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WEBINAR

UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING GENDER, CLASS, AND RACIAL DISPARITIES

IN COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

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WELCOMING REMARKS AND MODERATOR:

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PRESENTATION:

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DISCUSSION:

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Katharine Meyer Good afternoon. On behalf of the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, I thank you for joining us for our event today, Understanding and Addressing Gender, Class and Racial Disparities in College Enrollment. I'm Katharine Meyer, a fellow in the Brown Center on Education Policy and Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution. And I'm delighted to be moderating today's panel discussion. We'll start today with a presentation by Sarah Reber, the Joseph A. Pechman senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution on College Enrollment Disparities: Understanding the Role of Academic Preparation. After Sarah's presentation, we'll open up for a panel discussion broadly college enrollment disparities. You can submit questions to our panelists at any time, either via Twitter using the hashtag college enrollment or by emailing events at Brookings dot edu. Now I'll turn it over to Sarah to share her latest findings with us.

Sarah Reber Thanks, Katharine. Let me just get my screen sharing. Okay, great. Thank you, Katharine, for the introduction and for moderating, moderating this event. And thanks to everyone out there watching for taking the time to watch this presentation and this panel. This work was funded in part by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and we thank them for their support. Of course, the findings and conclusions presented here are ours and did not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundation. This presentation draws on a new report we released today, "College Enrollment Disparities: Understanding the role of Academic Preparation," which is joint work with Ember Smith, a research analyst here at Brookings and the Center for Children and Families, and I want to thank her for all her work on this report. You can find the full report on the Brookings website, and I hope you all will check it out. Okay, so I'm excited to present this new work and to hear from this great panel. Let's see how to advance my slides.

Okay, so we are asking two basic questions in this report. First, how much do college enrollment rates vary depending on socio economic status, gender and race or ethnicity? And second, what role do differences in academic preparation play in explaining those gaps? And just in case your attention flags during the presentation, I'll give you the quick answers now. So the answer to the first question is that college enrollment varies quite a bit depending on gender, SES, and race, and differences in academic preparation play a big role in explaining college enrollment disparities. But there are some subtleties to those answers, depending on which group we look at and which outcomes we consider.

Before I move on and get into the nitty gritty of the report, I want to say a word about why should we, why we should care about college enrollment disparities. The short answer is that graduating from college, especially with a B.A., has many benefits for individuals, including but not only higher wages. And if we see that students from some groups are less able to access higher education, that should make us worry that as a society, we're not developing all of our talent and it's not just individuals that will miss out when we don't do that, but everyone. Okay. I'm going to tell you a little bit about the data before we get into the results. But please check out the report for all of, all of the details.

So to do this analysis, we need to know if a student enrolled in college, and we need that link to information about the socioeconomic status of the family they grew up in, as well as information about how they did in high school. So we need a data set that follows people over time. Fortunately for us, the National, National Center for Education Statistics collects data like this, and they start a new cohort every several years. For this analysis, we use the High School Longitudinal Survey or HSLS, which sampled over 2000 9th graders in 2009 and then followed them and surveyed them every year or so after that. So all of the analysis we do here uses this sample who graduated from high school in 2013.

And we're going to be focusing on what I'll call on time enrollment in a two- or four-year college so that is, we look at whether a student enrolled in college any time in the first 18 months after expected high school graduation, and I want to note that college graduation is also important, and we would like to look at that. But this cohort is not old enough yet to have the data to look at how they're doing in college. So we're going to be focusing on enrollment here, and I'll refer to this as on time enrollment as a shorthand throughout the presentation.

Okay. So let's have a look at the data on the first question, how does college enrollment vary across groups? The first bar of this figure shows about 44% of this cohort enrolled in a four-year college on time. And the next set of bars shows how four-year college enrollment rates varies, enrollment varies depending on socioeconomic status. So to measure SES, we use an index that's created by the NCES, who collected these data, and it's based on parental education, parental occupation and family income. And then we divide the sample into five equal groups or quintiles. But you would see a similar pattern if you look at these findings by parental education, for example.

So I think it's fair to characterize these SES disparities in four-year college enrollment as enormous, there's a very strong slope in this graph. Almost three quarters of students from families in the top one fifth of the SES distribution enroll in a four-year college. And that's compared to less than one quarter of students from the bottom fifth. So this, this gradient is steep across the distribution, but you can see that high schoolers from the top two quintiles are particularly likely to attend four-year college. So this figure adds two-year enrollment, which are the light blue bars. And in the first bar we see that about 24, 24% of this cohort enrolled in a two-year college. So 68% enrolled in some type of college, two year or four year. And we see that students from lower SES families enroll in two-year colleges at higher rates. In the bottom three quintiles between 26 and 28% of students enroll in a two-year college, and that's compared to only 15% of students from the highest SES families.

So there's a little less inequality by SES if we consider any enrollment rather than just four-year enrollment. But there's still a 35-percentage point gap between enrollment rates in the top and the bottom quintiles of socioeconomic status. So next we look at four year and two-year enrollment by gender, and we can see that 73% of girls and 64% of boys enroll in either a two year or four-year college. And enrollment in a two-year college is the same for boys and girls. So the nine-percentage point gap is driven by differences in four-year enrollment.

Finally, we look at enrollment disparities by race and ethnicity. And for this, we use the mutually exclusive categories created by NCES, and it's based on self-reported race and Hispanic ethnicity. And we include everyone in the analysis, and you can see that in the report. But unfortunately, the sample sizes for American Indian and Alaska Native students and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students are too small to give us reliable results. And the multiple race category can be somewhat difficult to interpret, so we're not discussing those results here.

So you can see that Asian American youth have the highest college enrollment rate at 83%, followed by white youth at 72%. And Black and Hispanic youth have similar enrollment rates of 62 or 63%. And most of the differences are driven again by four-year enrollment, the dark blue bars. But Hispanic students are particularly likely to enroll in a two-year institution, the light blue bars in this figure and have the lowest four-year enrollment rate of any group. And white students are the least likely to enroll in a two-year college and are more likely to enroll in a four-year college if, if they're enrolled in college.

Okay. So this figure shows the average academic high school GPA for those same groups as I just showed you. And you can see that the pattern is quite similar to the previous figure. So other measures of academic preparation would tend to follow a similar pattern. There's one exception here, which is when you look by gender, there are some differences and I'll come back to that. But these academic preparation measures, especially high school GPA, are very strong predictors of college going. S

o this raises the question of how the gaps in academic preparation that you see here relate to the gaps in college enrollment outcomes that I showed you on the previous slide. And so that's what we're going to look at next. But before we do that, I want to emphasize that our analysis can't speak to the reasons for these gaps in academic preparation, which are surely related both to students' own decisions and actions that they take in school, but also to the opportunities they've had both in school and out of school. And specifically, with respect to racial disparities, there's evidence of different kinds of discrimination against Black students and other students of color, both in schools and in the broader society, which certainly contribute to these gaps.

Okay, so how do we assess the role of academic preparation and explaining college enrollment gaps? Well, what we want to do is compare college enrollment outcomes for students with similar academic preparation, and we use linear regression controlling for academic preparation to do this, it is a fairly standard approach to this type of question. And we ask if, if gaps or if we see that gaps for students with similar academic preparation are different from the gaps I showed you before, that suggests that group differences in academic preparation are important in explaining differences in college enrollment. We also consider the role of SES differences in explaining gaps by race and ethnicity in college enrollment. But it won't have talk, I won't have time to talk about those in the presentation today, but I hope you'll check that out in the report.

Okay, so in these data, we have pretty good measures of academic preparation, which are overall academic GPA in high school, and we also consider math and English language arts GPA separately. And we have the number of AP or IB courses and the highest math class that the student completed. And we also have a standardized math test score that was, comes from a test that's administered by the NCES as part of the, the survey administration collection of this data.

