

From High School to College: Removing Barriers for Maine Students



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Mitchell
Institute

SENATOR GEORGE J. MITCHELL
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“Policymakers and the public should focus attention on how to raise the fraction of American youth who complete high school and then go on for a college education.”

–Economists Gary Becker and Kevin Murphy,
“The Upside of Income Inequality,” May/June 2007, www.american.com.

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INTRODUCTION

The goals of the Mitchell Institute’s initial Barriers study were to explore the gap between Maine’s strong high school completion rate and its below average college-going rate, and to identify strategies for making college more accessible to Maine students. That project included focus groups with high school students; an online survey of educators; and telephone surveys of 2,200 parents, high school juniors and seniors, and recent high school graduates from across the state. It resulted in the 2002 report *Barriers to Postsecondary Education in Maine: Making College the Obvious and Attainable Next Step for More Maine Students*. Since the release of the first Barriers report, intent to enroll in college among Maine high school graduates has steadily increased but actual enrollment in college has not. This growing gap between college intentions and enrollment is the focus of the current study, *From High School to College: Removing Barriers for Maine Students* (“Barriers 2”).

In 2006, the Mitchell Institute received grants from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and Bank of America to fund the Barriers 2 study. The research included:

- **Maine College Enrollment Data Set:** We invited each Maine high school to provide electronic records for their graduates since 2001. These records were matched with college enrollment records nationwide through the “StudentTracker” service of the National Student Clearinghouse, a college enrollment and degree verification service that includes 92% of the nation’s colleges and universities. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Maine’s 131 public high schools—96 schools—signed on to participate in the project and receive the StudentTracker service free of charge, including semester-by-semester records of graduates’ enrollment in college and degrees earned. Ultimately, 81 schools (62%) provided data, and we aggregated their enrollment and graduation reports to create statewide estimates.

- **Interviews:** The Mitchell Institute worked with faculty and students at Bates and Bowdoin Colleges and the University of Maine to conduct qualitative research with high school

students and recent graduates throughout Maine. Group interviews were held with juniors and seniors at 19 Maine high schools and students at one Maine college campus. Several high school graduates who did not go to college participated in individual interviews. The interviews explored attitudes about college, experiences, and the key factors that help some students successfully make the transition from high school to college and, conversely, the barriers that prevent others from realizing their college plans.

- **Surveys:** PanAtlantic SMS Group, a Portland-based market research firm, conducted surveys of 1,145 Maine High School Educators, 67 College Administrators, 900 Parents, 800 Students, and 390 Young Adults who recently graduated from Maine high schools. Some questions from the 2001 surveys were repeated to gauge whether and how things have changed over the past five years. New questions were added to probe more deeply into perceptions and experiences of the transition from high school to college.

- **Profiles:** We interviewed experts to identify schools, programs, and communities with promising practices for helping students to realize their college intentions. Through site visits and interviews, we created profiles of some of the academic practices, counseling and information services, policies, and structures that effectively help students make successful transitions from high school to college.



OVERVIEW

This full report is a summary of dozens of hours of interview transcripts and hundreds of pages of data tables and spreadsheets. While there are many layers of detail and analysis we delve into, we want to be sure we leave no doubt regarding the most important messages to take away from this research project.

Major Themes

- **Maine has made important progress in the last five years.**

Community encouragement for college has increased, a sizeable number of Maine high schools have changed academic tracking practices (potentially allowing more students access to a rigorous curriculum), more high school students are gaining exposure to college, more parents are getting involved in helping students plan for the future, and more schools are embedding college and career planning activities into their day-to-day work. Even as college aspirations have increased, however, actual matriculation has stayed flat, and even dropped a bit last year.

- **A student's academic track in school matters a great deal.** The data clearly show that students in a General/Vocational track are less challenged in the classroom, receive less encouragement about college, experience less effective career planning practices at school, and feel less prepared for life after high school than do students in an Honors/Advanced Placement (AP) or College Preparatory track. General/Vocational track students are less likely to aspire to college and to believe that their parents expect them to attend college, and the strength of their convictions that college is attainable is significantly lower.

- **Parental educational attainment has a critical influence on student experience.** There is a strong correlation between a student's academic track and his parents' education level. Parents' education has an even stronger influence on their beliefs about the financial feasibility of college than does household income.

- **Geographic differences persist.** Northern Maine supports and values education and has made significant strides expanding early college opportunities. Southern Maine still

experiences the benefits of a more highly-educated population, such as widespread expectations that college is the next step after high school and a high degree of parental involvement at school. Coastal Maine tends to value college less highly than do the other regions, students have more experience handling responsibilities, and parents here tend to be less involved in planning for the future. In Central/Western Maine, the strength of convictions regarding the attainability and importance of college is lower, and this region often lags when it comes to taking timely, concrete steps to plan for students' futures.

- **Gender differences are clear.** Male students have less confidence about their future plans than female students do. Some educators say that practices in their schools as well as community and personal characteristics make the academic program at their high schools less effective for male than for female students.

- **Maine families do not know enough about how to pay for college.** Far fewer students complete financial aid applications than are eligible to receive aid. Educators acknowledge that schools are not as effective at helping students understand college finances as they are at informing them about college options.

Promising Practices

- **Early College:** An education strategy that cuts across academic track, family background, gender, and geography, dual credit early college programs give high school students a taste of college-level work, exposure to a college campus, and a chance to earn credit toward a college degree.

- **Strategic Structures in Schools:** Embedding career and college planning into classroom and advising systems, creating career and college centers at school, including PSAT and SAT preparation as part of classroom instruction, and teaming of teachers to provide transitional support to students are examples of school practices that have a positive impact.

- **Hands-on, Concrete, Kid- and Family-Focused Programs:** On-the-ground help such as facilitating college visits, mentoring programs, College Goal Sunday, and summer programs for students who have just graduated all have promise for ensuring that more students make successful transitions from high school to college.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“The big thing that teachers emphasized which I never fully understood about college until now was it isn’t all about hitting the books; it is about maturing and doing it in a place where there is a diverse array of opportunities, cultures, thoughts, and experiences that are all at your fingertips.” —a Maine college student

College Intentions and Enrollment

Despite growing proportions of Maine’s high school graduates reporting intentions to enroll immediately in college, Maine has not seen increases in college enrollment among our recent high school graduates. This has caused a growing gap between college intentions and actual college enrollment over the last several years. The rate of college enrollment within one year after graduating from high school dipped to a low of 57% in 2006. The college enrollment rate among Maine’s high school graduates is lower than both the U.S. and New England averages.

While the gap between college intentions and enrollment is of concern, the proportion of college students who persist and eventually earn a degree is equally troubling. We find that within several years after high school graduation, only about two-thirds as many students as initially enrolled in college are either currently enrolled or have completed a college degree.

Key Changes Since 2001

The new round of surveys revealed a number of changes from five years ago:

- Fewer educators report that students in their schools are placed into academic tracks (54% compared with 71% in 2001). Two in five educators say that the tracking or ability grouping practices in their school have changed in the past five years.
- More Parents (71% compared with 55%) and Young Adults (55% compared with 44%) agree that their community strives to encourage young people to consider attending college.
- More Students agree that their parents are actively planning

ways to finance their college education, and that they have had serious discussions with parents and guidance counselors about what they plan to do after high school.

- Students are more likely to agree that “How well I do in high school is very important to my future” and “I often spend time thinking about and planning my future.”
- More Students report that they are getting help from teachers with post-high school planning, and that their parents have taken them to visit a college campus.
- More Students report that their schools now offer activities such as exploring careers as part of class time, college campus visits arranged by school, and preparing for the PSAT and SAT during school time.



- Parents are much more likely to say that a student’s parents are the most responsible for planning what the student will do after high school (45% compared with 26% in 2001), and are less likely to say the student is the most responsible (50% compared with 67% in 2001).

Social/Cultural Issues

- Strong majorities of Parents and High School Educators agree that their community strives to encourage young people to consider attending college and that a college education is very valuable in their community. Agreement that a college education is very valuable is strongest in the South and weakest in Coastal Maine.

- 85% of high school juniors and seniors surveyed expect to go to a two- or four-year college right after high school. Just over three-quarters (77%) of Parents expect their child to attend a two-year or four-year college directly after high school.
- More than two-thirds (68%) of Students strongly agree that a college education is attainable for them. Students in an Honors/AP track in school agree the most strongly (78%), followed by College Prep (65%) and then General/Vocational (46%) track Students.
- Only one in ten Students agrees that they don't need to go to college to get a good job. Students in Central/Western Maine are the most likely to agree, followed by those in Coastal and Southern, then Northern Maine.

Academic Preparation

- Just over one-half (56%) of Maine High School Educators say that their schools place students into academic tracks based on perceived abilities, one-quarter do not track students, and about one-in-five fall somewhere in between. We find that there are a wide variety of tracking systems in Maine schools, some more flexible than others. Larger schools are more likely than smaller schools to track students. The top three criteria used to place students into tracks are teacher recommendations, parents' preferences, and grades in math courses.
- Three in five educators (59%) rate their school as at least somewhat effective at preparing students for success in college and the workplace. Educators are twice as likely to rate their school very or somewhat effective at preparing Honors/AP track students as General/Vocational track students.
- Two-thirds of Students report that they have taken or will take an advanced math course. Honors/AP track Students are more likely than College Prep Students and nearly three times as likely as those in a General/Vocational track to report taking an advanced math course. Taking a year of math beyond Algebra 2 is strongly associated with success in college.
- There is growing evidence that students need comparable levels of reading and math skills for success in college and the workplace. Students appear to be the least aware of this, followed by Parents and Young Adults, High School Educators, and College Administrators.

- High School Educators indicate that school factors such as curricula that do not engage students and lack of interactive learning opportunities make the academic program less effective for male than for female students in some schools. One-third of Educators report that "Socially, it is not 'cool' to be studious" for male students, while one-quarter say that this is true for both female and male students at their school.

Financial Issues

- About three in ten Parents (29%) say that finances are likely to be the determining factor in whether their child attends college, as do 30% of Students. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Parents say that finances are likely to be the determining factor in which college their child attends, compared with about half (49%) of Students.
- Students are more confident than Parents are about how well parents understand the financial aid application process and that parents are actively planning ways to pay for college.
- Students, Young Adults, and Parents provide lower ratings of student preparation for managing personal finances and budgets than for other life skills, suggesting that Maine high school graduates need additional education and exposure to managing finances.
- One-quarter (24%) of High School Educators rate their school's programming regarding college financing as very adequate, significantly lower than the 38% that rate their school's programming regarding higher education options as very adequate.
- At community colleges, 60% of Administrators say that negotiating the financial aid process is a somewhat significant barrier to students enrolling, and another 20% say that it is a very significant barrier. Among four-year College Administrators, 53% say that negotiating the financial aid process is a somewhat significant barrier, and 4% say it is a very significant barrier to enrolling.

College Planning

- Students say that the top three school activities that have been most helpful to them in planning for the future are: preparing for the PSAT or SAT during the school day, college fairs, and regular guidance counselor meetings.

- One-half of Students say their parents have had a meeting with guidance about post-high school planning, and just over half of Parents with a child in 11th or 12th grade say that they have had such a meeting with their child's guidance counselor. Parents in Central/Western Maine and Parents of General/Vocational track students are less likely than their demographic cohorts to say that they have had a post-high school planning meeting with the guidance counselor.
- 45% of Students choose parents as the most helpful resource in post-high school planning, followed by teachers (21%), and guidance counselors (12%). Most Parents and Students agree that parents are very involved in helping plan for the future. There are strong correlations with academic track and parents' education; Parents of students in Honors/AP and College Prep tracks and more-educated Parents are more likely to be very involved in their children's future planning.



- Among Young Adults, current college students are more than twice as likely (64%) to say that they began planning for the future early enough as are those who did not go to college (28%). Nearly one-half (46%) of the College Administrators surveyed say students should begin planning for college prior to 9th grade. In contrast, only one-quarter of Students say that they began having serious discussions with parents about future plans before they entered high school.

Promising Practices

A number of practices that promise to help more students make successful transitions from high school to college are in place in Maine schools and communities. Many of the schools we profile have a combination of practices in place to address preparation of all students for college and careers. Many of the practices involve partnerships between high schools and colleges.

Practices that address multiple barriers to college include:

- Dual enrollment early college programs in which students take college courses for dual high school and college credit. These programs give high school students a taste of college-level work, exposure to a college campus, and a chance to earn credit toward a college degree.
- College and career centers at school that provide students with resources and one-on-one help with career exploration, college selection, and financial aid applications.

