

Best Practices to Increase SAT Participation

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In the following report, Hanover Research identifies best practices in SAT preparation to increase college entrance exam participation and ultimately prepare students for success in college, career, and beyond. Additionally, the report provides an overview of policies and practices to support SAT participation, as well as college and career readiness, in several K-12 school districts.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

States and school districts are increasingly focusing on ensuring that students are college and career ready once they graduate high school, and many have begun to implement supportive college and career policies and practices, often as early as middle school. One measure that has become synonymous with evaluating college and career readiness is the SAT. While most commonly used to assess knowledge and skill, participation in the SAT also serves as a proxy as to whether school districts are successfully fostering a culture of high expectations, thereby preparing students for life beyond high school.

This report is designed to assist school districts in identifying best practices in SAT preparation in order to implement strategies for increasing SAT participation, and ultimately, ensure that their students are prepared for success in college, career, and beyond. The following report is divided into two sections and two appendices:

- **Section I: Review of Best Practices** identifies practices found to be effective in increasing SAT participation and expanding student opportunity, looking at both direct and indirect strategies.
- **Section II: School District Profiles** examines key policies and practices from three school districts that have seen increases in SAT participation while implementing some or all of the best practices identified in Section I. Additionally, Section II includes one case study of a school-wide support program that successfully established a culture of college and career readiness, ultimately increasing SAT preparation and participation. The three school districts and one case study include:
 - Boston Public Schools, Massachusetts
 - New York City Public Schools, New York
 - District of Columbia Public School, District of Columbia
 - MacArthur Senior High School, Aldine Independent School District, Texas
- Appendix A: Sample Needs Assessment Surveys, Students and Staff
- Appendix B: Contents of the New York City Public Schools College Planning Handbook

KEY FINDINGS

- **There are a variety of direct methods to increase SAT participation related to testing requirements, full or partial funding, or free test preparation programs.** Strategies may include:
 - **Mandating the completion of the SAT for all high school students.** School districts may require students to take the PSAT/NMSQT or the SAT. In addition to mandating the tests, some districts automatically enroll students in and

expect them to complete online SAT preparation courses. However, few districts and/or states require all students to take the SAT.

- **Fee waivers** from the College Board cover 100% of test registration costs and are available to students who qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch. In 2013, nearly a quarter of all SAT takers used a fee waiver.
- **“SAT School Day”** generally includes a free SAT exam offered during the school day to make student participation as convenient as possible. In 2014, SAT School Day was offered to junior and/or senior public school students in over 60 districts, 14 states, and the District of Columbia.
- **Strategies to increase SAT participation also include indirect methods as a component of a larger college- and career-ready focus. College- and career-readiness initiatives represent a systemic, sustainable approach to increasing SAT participation over the long term.** These efforts encourage students to think about the future, become their own advocates, learn about college and other postsecondary options, and find schools that closely align to their interests and needs.
 - Strategies to indirectly encourage students to take the SAT often include **increasing enrollment in rigorous coursework, providing additional support (in and out of school), and increasing student and family awareness of college accessibility.** School districts implement broad, college-going approaches for all students, but especially for racial and ethnic minorities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students.
 - **School districts may expand the expectations of their staff to establish a “college going culture.”** To establish college-focused cultures, school staffs are encouraged and trained to implement college-targeted interventions for all students as early as elementary school and continuously throughout high school. The College Board offers specific suggestions for implementing small- and large-scale approaches to cultivating college-focused cultures.

SECTION I: REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES

College entrance exams, such as the SAT, are the gateway to college for most students. Not only does the SAT measure a student's college- and career-readiness, but higher participation rates are a strong indicator of a culture of high expectations within school districts.¹ Among 2013 graduates, national data show that SAT participation rates hover around 50 percent, but individual scores indicate that only 43 percent of participants are prepared for college-level coursework.²

In this section, Hanover Research identifies best practices for increasing SAT participation and expanding student opportunity, looking at both direct and indirect methods of encouraging students to participate.

BEST PRACTICES TO INCREASE SAT PARTICIPATION

The College Board, a nonprofit organization responsible for administering the SAT and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, also serves as a research and advocacy group on behalf of students, educators, and schools. In collaboration with K-12 and higher education partners, the College Board is working to identify and dismantle barriers that have historically prevented students, and particularly minority students, from realizing the opportunities of higher education. Together they have identified the following best practices, and are working "to drive measureable outcomes for students" through the actions listed below.

- **Covering all or part of exam fees:** fee waivers are available for low-income students, particularly those to whom exam fees would present an undue burden.³ The College Board also provides a free tool for school counselors to track students' progress in registering for the SAT and using fee waivers.⁴ The College Board reports that fee waivers are more common than ever and supported 23 percent of SAT takers in 2013.⁵ However, obtaining a fee waiver does not guarantee test participation. The College Board found that the two most common reasons for test day absenteeism among fee-waiver recipients were 1) feeling unprepared and 2) not having transportation. Fee-waiver recipients indicated that the school counselor was the most important influence in deciding whether to register, and they would have been

¹ "ACT & SAT Report: Graduating Class 2013." Alexandria County Public Schools, Department of Accountability, School Board Meeting, December 5, 2013. p. 11. <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/mes/sat/2013-sat-board-report.pdf>