Okay. Here, here are the results for socioeconomic status. So the first panel on the left shows four-year college enrollment by SES quintile. So this is the same as what we saw in the first figure I

showed you. And the second panel shows the same thing but controlling for all of the academic preparation measures I mentioned on the last slide. So the, the bars on the right are clearly much flatter than the bars on the left. And what this means is that holding constant academic preparation gaps in college enrollment by SES are much smaller. And so this means that a large portion of the SES gaps in college enrollment are related to differences in academic preparation.

But the raw gaps in the first panel are so large that even though controlling for academic preparation shrinks them a lot, the gaps in the second panel are still really big. Among those with similar academic preparation, students in the top SES quintile are 18 percentage points more likely to enroll in a four-year college compared to students in the first quintile. And that's a very rich difference. And there's even a nine-percentage point gap just between the third and fourth quintiles. So for the sake of time, I won't show the results for total enrollment, including two-year, two-year colleges but there's generally a similar picture if you if you look at that.

Okay, so here we see the same type of analysis by gender and the nine-percentage point gap in four-year college enrollment, which is shown in the bars on the left and is what we saw on the first figure essentially disappears if you control for differences in academic preparation, which is in the bars on the right. And the gap actually reverses a little, but that one percentage point gap is is not statistically significant. So what this is saying is that boys and girls who have similar academic preparation attend four-year colleges at the same rate.

And so compared to differences by SES, the gender gap is smaller, and it's fully explained by differences in academic preparation. And I mean here, I mean all of those measures I mentioned, the GPA, course taking, highest math and test scores. So this middle set of bars shows what would happen if you just control for the math test score and not anything about grades or course taking. And what you see is that holding constant the math test score doesn't shrink the gap at all.

So for for girls and boys who have similar math test scores, the, the gap in, in enrollment in four-year college is still nine percentage points. And I didn't show it to you, but in the analysis of SES gaps, if we hold constant just the math scores or hold constant all the academic preparation measures, the real results pretty much look similar. So this divergence between in-school performance related measures of academic preparation and test score-based measures is specific to the analysis of gender gaps. And this is something that has been noted elsewhere. But I think more

research on this would be helpful and maybe revealing about the nature of gender gaps in college enrollment.

And this divergence also has implications for research in that we don't always have all of these measures available in the data we use for this type of analysis. For example, sometimes you only have test scores, and our analysis suggests that test scores are pretty substitutable with the other measures if you're looking at SES or race gaps, but that's not the case when you're studying gender.

So finally, I'll also mention that the results for total enrollment, including two-year enrollment, again look very similar. In fact, the gender gaps in college enrollment are completely driven by differences in four-year enrollment. So you're really seeing the full story here, the four-year enrollment.

Okay, so finally, this figure shows the findings by race. And here there are some interesting differences depending on whether you look at total post-secondary enrollment, including two-year enrollment or just four-year enrollment. So I'll start by talking about total enrollment rates, including two-year enrollment.

So as we saw earlier, the first set of bars shows that Asian youth are the most likely to enroll in college, followed by white and then Black and Hispanic youth who have similar enrollment rates to each other. And then the second set of bars shows that among students with similar academic preparation, the order is reversed. So Black youth are the most likely to enroll, followed by Hispanic and then white and Asian youth. And so among students with similar academic preparation, the gap between the highest and the lowest enrolling groups here is about eight percentage points.

Now, if we look in the second row, the, the figure shows that the results for, sorry, the second row shows just enrollment in four-year college. And as you see in the top row for total enrollment, taking account of differences in academic preparation, so going from the bars on the left to those on the right reduces and sometimes reverses the gaps. But there are some differences that we look at four-year enrollment in the second row. For students who have similar academic preparation and enroll in some type of college, the bottom right panel, Black and white students are more likely to enroll in a four-year college, and Hispanic and Asian students are less likely to enroll in a four-year college, meaning they're more likely to enroll in two-year colleges. So that's among students who

have similar academic preparation and are enrolled in some type of college, we see that Hispanic and Asian students are more likely to be in a two year and the other groups in a four year.

Okay, so before I wrap up and we move on to the panel discussion, I want to note some important limitations of this type of analysis. So we've shown that differences in academic preparation, measured by high school GPA, course taking, and test scores are an important proximate cause of disparities in college enrollment across these groups. But with this analysis, we can't speak to what causes the differences in academic preparation, which obviously is going to be very important to addressing them. And, you know, differences and opportunities that students have are going to play an important role here.

And importantly, this analysis can't speak directly to the presence or absence of discrimination by race, gender or SES. And I just want to give a reminder that we see a lot of parental and media attention to college admissions. But I want to caution against interpreting differences in four-year college enrollment as, as being driven solely or even primarily by college admissions policy. Students who could attend a four-year college often don't apply, and many students who are admitted to a four-year college don't attend one. There are just many factors other than admissions policy that influence whether and where students attend four-year college that we don't, we aren't able to look at here.

Okay. So let me summarize and wrap up with a couple of concluding thoughts. First, gender and race gaps in college enrollment are largely related to disparities in academic preparation through high school. And second, gaps in college going by SES are really quite large, differences in academic preparation explain more than half of these gaps, but the unexplained gaps are still quite big. And I think we don't see this analysis by socioeconomic status quite as frequently as we do by race or gender. And that's partly because the need to have longitudinal data, to be able to have students linked with their, the socioeconomic status of the family they grew up in that is a little bit more demanding of the data, so it's nice that the NCES collects these data.

We also see that high school GPA is by far the most important measure of academic preparation for predicting college enrollment and also for explaining group differences in college enrollment. But we do see this disconnect between test scores and GPA for gender gaps. And I should say that what we find here is pretty consistent with research that looks into these questions for

earlier cohorts going back at least a couple of decades. So this isn't necessarily a new phenomenon that we're documenting here.

And overall, these results, I think, suggest that closing gaps in academic preparation will be key to making progress on college enrollment gaps. And this doesn't mean that we should ignore other issues like the cost of college or the difficulty of applying, work on those issues is important, but I think we need to be sure that those issues don't overshadow attention to the need to improve academic preparation for college across all these groups. So I'll stop there. Thanks to everyone for listening and I really look forward to hearing from this panel.

Sarah Reber That's great. Thank you so much, Sarah, for sharing those findings. As a reminder, if you're watching today via the Brookings event page, that report that Sarah just reported on is linked below. So you can scroll down and check that out. You can continue sending us questions at our Twitter using the hashtag college enrollment or by sending an email with your question to events at Brookings dot edu, I will be looking out for those as they come in.

We are now joined by a distinguished panel of experts to discuss both the report findings and then broadly college enrollment trends, disparities, and perhaps more importantly, potential policy solutions. And just a note that Beth Akers was unable to join us today, but I'm sure would be delighted to share her thoughts with you, she's at the American Enterprise Institute, and we hope to have her on a future panel. Today, we are joined by Sade Bonilla, an assistant professor in education policy at the University of Pennsylvania and faculty affiliate in the Consortium for Policy Research and Education. Also joined by Lindsay Page, the Annenberg associate professor of education policy at Brown University and research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research. And last but not least, joined by Richard Reeves, the John C. and Nancy D. Whitehead chair and senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution.

Thank you all so much for joining us today. I figured we'd start just by giving each of the panelists a chance to briefly comment on the findings of the report. Are the findings unexpected? What stuck out at you? How did the results kind of align with what you know from your own work and work in the area? Maybe let's go ahead and we can do alphabetical order, so I'll turn over to Sade first.

Sade Bonilla Thanks, Katharine. And thanks to Sarah for that, for that presentation and this invitation. I really enjoyed looking at this report and I'm always very appreciative of these scans and

just looking at general trends. It's so important for us to be able to benchmark, you know, the, we're doing, you know, many of us are doing different studies in this space and sort of understanding what the generalized trends are and the directions is just really critical to have that work done and particularly for policymakers and practitioners to be able to look at those generalized results and benchmark just what outcomes they're looking at for their own states and institutions, it's just really critical work. And so I'm highly appreciative that Brookings and Sarah were willing to do this work.