Practices that address academic barriers to college include:

- Advisory programs and student/faculty teams that foster sustained connections between students and faculty and allow for connections and coordination across the curriculum.
- Senior seminars that focus on preparation for life after high school, including things like career research, mentoring, and college essay writing.

Practices that address social and cultural barriers to college include:

- College campus visits organized by schools for all students.
- College introduction programs for high school students organized and sponsored by a college campus.

Practices that address financial barriers to college include:

- The Finance Authority of Maine's College Goal Sunday, where families get help completing financial aid forms.
- A community-wide committee involving local businesses that has designed programs to raise parents' awareness about financial preparation for college early.

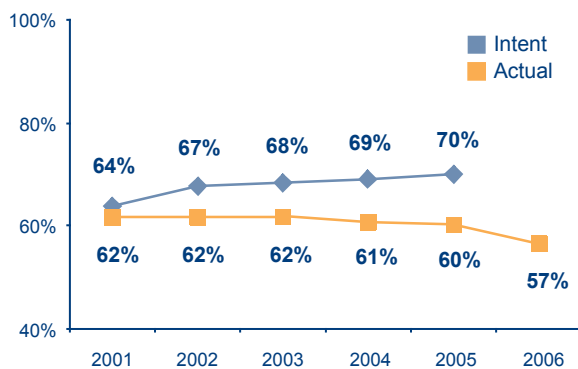
PART I. COLLEGE ENROLLMENT TRENDS

College Intentions and Actual Enrollment

Despite growing proportions of Maine’s high school graduates reporting intentions to enroll immediately in college, Maine has not seen increases in college enrollment among our recent high school graduates. Comparing the number of Maine high school graduates each year (roughly 14,000) to the number of students who entered ninth grade five years earlier, we find that Maine’s high school graduation rate was 74% in 2001 and had risen to 78% by 2005. This compares favorably to the national average, which rose from 67% to 70% over the same time period (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems at www.higheredinfo.org).

Each year, Maine’s high schools report the postsecondary education plans of their graduating classes to the Maine Department of Education (the source of the “intent” line in Figure 1.1). Data on college enrollment within the next year, shown in the “actual” line, come from our new data set on college enrollment among graduates from 81 Maine high schools. The participating schools make up 62% of all Maine public high schools. They are evenly distributed throughout the four regions of Maine, and closely match the state in terms of the proportions of small, medium, and large schools. Our college enrollment estimates are aggregates of school reports from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), a nonprofit college enrollment and degree verification service that houses enrollment records from 92% of U.S. colleges and universities.

Figure 1.1: College-Going among Maine High School Graduates



Source for intent data: Maine Department of Education at www.state.me.us/education/enroll/grads/gradspost.htm

¹Not all schools provided graduate data for every year. The numbers of high schools included in our estimates by year are: 50 in 2001, 63 in 2002, 70 in 2003, 78 in 2004, 77 in 2005, and 78 in 2006. The numbers of graduates at these schools are 5053 in 2001, 7195 in 2002, 8258 in 2003, 9285 in 2004, 8819 in 2005, and 9136 in 2006.

²The data on intent to enroll in college are not yet available for the 2006 graduating class.

Because the proportion of graduates reporting intentions to enroll in college has grown while actual college enrollment has not, there has been a growing gap over the last several years between college intent and enrollment. The gap between intentions and enrollment grew from two percentage points in 2001 to ten percentage points in 2005 (see Figure 1.1). In 2006, college enrollment dipped to a low of 57% of the graduating class.

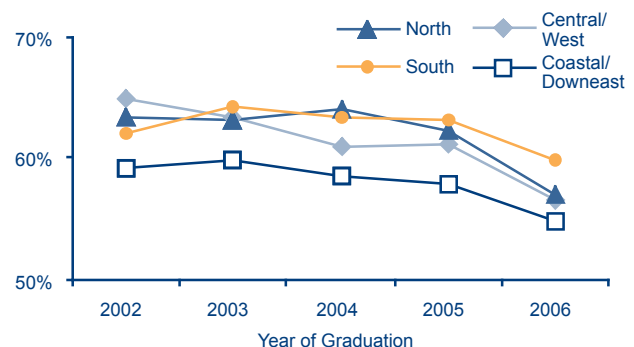
Directly comparable national data on college intentions among high school graduates are not available. Similarly, statewide estimates based on National Student Clearinghouse college enrollment records are not currently available. 50-state data on immediate college enrollment among high school graduates, however, suggest that Maine’s college-going rate is lower than both the New England and national averages (www.higheredinfo.org).

Initial College Enrollment

Our college enrollment data include information on the type of institution students enroll in, location, and enrollment status. **In 2006, of those who enrolled in college, more than two in five (44%) entered a four-year public institution, one-third (33%) enrolled in a four-year private college, and just over one in five (22%) enrolled in a two-year public college.** Fully 93% of these college students were enrolled full-time, with 5% enrolled half-time, and 2% enrolled less than half-time. **Nearly two-thirds (65%) of 2006 graduates who went to college enrolled in Maine colleges, and 35% enrolled in colleges outside Maine.**

Trends in initial college enrollment show some regional differences, as shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Initial College Enrollment by Region



MAINE REGION DEFINITIONS

Central/Western Maine: Androscoggin, Franklin, Kennebec, and Oxford Counties

Coastal/Downeast Maine: Hancock, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Waldo, and Washington Counties

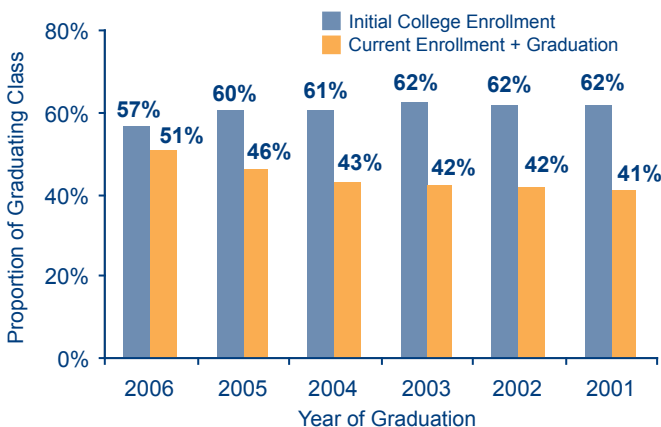
Northern Maine: Aroostook, Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Somerset Counties

Southern Maine: Cumberland and York Counties

College Persistence and Graduation

While the gap between college intentions and actual enrollment is of concern, the proportion of college students who persist and eventually earn a degree is equally troubling. Figure 1.3 shows the recent trends in initial college enrollment (defined as enrolling within one year after high school graduation) and current enrollment plus college graduation as of May 2007. The current enrollment figures include students who did not enroll within the first year of graduation, but entered college later. Working back from 2006 to 2001, the chart shows that within several years after high school graduation, only about two-thirds as many students as initially enrolled in college are either currently enrolled or have completed a college degree. For example, 61% of the class of 2004 enrolled in college within one year. In May 2007, 41% of the class was currently enrolled in college and 2% had completed a college degree, for a total of 43%. Even within the graduating class of 2006, of which 57% enrolled in college within one year, the proportion still enrolled in college had dropped to 51% by May 2007.

Figure 1.3: Initial College Enrollment compared with Current Enrollment plus Graduation



Note: Initial Enrollment is within one year of graduation.
Current Enrollment + Graduation is as of May 2007.

Again, other states do not have strictly comparable data sets. National data on college retention and completion, however, show that Maine's loss of college students before graduation is not unique (see Figure 1.4). Maine fares slightly better than the United States and New England in terms of community college retention and degree completion, just below average for four-year college retention, and between the national and New England averages for bachelor's degree completion.

Figure 1.4: College Retention and Completion

	Maine	New England	U.S.
Retention of community college students to the second year	54.3%	48.5%	51.5%
Retention of bachelor's degree students to the second year	74.7%	80.2%	75.8%
Three-year associate degree completion rate	34.2%	24.2%	29.3%
Six-year bachelor's degree completion rate	57.4%	62.6%	55.8%

Source: www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?measure=19

Conclusions

- Intentions to enroll in college among Maine's high school graduates have been growing during this decade, but actual college enrollment rates have declined slightly, resulting in a growing gap between college intentions and enrollment. In 2005, 70% of the graduating class indicated intent to enroll in college, and 60% actually enrolled in a two- or four-year degree program within one year.
- The proportion of entering college students that does not persist and earn a degree, roughly one in three, is an equally important problem, both in Maine and around the United States.

PART II. SURVEY AND INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Methodology

The Mitchell Institute commissioned a research firm, PanAtlantic SMS Group, to conduct a series of five surveys as part of this study. The surveys were conducted between November 2006 and February 2007. PanAtlantic SMS Group developed cross tabulations, analyzed descriptive statistics, and provided additional analysis for this project.

- Telephone surveys were conducted with Students (Maine high school juniors and seniors) and Parents of Maine students in grades 7-12, selected using stratified statewide sampling plans.
- Young Adults ages 18-25 were surveyed, first by telephone, then, after difficulty obtaining Young Adults to interview, as a mail survey stratified by county. The response rate for the mail portion of this survey was 11.8% (356 of 3,017 completed).
- High School Educators were surveyed online using a list of all secondary school teachers and guidance counselors acquired from the Maine Department of Education. The response rate for this survey was 19.1% (1,145 of 5,990 completed).
- College Administrators were surveyed online. The Mitchell Institute identified Administrators who work in Financial Aid, Admissions, and other offices that manage prospective and first year students at each of Maine's two- and four-year colleges and universities. The response rate for this survey was 53.6% (67 of 125 completed).

Margin of Error Calculations

	Students (11th-12th grade)	Parents (7th-12th grade)	Young Adults (18-25 years)	High School Educators	College Administrators
Sample	800	900	390	1,145	67
Population	31,412	113,095	121,212	5,990	125
Margin of Error (+/-)	3.42%	3.25%	4.95%	2.60%	8.19%

Source for parent & student population estimate: Maine DOE, 2006

Source for high school educator population estimate: Maine DOE database of secondary teachers & guidance counselors

Young adult population estimate derived from 2000 U.S. Census Data

The Mitchell Institute also worked with faculty and staff at Bates College, Bowdoin College, and the University of Maine to identify student researchers to conduct qualitative research for the Barriers 2 study. A total of thirteen undergraduate student researchers from Bates and Bowdoin conducted group interviews with high school juniors and seniors. A University of Maine graduate student also conducted group interviews. Between November 2006 and February 2007, group interviews were held at 19 Maine high schools: Brunswick, Deering, George Stevens, Hodgdon, Lawrence, Leavitt, Lewiston, Lubec, Machias, Marshwood, Messalonskee, Mount Ararat, Portland, Skowhegan, South Portland, Southern Aroostook, Traip, Waterville, and Winslow. We also interviewed a group of college students at the University of Maine at Machias. Several young adults who graduated from Maine high schools in Cumberland, Sagadahoc, Washington, and York Counties participated in individual interviews.

SURVEY SAMPLE PROFILES

Region	Central/West Androscoggin Franklin, Kennebec Oxford	Coastal Hancock, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc Waldo, Washington	Northern Aroostook, Penobscot Piscataquis Somerset	Southern Cumberland York
Students (N=800)	24.5%	15.6%	22.5%	37.4%
Young Adults (N=390)	23.6%	17.9%	21.0%	35.9%
Parents (N=900)	24.0%	18.1%	22.4%	35.4%
High School Educators (N=1,145)	26.4%	16.2%	24.2%	33.3%
Maine population (1,321,574)	23.9%	18.1%	21.9%	36.1%

SURVEY SAMPLE PROFILES

Academic Track	Honors/Advanced Placement (AP)	College Prep	Vocational/General	Not Tracked/ Don't Know
Students (N=800)	24.5%	15.6%	22.5%	37.4%
Young Adults (N=390)	23.6%	17.9%	21.0%	35.9%
Parents (N=900)	24.0%	18.1%	22.4%	35.4%

Parents' Education	High school diploma or less	Some college, no degree	2- or 4-year college degree	Graduate work or degree	Don't know/ Refused
Students (N=800)	17.3%	11.1%	45.8%	21.3%	4.7%
Young Adults (N=390)	34.4%	18.2%	35.9%	11.3%	0.3%
Parents (N=900)*	16.2%	19.3%	41.0%	22.3%	1.1%

* Parents provided their own highest level of education and that of their spouse (if married). These data were recalculated into a new variable that represents the highest education of either parent in the household.

