what was being taught	
High school teachers	26%
Teachers you have had after high school	20%
About the same	53%
Don't know	1%
I felt I could go to them if I had a personal problem that was affecting my schoolwork	
High school teachers	34%
Teachers you had after high school	20%
About the same	40%
Don't know	3%
They really had a skill in making the subject matter come alive	
High school teachers	18%
Teachers you had after high school	37%
About the same	43%
Don't know	1%
They helped me understand why what we were learning in class was relevant to me	
High school teachers	16%
Teachers you had after high school	42%
About the same	41%
Don't know	1%

		Total
		n=614 %
Q43. Thinking about the last school you attended, for each of the following, please tell me if it is a reason why you did not complete your program. [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program.]		
I just couldn't afford the tuition and fees		
Major reason		31%
Minor reason		21%
Not a reason		46%
Don't know		2%
I thought many of the classes were boring		
Major reason		14%
Minor reason		31%
Not a reason		52%
Don't know		2%
I needed a break from school		
Major reason		21%
Minor reason		33%
Not a reason		44%
Don't know		2%
All things considered, it just didn't seem to be worth the money I was paying		
Major reason		14%
Minor reason		21%
Not a reason		62%
Don't know		2%
I had to take too many classes that I did not think were useful		
Major reason		16%
Minor reason		27%
Not a reason		55%
Don't know		2%
Some of the classes were too difficult		
Major reason		10%
Minor reason		24%
Not a reason		63%
Don't know		2%

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

		Total
		n=614 %
I didn't like sitting in class		
Major reason		11%
Minor reason		27%
Not a reason		60%
Don't know		2%
I needed to go to work and make money		
Major reason		54%
Minor reason		17%
Not a reason		28%
Don't know		2%
I didn't have enough time for my family		
Major reason		16%
Minor reason		25%
Not a reason		57%
Don't know		3%
[Note: There is no Q44.]		
Q45. How much thought have you given to going back to school—a lot of thought, some thought or no thought at all? [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program.]		
A lot of thought		65%
Some thought		24%
No thought at all		9%
Don't know		2%
Q46. Would you say you have seriously looked into a specific school, have not yet looked but plan on doing so soon or are not going to look into a particular school or program anytime soon? [Base: Those who have thought about going back to school.]		
Seriously looked at some specific schools		38%
Have not yet looked but plan on doing so soon		37%
Not going to look into a particular school or program anytime soon		23%
Already chosen/accepted into a school (VOL)		1%
Don't know		1%

	Total
	n=614 %
<p>Q47. Suppose that you didn't have to pay tuition because you got a grant that covered the tuition and books. Would it be hard for you to go back to school or would it be pretty easy to do if that's what you really wanted? [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program.]</p>	
Hard to go back	36%
Pretty easy to do	57%
Don't know	5%
<p>Q48. For each of the following, is this a reason why it would still be hard for you to go back to school? [Base: Those who say it would be hard go back to school.]</p>	
I still would not be able to afford college	
Major reason	26%
Minor reason	29%
Not a reason at all	43%
Don't know	2%
I have family commitments	
Major reason	56%
Minor reason	19%
Not a reason at all	26%
Don't know	2%
I really need to work full-time, and I don't think I could work and go to school at the same time	
Major reason	56%
Minor reason	19%
Not a reason at all	23%
Don't know	2%
I don't think any college would accept me	
Major reason	7%
Minor reason	15%
Not a reason at all	75%
Don't know	2%
No school near me has classes that fit my schedule	
Major reason	17%
Minor reason	31%
Not a reason at all	48%
Don't know	3%

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

		Total
		n=614 %
No school near me seems to have a program that I am really interested in		
Major reason		14%
Minor reason		18%
Not a reason at all		67%
Don't know		2%
[Note: There is no Q49.]		
Q50. Would you say that you ended up choosing your current job more by chance, or was it something you had been hoping to do for quite some time? [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program and are current employees.]		
Chose current job more by chance		61%
Hoping to do for quite some time		37%
Don't know		1%
[Note: There is no Q51.]		
Q52. Would you say that in your current job situation there's plenty of room for you to grow and move up, or there's room to move up but only if you get more education, or there's not much room to move up? [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program who are currently employed.]		
There's plenty of room for you to grow and move up		50%
There's room to move up but only if you get more education		23%
There's not much room to move up		28%
Q53. For each of the following, please tell me how much you think this would help someone whose circumstances are similar to yours after high school in getting a college degree.		
Have the government offer more college loans		
A lot		71%
A little		22%
Not much		3%
Not at all		3%
Don't know		1%
The opportunity to talk with advisers who know all about the different college and job-training programs so you can make a good choice		
A lot		72%
A little		23%
Not much		1%
Not at all		2%
Don't know		1%

	Total
	n=614 %
Cut the cost of attending college by 25 percent	
A lot	82%
A little	13%
Not much	1%
Not at all	2%
Don't know	1%
Allow part-time students to qualify for financial aid	
A lot	76%
A little	19%
Not much	1%
Not at all	3%
Don't know	1%
Make the college application process easier	
A lot	46%
A little	34%
Not much	8%
Not at all	11%
Don't know	1%
Put more classes online	
A lot	53%
A little	29%
Not much	8%
Not at all	8%
Don't know	2%
Provide health insurance to all students, even those taking classes part time	
A lot	61%
A little	25%
Not much	5%
Not at all	7%
Don't know	1%

FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total
	n=614 %
Provide day care for students who need it	
A lot	66%
A little	23%
Not much	2%
Not at all	6%
Don't know	2%
Make sure students learn good study habits in high school so they're prepared for college work	
A lot	77%
A little	18%
Not much	1%
Not at all	3%
Don't know	1%
Offer more courses in the evenings, on weekends or in the summer so people can work while attending school	
A lot	74%
A little	21%
Not much	2%
Not at all	2%
Don't know	1%
Improve teaching so the classes are more interesting and relevant	
A lot	67%
A little	24%
Not much	4%
Not at all	4%
Don't know	1%
Have more programs for students who are interested in hands-on learning, apprenticeships and nonclassroom work	
A lot	71%
A little	23%
Not much	2%
Not at all	2%
Don't know	1%

	Total
	n=614 %
Q54. And out of the different options you say would have helped someone like you 'a lot,' which one option do you think would help THE MOST? [Base: Those who said more than one option in Q53 would help "a lot".]	
More government loans for college	9%
The opportunity to talk with advisers who know all about the different college and job-training programs so you can make a good choice	8%
Cut the cost of attending college by 25 percent	35%
Allow part-time students to qualify for financial aid	6%
Make the college application process easier	*
Put more classes online	4%
Provide health insurance to all students, even those taking classes part-time	4%
Provide day care for students that need it	6%
Make sure students learn good study habits in high school so they're prepared for college work	9%
Offer more courses in the evenings, on weekends or in the summer so people can work while attending school	7%
Improve teaching so the classes are more interesting and relevant	4%
Have more programs for students who are interested in hands-on learning, apprenticeships and nonclassroom work	5%
Don't know	1%
D10. How important is it to you that your children, or children in your care, go to college? All in all, would you say it is... [Base: Those who have children in the household.]	
Very important	82%
Somewhat important	16%
Not too important	1%
Not at all important	*
Don't know	1%

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

	Total %
Gender	
Male	47%
Female	53%
Highest Education	
Some college	
Dropout	29%
Technical/vocational school in progress	2%
Two-year community college in progress	6%
Four-year undergraduate in progress	5%
Technical/vocational school	6%
Two-year or community college	7%
Four-year undergraduate college or university	29%
Graduate school in progress	8%
Graduate school	9%
Education participation (not necessarily completion)	
Trade or vocational school	25%
Two-year or community college	59%
Four-year college or university	66%
Formal apprenticeship	19%
Military	7%
Time before matriculation to postsecondary education	
Within six months	54%
Within one year	11%
Within one to two years	8%
Within two to four years	17%
Later	9%
Current student enrollment type	
Full-time student	49%
Part-time student	31%
Just taking a class here and there	19%
Employment status	
Full-time	61%
Part-time	16%
Retired	1%
Not employed	19%
(VOL) Homemaker	1%
(VOL) Student	2%
(VOL) Disabled	1%

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

	Total %
Marital status	
Married	36%
Living as married	4%
Divorced	2%
Separated	2%
Widowed	*
Never married/Single	55%
Number of children in household	
Zero	60%
One	21%
Two	12%
Three or more	7%
Current living arrangement	
At home with my parents	14%
Dorm or other college housing	1%
Share a place with roommates	14%
Own place	60%
Other	11%
Total household income in 2008	
Under \$15,000	12%
\$15,000 to under \$25,000	12%
\$25,000 to under \$35,000	15%
\$35,000 to under \$50,000	19%
\$50,000 to under \$75,000	16%
\$75,000 or more	21%
Household size in high school [Base: Those who do not currently live with their parents.]	
One–two	5%
Three	18%
Four	34%
Five	25%
Six or more	17%
High school home [Base: Those who do not currently live with their parents.]	
Single-family house	86%
Other kind of dwelling	14%
Town house	2%
Duplex or two-family home	2%
Condominium	1%
Apartment	5%
Trailer or mobile home (VOL)	1%
Other	4%

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

	Total %
Family financial situation when living at home [Base: Those who do not currently live with their parents.]	
Generally had extra money each month	47%
Made ends meet, but usually didn't have money left over each month	41%
Had trouble getting by each month	10%
Don't know/refused	2%
Parents' education	
A high school diploma or equivalent	28%
A technical or vocational certificate	8%
Two-year associates degree	9%
Four-year bachelor's degree	23%
Graduate degree	22%
Something else (SPECIFY)	1%
None/Both parents have less than high school diploma (VOL)	6%
Don't know/Refused	3%
Race/Ethnicity	
White	67%
Black	11%
Hispanic	12%
Asian	6%
Other	3%
Don't know/Refused	3%
Urbanicity	
Metro	86%
Nonmetro	14%
Census Region	
Northeast	18%
Midwest	24%
South	35%
West	23%

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