You know, one of the, the things that, that I appreciated that Sarah noted, and sort of her conclusion is that the policy environment around postsecondary access has really focused on finances and information. And I think that pointing to sort of this this shift to thinking about academic preparation as another sort of forefront, right, that we've maybe been focusing on these sort of low hanging fruit type interventions and and digging into some of this more meaty work around academic preparation and some more entrenched challenges that I think our society faces in thinking about post-secondary access and beyond is is really critical. And so that was something that stood out to me.

You know, another piece is that I think that the analyses that, we sort of see these continuation of disparities that I think Sarah sort of highlights that have been ongoing. But I also see some sort of silver linings of the analysis. I think I think I see some things that are heartening because we can see for students of Black and Hispanic or Latinx backgrounds who grow up in families categorized as being from low-income socioeconomic status, we see that their enrollment is sort of above what you would expect at both the two- and four-year levels. Right. And so there's this piece around access.

However, when we look at the Asian population and the intersection of Asian students who grow up in low socioeconomic households, we can see that there's this under-representation for this particular student group. Obviously, all of this compared to white. That's probably something else we should maybe recognize is that some of these comparisons, the white group is sort of our comparison group and them being the average is mechanical, right, in all of these relationships. And so I think for readers going and looking through the report, you know, we maybe should also be thinking a little bit about some of our colleagues in sociology and the good work they're doing around reference categories and how we sort of think about norms. And so we've sort of normed the white population

and then are sort of saying, how are other populations performing sort of differently and then using that to think about potential policy solutions.

So I think there's really good work in the field of sociology that sort of says maybe we should be rethinking how we, how we consider reference categories and just how we, how we frame that or maybe that we be more explicit about that and how that might lead us down particular policy or programmatic solutions that might vary depending on sort of how we look at things. Sorry, that was a bit of a tangent, but I had mentioned in my, in my list of things.

But I want to get back to sort of this intersection of race and class that that I think the results sort of maybe don't highlight in, but I found particularly interesting. Which is that, you know, that although there's this general affluence in the Asian student population in that subgroup, right, they're more likely to be in the top quartile, when you look at the lowest income Asian students, we see this underrepresented-ness, right, which I think it sort of really speaks to this variation in the Asian subgroup. Right? And when we're sort of categorizing all of these students together, we're masking significant heterogeneity in outcomes. And I think that, you know, sort of if you look at this report, you might walk away and sort of say that this sort of speaks to sort of overrepresentation of Asians in higher education.

You might draw some linkages to thinking about the, you know, the Supreme Court case that's being heard and some of the sort of political things that are happening around advocacy, around sort of representativeness. And I just think it's important to just note that there really is significant heterogeneity, particularly in the Asian population. And I think we need to be sort of mindful of that. And I think as quantitative researchers, we really have to think about how we're often underpowered for specific subgroups. And when we do some of this, you know, combinations, we can you know, we can basically mask some of this heterogeneity.

And so I think that we also have to sort of think about the intersection, because you see that in the, in the race and class intersection. And but we have the data there to sometimes unpack some of our results and provide a little bit more nuance, which I think is important for policymakers and, and practitioners. And so sort of my takeaway of this is that the intersection of race and class in my point of view is really critically important to addressing the systemic barriers that we face for college enrollment and then later on completion, right, which is, would be the ideal goal. And thinking about sort of policy and programmatic solutions, sort of given this pending Supreme Court case on

affirmative action, I think is going to be particularly more and more important for policymakers and institutions. So I'll I'll stop there and let others.

Katharine Meyer No those are some great points and hopefully we can dig into all of those, particularly on the note of sort of heterogeneity within race categories just a plug for some reports that I've really been drawing on, the Common app put out some interesting briefs this year that looked at sort of the disaggregated racial application behavior. So if anyone on the line is interested in checking that out, they're doing some really nice work looking within racial categories and differences in patterns. Let's go ahead and turn to Lindsay for your thoughts.

Lindsay Page Thanks so much, Katharine. I think I will reiterate that the thanks to Sarah and team for this great report. I agree that it's valuable to have this kind of descriptive work, so thank you. And I think I think my comments are of, you know, of a similar flavor. You know, it's, it's important to be, this sort of focus on academic preparation and course taking in high school. You know, what we know is that what students are doing in high school is a cumulative process over a very long time. You know, I if anybody has tried to coax their own children through, say, like learning how to play the piano, which is, in my experience, a painful process, it's, it's something that requires time and attention on a, on a daily basis. And I think, you know, what, what students achieve academically in high school, we could think of in a, in a similar way, it's, as with college going, it's a culmination of inputs that happen over a very long period of time.

In a lot of my own work, I've focused on very discrete moments in the college going process, but we could really think about articulating a student's journey through elementary and secondary education as a sequence of these discrete moments and different, different pathways that students might take at various discrete moments can, can really add up over time. And I think that that's really something that was coming to mind for me as I read this report, you know, in in recent conversations that I've had with admissions directors, there was one admissions director that basically said, you know, by the time students are applying to college, particularly competitive colleges, the cake is already baked, or the cake is mostly baked.

And so you know, how students are preparing for college in high school, you know, as, as this work suggests, is is really going to tell us a lot about whether students are going to go to college. And although this wasn't an area of focus in this report, you know how students do once, once they are there, we know high school performance is is predictive of success in college. So, you know, when we

think about college going interventions, supporting students with the steps and tasks associated with college search application and transition is certainly part of it. But we also need to think about college readiness really much earlier in the academic pipeline.

This work, you know, that that idea really made me think about studies that have investigated this kind of question really well. And there's one study that was led by Sarah Cohodes— I wish I had the complete citation off the top of my head, I'm glad to find it— Sarah studied an effort in the Boston Public Schools that really focused on academic advancement for elementary school children, so students were identified as, quote, high achieving based on their standardized test performance and placed in an accelerated curriculum with a teacher that was identified as a high value added teacher in elementary school. And that act put students on a different trajectory.

So it was, it was happening when they were in elementary school, but it set them on a different trajectory, those students were more likely to take advanced courses, the kinds of AP and IB courses that Sarah looks at in her report, the students were more likely to graduate from high school, they were more likely to enroll in college. And, and Sarah Cohodes, not Sarah Reber, Sarah Cohodes in this work finds that these effects were primarily driven by impacts for Black students and for Latino students. And so, you know, I don't necessarily ascribe to the idea of of college for everybody, but I subscribe, ascribe to the idea of college opportunity for everybody. And so I think we really want to think about the trajectories that we're setting children on, even in those earliest years.

On the flip side of that, or it's sort of another, another piece of the coin, or side of the coin that I think about is so, so that work from Sarah Cohodes relies on standardized testing, so, so that work would sort of advocate for the use of standardized testing for identifying students eligible for accelerated curricula and, and identifying those students in a way that isn't subjective or prone to biases that we know exist in, in the system. But, you know, one thing that I was also struck by in this report was the sort of growing gaps by gender, in particular between boys and girls. And it makes me wonder about the ways in which the era of standardized testing in particular may have been detrimental for boys. You know, what, what we know about test-based accountability is that it drove in many school systems, sort of a narrowing of curricula and perhaps a narrowing of the stereotypical notion of what a good student is at, particularly at the elementary level. And this may also have repercussions for the sort of trajectories for boys and girls through middle school and high school.

In in Sarah's report, Sarah Reber's report, we see that boys are less likely to take advanced math, they're less likely to take up AP and IB courses once they get into high school. But again, this is likely a continuation of a trajectory that began in elementary school. So I really want to ask the question or sort of link to work that asks how elementary school curricula and outcomes are affecting the trajectories of boys. And I say that also as a parent who has a little boy who can barely sit still. So, you know, I'm also bringing my experience as a parent into thinking about this work.