Gender	Female	Male
Students (N=800)	54%	46%
Young Adults (N=390)	69%	31%
Parents (N=900)	60%	40%

Income	Under \$35,000	\$35,000 - \$49,999	\$50,000-\$74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$100,000 or more	Refused
Parents (N=900)	14.7%	19.3%	24.2%	17.0%	14.6%	10.1%

High School Educators: Subject Area	Science	English	Math	Social Studies/ History	Special Education	Guidance	Foreign Language	Art/ Music	Technology	Physical Education
	14.5%	13.6%	12.8%	11.1%	8.9%	7.6%	6.6%	6.2%	4.5%	3.8%

Key Findings

Maine students face different combinations of both barriers to college and assets that help them make successful transitions to college. We divide these into three broad categories: social/cultural issues, academic preparation, and financial issues. Our analysis explored whether and how these factors differ depending on the region students live in, the level of their parents' education, gender, family income, and academic track in school.

SOCIAL/CULTURAL ISSUES

“If the student doesn't feel supported to do this, it's kind of a large burden to have on just one set of shoulders. It's kind of nice when that weight's distributed and they have that family support or that teacher support right behind them.”

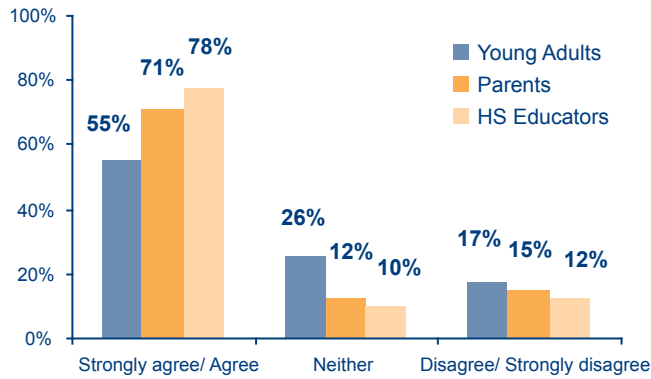
—a Maine high school student

Education and the Community

We asked Young Adults, Parents, and High School Educators whether their community strives to encourage young people

to consider attending college. High School Educators are the most likely to agree that the community in which they teach/work strives to encourage young people to consider attending college.

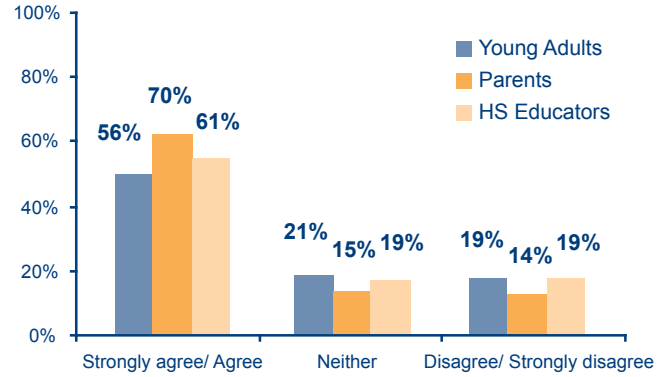
Figure 2.1: “My community strives to encourage young people to consider attending college”



The percentage of Young Adults who agree that their community strives to encourage young people to consider attending college improved substantially over the past five years (44% in 2001 to 55% in 2006). The proportion of Parents agreeing that their community strives to encourage young people to consider attending college also increased, from 55% in 2001 to 71% in 2006.

While majorities of Educators, Parents, and Young Adults agree that a college education is very valuable in their community, Parents are more likely than Educators or Young Adults to agree with this (see Figure 2.2). There is regional variation; those in Southern Maine are more likely to strongly agree that a college education is very valuable in their community than are their demographic cohorts. While most Parents agree that a college education is very valuable in their community, the proportion disagreeing increased from 8% in 2001 to 15% in 2006.

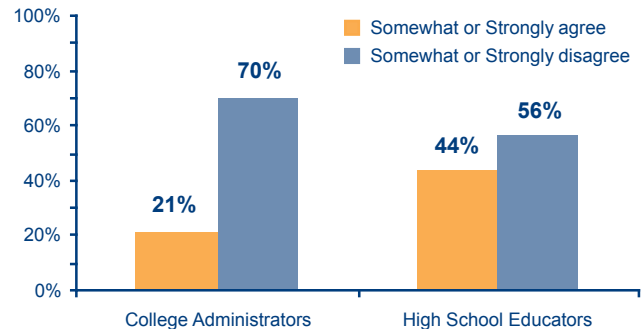
Figure 2.2: “A college education is very valuable in my community”



All Students College-Ready

One in five College Administrators (21%) agree that all students are capable of graduating from high school ready for college; Administrators at two-year and four-year colleges are equally likely to agree. More than twice as many High School Educators, 44%, agree that all students are capable of graduating ready for college.

Figure 2.3: “All students are capable of graduating from high school ready to go to a two- or four-year college”



The primary reasons cited by College Administrators who disagree that all students are capable of graduating from high school ready for college are inadequate academic preparation for college and some students’ lack of maturity. Among High School Educators who disagree, the main reasons are students’ lack of motivation for academic work in high school and lack of interest in attending college.

College Aspirations

More than four in five Students surveyed (85%) expect to go to a two- or four-year college right after high school (78% expect to go to four-year college and 7% expect to go to two-year college). 88% of Students agree that their parents

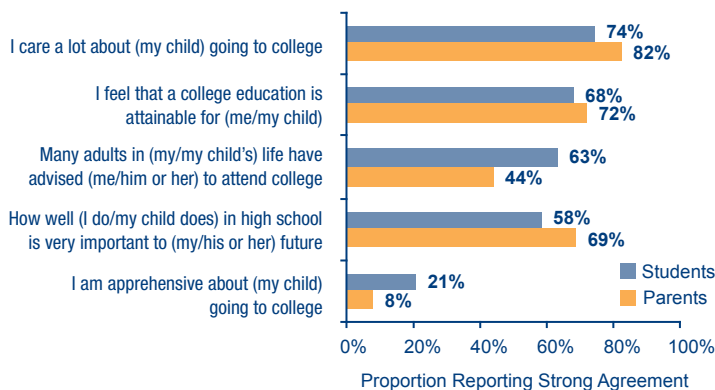
strongly expect them to attend a two- or four-year college. Students' college expectations are slightly higher than Parents'; three-quarters (77%) of Parents surveyed expect their child to attend a two-year or four-year college directly after high school.

Students' college expectations vary depending on their academic track at school. **More than nine in ten Students (93%) in an Honors/AP track report that they plan to attend a four-year college, compared with 77% of College Prep track Students and 37% of General/Vocational track Students.** Students in the General/Vocational track are the most likely to report planning to attend a two-year college (21%) or a technical/trade school (13%). We observed similar academic track differences in the expectations Parents have for their children and that Young Adults had when they were in high school. Students and Young Adults whose parents do not have education beyond high school (75% and 62%, respectively) are less likely than Students and Young Adults whose parents have attended college (87% and 82%) to report that they expect or expected to go to two- or four-year college directly after high school.

Student and Parent Attitudes toward College

The surveys asked respondents how strongly they agree with a variety of statements about college and their future plans (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Beliefs about College



Parents are more likely than Students to strongly agree that:

- “How well my child does in high school is very important to his or her future”
- “I care a lot about my child going to college” and
- “I feel that a college education is attainable for my child.”

Parents are less likely than Students to strongly agree that:

- “Many adults in my child’s life have advised him or her to attend college” and
- “I am apprehensive about my child going to college.”

The strength of Students' convictions about many of the statements vary by academic track, parents' education, region, and gender. Students in an Honors/AP track are more likely than College Prep and General/Vocational Students to agree that:

- “Growing up, I always assumed I would someday attend college.”
- “I feel that a college education is attainable for me.”
- “Many adults in my life have advised me to attend college.”
- “How well I do in high school is very important to my future.”

General/Vocational track Students are twice as likely as College Prep and Honors/AP track Students to strongly agree that “I don’t need to need to go to college to get a good job.” General/Vocational and College Prep track Students are twice as likely to strongly agree as are Honors/AP track Students that “I really don’t know what I want to do after high school.”

Students whose parents have attended college are more likely than those whose parents have no education beyond high school to strongly agree that, “Growing up, I always assumed I would someday attend college,” and are less than half as likely to agree that, “I don’t need to need to go to college to get a good job.”

Students in Northern Maine are more likely than those in the other regions to strongly agree that:

- “I care a lot about going to college.”
- “How well I do in high school is very important to my future.”
- “I often spend time thinking about and planning for my future.”

Students in Central/Western Maine are twice as likely as those in Northern Maine to agree that “I don’t need to need to go to college to get a good job,” with Students in Coastal and Southern Maine falling in between.

Female Students are more likely than male Students to strongly agree that:

- “I care a lot about going to college.”

- “Growing up, I always assumed I would someday attend college.”
- “I feel that a college education is attainable for me.”
- “Many adults in my life have advised me to attend college.”
- “How well I do in high school is very important to my future.”
- “I often spend time thinking about and planning for my future.”
- “I am apprehensive about the prospect of going to college.”

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

“I’ve heard from a lot of friends and my sister is also in college, it’s just like another whole step up from high school...I’m just worried that I won’t be prepared enough.” —a Maine high school student

A number of recent national studies find that many high school graduates are not academically prepared for college, and several groups recommend improving the alignment of high school graduation requirements with college entrance criteria and expectations. Our surveys and interviews explored the perceptions of Maine Students, Educators, and Parents about academic preparation for college.

Academic Tracking

The High School Educator survey asked, “Are students in your school placed into academic clusters or ‘tracks’ based upon abilities?” The majority of Educators (56%) indicate that students are tracked, down from 71% in 2001. Two in five respondents (40%) say that the tracking or ability grouping practices in their school have changed in the past five years. One-quarter (25%) of Educators report that all classes in their school are heterogeneously grouped with mixed ability levels, indicating that there is no academic tracking. At the schools of the other 19% of respondents, practices may fall somewhere in between.

Educators’ responses regarding tracking are somewhat difficult to interpret. In many cases, Educators from the same schools give different answers as to whether their school has tracks or has ability groups. This may be due to differing definitions of those

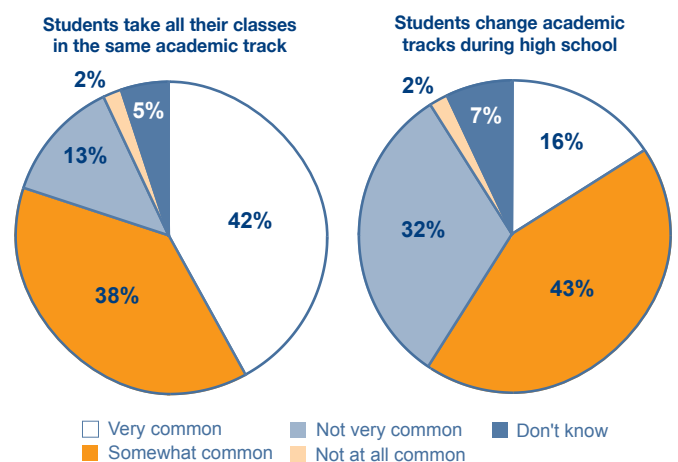
terms and to value judgments about tracking. Also, there is statewide initiative to expand Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings and to broaden access to these courses, which may lead more Students to characterize their academic track as Honors/AP and some Educators to say that their schools have changed tracking practices.

Despite mixed responses from Educators, respondents to the other surveys do not seem to have difficulty characterizing their or their child’s academic track. The surveys collapsed the tracks into three categories: Honors/AP, College Prep, and General/Vocational. Since school tracking systems vary widely, however, Honors and AP may be separate tracks in some schools, there may be more than one College Prep track, and General may be a separate track from Vocational.

The main factor associated with tracking is the size of the school. The average 2004 enrollment in tracked schools was 716 students, compared with an average enrollment of 356 students in schools that do not track. Tracking is least prevalent in Coastal/Downeast Maine high schools (40%), which tend to be small, followed by Northern (47%), Central/Western (59%), and Southern Maine (84%), where most high schools are large.

The survey asked two questions to gauge the flexibility of tracking systems (see Figure 2.5). It appears to be the norm for students to take all their courses in the same academic track; four in five respondents (80%) report that this is at least somewhat common. About three in five respondents (59%), however, report that it is at least somewhat common for students to change academic tracks during high school.