² "Expanding Access to Rigorous Course Work in K-12 is Critical to Delivering Opportunities to More Students." College Board. <https://www.collegeboard.org/releases/2013/stagnant-2013-sat-results-require-action>

³ "SAT Fee Waivers." College Board. <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-fee-waivers>

⁴ "2013-2014 Counselor's Guide to Fee Waivers." College Board. <http://sat.collegeboard.org/SAT/public/pdf/counselors-guide-to-sat-program-fee-waivers.pdf>

⁵ "2013 SAT® Report on College & Career Readiness." College Board. p. 8. <http://media.collegeboard.com/homeOrg/content/pdf/sat-report-college-career-readiness-2013.pdf>

more likely to be present on test day with more encouragement, increased accessibility to test centers, and more preparation.⁶

- **Offering the SAT during regular school hours:** SAT School Day, an initiative first offered in 2010, helps states and school districts foster a culture of college interest by increasing access. Students take the SAT for free, during the school day, reducing potential Saturday testing barriers (e.g., part-time jobs, family responsibilities). In 2014, SAT School Day will be offered to all junior and senior public school students in more than 60 districts, 14 states, and the District of Columbia.
- **Increasing access to the PSAT/NMSQT®:** performance on the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) is one of the strongest predictors of AP success, so increasing participation will identify more students who should be enrolled in AP courses.
- **Expanding access to honors and AP courses:** students who meet the *SAT College and Career Readiness Benchmark* (a score of 1550 or higher) are more likely to have taken advanced coursework.
- **Targeting high-achieving, low-income students:** providing disadvantaged but highly achieving students with customized college information will provide them with information to better identify more selective higher education institutions.

Below, we examine the two main categories of strategies for increasing SAT participation: direct and indirect methods.

DIRECT METHODS

State departments of education and local education agencies use a number of direct methods to increase SAT participation such as statewide testing requirements, full or partial funding, or free test preparation programs. One notable example is the Maine Department of Education, which has, since 2006, required all 11th grade students to complete the SAT as part of the Maine High School Assessment (MHSA).⁷ Because of the state requirement, the full cost of the exam is covered by the state. In addition to the SAT, the PSAT/NMSQT is offered at no cost to all students who wish to take the practice exam during their sophomore or junior year of high school.⁸ Students also have access to the Official SAT Online Course, a “free, year-round readiness/preparation resource to all Maine public high school students in their third year of high school.”⁹

⁶ “How the Fee-Waiver Service works.” College Board.

<https://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/waivers/guidelines/sat>

⁷ “Maine High School Assessment.” Maine Department of Education. <http://maine.gov/doe/mhsa/index.html>

⁸ “Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.” Maine Department of Education. <http://maine.gov/doe/psat/index.html>

⁹ “2013-2014 MHSA/SAT initiative guidelines and updates.” Maine Department of Education Newsroom, January 7, 2014. <http://mainedoenews.net/2014/01/07/2013-14-mhsasat-initiative-guidelines-and-updates/>

While the SAT requirement for the MHSAs is expected to be replaced next year following the adoption of new exams from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium,¹⁰ the impact of the initiative on SAT participation and performance has been positive.¹¹ The state has experienced a 5 percent increase in the number of students who have been identified as “college and career ready but previously were not likely to have taken the SAT or considered going to a four-year college.”¹² In fact, after implementing its statewide SAT testing program, Maine has recorded “modest increases in both two-year (3 percent) and four-year (4 percent) college enrollment.”¹³

Another state that offers the SAT at no cost to students is Delaware, which has used Race to the Top funding to cover the cost of the exam since 2011. The program is offered to all 11th grade students enrolled in public schools. In addition to providing the test free of charge, students complete the exam during a regular school day.¹⁴ Rather than requiring the completion of the exam as part of a statewide assessment program, Delaware’s initiative is notable because its sole purpose is to “promote a school culture that encourages more students to pursue education after high school.”¹⁵

To prepare students to successfully complete the SAT, the Delaware Department of Education provides all 11th grade students enrolled in public schools with free access to the College Board’s Official SAT Online Course.¹⁶ Individual districts have also implemented their own SAT preparation programs; for instance, Red Clay Consolidated School District offers a seven-week SAT prep class free of charge.¹⁷

Idaho State Department of Education (ISDE) serves as a final example of how to incorporate best practices to reinforce SAT participation. Similar to Delaware, all 11th grade students enrolled in public schools may complete the SAT free of charge. Launched in 2012, the Idaho SAT School Day initiative provides the exam at no cost to students during a regular school day in April.¹⁸

While the state describes the initiative as being “designed to promote college-readiness among all students and to encourage students to start planning for educational

¹⁰ McMillan, S. “Maine students field testing educational assessment exams.” *Portland Press Herald*, May 31, 2014. http://www.pressherald.com/news/Maine_students_field_testing_educational_assessment_exams_.html

¹¹ Warren, S. “Maine students show improved proficiency in math, reading.” Maine Department of Education Newsroom, October 16, 2013. <http://mainedoenews.net/2013/10/16/maine-students-show-improved-proficiency-in-math-reading/>

¹² “2013 SAT® Report on College & Career Readiness.” College Board. p. 7. <http://media.collegeboard.com/homeOrg/content/pdf/sat-report-college-career-readiness-2013.pdf>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Free SAT registration now open for public school juniors.” Delaware PTA, February 10, 2014. <http://delawarepta.org/free-sat-registration-now-open-for-public-school-juniors/>

¹⁵ “SAT School Day Registration Open.” State of Delaware Department of Education, February 6, 2013. <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/news/2013/0206.shtml>

¹⁶ “Free SAT registration now open for public school juniors,” Op. cit.