And then, you know, I think Sade's call to, to look at these results with an intersectional lens I think is really, really important. And so, you know, thinking particularly about these differences between boys and girls, I think that we need to focus particularly on the outcomes that we see for Black boys and how different they are in the outcomes for Black girls. And so again, just a call for looking at these kinds of patterns, intersectionally, tying these results to things like high societal incarceration rates for Black males in particular, and how those trends are affecting Black youth and Black boys in particular. So I'll I'll stop there.

Katharine Meyer I couldn't have thought of a better transition to Richard for your thoughts.

Richard Reeves Yeah, except that Lindsay said half the things I was going to say.

Katharine Meyer Great minds think alike.

Richard Reeves Yeah, especially, I think the point about the intersection of race and gender is huge, and it's, it's a source of frustration to me that states don't have to report their on-time high school graduation rates by sex to the federal government. So we don't know what the on time high school graduation rate of Black boys is in the US. That's what I've previously done with Ember Smith, because I think that we haven't taken seriously the need to be intersectional.

So a couple of thoughts. One is this report takes, it looks at a very narrow period of time. It's 18 months with an expected high school graduation time, which is why that point about on time is important. And it's one and it's one decision, so it's enrollment in this narrow window. I see that as a real strength of the report. It's obvious that that could be a weakness as well in the sense that people enroll at other times, not everyone graduates on time. But I'm convinced by Sarah's other work and by other scholars work that actually that's a critical moment.

And I sometimes, the analogy I think we sometimes have in our minds of the education system is of a conveyor belt. You know, you join this bit, and you drop off onto the next bit, you drop off onto the next bit. But particularly when you get to these periods, I see it now much more as a

series of steppingstones. And whether you successfully make it to that next steppingstone or not and how much support you have. And some of them are pretty slippery and you just got to make it through one step to another step. And this enrolling within a reasonable period of time of finishing high schools does seem to be very, very important. So that narrowness I think, is actually, I think, a feature of it as much as it is a bug.

But I do think it's important to put on the table that it's one moment to use Lindsay's language in it, it's in a small period. Of course, it doesn't talk about completion, it doesn't it doesn't talk about what happens next, it doesn't talk about does it matter where they go, etc.

The other thing, obviously, I'm doing a lot of work on boys and men, so echoing a lot of what Lindsey said, but the fact that you can explain, quote unquote, explain the gender gap with preparation as measured there, I think is just a very important and striking finding that the tests don't really matter. I really like what you were just saying, Lindsey, about what does that mean for tests, you know, it's really interesting when colleges go test optional, the share of women goes up very strongly. You'd expect that, and that's probably a good thing from the point of view of completion. But you're making me think actually more broadly about the role of tests just more generally in, in schools and how it might not matter very much. The boys are doing as well on, on tests.

And the last thing I'll say is that it's interesting thinking about this term preparation affecting enrollment. Obviously, as Sarah and Ember say, lots of things go into enrollment, you can apply, you can not get in, etc. And so I'd really like to start unpacking that and seeing like, what is it that's happening? Because I wonder how far it's as much a signal to yourself as well, like what's going on here? Is there, is it that the student is saying, well, I'm, you know, that's not for me because look at my GPA, or is it that they're trying and they're not getting in, etc. And so and I know that both Sarah and Ember are interested in work around expectations and aspirations and so on.

So I'm I'm kind of interested in the story that's being told here to students through these various mechanisms. What's the signal and is that signal making a difference in terms of their own decision making whether to apply? Or is it purely about whether or not they're successful going forward? And so that's, I think, a real frontier, and I think this would apply to race, class and gender and all the intersections between them, which is what's the story I'm telling about myself as a student, about what I should do next, and what's the information I'm getting from my school or from my institution, which is helping to inform that decision. And so to some extent, I think it becomes an

identity question as well, which I think this this really speaks very strongly to. So I'd love to talk more about that if we have the chance.

Katharine Meyer That sounds great. Well, let's start with, I think a lot of you, you all sort of brought up with the idea of academic preparation, which I think the report does such a nice job. And Sarah shared a little bit in one of her slides, sort of showing the, the differences in GPA, but obviously she looks at a lot of other metrics. I was particularly struck by the share of students who take AP IB classes that it ranges from 20% of students with the lowest SES quintile to 60% of students in the highest SES quintile. Let's step back and think about what do we know about policies that can address these gaps, both on the more enrollment access elements of academic preparation like the courses that you take, as well as policies around helping students with their performance, or of the GPA in the test score measures.

Lindsay Page I, Katharine, I don't know if you want to call on people so that we don't sit here, but I am going to go ahead and jump in on this question. Recently, I had the opportunity to work on a handbook of the Economics of Education on college access and success, and a chapter on college access and success. And one thing that we tried to do in that chapter was sort of survey the literature right around this, this kind of question. And I think if I can offer some broad strokes, I think my, my broad strokes read of the literature is that, you know, any kind of program that that says or that takes the approach of, well, let's just put everybody in AP, or let's just like call everybody advanced or let's put everybody in algebra in the eighth grade, any, you know, any, any of those kinds of gateway things that in general, those are not very winning strategies, in part because they have strong negative consequences for students who are placed into those advanced classes and are not— again, this word preparation— are not academically prepared for them. Whether that is happening in the middle school or in high school.

And so, you know, instead we really need to think about the ways in which we are identifying students for those kinds of opportunities and encouraging students towards those kinds of opportunities. We know that, you know, across different groups of students, you know, by race or socioeconomic status, in particular, the ways that parents react to or interact with the educational system and advocate for their children is going to differ quite a lot. And so making sure that we have systems in place that, you know, sort of like the Sarah Cohodes study that I mentioned that is working to identify students who are ready for those kinds of AP or IB opportunities and really supporting them

into those opportunities and supporting them once they are there. In general, the research says that those are going to lead to better outcomes overall and will expand opportunity for a more diverse set of students.

Katharine Meyer It reminds me of sort of the corequisite question I think that we've seen after college enrollment where instead of sending students purely into remedial courses, they have sort of the, the typical entry course, but with a supplemental course on the side. Sade.

Sade Bonilla Yeah, I'd like that to build off of what some of Lindsey was saying, which is that, you know, I think that it's notable that, you know, that very large difference in high SES students' participation and low SES students. But I want to be really careful about potentially pushing schools and students into the, you know, these, these type of opportunities, AP, AP and IB courses as the solution to increasing college readiness. And one is that I understand it's a common avenue that many schools take and initiatives around it. But I think I really just want to underscore that college preparatory work is not synonymous with necessarily taking one of these courses and or the three or four or five that you'll get on the standardized test.

And so I think that schools really should be thinking deeply about how to promote student engagement and the type of critical engagement and deep thinking that is really going to aid students in their post-secondary studies and success. And so, you know, and I say that because particularly, you know, we're talking about students of color often in here. Many of these students are, you know, students of color, those from immigrant community, immigrant backgrounds, those who are working class or from poor communities. They often receive a lot less representation in the school curriculum. Right. And the textbooks utilized, and I mean, the school curriculum that they're experiencing.

And so I think it's really important to sort of note that students from these different marginalized backgrounds encounter this lack of representation in the school curriculum and that there's, that there's, that there may stem sort of low levels of engagement and trust in the school system from these children and their families and participating in some of these standardized sort of ways of showing achievement and interest. And some of my, some of my work on culturally relevant education as sort of being this avenue for promoting student engagement and achievement, I think is a sort of really promising lens here for a different way of thinking about how to engage and promote, I think, the type of really deep critical thinking, higher order thinking, you know, extensive writing and research, understanding sort of complex issues in society.

So thinking about how sort of culturally relevant education can, can, can be a point of access for students from these marginalized backgrounds and recognize that what's working for students, and you know, who are from high SES backgrounds, sort of relatively privileged backgrounds, is not necessarily what's going to work for all kids. And so sort of pushing people into a particular mold, I think we have to sort of really take a step back and think about what we've learned, I think in in research more broadly about, about engagement there.

