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College Prep... or Not?

By CWK Network Producer

"We found that when students take those upper-level courses, beyond Algebra Two ... it greatly increased their chances of being ready for college."

- Jon Erickson, ACT Educational Services

As high school seniors all over the country work to complete their college applications, the 2010 Deloitte Education Survey revealed that slightly less than one-third of high school educators feel their students are prepared for college when they leave high school. In fact, findings support that a third of college students are taking remedial courses in college.

Twins Lauren and Stefanie are college freshman. Both of them say their high school wasn't all that demanding.

Lauren says: "I saw teachers who lacked willingness to really be there. Teachers who I thought didn't really seem to care about preparing their students." And she notes, "I didn't see a lot of incentives in my school for students to be academically motivated. We didn't really get any kind of rewards or anything like that for being motivated."

Stefanie had a similar experience. "Most of my friends," she says, "were in what was called on-level classes. And the on-level classes were not intense. (They) did not require much effort at all ... didn't require attendance, even."

That leaves many experts wondering ... are high school kids prepared for college?

Jon Erickson, vice president of educational services for ACT, which administers the annual college entrance exam, explains, "If students aren't ready for college, especially as measured by the college readiness benchmarks, their odds of either not getting into college, of going into remediation or not doing well once in college or of not graduating are greatly increased."

According to the Deloitte 2010 Education Survey, more than one-third of college freshman need remedial courses to catch up. And a staggering 92 percent of teachers surveyed say they don't have the data to help them measure how their students are doing in college – to make adjustments to their coursework.

Experts say, the way to get ready for college is for high school kids to take the toughest courses they can.

“We found that when students take those upper-level courses beyond Algebra Two... the upper science courses like physics,” says Erickson, “it greatly increased their chances of being ready for college, regardless of how they do in high school.”

And he says parents can play a huge role in motivating their kids. “We find that if they help their students choose their four-year course plan very early in eighth-grade, that’s a great benefit to students.”

Stefanie and Lauren say they were encouraged to take those higher-level courses, and it’s paying off. Both are doing well in their first semester in college as they head into final exams.

“I’ve always been very into my education and wanting to push for success,” says Lauren, “and my parents always placed a big emphasis on my schoolwork.” Stefanie says, “I really feel that I was prepared, that I know what my teachers expect of me.”

What Parents Need to Know

Schools nationwide are urged to strengthen the high school core curriculum to help improve students' readiness for college and the workforce. Students in K-8 who are not learning the foundational skills for rigorous high school coursework should be identified earlier and provided with supportive interventions, thus preparing them for higher-level math and science courses such as trigonometry, pre-calculus, chemistry and physics.

A new study by ACT, Inc. reveals that racial and income gaps in college success rates can be narrowed by ensuring that all students take a rigorous core curriculum in high school. The report, entitled “Mind the Gaps: How College Readiness Narrows Achievement Gaps in College Success,” calls for college and career readiness standards that are aligned among K-12, postsecondary education, and workforce training programs. It also suggests that student readiness for college and career should be monitored early and often.

The U.S. Department of Education prepared this list of recommended high school coursework for college-bound students. The specific classes listed here are examples of the types of courses students can take:

- English for four years. Types of classes include American Literature, Composition, English Literature and World Literature.
- Mathematics: Three to four years. Types of classes include Algebra I, Algebra II, Calculus, Geometry, Precalculus, and Trigonometry.
- History and Geography for two to three years. Types of classes include Civics, Geography, U.S. History, U.S. Government, World History, and World Cultures.
- Laboratory Science for two to four years. Types of classes include Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, and Physics.
- Foreign Language for two to four years.
- Visual and Performing Arts for at least one year. Types of classes include Art, Dance, Drama or Music.
- Challenging Electives for one to three years. Types of classes can include Communications, Computer Science, Economics, Psychology, and Statistics.

Students and their parents should enlist the support of the high school guidance counselor. Questions to ask can include:

- What basic academic courses do you recommend for students who want to go to college?
- How many years of each academic subject does the high school require for graduation?
- What elective courses do you recommend for college-bound students?
- Can students who are considering college get special help or tutoring?

- What activities can students do at home and over the summers to strengthen their preparation for college?
- How much homework is expected of students preparing for college?
- What do different colleges require in terms of high school grades and SAT or ACT scores?

Resources

- ["Mind the Gaps: How College Readiness Narrows Achievement Gaps in College Success."](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Recommendations for Academic Preparation](#)
- [Deloitte 2010 Education Survey](#)

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