¹⁷ Adams, C. “Delaware Gives All Juniors SAT During School Day.” *Education Week*, January 25, 2011. http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/college_bound/2011/01/all_high_school_juniors_in_delaware_take_sat_starting_in_april.html

¹⁸ “SAT.” Idaho State Department of Education. <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/assessment/SATstudentParent.htm>

opportunities beyond high school,” a key advantage of the program is that it helps students fulfill the college entrance exam testing requirement.¹⁹ Beginning with the class of 2013, all students are required to take the one of the SAT, ACT, COMPASS, or ACCUPLACER exams by the end of their junior year, though the SAT and ACCUPLACER exams are the only ones covered by the state.²⁰

In addition, public school students in Idaho have free access to the Official SAT Online Course for one year, starting in March of their sophomore year.²¹ The Idaho State Department of Education recommends that schools encourage the use of this resource through one of three implementation models, outlined in the figure below.

Figure 1.1: SAT Participation Implementation Models, Idaho Public Schools

| IMPLEMENTATION MODEL | COMPONENTS OF MODEL |
|---|---|
| SAT Prep Course Implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The district offers a for-credit SAT Preparation Course by leveraging online SAT courses ▪ Students are exposed to, and able to practice critical new skills while reviewing previously acquired knowledge and skills ▪ Offering credit for the course motivates students at all academic levels, and ensures they are better prepared for the SAT |
| Classroom Integration Implementation | Teachers integrate the online SAT Prep Course into the classroom through homework, quizzes, and classroom activities |
| Independent Study Implementation | <p>Students voluntarily opt into Independent Study, but the district establishes some structure, for example:</p> <p>SAT Online Course Lunch Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Computer lab is available during lunch ▪ One ELA and one Math teacher trained in the SAT Online Course are available (ISDE recommends training 2-4 teachers) ▪ The program should have fewer than 25 students enrolled, or more sections should be made available ▪ Students who enroll must take the PSAT before the first session to determine strengths and weaknesses <p>Official SAT Question of the Day Contest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Post a daily link to the College Board’s contest on the school’s website ▪ Encourage students to participate by turning answers in to a suggestion box ▪ Criteria to win is participation (not the correct answer) ▪ Each week, one male and one female winner are announced |

Source: Idaho Public Schools²²

¹⁹ “Idaho SAT School Day Registration Begins Today.” Idaho State Department of Education press release, February 6, 2012.

http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/media_center/past_releases_docs/2012/IdahoSATDay_Press_Release_020612.pdf

²⁰ “Graduation Minimum Requirements.” Idaho Department of Education, April 3, 2013. http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/hs_grad_requirements/docs/Grad%20minimum%20Requirements.pdf

²¹ “SAT School Day 2013-2014: Idaho School Implementation Overview.” Idaho State Department of Education, p. 12. Available for download from <http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/assessment/SATstudentParent.htm>

²² “Best Practices for Helping All Students Get Ready for the SAT: Prepared for Idaho SDE.” College Board, January 2014. pp. 22-25.

INDIRECT METHODS

The aforementioned best practices are effective at increasing measureable outcomes at present; however, addressing the systemic issues is ultimately a more sustainable approach to increase SAT participation and general postsecondary college and career readiness. To illustrate, students from high-income families are 25 percent more likely to enter college when compared to students from low-income families.²³ Furthermore, students with the largest obstacles to college often face:

[S]ocial and language barriers, less access to information and guidance, less exploration because of low expectations, decreased access to the Internet, and underestimation of the amount of financial help available.²⁴

School communities can use indirect methods to many of the barriers associated with economic disparities. One such approach is changing school culture through narrative – for instance, transforming the notion that ‘attending college is an *option*’ to ‘attending college is an *expectation*.’ Fostering an appreciation of academics will lead to the “desire to succeed and a drive to attend college,” thus supporting lifelong learning.²⁵ According to the College Board, college-focused schools are characterized by the following priorities:²⁶

- Expecting that all underserved students are capable of being prepared to enroll and succeed in college
- Providing a range of high-quality, college preparatory tools for students and families
- Embracing social, cultural, and varied learning styles when developing the environment and activities at the school
- Involving leaders at all levels in establishing policies, programs, and practices
- Maintaining sufficient financial and human resources for this mission
- Assessing policy, programs, and practices regularly to determine their effectiveness

According to the College Board, “creating a college-going culture requires a change in attitude on a global scale.”²⁷ Schools must begin by clearly articulating, through words and actions—that all students are expected to achieve at a high level, they must remove barriers to learning, and teach students and families how to become their own advocates. Additionally, schools must offer training and support to staff on how to promote high expectations and standards in the classroom by eliminating “low-level and unchallenging courses, and debunk[ing] negative myths about who can and who cannot achieve success in rigorous courses.”²⁸

<http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/assessment/docs/accuplacer/SAT/SAT%20Online%20Course%20for%20Educators.pdf>

²³ “CollegeEd: Creating a College-Going Culture Guide.” College Board, 2006. p. 2.

http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/collegeed/collegeEd-create-college-going-culture.pdf

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Pathways to College Network, As cited by: Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁸ Ibid.

In Virginia, Alexandria County Public Schools (ACPS) serves as an example of how to adopt general strategies identified by the College Board. In 2013, ACPS reported that its students' SAT scores were below the average scores in both Virginia and the nation. To address the score differential, the district's Office of Accountability recommended that the School Board expand outreach for both the SAT and the ACT; focus efforts on increasing Hispanic student participation rates; and provide information to students and their families about the differences in requirements for high school graduation versus college entry.²⁹

Another example of using indirect methods to increase SAT preparation is the Turf campaign, a national advocacy campaign designed to "galvanize and mobilize school counselors to take the lead in establishing a college-going culture in their schools, districts, and communities."³⁰ The campaign supports a systemic approach to K-12 education as early as elementary school by encouraging the following components of counseling:³¹

- College aspirations
- Academic planning for college and career readiness
- Enrichment and extracurricular engagement
- College and career exploration and selection processes
- College and career assessments
- College affordability planning
- College and career admission processes (high school only)
- Transition from high school to college enrollment (high school only)

Understanding students' opinions and knowledge about college, as well as their vision for the future will help administrators understand what adjustments will most effectively address student need and cultivate a college-going culture. Appendix A offers a reproduction of the College Board's "Sample Needs Assessment Survey for Students" and "Staff Input Survey."

Different program approaches—both small- and large-scale—can help schools foster a college focused culture. A school's specific program approach "depends on [the] school's current culture, staff participation, parent involvement, financial resources, school board acceptance, and availability of administrators."³² The following two figures describe small-scale and large-scale approaches and examples to becoming a college-focused school.

²⁹ "ACT & SAT Report: Graduating Class 2013," Op. cit., p. 11.

³⁰ Figure text taken verbatim from: "Own the Turf: Best Practices for Implementing the Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling with Equity." College. Board. p. 2.
http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/nosca/OTT_Webcast_10-26-2011_Forum-2011.pdf

³¹ Ibid., p. 4.

³² Ibid., p. 7.

Figure 1.2: Small-Scale Approaches to Cultivating a College-Focused School

| APPROACH | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|
| Appearance of School Grounds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hang posters and brochures from community, two-year, and four-year colleges ▪ Announce upcoming college entrance exams and test-preparation classes with flyers ▪ Bookmark college resource websites in computer labs (e.g., admission, financial aid, scholarships, etc.) ▪ Offer computers lab resources at night for families, especially near FAFSA deadlines |
| Appearance and Attitude of Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage staff to wear apparel from their alma mater every Friday ▪ Post pictures of staff and include where they earned their degrees ▪ Inform staff of college related issues or changes (e.g., admissions, graduation requirements, entrance requirements, etc.) through a “College Corner” newsletter and at faculty meetings ▪ Make sure teachers share the message that college is for ALL students, not just honors students |
| Course Handbook | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Start an AP class or curriculum if one doesn’t exist ▪ Expect ALL students to take one AP or college-level course before graduation ▪ Motivate students to enroll in classes based on potential ▪ Avoid fees in the prerequisites for advanced classes ▪ Create a model college-preparatory, four-year plan for students ▪ Offer SAT and ACT preparation classes during the school day, or require a College Issues class for grades 11 and 12 |
| Counseling Office | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Frequently hold individual conferences with each student, regardless of academic level, especially during junior year to monitor future plans and progress ▪ Invite local college graduates to speak ▪ Host college information sessions with admissions officers during lunch ▪ Send a “College Corner” newsletter to parents ▪ Create a college of the week profile, complete with pictures ▪ Celebrate students acceptances publicly ▪ Change the name of the department to “Counseling and Postgraduate Planning” |
| Curricular Ideas: Math | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Apply curricular concepts and assignments to college and beyond ▪ Use resources from www.achieve.org, a bipartisan nonprofit organization aimed to raise school accountability and standards ▪ Include SAT and ACT preparation as a part of grade 11 and 12 classes ▪ Discuss college majors and jobs involving math, reiterating “When you are in college math class...” ▪ Organize field trips to local college campuses |
| Curricular Ideas: Language Arts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Again, apply curricular concepts and assignments to college and beyond ▪ Use resources from www.achieve.org, a bipartisan nonprofit organization aimed to raise school accountability and standards ▪ Include SAT and ACT preparation as a part of grade 11 and 12 classes ▪ Discuss college majors and jobs involving English, reiterating “When you are in college writing class...” ▪ Assess students’ writing abilities frequently, emphasizing the importance of writing and reading in college |

Source: The College Board³³³³ Figure text taken with minimal variation from: Ibid., pp. 8-9.