Richard Reeves You know, let me just add a little bit on that. I'll, I'll, I'll just flog a bit of a hobbyhorse of mine, which is, I think, male teacher, more male teachers. You know, I think the fact there are fewer, fewer men in teaching in public high schools is potentially a problem. Interestingly, a slight increase in private schools, share of men in private schools. So there may be something of a real preference going on there. And I think particularly of color, men of color. And that's, I think a broader point here is that teachers, I think, you know, teacher quality, whatever language you want to use and you know, where are the good teachers. I'd love to hear your views, Katharine, actually on on this.

But because I want to, but if I wanted to make an unhelpful comment in a way, given the question here, which is my fear about this work, is that it could be interpreted by institutions of higher education as saying, yeah, well, we're doing what we can. You know, if anything, we're kind of, you know, look at that last chart. We're quotes over enrolling, right. Given academic preparation, it's not our problem as Lindsay's, you know, the cake was baked earlier.

But my observation is the cake is always baked earlier. If you go into the high schools, they'll say, oh, look at ninth grade, look at the middle school, you go into the middle schools, they'll say, oh, a lot of it, the cakes baked in elementary school, and you go to elementary school and they'll say the cakes baked in pre-k, and you go into pre-k and they'll say the cake is baked by the parents. And so the cake is always being baked by the previous baker.

And so the danger then is that it can sort of, everyone can point to the earlier and earlier and earlier set of problems and it's not to say it isn't true, but it is to say that is in no way an abdication of responsibility. To some extent, it's the job of colleges to be student ready as well as of students to be college ready. That's just the reality. And so I don't want the conversation to immediately go to well, you know, look at look at post-secondary education, look how amazingly they're doing and start focusing on high schools, it’s not we shouldn't do stuff in high schools and middle schools and before.

But I do think, like realistically, it seems to me that K-12 education reform has been around about as long as K-12 education. It's really hard and we should keep trying. But at the same time, this is a critical moment, this transition into post-secondary. And so I, I really if there are post-secondary people out there, it's like my message is this is not a get out of jail card. So because you got to do more with the students that are there, which might mean some of the things that you've just heard from Sade and Lindsay around quotes, remedial prerequisites just, you know, dealing with the world as it is to some extent.

Katharine Meyer That's great. Other than now being very hungry for cake. I think it's totally right that you, you deal with the students that you have, and you want to support the students that you have. And the college enrollment is a useful metric. And certainly the one that we have the time frame to look at in this report. But that completion is really the goal and that enrollment without completion is maybe one of the worst options out there.

Let's back up. I guess maybe related to that, you know, I was, I was hoping to hear, obviously going to college is a big decision. Obviously, it's not one that students should make lightly. There are significant costs, but obviously significant benefits to going to college and completing a degree. How should students think about whether or where to go to college? And in particular, let's, let's look back, I know we've had a lot of audience questions on the past couple of years and how we think about the labor market shifts are changing how students are thinking about, again, whether to go to college, where to go to college, when to go to college. I know, Richard, you talked about sort of the value of looking at the immediate college enrollment. How do we think the pandemic has changed students, the conveyor belt connection, for lack of a better word, from high school or college?

Richard Reeves I'm happy to say something, but I'm actually more interested to hear from the other, other colleagues and maybe bring Sarah Reber back in a little bit, too. But I was really— this is more an observation, really, rather than an answer— the two-year, four-year differences in the report are super interesting to me in terms of like appropriateness, where's the best chance of success, etc. And of course there's huge heterogeneity in both those sectors as well, which you can't see from, from these charts. But I was very struck, for example, one of the charts that Sarah put up, the difference between Black and Hispanic students in terms of enrolling in two and four, right, if I remember correctly, with much higher four-year enrollment. I think this is with the controls in four and higher Hispanic in two-year community college.

And that, just kind of super interested in that because I don't necessarily look at the higher Black enrollment in four year and say yay, because I really want to know where, which colleges and what happens next. And so that's a question, not an answer. But I, but I think there's a kind of implicit sense of like, you no, four is not necessarily, four is not better than two, right? Or when is two better than four, when does two lead to four, etc, which I think was a little, which was that there was a couple of interesting data points in there that made me think that there may be some, some, some good decision making being made there. Right.

In terms of what's the return on your investment, what are you ready for? Where are you going to get the best return into, say, a two year as opposed to a four years? So that's really something just again, something that jumped out and I didn't get a chance to get to earlier, but might speak a little bit to the whether, where, why questions I think that are implied in this in this research.

Sade Bonilla Yeah, Richard, I think that's a good observation. I was thinking a lot about that and reading the report. And you know what we do in higher education, right, is we spend the most money on the most advantaged students and we spend the least amount of resources on the students who could probably use a lot more support. Right. That four-two-year dichotomy and even sort of the eliteness of where four-year institutions. Also I think that's something just important to remember too. We sort of have this kind of you know, this prevailing sort of meritocracy kind of aura in higher education, that sort of the best and the brightest will go to these institutions because they sort of merit it, but were really given lots of support at these top institutions to these top students.

And so then we kind of have this self-fulfilling prophecy, if you will. Right. Then they end up going on and doing well, and it's not clear kind of necessarily what the value add is. Right? There's actually some research that shows that the low income first gen students who end up getting access to these elite institutions actually are the ones who benefit from it, because in the absence of those additional supports, right like it's that, that is the difference here.

So I think you know we have this other situation where, you know, I know this panel is not going to sort of undo all the policy and, and sort of customs around how we sort of match students to different colleges. But, you know, I think it's, I think it's maybe, I guess my Rawlsian sort of, sort of beliefs are really, you know, sort of coming out and that, you know, are we, you know, we aren't maximizing benefits for the least advantaged sort of members of society here. Right. And I think we're, we should be clear about, about that strategy.

And so when we think about sort of like who is deserving of sort of being at these sort of institutions that are going to provide more of these wraparound supports, I think we should just be cognizant of, of these choices, because sometimes I get a little sort of worried when we start talking about sort of good matches. And I think that, Richard, I don't think you were sort of getting on this, but, but this idea that we want people to be successful, but we don't want to put people in positions where they're going to take on debt and then not get that, get any sort of degree or something that has value on the labor market that will actually enable them to repay. Right. We don't want to get people in these situations where they're in over their heads before their lives have sort of practically started. And so I think a lot about those two things all at the same time. And sometimes my beliefs right, slash and in that way.

Richard Reeves Yeah. Can I just say one thing on that? Because I, I sometimes think there's a case for saying we should be the opposite of meritocratic. And so there's an implicit meritocratic strand even through this work, which is, well, look, they're, they're the best prepared, right? They've got the highest levels of academic preparation. So they're the ones enrolling in and going to those colleges. But if academic, if you think about academic generally is preparation for life, maybe it's the wrong way round. Maybe the institutions with the most resources and the most talented teachers should be the ones taking the least prepared, academically prepared students and then using the next four years to help prepare them for life in the labor market. It's a crazy, crazy utopian thought.

But I think there's an argument for saying it may be that, meritocracy might have its place in the labor market, but actually the over application of meritocratic principals, Sade I think what you just said it, the over application of meritocratic principals turns out to fly in the face of other values like social mobility or social welfare, because you're just following the principle of to those who have much more shall be given, which is implied in some of these, these numbers.

Katharine Meyer And I think that very much bears out in the research when we look at students who, or do these analyses of students, you're sort of on the margin of two- or four-year enrollment that getting sort of nudged into four-year enrollment tends to result in higher outcomes than, than the students who ended up in a two year system. And Lindsay if you want to, to jump in here.

Lindsay Page Yeah, you know, there are, there's work in two very different fields that I think are really important on this question. One book that I want to highlight is the book "Paying for the

Party," if, if folks have read that, that really, you know, is a is a deep look at the social context of literally one dorm at one college. So there's always a generalizability question. But it, it really, you know, particularly thinking about residential colleges— and not every college student attends a residential college— but I think that book really raises questions about all of the things that happen at college besides academics and, you know, whether and how the social context of college can either support students', you know, life outcomes and academic pursuits or really create quite a diversion. Such that, you know, for, for some students going to their state flagship school may not, may not be the best choice for them.