Figure 2.5: Flexibility of Academic Tracking Systems

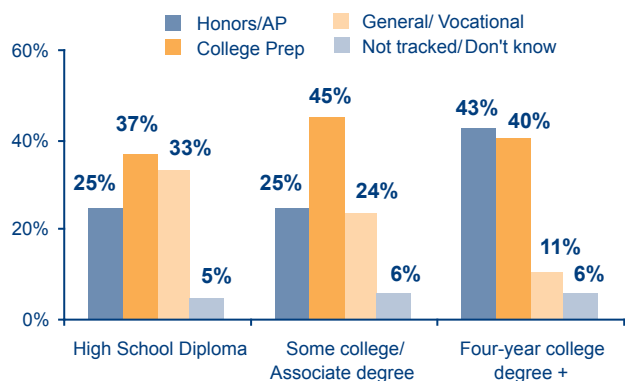


Educators were asked what bases are used to place students in academic tracks. It appears that parents' preferences are nearly as influential in tracking placements as are teacher recommendations, and that grades and students' goals are also important factors in placing students into academic tracks. The most common bases for academic track placements are:

- Teacher recommendation (84%)
- Parents' preferences (77%)
- Grades in math courses (73%)
- Grades in English courses (68%)
- Middle school teacher placements (59%)
- Students' career/college goals (51%)
- Standardized test scores (35%)
- English proficiency (30%)

Among Parents with a child in high school, there is a high degree of correlation between the parents' education level and their child's academic track (see Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6: Academic Track of Child, by Highest Level of Parents' Education



A number of Educators indicated that our survey did not allow for accurate representation of their school's tracking system. These respondents' descriptions of the way they place students into courses include:

- “The notion of an Honors track or a General track is the problem. There are students who are in Honors/AP science and standard history... There are students who choose the AP Government course because of enthusiastic interest and also take remedial math... Most teachers I know would agree that rigid tracking is bad AND that appropriate placement in appropriately challenging groups is for the best.”
- “We offer levels of classes but operate on a system we call ‘challenge by choice.’ This means students, not teachers or guidance counselors, choose the difficulty level of the classes

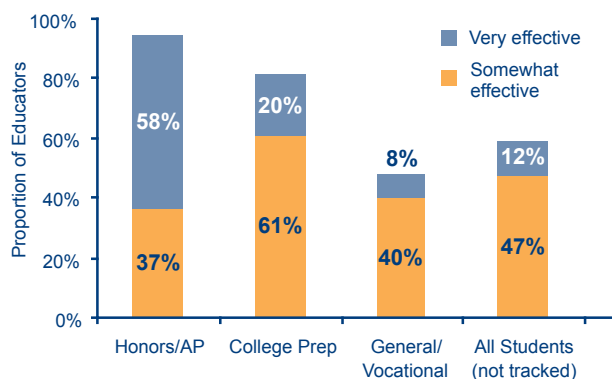
they'll take, and all classes are designed to push students to advance beyond whatever skill or interest level they have currently attained.”

Some Educators expressed opinions about tracking in response to questions asking about the most helpful and least helpful tactics at their school in terms of preparing students for careers and college. 22 respondents say that academic tracking is the least helpful tactic in their school. 27 respondents named heterogeneous classes or de-tracking as the least helpful tactic at their school, for example: “Heterogeneous grouping has fostered problems—students give up because they are not challenged enough or because they feel inadequate.”

High School Effectiveness

We asked Educators to rate their school's effectiveness at preparing students for success in college and the workplace (see Figure 2.7). **Nearly three times as many Educators rate their schools very effective at preparing Honors/AP students (58%) as rate them very effective for College Prep students (20%), and even fewer (8%) rate their schools very effective at preparing General/Vocational track students for success in college and the workplace.**

Figure 2.7: “How effective is your school at preparing students for success in college and the workplace?”



Career preparation shortcomings, including an inadequate focus on Vocational students, are among the top answers Educators provide regarding the least helpful tactic employed at their school for preparing students for careers and college.

Figure 2.8: School Factors that Make the Academic Program Less Effective (Proportion of Educators)

School Factors	Male Students	Female Students	Both	Neither
Teachers/staff treat students differently	8%	1%	28%	63%
Curriculum not engaging students	16%	1%	18%	65%
Lack of interactive learning opportunities	12%	1%	15%	73%
Type & amount of homework	10%	0%	16%	74%
Teachers/staff hold students to different standards	4%	1%	20%	75%
Curriculum & grading system don't play to student strengths	8%	1%	16%	76%
Not enough teachers & administrators as role models	5%	2%	8%	84%

The survey presented a list of school factors and asked Educators to indicate whether any of them make the academic program less effective for female students, male students, or both (see Figure 2.8). The factors Educators most commonly chose as making the academic program less effective for both female and male students are “Teachers/staff treat students differently” (28%) and “Teachers/staff hold students to different standards” (20%). For male students, teacher were most

likely to indicate that “Curriculum not engaging students” (16%) and “Lack of interactive learning opportunities” (12%) make the academic program less effective.

The survey also presented a list of student and community factors and asked educators whether any of them hinder the academic achievement of female students, male students, or both female and male students at their school (see Figure 2.9).

Figure 2.9: Community and Student Factors that Hinder Academic Achievement (Proportion of Educators)

Community and Student Factors	Male Students	Female Students	Both	Neither
Socially it is not “cool” to be studious	32%	1%	23%	43%
Developmental differences	26%	1%	14%	60%
These students do not appear as motivated to learn as other students	25%	0%	14%	61%
Learning styles not well-suited to school's academic program	21%	1%	12%	66%
Community does not encourage students to value education	8%	1%	25%	65%

High School Curricula

Students were asked whether they have taken or plan to take a list of courses associated with college entrance, and Young Adults were asked whether they took these courses while still in high school (see Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10: High School Courses Taken (or planning to take before graduation)

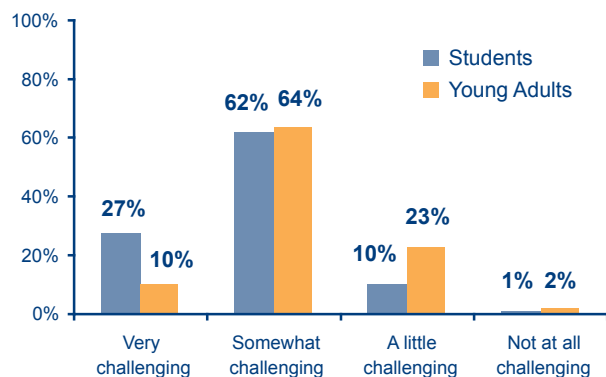
Courses Taken	Students	Young Adults
Lab Chemistry, Physics, or Biology	97%	92%
Algebra 2	91%	85%
Two or more years of a foreign language	86%	79%
Trigonometry, Precalculus, or Calculus	66%	55%
Advanced Placement (AP) course	57%	41%
Early college course	31%	19%

Honors/AP track Students (87%) are much more likely than College Prep Students (58%) and nearly three times as likely as those in a General/Vocational track (30%) to report taking Trigonometry, Precalculus, or Calculus. Taking a year of math beyond Algebra 2 is strongly associated with success in college. Students from Southern Maine are more likely than those from other regions to report taking advanced math and foreign language courses. Students from Northern Maine were the most likely to report that they will take an early college course (39%, compared with 31% on average). For both Students and Young Adults, those whose parents have attended college were more likely than those with a high school degree or less to report taking an advanced math course, an Advanced Placement course, and two or more years of a foreign language.

The surveys asked Students and Young Adults to rate how challenging their high school courses are or were (see Figure 2.11). 39% of Honors/AP track Students say their courses are very challenging, compared with 18% of College Prep track Students, and 10% of General/Vocational track Students. Female Students are more likely (31%) than male Students (22%) to say their courses are very challenging. Students from Southern Maine (92%) are more likely than those from Central/Western (87%), Northern (87%), and Coastal Maine (85%) to report that their courses are very or somewhat challenging.

“Students need to learn how to study, and they need more math to help them succeed. They need to take math each year.” —a college administrator

Figure 2.11: How Challenging Are/Were Your High School Courses?



More than two-thirds (69%) of Parents agree that “My child’s teachers challenge my child and encourage more difficult courses”; of these, 31% strongly agree. Parents of Honors/AP students are twice as likely as General/Vocational track Parents to strongly agree that their child’s teachers challenge and encourage them to take more difficult courses (40% compared with 21%). Seven in ten High School Educators (70%) agree that their school offers a challenging curriculum that engages all students.

Exposure to College

“Early college” opportunities, in which high school students earn dual college and high school credit for a college-level course taken online, on a college campus, or at their high school, have grown rapidly in Maine over the past several years. Some programs are designed to serve students with

uncertain college aspirations or particular barriers to college. Three in ten Students (31%) said that they have taken or plan to take an early college class before they graduate from high school. Unlike other college-preparatory classes the survey asked about, there is no difference in early college course-taking based on academic track or parental education level.

Three in five Students (61%) report that their school arranges college campus visits, compared with 45% in 2001. In addition, more Students in 2006 than in 2001 (63% compared with 55%) report that their parents have taken them to visit a college campus.

Perceptions of Preparedness for College

All the surveys asked how prepared students are for college and jobs when they graduate from high school.

- About one-half (49%) of Students believe that they are very prepared, while 45% feel somewhat prepared for college coursework and jobs in terms of critical reading, analytical writing, and mathematical reasoning skills.

- **About one in three Young Adults (35%) believe that they were very prepared, while 48% say they were somewhat prepared for college courses and jobs when they graduated from high school. 48% of Young Adults who were in an Honors/AP track say they were very prepared, compared with 35% of College Prep and 19% of General/Vocational track Young Adults.**

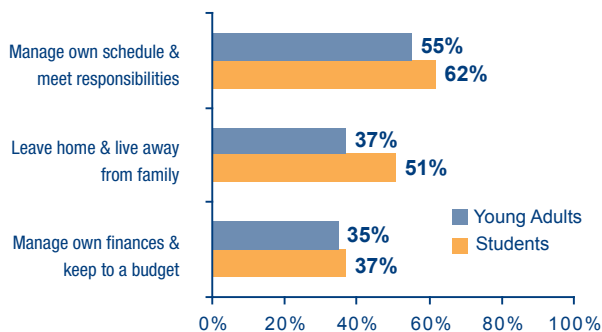
- 44% of Parents feel that their children will be very prepared for college courses and jobs when they finish high school. There is a dramatic difference depending on the child’s academic track: 65% of Parents whose child is in an Honors/AP track, 45% of Parents whose child is in a College Prep track, and 18% of those whose child is in a General/Vocational track feel that their child will be very prepared for college coursework and jobs.

College Administrators’ responses indicate that managing time, managing finances, and balancing studies with work are areas in which Maine students tend to lack adequate preparation. About two in five College Administrators (43%) indicate that Maine students are equally academically prepared for college compared with entering students from outside Maine. About one-quarter (24%) say that Maine students are less prepared academically for college than are students from

other states, and 5% say that Maine students tend to be more prepared than out-of-staters for college.

Young Adults, perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, tend to rate their preparedness for aspects of life after college slightly lower than do Students (see Figure 2.12). Both Students and Young Adults whose parents have no education beyond high school tend to give lower ratings to their preparedness than do those whose parents attended college. Among Students, male students are much less likely than female students (54% compared with 69%) to rate themselves very prepared to manage their own schedule.

Figure 2.12: Respondents who Feel/Felt Very Prepared for Adult Responsibilities



Experience with Responsibilities

Students are more likely to report that they have significant experience managing several types of responsibilities than Parents of 11th and 12th graders are to report that their child has significant experience with these responsibilities (see Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13: Proportion Reporting Significant Experience with Responsibilities

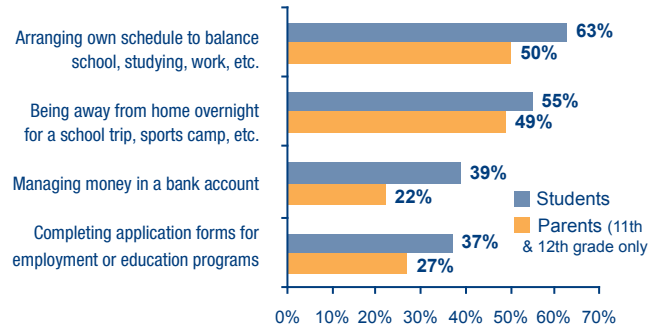


Figure 2.14 summarizes key differences in Students' ratings of their level of experience with responsibilities. Overall, academic track is the most significant factor in explaining differences, followed by parental education.

Knowledge of College-Level Academic Expectations

One-half (49%) of College Administrators believe that their college is somewhat successful at making academic expectations clear to high school educators, and an additional one-quarter (27%) believe it is very successful. Nearly all High School Educators rate their personal understanding of the level of academic preparation required for their students to attend college as either excellent (55%) or good (41%).

