

Strategies for Success: High School and Beyond

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Regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, most American adolescents today expect to attend college, and a significant proportion of them expect to attend graduate school. Many of these teenagers, however, will not fulfill their expectations, not because they are unwilling to work hard for grades or believe they that school is unimportant to their futures, but because they often lack important information that would help them form effective strategies for preparing for and applying to college. In this paper, Schneider summarizes findings from several analyses she and her graduate students have conducted, based on data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988-94 (NELS:88-94) and other national studies, on predictors of college matriculation. She and her research team have found that high school students who take advanced courses sequences in mathematics and science are the most likely to receive high scores on college admissions tests and to attend four-year colleges. For example, student who takes rigorous course sequences in both mathematics and science can potentially gain 265 points on the SAT compared to a student who takes no advanced courses and is much more likely to attend a four-year college. Participation in extracurricular activities, such as interscholastic sports, performing arts groups, and school publications, also significantly improve a student's prospects of attending a four-year college, but to a lesser extent than taking advanced coursework. Schools and parents also influence students' high school careers and college plans. Research findings suggest that high schools can significantly improve college matriculation rates, particularly among minority students, by implementing foreign language requirements, having college representatives visit the high school, and providing assistance with college applications and financial aid forms. Adolescents whose parents consult with knowledgeable persons about financial aid and who are willing to commit additional financial resources toward their children's education are also more likely to attend.