And so I think in terms of the question about where students should go to college, I think, you know, asking questions about whether the social context of a college is going to be a good environment for students is, is a really important one that we don't think a lot about. The other sort of tradition that I want to turn to or work that I think is worth thinking about is the work from the Opportunity Insights Team and Raj Chetty and his colleagues, John Friedman at Brown University looking at the relationship between different colleges and social mobility.

And, you know, for any given student, you know, their work would say, you know, your, your outcomes, at least in terms of earnings, are going to be highest if you go to the most elite school, you know, for one individual. However, what I think their work really shines a light on is asking the question of, you know, where in our post-secondary system is social mobility actually happening? It's happening more at our regional colleges, you know, our colleges that serve a lot of low-income students and conditional on serving those low-income students have terrific outcomes for those students in general.

And so if we think about— and I think this gets to Richard's point— and Sade's point, you know, where should we invest in the system? It's, it's, my, my institution doesn't, I mean, they probably wouldn't like it that I'm saying it, but my institution doesn't need anything. Instead, I think it's really those public regional colleges that are punching above their weight in terms of the outcomes that they're, that they're bringing to society.

Katharine Meyer I think Sarah's going to jump back in and join us for a moment.

Sarah Reber I'm just going to pop in for a second, I just wanted to follow up on something Richard said, and as it relates to the report and how to think about what is the right relationship between academic preparation and college enrollment. Okay, so what we can say from the report and

it's intuitive is that the relationship between, let's say, high school GPA and college enrollment is very strong. And so then we can say like, well, we would expect some of, we would expect lower enrollment rates in groups that have lower GPAs based on that relationship. And but then we want to like, you know, and I do think it's important to close gaps in academic preparation, both as they relate to college enrollment, but also as they relate to measures of what you've learned in your K-12 education and up to that point.

So there's, we can, you know, sort of want to address those differences because we want students to be accumulating human capital, developing skills, learning things. And I think we can have, we can question what measures those best. You know, is it the test scores? Is it the GPA? There's a lot, you know, is it the course taking? These are all kind of like proxies that are imperfect for things that students have learned and some of which are probably important for success in college. But I think we can kind of come at that from two points, two sides.

And one thing we could say, which I think is kind of along the lines of what Richard is saying, is like, maybe we should be trying to reduce the strength of the relationship between academic preparation and college going and say, look, these students who have taken a lot of IBs and APs and have, you know, have, have had a really good access to education and through high school, they actually might not benefit as much from all these resources in college, you know, as students who weren't able to have those opportunities already and haven't already learned those things.

So I think that we really often take it as a given, and I think maybe in the report we may not make the point strongly enough. But I, you know, I think there's a reason that there's a relationship between academic preparation and college going, and it makes sense. But like, we shouldn't necessarily say, oh, whatever that is, it's set in stone, and we shouldn't think about changing policies related to that. So I, I'll, I'll pop that back out to the panel, but I just wanted to emphasize that point following up with that discussion.

Katharine Meyer I think that's a great transition actually to talking about some of the ways that policies have really changed around college admissions or if not policies, then kind of trends. I think one of the more enduring changes in college admissions from the onset of the pandemic has been the adoption of test blind or test optional admissions that have really skyrocketed to near universal take up. We've seen maybe a few notable scale backs, and MIT has gone back to incorporating tests in their decision making.

I'm curious on the panel, you know, do you think these policies of being test optional are likely to persist in the coming years? And what are the implications of that for thinking about students' academic preparation and college enrollment and how admissions officers can, can build a class? Get out your crystal balls, let's predict policy.

Lindsay Page I'll just say that my, my concern about, you know, I see the reasoning for test optional in that there are, you know, the history of the S.A.T. in particular is not an attractive history. And I think understanding that history is, is really very important. My, my worry about the rush to— not the rush, I shouldn't say that— but turning to test optional policies is that in my mind, it has a little bit of a shooting the messenger flavor to it that, you know, the differences that we see in SAT scores in general are, in my mind, a sign of the dramatic inequality that we have in our society and the dramatic inequality that we have in educational opportunity in this country.

And so I think that the differences that we see in SAT scores by things like socioeconomic status are, are an indication of that. My, my read of the literature on test optional policies is that in general, they may lead to relatively marginal shifts in the distribution of students across institutions, but I don't think that we will expect to see dramatic shifts in the distribution of students across institutions, in particular because of the things that we see in Sarah's work in this report, that there are still very strong differences in GPA and academic performance in high school by things like socioeconomic status.

Sade Bonilla Now I'm going to, I'll chime in, you know, I see some, I see test optional policies and some of the sort of movements around, around own sort of testing as being a bit of a red herring. Right. Because I think it sort of underlines what Lindsay says, which is that it sort of mirrors sort of existing things that are happening in society. And it's unclear to me, I think that, you know, sort of admissions officers in post-secondary institutions can suss out the things that they learn from the S.A.T. from a host of other metrics in a student's application.

And so I don't necessarily, I think that sort of we might have this view that there's going to be sort of be radical change when all the other components of the application are giving institutions a lot of information already about what students likely access to or what they're, you know, sort of the types of opportunities and the types of preparation that they have that that I think sort of closely mirror the things that we already knew about them. And that maybe they just have to sort of dig a little sort of

deeper or create new sort of strategies for sussing these things out. And so I don't think that we're going to sort of see things that are going to be radically different.

I think a lot of this is going to be dependent on, you know, I think, I think social and political pressure from those who have more power to dictate these processes in terms of admissions policies. And I sort of see it as being less consequential for marginalized communities, whether there's this option to submit a test score versus not because there's already other sort of disadvantages that are apparent in the application that that are really the consequences. And so that's what I sort of mean by that being a red herring. So I guess I'm less interested in that. And maybe that's, you know, I hope others disagree and can illuminate me in terms of their thinking on that.

Richard Reeves So I will do the crystal ball. I think we'll see more and more of it going forward for two reasons. One, because it's pretty strong evidence that you don't get that much additional information in terms of predicting success in college, over and above what Sarah's got in her details as an empirical argument. And I just think politically, I think the kind of sense of it's a, it's a kind of more progressive and inclusive thing to do because of some of the kind of bad sort of karma around the SAT, deserved or undeserved, I think those forces will mean it keeps going.

But Christopher Bennett has a paper that confirms what we've just heard, which is that, you know, going test optional had pretty marginal effects on traditionally underrepresented groups, but had quite a big effect on the gender gap. You know, he said, a four-percentage point increase in the share of women which is, which is not trivial given, given the, where they started from which is I think I would expect given, given the evidence that we have on these gender gaps and in other areas of academic preparation.

Now, is that a good or bad thing? Well, it started to come back to this bigger question of do you only want to take people at college that you can be pretty sure are going to do well at your college? Right. How far do you just, how far do you just want to get so good at just aligning all of this that you kind of eliminate that possibility? I mean, after all, like if you don't want higher rates of dropout, then you don't want less advantaged students and you certainly don't want men, if if you're worried about your completion rate. And so a lot of this is going to come down to what does success look like.

And I fear that if we have too narrow a definition of success, then we kind of we have— I was going to say baked in, sorry, Katharine— that we've kind of baked in a sort of a quote, meritocratic

ideal, which is like, you can get in, you can get in once we know for sure you're going to succeed. Right. And that's a bit of a, that's potentially a bit of a vicious circle. But I couldn't, I couldn't not mention Chris's paper and show that if we care about the gender gap on college campuses, we might, perhaps shouldn't be blind to the fact that the single biggest impact of going test optional is to increase significant increase the share of female undergraduates.