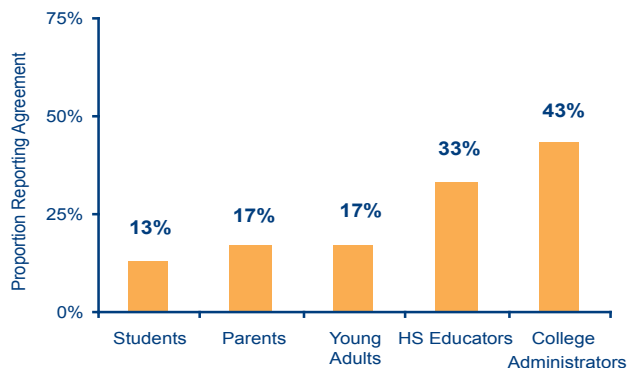
There is growing evidence that students need comparable levels of reading and math skills for success in college and success in the workplace. All five surveys asked a question to gauge awareness of this convergence. Students appear to be the least aware of this, followed by Parents and Young Adults, High School Educators, and College Administrators (see

Figure 2.14: Students' Level of Experience with Responsibilities

Responsibility/Experience	% with significant experience	Key Differences
Arranging your own schedule to balance school, studying, work, etc.	63%	74% Honors/AP, 58% College Prep, 43% Gen/Voc 70% Coast, 63% South, 62% North, 57% Central 69% seniors, 56% juniors 68% girls, 56% boys
Being away from home overnight for a school trip, sports camp, or other similar program	55%	62% Honors/AP, 53% College Prep, 41% Gen/Voc 39% parents with HS, 59% parents with some college+ 62% Coast, 56% South, 53% North, 52% South
Managing money in a bank account	39%	41% Honors/AP and College Prep, 31% Gen/Voc 45% seniors, 33% juniors 48% Coastal, 40% South, 37% North, 33% Central
Completing application forms for employment or education programs	37%	46% Coast, 38% South, 36% North, 32% Central 46% seniors, 28% juniors

Figure 2.15). Among College Administrators, 65% of community college respondents agree that students need similar skills for college and for jobs, compared with 34% of four-year college respondents.

Figure 2.15: Similar Skills are Needed for College and for Jobs



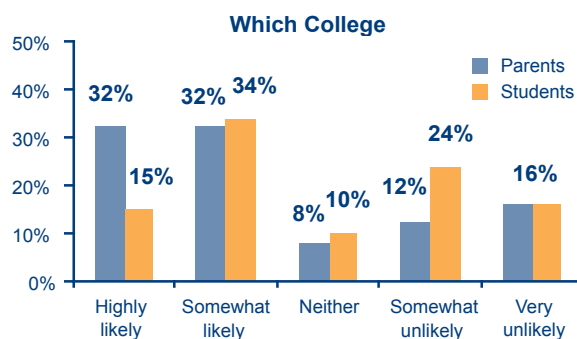
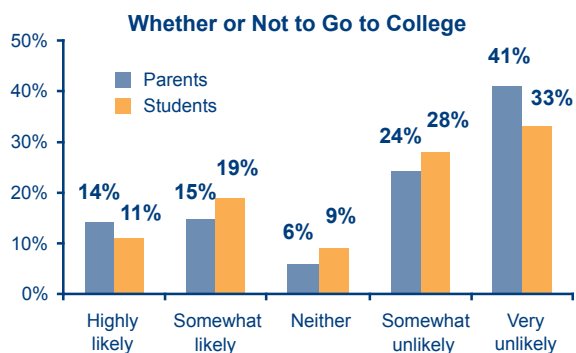
FINANCIAL ISSUES

“Nothing will prevent me from going to college, except money.” —a Maine high school student

Finances as the Determining Factor in College Decisions

About three in ten Parents say that finances are likely to be the determining factor in whether their child attends college, and nearly two-thirds say that finances are likely to be the determining factor in which college their child attends (see Figure 2.16).

Figure 2.16: How Likely is it that Finances will be the Determining Factor in College Decisions?



Students rate the likelihood that money will be the determining factor in whether or not they go to college differently depending on the region they live in, their academic track, and their parents’ education level. Parental education level explains most of the variation in responses to this question. Students whose parents did not go beyond high school are nearly twice as likely as those whose parents have at least some college education—48% compared with 26%—to say that money will be the determining factor in whether or not they go to college.

Nearly three in ten Parents (29%) who do not have education beyond high school say it is highly likely that finances will be the determining factor in whether or not their child goes to college, compared with only 11% of Parents who have attended college. **Parents with lower incomes are more likely than those with higher incomes to believe that finances will be the determining factor in whether or not their child attends college, but parental education makes a greater difference than does family income.**

Regionally, Central Maine Students (37%) are the most likely to say that money will probably be the determining factor in whether or not they go to college, compared with 28% in the North and South and 26% in Coastal Maine. Students in a General/Vocational track are nearly twice as likely to say that money will probably be the determining factor in whether or not they go to college (48%) as are College Prep (27%) and Honors/AP (26%) track Students.

Two-thirds (65%) of Young Adults who did not attend college or who withdrew from college said that money was a somewhat or very significant factor in their decision. Responding to questions about specific college costs, Young Adults who

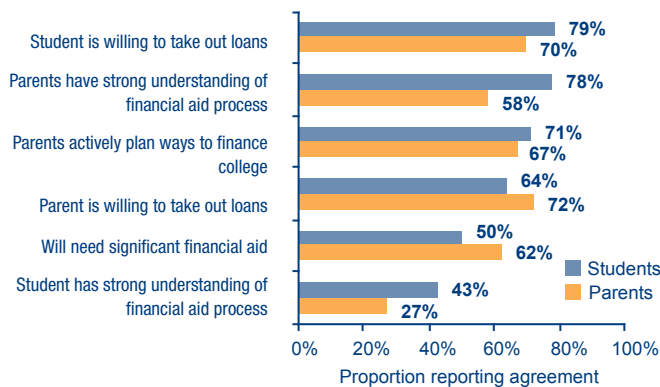
did not go or withdrew from college rate tuition costs and the amount of student loans needed as very significant factors. Fewer Young Adults rate the difficulty understanding and applying for financial aid as a very significant factor in their decision not to go to college or to leave college.

Compared with 2001 (35%), a slightly smaller proportion of Students now (30%) say that finances are likely to be the determining factor in whether or not they attend college. Similarly, 34% of Parents surveyed in 2001 said that finances were likely to be the determining factor in whether or not their child attended college, and this proportion has dropped slightly to 29%.

Beliefs about Financial Aid

Students, Parents, and Young Adults were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements regarding financial aid for college (see Figure 2.17).

Figure 2.17: Beliefs about Financial Aid



Overall, parental education has the greatest influence on Students' confidence that they will be able to overcome financial barriers to college. Three quarters (76%) of Students whose parents have at least some college education agree that their parents are actively planning ways to finance college, compared with just over one-half (53%) of those whose parents do not have education beyond high school.

Academic track is also an influential variable in Students' confidence that they will be able to manage the financial challenges of going to college. For example, Honors/AP and College Prep track Students are more likely to agree that they are

willing to take out loans to attend college (85% and 78%, respectively) than are General/Vocational track Students (62%). Students in an Honors/AP track are much more likely to agree that their parents are actively planning ways to finance their education beyond high school (80%) than are College Prep (68%) or General/Vocational (53%) track Students.

Parents of students in an AP/Honors or College Prep track have much stronger convictions that "If my child wants to attend college, I will be able to find a way to afford it" (53% and 47%, respectively, strongly agree) than do those with General/Vocational track children (26% strongly agree). Household income is the most important difference in Parents' agreement that "I am actively planning ways to finance my child's college education." 56% of Parents with incomes below \$50,000 agree that they are actively planning ways to pay for college, compared with 74% of Parents with higher incomes. From a list of hypothetical ways to get help with financial aid, Parents were asked which would be the most helpful.

- 29% of Parents chose "One-on-one help with financial aid from a guidance counselor or school official."
- 21% chose "Financial aid info session with parents who have already gone through applying for financial aid with at least one child."
- 20% chose "None of these; I don't have any questions about financial aid."

Among Young Adults, current college students are nearly three times more likely to agree that their parents actively planned ways to finance a college education (60%) than are those who have not pursued any post-secondary education (22%).

"I've never heard my guidance counselor talk about paying for college." —a Maine high school student

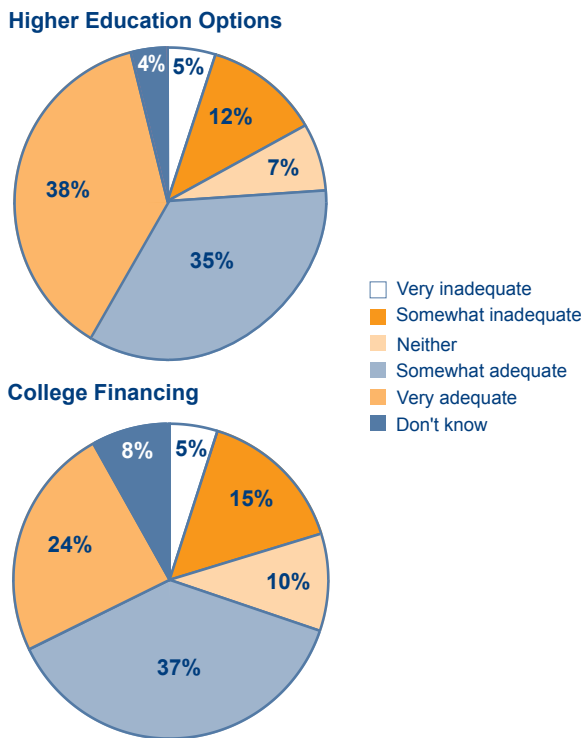
Educators' Perspectives

Among College Administrators, three-quarters (77%) of those who work at four-year colleges and 95% of those who work at two-year colleges rate their schools somewhat or very financially accessible for most Maine students. At community colleges, 60% of Administrators surveyed acknowledge that

negotiating the financial aid process is a somewhat significant barrier to students enrolling, while 20% say that it is a very significant barrier. The numbers are lower among four-year college respondents: 53% say that negotiating the financial aid process is a somewhat significant barrier and 4% say it is a very significant barrier to enrolling.

One-quarter (24%) of High School Educators rate their school’s programming regarding college financing very adequate, significantly lower than the 38% that rate their school’s programming regarding higher education options very adequate (see Figure 2.18).

Figure 2.18: Educator Ratings of their Schools’ Programming



“When we had a college info session, they brushed over [financial aid]...But I know when we went through this with my sister it took like six hours to get all the way through the website. It’s almost like they’re scared to talk about that, like it will drive us away from going to college.”
 —a Maine high school student

The Guidance Office Role

Survey and interview findings suggest that the degree to which guidance offices are helpful to students in planning for college and careers varies widely among Maine high schools. We asked Educators whether there is sufficient guidance programming and outreach to meet the post-high school planning needs of the students in each academic track. **84% of Educators agree that guidance programming is sufficient to meet the planning needs of Honors/AP track students at their school, while 73% agree that it meets College Prep track students’ needs, and only 46% agree that guidance programming meets General/Vocational track students’ planning needs.** Where students are not tracked, 51% of Educators agree that guidance programming is sufficient to meet students’ post-high school planning needs. With regard to post-high school planning, 56% of responding Educators agree that the guidance department is able to focus equally on all types of students, regardless of ability level; 28% disagree.

Guidance counselors who responded to the survey were asked how they spend their time. On average, guidance counselors report that they spend 34% of their time on post-high school planning, 30% on academic counseling and course selection, 21% on social/emotional counseling and social work, and 15% on other duties.

Educators and Students described widely varying guidance practices at different Maine high schools, suggesting that some are very helpful in career and college planning and others are less so (see Figure 2.19).

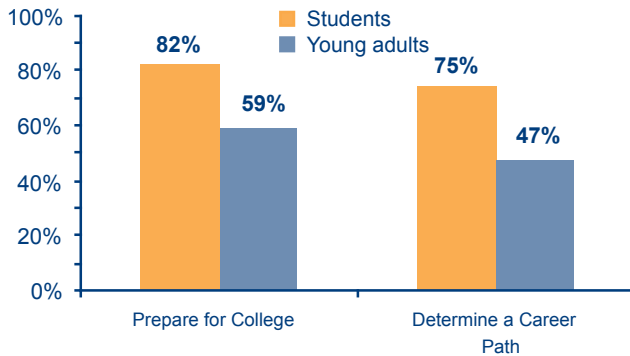
The School’s Role

Students and Young Adults were asked whether their school provides (or provided) information and counseling to help prepare for college or to determine a career path (see Figure 2.20). Among Young Adults, two-thirds of those who are current college students agree (65%) that their school helped them prepare for college, compared with 48% of those who attended college but dropped out, and 39% of those who have not attended college.