Figure 1.3: Large-Scale Approaches to Cultivating a College-Focused School

| APPROACH | EXAMPLES |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Advanced Placement Program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a cooperative program between high schools and university to encourage students to take college-level courses; students gain college credit by passing the exam and learn college-level skills Studies have shown that students who take rigorous coursework are more likely to complete a bachelor's degree in four years or less http://apcentral.collegeboard.com |
| CollegeEd | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The only packaged curricular resource for ALL students, focused on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everyone can go to college There are many options to make college affordable Different types of colleges and postsecondary opportunities are available Education and training are essential for career success Students' high school course and activity choices affect post-graduation options It is important to begin planning for college and careers in middle school Involving family and/or supportive adults is part of academic planning and future success www.collegeboard.com |
| AVID | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is a program for grades 5 through 12 that encourages low-income, underrepresented, academically average, motivated students to achieve their potential and attend college AVID requires enrollment in elective classes taught by an AVID-trainer, enrollment in rigorous school courses, and use of AVID methods AVID is not a curriculum, but is a program that encourages collaboration, support and teaching http://www.avid.org/ |
| Recognizing the College Dream | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The University of California's Center for Educational Partnerships has developed an outreach program for schools to strengthen their college-going culture through curriculum designed to increase access for underrepresented and low-income students Lessons are offered in English and Spanish, help students view themselves as college students, and correct myths about college Includes a parental involvement guide http://outreach.berkeley.edu/ |
| TRIO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach programs run by the federal government to motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds, includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upward Bound: for students from low-income families in which neither parent went to college, as well as low-income, first generation veterans Talent Search: assists disadvantaged students with academic, career, and financial aid counseling Other programs that aid current college and/or adult students http://www2.ed.gov/programs/landing.jhtml |
| GEAR UP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Preparation) offers tutoring, counseling, scholarships, and mentor services through a six-year grant program to states with high rates of poverty and low-income students http://www2.ed.gov/programs/landing.jhtml |

Source: The College Board³⁴³⁴ Figure text taken with minimal variation from: Ibid., pp. 10-11.

SECTION II: SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILES

This section examines key policies and practices from three urban school districts that have witnessed an increase in SAT participation after implementing some or all of the best practices identified in Section I. Additionally, this section includes case study outcomes from a school-wide intervention that successfully established a culture of college and career readiness, ultimately impacting SAT preparation and participation. The three school districts and one case study include:

- Boston Public Schools, Massachusetts
- New York City Public Schools, New York
- District of Columbia Public Schools, District of Columbia
- MacArthur Senior High School, Aldine Independent School District, Texas

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, MASSACHUSETTS

Boston Public Schools (BPS) received the Broad Prize in 2006, a \$1 million annual award “to honor urban school districts that demonstrate the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among low-income students and students of color.”³⁵ Additionally, BPS was a Broad Prize finalist from 2002 through 2005.³⁶ Data collected in 2012 show an overall 61 percent SAT participation rate among high school seniors, up from the 54 percent in 2009. Asian students had the highest SAT participation rate, followed distantly by white students. Notably, the largest increase in SAT participation was experienced by African American students, followed by Asian students.³⁷ Figure 2.1 provides participation rates by demographic group for grade 12 students in BPS, as reported by the Broad Prize.

Figure 2.1: Grade 12 Participation by Racial/Ethnic Subgroup, BPS

| SUBGROUP | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | AVERAGE CHANGE |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| African American | 44 | 49 | 54 | 56 | 4 |
| Asian | 87 | 89 | 91 | 94 | 3 |
| Hispanic | 39 | 40 | 39 | 41 | 1 |
| White | 57 | 65 | 65 | 61 | 1 |
| All | 54 | 58 | 59 | 61 | 2 |

Source: 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education³⁸

³⁵ [1] “Overview.” The Broad Prize for Urban Education. <http://www.broadprize.org/about/overview.html>

[2] “Previous Winners and Finalists.” The Broad Prize for Urban Education. http://www.broadprize.org/past_winners/map.html

³⁶ “Previous Winners and Finalists,” Op. cit.

³⁷ “Boston Public Schools, Massachusetts.” The 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education. p. 17. http://www.broadprize.org/ddr/MA_BOSTON.pdf

³⁸ Ibid.

SAT PARTICIPATION INITIATIVES

A December 2013 presentation to the BPS School Committee explains that while “overall five-year SAT participation and performance rates remain stagnant [in Boston],” there is a “significant gap” between the district’s three schools that require an entrance exam for admission (known as the “exam schools”³⁹) and all other district schools (i.e., “non-exam schools”).⁴⁰ To address its SAT participation and performance weaknesses, BPS set a goal to “increase the percentage of students taking the SAT from non-exam schools by 10 percent, and ... increase the performance on the SAT at both exam and non-exam schools by 20 points per subject over a two-year period,” though the following actions:⁴¹

- Expanding the number of BPS SAT testing sites
- Providing SAT prep materials to all high schools through the State College and Career Portal and Success Boston
- Working closely with BSA (Boston Scholar Athletes) to establish more SAT prep classes within the BSA zones⁴²
- Sharing best practices of SAT performance across Network G for the schools showing significant increases in SAT scores

Additional SAT support services for students come from a partnership between BPS and the Boston Public Library, which offers free online resources to help students prepare for the exam. For example:

- The College Board’s *My College Quickstart* website provides free access to a customized “personal SAT study plan for students, based on their performance on the PSAT/NMSPT exam (taken by BPS students in grades 10 and 11),” which includes:⁴³
 - SAT practice questions
 - Individualized skill building lessons
 - Test taking strategies
 - Official SAT exam with score summary
 - Links to college and financial aid resources

³⁹ The three BPS exam schools are Boston Latin Academy, Boston Latin School, and The John B. O’Bryant School of Mathematics and Science; admission to these schools is based entirely on grades and test scores from the Independent Schools Entrance Exam. See “Exam Schools.” Boston Public Schools. <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/exam>

⁴⁰ [1] “Network G.” Boston Public Schools [PPT], December 18, 2013. p. 3. <http://bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/162/2013%2012%2018%20Network%20G%20Academics%20Final.pdf>

[2] Exam schools accept students according to grade and score on the Independent School Entrance Examination

⁴¹ Quote and bullet points taken verbatim from: “Network G,” Op. cit., p. 8.

⁴² BSA Zones are learning centers located in each of Boston Public High Schools. Programming includes scholar-athlete peer tutoring and mentoring, a College Readiness Initiative program, a Summer Jobs program, and the BSA College Scholarship. Each Zone is equipped with technology (e.g., computers, internet access, Nooks, flash drives, and printers), school materials, and text books. For more information, visit the BSA site: http://www.bostonscholarathlete.org/inside_academics/Zones/index

⁴³ “College Readiness.” Boston Public Schools. <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/Domain/208>

- *SkillsTutor*, an online program available to all BPS high school students “personalizes tutorials for students so that they can ‘brush up’ on the academic content covered on the SAT exam,” including:⁴⁴
 - Critical reading, writing, and mathematics lessons
 - Periodic progress assessments
 - Opportunities to focus on content deficits

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS POLICIES

According to the State of Massachusetts, students are “College and Career Ready” when they “have the academic knowledge, experiences, and intellectual and personal qualities needed to enter into a college program or economically viable pathway,” a goal to which BPS is committed.⁴⁵

BPS publishes an annual *College and Career Guide* which includes valuable information, such as resources and websites, is supplemented with advice from BPS graduates, and is available in English and Spanish.⁴⁶ The guide engages students and parents in a thoughtful way, letting them know that they are not only in control, but ultimately responsible for determining their futures. The figure below summarizes the contents of the guide.

Figure 2.2: College and Career Guide Content Focus, Boston Public Schools

| INTRODUCTION | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Letter from BPS Assistant Superintendent ■ Why a College Education? ■ College Options | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Career Options ■ Career and Technical Education Options |
| HIGH SCHOOL | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Need to Know ■ Conquering High School ■ Do Your Best | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Now That You’re on Your way ■ Do Your Thing ■ Taking MassCore |
| TAKE 3 STEPS INTO YOUR FUTURE | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Step 1: Explore Your Options ■ Step 2: Visit Colleges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Step 3: Make a Plan for After High School |
| MAKE COLLEGE HAPPEN | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prepare a List of Colleges ■ Fill Out College Applications ■ Take Standardized Tests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Find Ways to Pay for College ■ Make Decisions ■ The Move from High School to College |
| GET ORGANIZED: A TIMELINE FOR HIGH SCHOOL | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In the 9th Grade ■ In the 10th Grade ■ In the 11th Grade ■ In the 12th Grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are You on Track to Graduate? ■ College Application Organizer |

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “College Readiness,” Op. cit.

⁴⁶ “College and Career Guide.” Boston Public Schools.

http://www.bostonfoundation.org/uploadedFiles/Sub_Site/web_specials/Success_Boston/BPS%20CCR%20final-English.pdf

| YOUR RESOURCES | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommended Websites Glossary of Terms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources—Preparing for College Notes |

Source: Boston Public Schools⁴⁷

The Guide is intended to get students and parents to think about their options beyond high school and to begin planning early as middle school. It begins by explaining the importance of college and the different types of continuing education options. Specific tips and actionable takeaways are encouraged, such as developing an academic plan at the beginning of high school. Ultimately, the Guide reiterates that choosing the right option and realizing one's goals "is based on your interests and goals as well as your level of preparedness."⁴⁸

NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, NEW YORK

New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) received the Broad Prize in 2007, and was a finalist in 2005 and 2006.⁴⁹ Data collected in 2012 show an overall 78 percent SAT participation rate among high school seniors. Participation rates were highest among Asian and white students, and these groups also experienced the largest increases in participation between 2009 and 2012.⁵⁰ Figure 2.3 provides participation rates for grade 12 students in NYCDOE, as reported by the Broad Prize.

Figure 2.3: Grade 12 Participation by Racial/Ethnic Subgroup, NYC

| SUBGROUP | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | AVERAGE CHANGE |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| African American | 62 | 65 | 66 | 65 | 1 |
| Asian | 82 | 79 | 81 | 87 | 2 |
| Hispanic | 63 | 63 | 62 | 65 | 1 |
| White | 67 | 58 | 71 | 73 | 3 |
| All | 78 | 74 | 76 | 78 | 0 |

Source: 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education⁵¹

SAT PARTICIPATION INITIATIVES

NYCDOE offers free PSAT testing to 10th and 11th grade students each fall to help students prepare for the full SAT exam.⁵² NYCDOE also published a toolkit (*Best Practices in Counseling and Postsecondary Planning School Culture: 9-12 Timeline Tool*) with specific SAT participation strategies for each year of high school (Figure 2.4). Notably, SAT test preparation courses are offered in January for grade 11 students and school-wide registration days encourage increased participation. School leaders have discretion over

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁹ "Previous Winners and Finalists," Op. cit.