Katharine Meyer Yeah, his paper is great, I encourage everybody to check that out. I think I'll just throw in a small point on test optional, which is that maybe building on Sade's points about how admissions officers are viewing packages. It does introduce quite a bit of gamesmanship for those students who are prepared to play a game and sort of whether or not to submit scores and to which institutions which is becomes part of the sort of invisible hidden curriculum of college application that students who don't have mentors in their lives, who have gone through or understand the college admissions processes aren't equipped to make those sort of strategic decisions that more affluent, more, more socially connected students are able to do on that process.

I think in particular, I'll be interested in how those optional intersects with affirmative action. But affirmative action on its own as an admissions policy, that is a hot topic right now. The Supreme Court heard oral arguments in October in two cases about the consideration of race in admissions. I think many experts expect that the court will rule in favor of the plaintiff, which is to say that colleges will be limited or not allowed to consider race in their admissions decisions. How do we think about that affecting, even absent this report, college enrollment trends in the next couple of years? And then if you want to kind of connect it back to Sara's findings and thinking about academic preparation and how that factors into enrollment.

Sade Bonilla I mean, I think that, probably not going out on a limb here to say that I think we all, we expect that that affirmative action will, will not sort of proceed in its current state, most likely. And but we have, we have a lot of good research and good examples. And by good examples, I just mean they exist, not necessarily good, turn of phrase there. But we have examples in states that have banned affirmative action. We've seen what happens. And so I think we have a, have a decent window into understanding what is likely to happen, which I think from California, you know, Proposition 209. And looking at that aftermath, we see sort of differences in in in who is going but in what institution, right.

And so, you know, we saw Black and Hispanic students really shifted from going to the flagship UCs to the sort of lower tier UC schools. We saw sort of increases in in Asian representation at the flagship schools. And so there is sort of a little bit of a dance, if you will, in terms of a redistribution of students across the post-secondary system. And I don't necessarily think a difference in attending at all, but rather where they're attending. But it does certainly shift sort of access to the resources. Right. And so if we're thinking about elite institutions offering sort of more investments in the students that they educate, I think, you know, we do see a difference there.

And there's potential as a result of that for marginal students to see differences in their completion rates based off of access to those supports and opportunities. And then I think Richard mentioned this earlier, right, or maybe it was you, Katharine, sorry, in terms of income downstream, right, because of sort of access to professional networks and opportunities. So that's kind of what I'm thinking about most.

Richard Reeves I'll just say, weight in a little bit here on the hope, I think, would be that it would just force just a more, a broader reckoning on college admissions. Right. I mean, for one thing, I think legacy preferences, the days are numbered for legacy preferences, if the Supreme Court goes the way I think it will on affirmative action, because I think there's been a bit of a, a weird kind of bargain that's been struck around some of those things. And more generally, this speaks, I think, back to the earlier conversation about complexity. As a general proposition, I think that complexity is the friend of the privileged. If you have a complex system, then having knowledge, having, having resources will allow you to navigate the complexity of that system.

And so right now we have an incredibly complex system of admissions for the more of the elites, right? Not so for the less elites. And so if we actually end up having a, could we just make this a little bit more transparent, a little bit simpler? And if we're going to have preferences for certain groups, let's just be hands above the table about that rather than in sort of some mystical way. It's like the smoke coming out of the Vatican when the pope is appointed, you never know what the heck went into that admissions decision, why that person got in and didn't. So I think a little bit more maybe just more transparency and more clarity about like why, why them, not them, etc.

But I think the last point is the most important one that Sade was just making, which is the money, the resources. I think to some extent the hope has been that with affirmative action we can take these very expensive elite institutions and they can do a lot of the heavy lifting for us in terms of

reducing these inequities. But if that, if that gets taken away, that it makes it even more important that resources go to the places where the students who need those resources most are, and that will be unpopular, Lindsay as you said, in some quarters. But the extraordinary asymmetry of resource allocation in higher education right now is something that I think will come into even sharper light, if we see a move away from affirmative action, we won't have that sort of excuse, quote unquote, anymore for the dramatic underfunding of so many of our public institutions.

Lindsay Page I think that's exactly right. And I think, you know, one, one worry about sort of, you know, placing, placing burden over— not burden, that's the wrong word— but overemphasis on the role of the elite privates is, you know, the elite privates just don't educate that many students when we're thinking about the nation as a whole. And so, you know, at places like, you know, the elite private institutions where, where, you know, there are so many resources at hand to read students admissions files one at a time. I, you know, my sense is that all sorts of characteristics of students will still be reported in students' applications. They will just, you know, for, you know, in terms of the complexity, students will report their race, report their socioeconomic status, report details about themselves in subtler ways that may still be considered in the process.

What, where I think we're really going to see an impact of the Supreme Court cases is at the UC Berkeley's, you know and Safe mentioned Prop 209 is at UT Austin, is at the University of Michigan, the University of Virginia, the University of North Carolina. You know, our, our elite public flagships that are educating many more students than, than the elite privates. I agree with Richard on the sort of reckoning on college admissions in general in terms of legacy status, also in terms of the role of athletics in, in admissions, you know, if you think about the, the resources that have to go into becoming a college level Nordic skier and, and the role that that can play in getting into or, you know, a fencer or whatever, you know, random sport— no offense to the fencers out there— you know, thinking about the cultivation that happens over a long period of time to, to for families to access those kinds of pathways to, to college is also something that I think we will societally have to reconsider in the wake of, of the way we expect the Supreme Court to go.

Katharine Meyer Those are some great points. I want to make sure we get a chance to tackle some of the audience questions that have been coming in, somewhat, some of which we've touched on already. I know that a number of audience members ask about older students enrolling in college. Obviously, Sarah's report was looking at enrollment right after college, but I wanted to open

up for anyone to talk about what do we know about college enrollment for adult or older adult students? Do we see similar gaps by gender or race, SES. And are there any promising policies that you know of that really help older students enroll? And again, to the point we keep hammering home, complete their credential.

Sade Bonilla Well, I think we know that for, for older students, nontraditional sort of students, if you will, in particular, community colleges really are, are a broad access point and a really important sort of mechanism for access to post-secondary for older adults, whether that is retraining, they were you know, they attended college earlier in their careers and are looking for specific skills or they are sort of coming upon college for the first time, sort of more than 18 months sort of later, if you will. And I, and I think that when we, I'm not, I'm not sort of the descriptive sort of statistics are not sort of at the top of my mind. But, but I think that it's important to sort of highlight and we haven't talked about this very much, we've leaned a little bit more towards elite institutions and access, but as, as we do sometimes in these circles, right, which is that, you know, community colleges are a huge important part of where students go to college. Students within 18 months, right, of graduating from high school and then older adults.

We also know that it plays an important and is much more sort of responsive to the labor market and what's happening in the labor market and what the demands of the labor market are in terms of you know, we know from good research in, in California that, you know, when, when there are, when there are layoffs, right. We see sort of increases in in community college enrollment. Right. So this is an important sort of mechanism for, for retraining.

We also know that for public institutions, so we know that the community, like adults in general, are sort of looking at retraining opportunities and matching their skills to labor market needs. We also know that public two year colleges are not necessarily as responsive to changes in the labor market, and so they tend to do what they're already doing rather than sort of they're not as nimble institutions in terms of being more responsive to the needs of the labor market and to the desires of, of applicants who maybe don't have as much time for sort of self-exploration, are certainly not looking to pay for the party. Right. And are looking for, you know, sort of the skills that can get them on to the next sort of job opportunity.

And so I think we sort of can't ignore the importance of that, especially when we're also thinking about this large movement in high school around career and technical education, looking at

sort of career pathways, the recognition that, that sort of generalized four year degrees in the, in the social sciences or humanities that are not sort of skill specific necessarily are another sort of really important entry point and reason for attending college for, for a wide swath of folks that our postsecondary institutions serve.