Figure 2.19: Examples of More and Less Helpful Guidance Practices

	More Helpful Examples	Less Helpful Examples
Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Our guidance department does a tremendous job preparing students for postsecondary life, whether it is college, vocational school, or community college. They do this through a variety of programs that include parents, students, and teachers: College Night for parents of junior students, Graduates Return Night where graduates talk with juniors and seniors about college life, groups for parents and students about the application and financial aid processes, school administered PSATs, and distribution of information to teachers about current trends.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Because of a heavy load it is sometimes difficult for the guidance director to follow all students closely. It is the responsibility of the students, at times, to initiate conversations about college preparation.” • “Guidance does not encourage students strongly enough to attend college; there is a ‘let them do what they want’ attitude here.”
Students/Young Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The single most important influence on my going to college was the college placement officer. [He] provided guidance on essay writing, gathering recommendations and brought in college representatives to talk with students... This support system took away the anxiety of the college search.” • “The guidance counselor I credit with getting me to decide to actually attend college was available and he always knew who to call, when, to get the info I needed. He was constantly pointing out scholarship applications, offering letters of recommendation, and in general just convinced me that I was college material.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A lot of times I felt as though my guidance counselors didn’t know much more about the application process than I did.” • “They pretty much give you all the applications here, but they don’t really help.”

Figure 2.20: School Provides Information to Help



Students say that the top three school activities that have been most helpful to them in planning for the future are preparing for the PSAT or SAT during the school day (25%), college fairs (19%), and regular guidance counselor meetings (18%).

One-half (50%) of Students say their parents have had a meeting with guidance about post-high school planning. Among Parents surveyed, 55% with a child in 11th or 12th grade say that they have had a meeting regarding post-high school planning with their child’s guidance counselor. Central/Western Maine Parents with a child in 11th or 12th grade are less likely than Parents in the other regions to say that they have had a post-high school planning meeting with the guidance counselor. Parents of General/Vocational track students are less likely (49%) to report having had such a meeting than are Parents of College Prep (57%) or Honors/AP (59%) track students.

The Role of Parents

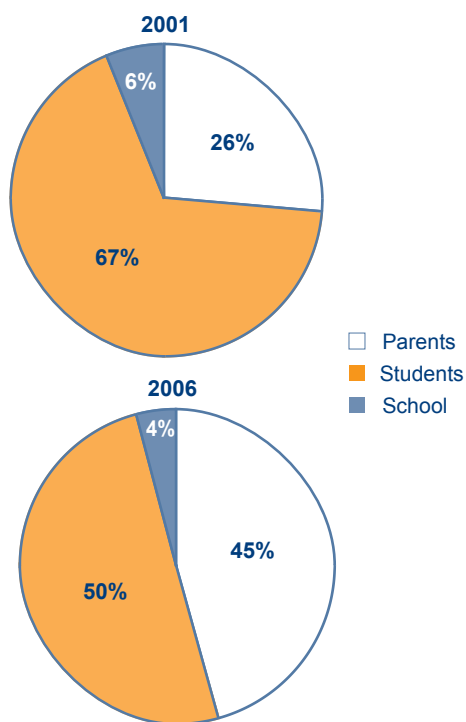
When Students were asked to choose the most helpful resource in post-high school planning, parents were the top choice (45%), followed by teachers (21%), and guidance counselors (12%). 91% of Parents surveyed and 89% of Students agree that parents are very involved in helping plan for the future. There are strong correlations with academic track and parents’ education; more-educated Parents are more likely to be very involved in their children’s future planning, and Parents of students in Honors/AP and College Prep tracks are more likely to be involved. 65% of mothers strongly agree that they are very involved in helping plan their child’s future, compared with 55% of fathers. Nearly three in five Parents (58%) agree that “I am getting helpful information about what I need to do now to prepare my child for college and a career.” While 86% of Parents have had serious discussions with their child about plans for after high school, only one-quarter of Parents whose children are in 7th or 8th grade have done so. Mothers (89%) are more likely to report having had these discussions than are fathers (82%).

About one-third (35%) of Parents report that they have taken their child to visit a college campus, and fully 70% of Parents of 12th grade students have done this. Parents of Honors/AP track students are more than twice as likely (48%) to have taken their child to visit a college campus as those of General/Vocational track students (22%), while Parents of College

Prep track students fall in between (38%). 44% of Parents say they have done reading or research on financial aid; these figures are higher for Parents of 11th graders (53%) and 12th graders (78%).

Parents were asked who they believe is most responsible for planning what students will do after high school (see Figure 2.21). Far more Parents in 2006 (45%) than in 2001 (26%) said that parents are most responsible for planning what students will do after high school.

Figure 2.21: Parents' Beliefs: Who is Most Responsible for Planning What Students Will Do after High School?



In interviews, students talked at length about their parents' expectations for them and their attitudes about college. For the majority of students interviewed, parents' expectations about college match the students', though for many students, the careers they're interested in are different than what their parents want them to pursue. For first-generation students, family expectations can go both ways.

- “My parents want me to go [to college] so badly, because they didn't.”
- “My whole family is counting on me to be the first one to go to college, and they depend on me.”
- “My parents didn't go to college, so they told me they don't like college.”

- “I haven't got a whole lot of information from my parents because they don't know a lot about college and stuff.”

When College Planning Starts

“I think it needs to be emphasized more for like freshmen and lower level high school students that they need to start planning earlier, and they can't coast through high school.” —a Maine high school senior

About one in three Young Adults (34%) remember having serious discussions with their parents about their future plans before they entered high school, and only one-quarter (24%) of Student respondents say that they began having these discussions with parents about future plans before they entered high school. Fewer than one in five (18%) General/Vocational track Students began having these discussions with their parents before they entered high school, compared with 23% of College Prep and 29% of Honors/AP track Students.

More than one-half (55%) of Young Adults think that they began planning for the future early enough, and 39% do not. Current college students are more than twice as likely (64%) to say that they began planning for the future early enough than are Young Adults who did not go to college (28%). In comparison, 39% of those who attended college but dropped out say they began planning for the future early enough.

Many High School Educators say that starting early is the most helpful tactic for preparing students for careers and college. At some schools, students develop a four-year plan in 8th grade or at the beginning of 9th grade, and update their plan each year. This gives them an opportunity to consider and continually revisit their plans for after high school.

Among College Administrators surveyed, nearly one-half (46%) said students should begin planning for college prior to 9th grade, 21% said students should begin in 9th grade, 27% said 10th grade, and 7% said students should begin planning for college in 11th or 12th grade.

REAL EXPERIENCES WITH THE TRANSITION

“The transition to college was rough, but I was able to talk to counselors who really were interested in helping me out...If there something that I can’t stress enough to incoming freshmen about coming to college, it is to use the resources available to them to get the help they need.” —a Maine college student

Young Adults’ Post-High School Experiences

80% of Young Adults report that they expected to go to a two- or four-year college directly after high school, while 74% actually did this. An even higher proportion (87%), however, had eventually enrolled in college by the time of the survey.

About one in twenty Young Adults (6%) expected to get a job directly after high school, but nearly one in five (19%) actually went straight to work.

Of those who did not go immediately to college, 30% say that they made this decision during their senior year, 25% decided during the summer after graduation, and 15% decided during the junior year of high school or earlier that they would not go to college. About 12% of Young Adults surveyed enrolled in college but, at some point, left college without completing a degree. Of these, 54% left during their first year of college, 22% left during the second year, 11% left during the third year, and 4% left during the fourth year.

Young Adults who were in a General/Vocational track in high school and who enrolled in college report higher levels of parental involvement with school and with future planning and are more likely to report that their teachers challenged and encouraged them than are those who did not go to college.

College Administrators’ Observations

College Administrators were asked to select the most significant barriers to enrollment for admitted students at their institution from a list. The top three barriers are the same at two-year and four-year colleges, but their prevalence appears to vary by the type of institution:

- Two-year College Administrators mainly chose “unexpected costs” (85%), “personal relationships/family demands” (85%), and “insufficient financial aid” (54%) as the most

significant barriers to enrollment for their admitted, entering students.

- Four-year College Administrators chose “personal relationships/family demands” (57%), “insufficient financial aid” (47%), and “unexpected costs” (21%) as the top three barriers to enrollment.

CONCLUSIONS

Our surveys of Parents, Students, and Young Adults find that academic track in high school and parental education level are two critical factors in determining college aspirations, academic preparation for success in college and jobs, and confidence that college will be financially accessible. General/Vocational track Students, Young Adults, and their Parents:

- experience less encouragement from the community to consider college;
- are not convinced that a college education is attainable for them;
- are unlikely to agree they are being challenged and encouraged by teachers;
- do not believe that they are or were well prepared for college courses and good jobs; and
- report lower levels of experience with adult responsibilities such as arranging their own schedule or managing a bank account.

It appears that being from a first-generation college family (a family in which neither parent has education beyond high school) is associated with high aspirations, yet weaker convictions that college is attainable, and, in particular, financially manageable.

- Students from first-generation college families are less likely than others to agree that their parents are planning for college and more likely to indicate that money will be the determining factor in whether or not they attend college.
- Parental education level has an even stronger influence on Parents’ beliefs about the financial feasibility of college for their children than household income.

PART III: PROMISING PRACTICES

There are many ways to approach the goal of helping more students make successful transitions from high school to college. Maine schools and communities have implemented a variety of changes and strategies. In some cases, one person who is committed to preparing all students for successful futures has effectively convinced others in the school and in the community, raised funds to implement changes, and worked with students one-on-one at different points in their high school careers. Many of the administrators we spoke with said that it took several years of experimentation and improvements to get a new strategy to fit well and be accepted in their school or community. Given the differences among Maine high schools and communities in terms of size, geography, economy, and demographics, different combinations of strategies will be effective in different settings. The following profiles are not meant as a prescription, but are given as examples of the types of innovations that have been effective in some Maine schools and communities.

Several statewide efforts have been effective in helping more Maine students make successful transitions to college. In 1998, the Maine Department of Education (DOE) released *Promising Futures: A Call to Improve Learning for Maine's Secondary Students*, which defined the practices of effective high schools. A 2002 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation created the Great Maine Schools Project at the Mitchell Institute, which assists high schools all over Maine with improvement efforts. Since 2003, the MELMAC Education Foundation has worked with 54 high schools and technical centers and 25 adult education centers, providing grant funds to help adopt proven best practices through its Connecting Aspirations to a Plan grant program. The Maine Compact for Higher Education, a group of Maine business, education, and political leaders, has been advocating and implementing programs to improve educational attainment in Maine since 2003. A National Governors Association (NGA) grant to the Maine Department of Education funds Kick Start, a multimedia campaign designed to encourage more Maine middle school students to develop college aspirations and plans. Maine now uses the SAT as its 11th-grade assessment test, and DOE provides free SAT preparation for all Maine students. The Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) hosts an-

nual College Goal Sunday events throughout the state to assist families in completing financial aid applications.

ADDRESSING MULTIPLE BARRIERS

Dual Enrollment Early College Courses

In the past several years, early college opportunities have rapidly expanded in Maine. Early college courses give high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to take a college course and earn dual credit—both credit toward their high school diploma and college credit that is transferable once they enter a degree program. The state-funded Aspirations early college program has been helping high school students take college classes since 1998. The state pays for one-half of the tuition and participating University of Maine campuses and community colleges waive the other half. 750 students participated in 2006-2007. Increasingly, students who face barriers to college are being targeted for participation in early college programs. The Access College Early (ACE) program, funded by an NGA grant to the Maine DOE, helped 44 high schools establish early college partnerships with 16 post-secondary institutions in 2006-2007, and over 400 students participated. Other examples of early college partnerships include:

- *The Downeast Community Learning Alliance (DECLA)* includes five Washington County high schools that have been working together for several years to expand early college opportunities for their students. In 2006-2007, students from the five high schools took 117 courses at University of Maine at Machias for dual credit.
- *The University of Maine at Fort Kent* has developed an early college partnership with four area high schools. In the past two academic years, 90 students have taken 150 courses for dual credit.
- *York County Community College* began an early college partnership with Wells High School in 2004 and has since expanded it to work with seven more area high schools. The program has been so popular that high school students accounted for 15% of YCCC's total institutional enrollment in 2006-2007.
- In 2006, the *University of Maine* introduced a distance learning early college program called Academ-e. The program makes it possible for seniors at all Maine high schools

to take college courses online. Academ-e includes a mandatory campus orientation for students and a parent, guardian, or guidance counselor at the beginning of the semester. On orientation day, students register their laptop computers, receive campus e-mail accounts, receive a tutorial in the online course software, and attend the first class meeting. Parents attend a special session highlighting college admissions and financial aid information while their student is in class. In 2006-2007, the program offered 14 college courses with a total of 560 student slots.