⁵⁰ "New York City Department of Education, New York." The 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education. p. 17.
http://www.broadprize.org/ddr/NY_NEWYORKCITY.pdf

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² "Yearly Testing." New York City Department of Education.
<http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/resources/testing/default.htm>

whether to offer the preparation course through partnerships or integrated into existing course content.⁵³ However, SAT preparation is just one component of the college- and career-readiness spectrum. The focus is not simply on taking the SAT exam, but on encouraging students to plan for their broader futures.

Figure 2.4: SAT Timeline, Grades 9 - 12

| GRADE | STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES | SCHOOL LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES |
|----------|---|--|
| Grade 9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin to research college options, including SAT and GPA requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify when college- and career-planning will occur during the school day Identify staff responsible for CCR planning (e.g., Advisory course or college and career center) Ensure a minimum of one staff member is knowledgeable of college- and career-training options |
| Grade 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sign-up for a free account at collegeboard.com Study for the PSAT exam with teachers trained in understanding the PSAT structure, content, and scoring Take the PSAT exam and discuss their scores with their counselor/college advisor Sign up for SAT II subject tests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan one-on-one PSAT score reviews for each student Meet with all students who should consider the SAT II's before November Create a SAT outreach plan: identify who will lead awareness, parent communication, registration, and preparatory activities? Determine school policy for College Board waivers to ensure greatest availability |
| Grade 11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review SAT scores and transcripts to begin college research Sign-up for SAT prep course that begins in January Take SAT in the spring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure test preparation course is available to all students Organize school-wide registration days Assign staff to oversee test-day reminders Make fee waivers widely available |
| Grade 12 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take the SAT a second time in the fall | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize school-wide registration days Assign staff to oversee test-day reminders Make fee waivers widely available |

Source: New York City Department of Education⁵⁴

COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READINESS POLICIES

The NYCDOE's emphasis on SAT preparation reflects its core mission to help students "develop meaningful personal aspirations and an understanding of the path towards their goals."⁵⁵ To facilitate the endeavor, the NYCDOE's Office of Postsecondary Readiness publishes resources designed to help high school students prepare for their futures. The aforementioned toolkit provides a roadmap for school leaders to guide college and career programming. It also "define[s] the qualities and achievement that students need to enroll,

⁵³ College and Career Readiness Benchmarks." NYC Department of Education. p. 5.

http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/1A6DB2EC-A636-4B65-9119-C33EE5B204DC/0/Resource1CCRBenchmark_912Timeline091412.pdf

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 3-6.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

persist, and succeed in college, postsecondary training opportunities, and meaningful careers.”⁵⁶

The toolkit models the best practices outlined by the College Board in Section I of this report, particularly the focus on school counselors’ roles in guiding school culture. Counselors “support high school students in making the best decisions for their postsecondary plans.”⁵⁷ While the toolkit does not recommend specific academic programming, it does encourage schools to assess course offerings and help students to enroll in rigorous and challenging courses. Furthermore, the toolkit identifies student and school leader expectations, all of which are designed to help students begin to think about their future and what steps they need to take in order to realize their dreams. For example, school leaders are expected to facilitate college and career planning programming and curriculum, either through an official advisory course or by offering a college and career center.⁵⁸

A second resource, the *College Planning Handbook*, was designed to help students “think about how college fits into ... life after high school.”⁵⁹ The nine-chapter, 150 page handbook teaches students about the differences between high school and college, postsecondary options, and how to find schools that align to their interests and needs. The NYCDOE handbook informs students that “the fastest growing and highest paying career fields require postsecondary education,” and that “college degree recipients earn more, have better economic security, are healthier, and participate more in their communities.”⁶⁰ Finally, the handbook is supplemented by tips and advice from NYC high school graduates.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MATERIALS

Available in ten languages, the NYC Department of Education’s publication, *Expect Success: A Family’s Guide to Preparing Students for College and Careers 2013-2014*, is a 20-page guide given to all parents of high school students. The guide emphasizes the importance of collaboration between families and schools and outlines opportunities for parents to become more involved in their child’s education, advising parents to begin exploring options with their children early to help them set goals for after graduation.⁶¹ Additionally, the guide introduces the various exams, (including PSAT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests, ACT, and Advanced Placement Tests) and provides online resources for students to learn more about what each exam entails. Finally, the guide includes information on curriculum, discusses the importance of academic and personal behavior, outlines course requirements for graduation and college readiness, and provides information on planning for the future (academically and financially).