Richard Reeves Yeah, I just want to underline the importance of community colleges. Some earlier work that we did in the future of the middle-class initiative shows that two year colleges are the modal destination for middle class, those from middle-class backgrounds. And Sarah Reber's done some previous work on this. So I'm going to, what I'm going to do is sort of cite her work, because she's lurking right now, and she can jump in and say if I got it right or wrong.

But, but actually, her previous work, looking at the like, which are the kind of engines that kind of middle class, getting to a middle-class income when and where convinced me that actually this on time point is pretty important. You know actually I just think like when you enroll was more important than I previously thought that it was. But the other thing it finds, and Sarah again correct me if this is wrong— is that it sort of depends what mobility kind of mobility we're talking about. I think in line with this obsession with elites is a sort of Horatio Alger view of mobility. You know, we have in our mind the, you know, the kid from the poor background that goes on to be upper middle class. Right. And so it is kind of bottom quintile to top quintile kind of movement. And there, like on time probably, you know, decently selected four years is absolutely critical as the Chetty work shows.

But if actually getting to the middle class, you know, having a kind of, you know, decent income being middle quintile actually it's, it's, it is community colleges very often it's not that four year and actually for a lot, that's more, more, there's a lot more of that kind of mobility. And so we sometimes fetishize, I think, the kind of Horatio Alger, you know, bottom to top mobility. And that is in turn one of the things that causes us to overfocus on the kinds of institutions that do that kind of mobility. And even some of the Chetty work sort of points that way a little bit, which is the sort of, you know, the heroic journey. And again, I think a lot of people who are in this debate have sometimes made similar journeys themselves. So there's an autobiographical element to it as well. But it can lead us to this elite thing. And so later might still be good if it's into a two year that helps you to secure, you know, a decent income, even if it doesn't help you sort of race to the top.

Lindsay Page I think just, just the one thing that I'll add there, I completely agree. And when we, when we think about community colleges, it's, it's also worth thinking about the sort of fluctuation that we see in our higher education market in the for-profit sector.

And I think that that's a sector in particular that we should, we should, you know, keep a, keep a close eye on if that's particularly a sector of the market where, you know, I worry about profit extraction from, from education. And if, if this is a sector of the market where people are legitimately seeking skills but not, not gaining skills and instead gaining debt, it's just a piece of the market that we should look at, in particular.

Katharine Meyer Some great points. You may be connected to this conversation around community colleges. We had some questions about the growth in dual enrollment and Sade, you talk about sort of the other trends in college and careers or prepatory pathways. Are there any particular really compelling examples of policies that are really helping students make this bridge transition from from high school into the right postsecondary bit.

Lindsay Page I think the one policy or programmatic effort that I want to highlight are the early college high schools. The, you know, the research coming out of North Carolina, led by Julie Edmunds and her team, shows just incredibly promising results of supporting, supporting students. So these are, you know, high schools that often are co-located with community colleges where students can blend the courses that they're taking from high school into college. So that, you know, especially in the later years of high school, they can take courses that count both for their high school requirements, but they can also be earning college credits at the same time. So of course, by, mechanically that's going to improve access to post-secondary education.

But we also, but the early college high schools often come also with, you know, better, better counseling and guidance around the pathways that students are taking into and through their, their community college experience. And so this is, these kinds of programs are leading to dramatic improvements in Associate's degree attainment. And, and for some students continue on, continuation on to a, to a B.A. So, you know, it's funny, on one hand, I do a lot of work that thinks very incrementally about little steps along the way. But as we look across the field, I think that we should, we should not be overly wooed by sort of cheap solutions. And instead the programs like CUNY ASAP, like the early college high schools that really take quite a holistic approach to supporting

students in all aspects of their, of their student life yield just incredibly stronger results. And so in my mind, it's programs like that that are really going to move the needle, even if they are more expensive.

Richard Reeves Yeah. I'll just add, I don't know how good the evaluations that are P-TECH, the K 14, some of that work, I think some of that overlaps, Lindsay, with these early high schools, career academies, etc. But it's crucial that very often there's a strong employer involvement, there is investment in counseling, etc. And so just how they replicate across I think is just a really big question for policy here, because you do get these kind of fairly unique circumstances sometimes where a local employer, local community college with an inspirational leader has formed this terrific program.

And it's where, when it gets a good evaluation, I think it's great. But sometimes I think there's a tendency to think you can just replicate that somewhere else. And sometimes it's been this kind of this combination of inspired leadership and I would say employer involvement in a lot of them actually seems to make quite a big difference too.

Katharine Meyer All right. Well, we're kind of nearing the end, so let's maybe do one more around the room. We'll go in reverse alphabetical order since, since we did alphabetical at the start, we'll do Richard, Lindsay, Sade. But just kind of looking ahead, what are your top priorities for policy in this area of college enrollment and or what are your priorities for research about what we don't know, what we need to know. I'll let you let you kick us off, Richard.

Richard Reeves Okay. So I'll be narrow because my current focus is on boys and men. And so I'm very struck by the need to actually be working earlier on what's happening to boys in high schools, what's happening with their GPAs, have we been focused too much on tests, etc? I think there's reason to worry now. The gender, the gender inequality in higher education is becoming a problem for many, for many boys and men, and we're not serving them very well, and particularly not serving them in this transition. And to the point of identity is very important to me.

We don't want to end up in a situation where we are inadvertently, by and large, sending a signal, particularly to working class boys and boys of color, that this isn't for them. And I think we do that in various ways by what kinds of professionals we have, what kind of teachers we have, what kind of tests they do, what kind of messages we send in high schools as well. And so I'm very, I'm very concerned to try and move on that in Sarah's work, Sarah and Ember's work, showing just how much of that is about what's happening earlier. You know, again, risking the baking the cake earlier

point not to let higher education institutions off, I do think it means that just a, a really strong focus on what's happening to the gender gap in high school is hugely important now.

Katharine Meyer And folks at home interested in learning more should check out Richard's latest book, "Of Boys and Men," available now.

Lindsay Page It's also on Audible. I just added it to my audible list, so I'm very excited. I think that, you know, thinking about the, the sort of trajectory of students through, through K-12 education, I think the, the thing that I would really like to advocate for is greater investment in guidance and counseling and really helping students and families to, to make informed choices all through the pathway. Yeah, I think I'll, I'll just leave it at that. I think that we clearly underinvested in counseling and and so that's, that's something that I would really like to see a greater focus on.

Sade Bonilla And for me, I think there are sort of two lines of inquiry that I'm really interested in. One is community college. How do we, how do we move folks who are enrolling in community college to completion? What is happening in terms of students' ability to, to access the resources and supports available to them and engage in sort of the education that they've sort of signed up for because we know so many people are dropping off. So that's one line of inquiry. And the other is just sort of around this recognition that, you know, K-12 schools have just traditionally been really hostile spaces for, for students from marginalized communities, from zero tolerance policies, to sort of the likelihood of being placed in restrictive educational settings.

So, you know, how do we, how do we think about how all this sort of professional expectations of teachers, the curriculum, how we think about sort of social and political awareness and engagement and teaching about those things, you know, engaging students in what they're doing and why, as a point of departure for how we can get sort of students to that next phase of taking sort of, I guess, a deeper lean in into, I guess, really operationalizing what do I want and how do I make a plan to get there? Right. I think we want to we know that students have potential, and we want them to realize that potential. Right. And so, you know, I think, and education should be in support of that.

Katharine Meyer What a terrific note to end on. Thank you again to all of our panelists, Sade, Lindsay and Richard, for joining on this robust discussion. Thank you, Sarah and Ember, for the report and sharing your research and insights. Thank you to the audience members for your questions and of course, to the Brookings Communications and tech team for making this event possible. Again, if you'd like to read the whole report, just scroll down to the bottom of the page where

you're watching this stream at Brookings dot edu, make sure to follow Brookings on Twitter at Brookings Inst, that's Brookings INST, for more information about future events. And we hope that we will see you again soon. Have a great afternoon, everyone.