Early College for ME

The Maine Community College System's Early College for ME (ECforME) program is for students who are undecided about college, yet who have the potential to succeed in college. Students are selected by their high school to participate in ECforME. The program includes advising, the opportunity to take one or two early college courses for free during the senior year, and a \$2,000 scholarship for students who matriculate into one of the seven MCCS campuses.

During high school, an ECforME advisor helps students assess their academic readiness for college, select courses to meet the entrance requirements of the college program they wish to enter, consider early college courses, and navigate the college application and financial aid process, including help with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). If the students enroll in an MCCS college, the advisors continue to be available throughout their college program. ECforME is now available at 74 Maine high schools and technical centers, with plans to expand to every high school by 2008.

Career/College Centers at School

- *Lewiston High School's Aspirations Initiative:* Lewiston High School serves over 1,300 students. For several years the Lewiston School Board has funded a full-time aspirations coordinator position at the high school. The coordinator does not have a guidance caseload, but works with all students. She coordinates three programs:

- The Aspirations Lab is a resource room for all the steps in the college search and application process. Students can get one-on-one support, guidance, and answers to questions. Teachers and guidance counselors take shifts staffing



the Lab, and students get help researching colleges, checking all the pieces of their application, and filing the FAFSA. Students' college application essays have improved, as the Lab increases the likelihood that all students get feedback on their early drafts.

- College visits for every sophomore.
- An extensive early college program, providing many juniors and seniors the opportunity to take courses at one of four local colleges and universities for dual college and high school credit. Since 2005, more than 200 students have taken early college courses.

The aspirations coordinator has also focused on engaging parents in the college application process, and on supporting students in accessing financial aid. The high school's web site has a page specifically for parents (www.lewiston.k12.me.us/~lhsparents/), which is regularly updated with timely information.

- *Mt. Abram High School's Pathway Partners:* Pathway Partners was founded at Mt. Abram High School in Strong in 1997, and began as a career mentoring and counseling program. Its mission is to provide a seamless transition from school life to a successful career pathway for every student. Pathway Partners works extensively with businesses in the area to arrange mentors, school-to-work experiences, and internships for students. For example, they are currently working with Cianbro, a large area employer, to develop a workforce training program. Pathway Partners also works with juniors and seniors and their parents to navigate the college process.

The staff is responsible for the district Adult & Community Education program, which offers occupational and vocational courses and adult basic education. In this way, the staff is committed to assisting students beyond high school, even if they do not graduate. Most recently, Pathway Partners has been developing a network of high school alumni for fundraising and to provide current students and recent graduates with more sources for advice on specific colleges and careers.

The staff reports that they have been successful at building a shared belief in both the school and the community that everyone can finish high school college-ready, and that Mt. Abram has been sending graduates to postsecondary education or training in unprecedented numbers. Understanding local culture and community engagement through interpersonal relationships have been critical to this success.

Pathway Partners' director advises, "With ninth graders, do interest inventories and talk about the next steps in pursuing their interests. If you start talking about college, many of them will lose interest. They're not there yet. Students need to learn how to plan, step by step, to turn their dreams into achievable goals."

- *Dirigo High School's Partnership with the University of Maine at Farmington:* Dirigo High School in Dixfield has had a partnership with UMF since they received a federal GEAR-UP partnership grant in 1999. Grants from the MELMAC and Nellie Mae Education Foundations have enabled them to expand the services they provide to the school communities' seventh through twelfth graders. A college access coordinator works at the high school, but is an employee of UMF. One of the signature programs at Dirigo is a mandatory tutoring program for any student with an average grade of 72 or below in any class. Freshmen are assigned to a teacher for one-half hour of tutoring after school. Students in 10th, 11th, or 12th grades are assigned to a UMF student tutor who meets with them during learning lab periods (Dirigo's alternative to study halls) during the school day. There are financial aid nights for parents and a PSAT night for sophomores when they get their PSAT scores to encourage them and their parents to plan for college. "These things have become institutionalized here now," the coordinator explains, "The district thinks it's that important."

The partnership sponsors several summer institutes for students:

- a middle to high school transition summer academy
- a leadership conference for middle and high school students that includes a different training curriculum and an extensive college campus tour each year
- "Jump Start Your Future" for students between their junior and senior years of high school
 - The focus is on college applications and financial aid. Students learn about the vocabulary of the college application process, learn how to complete the common application, and apply for PINs to begin the federal financial aid application process. A UMF professor comes to help students write the first draft of a college application essay, and students spend time peer reviewing the essays. Students also learn how to do scholarship searches. These sessions are repeated in the fall for students who cannot attend in the summer.
- "Ready Set Go", a four-day college transition institute for seniors after graduation, for the first time in 2007.
 - The institute will feature the same time management and study skills workshop that UMF offers to incoming freshmen; a day focusing on life skills like cooking, laundry, and living away from home; and a financial literacy day with both a session with FAME on how to stay on track and graduate from college on time and real-life budgeting exercises led by a local credit union.

Facilitating Successful Transitions from Middle to High School

In addition to traditional "step-up" activities to introduce incoming students and their parents to high school, several schools have practices in place to help improve student outcomes in the freshman year and beyond.

- *At Lake Region High School* in Naples, all students are assigned to an advisory group as freshmen. The groups stay with the same advisor for all four years of high school, and they meet for the first 15 minutes of school each day. Throughout high school, parent conferences are scheduled through the advisory groups, and this has improved parent attendance. Other schools that have developed advisory programs include *Mt. Abram* and *Poland High School*. *At Noble High School* in North Berwick, the roughly 1,000 students are

assigned to heterogeneously-grouped teams for all four years of high school, and all core subject area faculty members teach in teams.

- At *South Portland High School*, ninth graders are divided into three heterogeneously grouped teams of eighty to ninety students. The purpose of teaming is to increase communication among students, parents, and teachers. Teaming allows teachers to coordinate the curriculum across content areas, which supports students' understanding of the complex relationship between subjects. Each interdisciplinary team will consist of an English, social studies, math, and science teacher as well as special educators, a guidance counselor, a social worker, and an administrator. Freshman workshop replaces study halls during freshman year, and provides students with a block of time to complete homework, make up assessments, or work on enrichment material or on an honors challenge. South Portland has also implemented schedule changes that allow for teachers to hold content-area team meetings every other day.

Other high schools that have comprehensive programs in place to facilitate successful transitions from middle to high school include *Caribou*, *Dirigo*, *Fort Kent*, and *Sacopec Valley*.

Senior Seminars

At *Machias Memorial High School*, seniors take a year-long Senior Seminar course that fulfills the senior English requirement and includes a senior exhibition. Students select the topics they will pursue in the course, find a mentor, perform community service, conduct research and write a paper, develop a physical project, and present their work to a panel at the end of the year. Senior seminar is meant to be a culminating academic experience that allows students to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they have attained, challenges them to learn more, and helps them to direct their futures. The 2006-2007 seminar handbook is available on the web at http://65.18.58.89/pdfs/willey/sen_ex_handbook.pdf

At *Mt. Abram High School*, students in all four grades present their work in a spring showcase, and seniors must complete a postsecondary education plan that includes applying to a college or certificate program. *Poland* also requires all seniors to complete a college application. At *Hall-Dale*, the senior seminar includes researching a college and preparing a presenta-

tion about it. *Fort Kent* and *Sacopec* also have senior seminar courses and require senior exhibitions.

ADDRESSING SOCIAL/CULTURAL ISSUES

College Visits for All Students

Every *Lewiston High School* sophomore visits two colleges in a school-sponsored trip. The tours visit two colleges in one day, and include both Maine and out-of-state colleges. The tours are timed to get students thinking about college right before they select their junior-year courses, and give each student an introduction to the resources available in the Aspirations Lab at school. A survey conducted by Bates College students and faculty found that students, particularly male students, are more likely to see themselves as college material after going on a school-sponsored college tour.

Lake Region High School uses funds from its MELMAC Connecting Aspirations to a Plan grant to pay for college campus visits. LRHS hosts a trip to Southern Maine Community College for all sophomores and trips to several four-year colleges for all juniors. Other high schools that arrange college visits for all students include: *Central*, *Fort Fairfield*, *Fort Kent*, *Greely*, *Hall-Dale*, *Machias*, *Mt. Abram*, *Mt. View*, *Poland*, and *Portland*. One teacher found that the experience of chaperoning a college visit was an excellent opportunity to talk with college faculty and staff and to learn more about their expectations. She recommends that all teachers take a turn serving as chaperones on college visits. The MELMAC Foundation's website has several resources for planning successful college visits at www.melmacfoundation.org/grants/catp/Peer.aspx

Bowdoin College's Aspirations in Maine Program

Since 2005, Bowdoin College's Community Service Resource Center has hosted an Aspirations Program that brings high school juniors from eight schools in the region onto campus for a day of shadowing students and experiencing college student life. This year, the program expanded to Northern Maine, and brought 36 juniors from six Aroostook County high schools to Bowdoin for a two-day visit. Bowdoin students hosted the high school visitors in their dorm rooms and took them to classes during the day and campus entertainment at night. The students heard from admissions and financial aid representatives as well as former Maine Governor



Angus King. “I really liked the fact we could sit in on classes because it gave me a chance to feel the atmosphere and see the way a college class is conducted,” one participating student said. Another commented, “The best part for me was staying overnight, getting to experience night time college experiences, and seeing what a college class was like.” A teacher or guidance counselor from each high school served as a chaperone on the trip, and Bowdoin arranged special information sessions for them on admissions and financial aid.

ADDRESSING ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Core Curriculum for All Students

The University of Maine System’s Statement of College Readiness describes an optimal, college-ready high school transcript as including:

- four years of English courses that incorporate a variety of texts and emphasize writing skills;
- four years of math courses, including Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, and a 12th-grade college-preparatory math course;
- three years of laboratory science: biology, chemistry, and physics;
- three years of social studies and history that emphasize reading, writing, and the use of quantitative data and research findings; and
- at least two years of study in a language other than English.

Hall-Dale High School in Farmingdale recently revised its Program of Studies and its graduation requirements so that

all students will graduate prepared for college, work, and citizenship. Beginning with the class of 2009, all students must complete four years of math (including Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2) in order to graduate. Details are described in the Program of Studies, available online at www.halldale.org/index.php/hd_hs

Hall-Dale’s principal says that it took two years to make the revisions to the graduation requirements and program of studies. The school’s Great Maine Schools Project coach helped to gather research and feedback to support the case and convince the School Board to make the changes. Faculty members engaged in self-exploration and networking to determine what the requirements should be in their respective disciplines. The biggest concerns about the changes were that students would rebel, and that failure and dropout rates would increase. The principal reports that none of these things have happened. There was also a concern that students would not have access to as many electives, but with a growing early college program, the contrary has happened. “The senior year at Hall-Dale is now a year to gear up for the future, not to take it easy or coast,” the principal reports.

Other Maine schools that require four years of study in English, math, science, and social studies for graduation include *Poland, Sacopee Valley, and Searsport*. At *Fort Kent Community High School*, students must also complete two years of another language to graduate. At *Noble High School*, five English courses, five math courses (including one course beyond Algebra 2), and four science courses are now required

for graduation. Noble's Program of Studies is available at the school website: <http://knight.noble-hs.sad60.k12.me.us>

Peer Tutoring

Houlton Junior/Senior High School serves almost 600 students in grades 7 through 12. Several years ago, the principal and vice principal developed a program combining peer tutoring and service learning. The program gives about 40 students each year the opportunity to serve as peer tutors for fellow students. The service learning coordinator is also a special educator at the school. She explains, "Most community service had been done outside of school. This program focuses on the school as a community. There's a real need here." Students in grades nine through twelve are eligible to participate in the program and can earn up to one course credit. Service Learners who tutor peers earn a half-course credit each semester, and those who work with teachers or assist in the school library earn a quarter-course credit. Interested students must take part in an interview, sign a contract, and keep a log of their work. Students needing a tutor may be identified by parents, a teacher, or an administrator. Some Service Learners help peers with a specific subject at either of the Academic Learning Centers in the junior high and the high school; some serve as tutors during a mandatory after-school program for 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students who are failing a course; and some are assigned as positive role models to spend time going to lunch or meeting regularly with another student. The principal reports that two years ago, before the program began, 55 7th, 8th, and 9th graders failed core classes. Last year, only 14 students in those grades failed core classes, and he attributes much of this improvement to the Service Learners' work.

Ensuring Academic Rigor at Career and Technical Education (CTE) Centers

The Maine DOE has an ongoing effort to promote academic integration and literacy development in its CTE centers, and recently commissioned a report that documents promising practices for improving academic rigor. One example is the Mid-Coast School of Technology, which serves students from seven high schools. MCST has been working to integrate literacy development in reading, writing, and math across its curriculum for several years. Teachers in all classes are using

common reading comprehension and vocabulary development strategies, many of which emphasize critical thinking. MCST now offers English and math classes for students whose schedules do not allow them to take these courses at their sending high schools. MCST has seen enrollment increases and reports steady improvement in students' reading and math scores over the past three years (Julie Meltzer, *Motivating Contexts for Learning: Increasing Academic Rigor and Improving Literacy Development in Maine's CTE Centers*, www.maine.gov/education/it/promise/6finalrpt.pdf).

ADDRESSING FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Financial barriers to college may prove the most complicated to address. Much of the problem lies within the federal financial aid system, which is overly complex and timed to provide information too late to impact college-going decisions positively. In addition, the process of awarding financial aid and the resources available varies widely depending on the college or university. This makes it difficult to advise individual students on exactly what financial aid they will receive and what their net cost of college will be. At the national level, efforts have been made recently to address these issues. In April 2007, the federal government unveiled its new FAFSA forecaster web tool, which provides federal financial aid estimates in advance, based on family information the user provides.

In Maine, FAME offers several financial aid calculators for Maine families at <http://www.famemaine.com/education/calculators.asp>. In addition, FAME now offers a \$50 "First Step" grant to the parents of any newborn Maine resident to open a college savings account within the NextGen college investing plan (see www.famemaine.com/education/nextgen.asp). The state-funded Maine State Grant Program is a need-based grant for full-time, Maine resident college students. Roughly 9,600 students currently receive a Maine State Grant Program scholarship; the awards average \$1,200 per year.

College Goal Sunday

Nationally, an estimated 20-40% of eligible college students do not receive federal grants because they do not apply for financial aid (Dynarski and Scott-Clayton, page 18, <http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~SDynarski/200702dynarski-scott-clayton.pdf>). At one Maine high school, an administrator



recently learned that only 24% of 2006 graduates completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), even though more than 60% of them enrolled in college. Since 2004, the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) has sponsored College Goal Sunday, a nationwide program that takes place one Sunday afternoon each year in late January. Financial aid experts and other professionals volunteer their time to help students and their families complete the FAFSA and get financial aid information. Anyone planning to complete the FAFSA for the upcoming academic year can get help with it at College Goal Sunday. In 2007, the event was held at twenty sites around Maine.

SAD 60's "Believe Committee"

In 2004, the School Board of Maine School Administrative District 60 in North Berwick established a committee of small and large businesses, parents and educators called the "Believe Committee" to challenge the prevailing mindset in their community that a high school education is enough and college is a luxury. The group of 18 to 24 people has been meeting regularly for three years. It addresses cultural barriers to college by promoting awareness and building support for the increased graduation requirements recently instituted at the high school. The Believe Committee has targeted financial barriers to college by hosting events aimed at giving parents financial aid information and financial planning tools beginning when their children are in elementary school. It has developed financial aid workshops specifically for parents of children in kindergarten through grade 3; grades 4 and 5;

middle school; and high school. The Assistant Superintendent explains that several School Board members are financial planners, and local banks are very involved in the committee, and that these members have been effective in helping parents understand what they can do to start early in preparing their children financially for college. She advises, "Try to engage different people in the community. Get your businesses involved. Be willing to listen to what people are looking for."

CONCLUSIONS

Maine schools and communities are employing many promising practices aimed at removing barriers to college, and many of these practices have been implemented within the past several years. We noticed that, at many of the sites, multiple strategies are in place in different combinations. Some practices, such as career/college centers at school, address multiple barriers to college. Exposing all students to college addresses social/cultural barriers, and there are a number of ways to address academic barriers, such as increasing graduation requirements and improving the transition from middle to high school. While FAME has a number of statewide programs that help Maine families navigate financial barriers to college, we had a difficult time identifying many schools or communities that are addressing these issues.

PART IV: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we found in the first *Barriers* report, the vast majority of high school students and their parents have college aspirations. College-going among Maine high school graduates is not growing, however, and too many students who enroll in college do not persist. This research offers evidence about why college enrollment is not growing along with aspirations, and how Maine can help more students realize their aspirations:

- **Most educators do not believe that all students are capable of graduating from high school ready for college.** While this is partially due to factors like student maturity and motivation, some educators still have a limited view of college as a four-year degree program in the liberal arts and sciences.
- **There is a lack of awareness, particularly among parents and students, that similar math, reading, and writing skills are needed for success both at college and in the workplace.**
- **While educators and current college students believe that planning for after high school should begin early, many students are not starting until their junior year.** Many parents say that it is difficult to get started planning for their child's future. Some school districts have not built career exploration and college preparation into the school day.
- **There is work to be done improving academic readiness for college, particularly for students not in an Honors/AP academic track.** Not enough students are taking advanced math courses. Many students are concerned or apprehensive that they will not be adequately academically prepared for college.
- **There is not enough awareness of the financial aid process or support for families navigating it.** Students' confidence about the financial feasibility of going to college is significantly lower than college aspirations. Parents who themselves did not go to college tend to believe that finances will be the determining factor in whether or not their child attends college. Managing money and financial matters is an area where students tend to feel underprepared for life after high school.
- **Parental involvement is critical.** Students say that their parents are the most helpful resource in planning for life after high school, and parental involvement is a key factor in predicting college enrollment.

Eight Ways to Make a Difference

1) Continue to broaden the notion of college. As one educator put it, "There is a primary emphasis on four-year colleges and universities. I think that there needs to be more education and awareness presented to students on the benefit of two-year and vocational colleges. This may reach students who have not thought about college as something that is for them."

- **High schools and colleges** can improve awareness among educators about the full array of programs and majors—both two-year and four-year—offered at colleges and universities.
- As the skills needed for college and work become increasingly similar, **businesses and colleges** can reinforce the need for better preparation for all students by informing Maine citizens—educators, parents, students, and employees—about the skills needed for success at college and in the workplace.

2) Expose students to college, starting at a young age. Particularly for first-generation families, it is important to get parents as well as students familiar with college. Older elementary and middle school students, as well as high school students, should have these opportunities.

- **Schools** can arrange informal visits, such as attending campus arts or sporting events, as well as official tours and more extensive visits.
- **High schools and colleges** can build and expand early college partnerships, providing more opportunities for high school students to enroll in college courses.
- **Colleges** can open their doors to younger students. Invite participants in vacation or summer recreation programs to use the gym or pool, have lunch in the cafeteria, and meet some college students. Sports teams can host local youth groups for occasional clinics.
- **Students** can seek opportunities, and say yes when offered opportunities, to visit colleges.

3) Start career exploration early. Programs that are developmentally-appropriate can broaden students' horizons, convince them that the effort they put into school now will pay off by expanding their options in the future, and raise awareness of the full array of careers that exist.

- **Elementary and middle schools** can build career exploration into curricula at all levels.

- **High schools** can develop programs for students in each grade that explicitly lead them to connect interests with possible careers and to find out what education is required. Some schools have successfully built this into their advisory programs and into career/college centers at school.
- **Businesses** can host students for site visits and job shadows, encourage employees to serve as mentors, and sponsor visits to college programs related to their industry.
- **Parents and community members** can share their own experiences with their children, relatives, and friends, so that more students learn about different paths to success.

“Too often, we take for granted that everyone knows about jobs and college, but it’s just not the case for everyone. Many kids aren’t ready to start thinking about their future in 8th grade. But if you at least introduce them to it, it might help them to take course-selection in high school a little more seriously.”
—a Maine college student

- 4) Ensure that all students have rigorous educational experiences.** Maintain and communicate high expectations, and make sure all students take college preparatory math courses every year in high school. Particularly for students in a General or Vocational track, academic rigor and intentional career and college planning may need improvement.
- **Schools** should provide challenging, rigorous courses to all students.
 - **Parents** can get involved in their child’s course selection beginning in middle school. They should ensure that their child chooses the most rigorous courses they can, advocate for the resources needed to support successful experiences, and support students to stick with it.
 - **Students** should take Algebra 1 in 8th or 9th grade (which means getting adequate math preparation in the earlier grades), and continue to take a rigorous course of study, including a math course, every year of high school. Senior year is not a time to coast. Learning to think and write takes hard work—push yourself!

5) Enlist Maine colleges (faculty, staff, and students). One administrator suggests, “University and high school faculties need

to partner in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to shrink the disconnect...provide tutorial help at the high schools; administer college placement tests to high school juniors and first semester seniors and provide tutors to help students meet cut off scores and realize the rigor of college work.”

- **College administrators and faculty** can make connections with area high schools. Invite high school teachers to visit college courses in their discipline. Bring college administrators and high school guidance staff together to share knowledge about placement tests, admissions, and financial aid.
- **College students** can engage in community service by visiting local high schools (and their home high schools) regularly to serve as mentors or to supplement the college advising available at school. They can share their experiences with the college application process and the realities of college life.

6) Get businesses involved. Businesses are in a unique position to help, and in the long-term their efforts will pay off with a more highly-educated workforce. **Businesses can:**

- Think of their employees as parents of the next generation’s workforce, and provide them with information and services to ensure that they can effectively help their children prepare for success.
- Invite educators to visit work sites to show them the job skills that are in demand, and describe the expectations of employees in terms of reading, writing, and math proficiency.
- For employees with a child in high school, give one additional day off each year for college campus visits. They can host college and financial aid information sessions on-site and provide employees with hands-on help with completing the FAFSA, either by bringing in financial aid experts or by linking employees who have been through the process with those facing it for the first time.

7) Start financial planning and saving for college early.

- **Parents** can save for college starting when their children are born. By the same token, it is never too late to start saving for college.
- **Students** who work can save a portion of their earnings for college.
- **Community members** with expertise can provide workshops or counseling for schools and parents.

8) Make sure all families complete the Free Application for

Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Far fewer families than are eligible apply for financial aid. In Maine, federal and state grant aid can add up to nearly \$6,000 per year of college, depending on family income. FAFSA results are also used to determine loan offers and by many colleges to allocate institutional financial aid.

- **High schools** should explain the necessary steps and the appropriate timing for completing the FAFSA as part of career and college counseling for all students.
- **Parents** can complete their federal tax returns in January of their child's senior year so that the information needed for the FAFSA is accurate and available on time. This will put the student in the best position to receive financial aid from the government and from their college.

“The biggest challenge is getting students and families to prepare and save for several years prior to starting college. It is not the amount that is saved that is so important...it is more for students and families to feel vested in the process. If families spend time saving for college, then chances are quite good that other areas of the student's preparation are being scrutinized and planned for (such as rigorous math, science, and college-level high school classes).” —a Maine college administrator

About the Mitchell Institute

The core mission of the Mitchell Institute is to increase the likelihood that young people from every community in Maine will aspire to, pursue, and achieve a college education. Each year, the Mitchell Institute awards a \$5,000 scholarship to a graduating senior from every public high school in Maine. Selection is based on academic promise, financial need, and a history of community service. The Mitchell Scholarship Program has awarded more than \$5.7 million in financial assistance to nearly 1,400 Maine students since 1995. Mitchell Institute support programs create ongoing Scholar and Alumni involvement in leadership and professional development, as well as community service and mentoring activities. The Mitchell Institute strengthens the involvement of a new generation of civic-minded and committed citizens while creating educational opportunity for Maine's young people.



Through a longitudinal study of the Mitchell Scholars and broader statewide research, the Mitchell Institute contributes to the body of knowledge about postsecondary education in Maine. Our goals are to ensure that our scholarship and support program resources are used effectively, to measure the impacts of being a Mitchell Scholar, and to learn about practical barriers to postsecondary education in Maine and how to make college more accessible to Maine high school students.

The Great Schools Partnership, a supporting organization of the Mitchell Institute, is committed to strengthening and redesigning Maine's system of public secondary education to improve the quality of learning for every high school student in the state. In collaboration with organizations and educators across Maine and the nation, the Great Schools Partnership is working to raise educational aspirations and achievement by creating equitable, rigorous, and personalized academic programs that prepare all students for college, work, and citizenship in the 21st century.



Mitchell
 Institute

SENATOR GEORGE J. MITCHELL
SCHOLARSHIP RESEARCH INSTITUTE

22 Monument Square, Suite 200
Portland, Maine 04101
(207) 773-7700

www.mitchellinstitute.org