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵⁷ [Original emphasis] Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁹ “College Planning Handbook.” New York City Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Readiness. p. 1. <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/9BD47E57-EF8E-4BDA-95E3-893BDA0FBC94/0/CollegeHandbook52912.pdf>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ “Expect Success: A Family’s Guide to Preparing Students for College and Career 2013-2014.” New York City Department of Education. p. 11. http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/4F200AC3-6A10-4911-81CE-54F309DD9F2A/0/English_NYCDOE_ExpectSuccessHandbook_HighSchool_pg0124.pdf

The guide concludes with a number of online tools and resources available to parents to help them track their child's academic progress. These resources generally include information on how to access student academic progress, additional information on the school district, sign-ups for e-mail and/or text alerts, phone numbers for school-related questions and concern, as well as links to social media.⁶²

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Data collected from District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) indicate some growth in SAT participation from 2009 to 2012. In 2012, 69 percent of high school seniors participated in the SAT, a nominal increase from the 67 percent that participated in 2009. While the district experienced nominal increases in participation among African American and White students, Hispanic student participation decreased slightly.⁶³

Figure 2.5: Grade 12 Participation by Racial/Ethnic Subgroup, DCPS

| SUBGROUP | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | AVERAGE CHANGE |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| African American | 58 | 60 | 65 | 63 | 2 |
| Asian | † | † | † | † | † |
| Hispanic | 71 | 79 | 74 | 68 | -1 |
| White | 77 | 71 | 87 | 81 | 3 |
| All | 67 | 67 | 72 | 69 | 1 |

Source: 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education⁶⁴

† Data suppressed for Asian students because they represented less than 5 percent of district enrollment.

SAT PARTICIPATION INITIATIVES

Recognizing that “[t]he SAT is one of the bare minimums for college, and yet barriers still existed for too many of our students,” the DCPS implements strategies to increase SAT participation outlined by the College Board, including:⁶⁵

- **PSAT** administered to all grade 9 and 11 students
- **SAT School Day** for grade 11 students
- **Free SAT Exam** for all grade 11 students, which goes beyond the common practice of offering fee-waivers for students who qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch
- **Free test preparation** available from the College Board, the District's Individual Graduation Portfolio, Kaplan, and school-managed courses

⁶² Ibid., p. 18.

⁶³ “District of Columbia Public Schools, District of Columbia.” The 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education. p. 17.
http://www.broadprize.org/ddr/DC_DISTRICTOFCOLUMBIA.pdf

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Salmanowitz, M. “11th Grade DCPS Students to Take SAT for Free Today.” District of Columbia Public Schools, February 27, 2013.
<http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/About+DCPS/Press+Releases+and+Announcements/Press+Releases/11th+Grade+DCPS+Students+to+Take+SAT+for+Free+Today>

Beginning in 2012, all DCPS students in grades 9 through 11 took either the ReadStep or PSAT exam, both of which were offered during the school day and free of charge. Students who take the ReadStep and PSAT/NMSQT realize the following benefits:⁶⁶

- On average, DCPS students who take the PSAT/NMSQT **score higher on the SAT** than those who don't, and students who take the PSAT/NMSQT twice score even higher.
- All students are able to identify their particular academic strengths and weaknesses on skills necessary for college study. Students can then focus their preparation on those areas that could most benefit from additional study or practice.

COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READINESS POLICIES

DCPS's commitment to increasing SAT participation rates is one component of its larger focus to "ensure students are college and career ready."⁶⁷ The district has established a number of programs to support CCR initiatives, beginning as early as middle school.

The DCPS *College and Career Readiness Initiative* has a team of staff "focused on supporting a district-wide, college-going culture that makes college a possibility for any DCPS student."⁶⁸ The *Initiative* is guided by the following principles:⁶⁹

- All DCPS students, preschool through 12th grade, will understand that college is a viable option for each of them.
- All DCPS students will have access to rigorous academic preparation for successful college matriculation and graduation from preschool through 12th grade.
- All DCPS students and families will have access to consistent and informed guidance about the college admission process (choosing a college, funding a college, and graduating college).

DCPS developed an *Individual Graduation Portfolio* (IGP), a roadmap to help students plan their future and keep a record of their past.⁷⁰ The electronic portfolio includes educational, career, and achievement information for students beginning in grade 6 and continuing through graduation.⁷¹ The IGP helps to guide student progress, empowering them to track and make decisions about their educational progress. The portfolio is tailored to both high school and middle school students, offering different services according to student need (Figure 2.6).

⁶⁶ Bullet points taken verbatim from: "Preparing for ReadStep and PSAT," Op. cit.

⁶⁷ Salmanowitz, M., Op. cit.

⁶⁸ "Plan for College: DCPS College Readiness Initiative." District of Columbia Public Schools.

<http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/College+and+Careers/College+and+Career+Planning/Plan+for+College/Plan+for+College>

⁶⁹ Bullet points taken verbatim from: "Plan for College: Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Plan Your Future: Individual Graduation Portfolio." District of Columbia Public Schools.

<http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/College+and+Careers/High+School+Planning/Individual+Graduation+Portfolio>

⁷¹ "Individual Graduation Portfolios Parent Information." District of Columbia Public Schools, Office of Secondary School Transformation. p. 4. <http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/Files/downloads/College-Careers/DCPS-Parent-IGP-Presentation.pdf>

Figure 2.6: Individual Graduation Portfolio—Middle School and High School

| MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS | HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Choices Explorer: Designed for high school, college, and career exploration and planning ▪ Learning Styles Inventory: Figure out how you learn best | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Choices Planner: Designed for college and career exploration and planning ▪ Abilities Profiler: Match your strengths to potential careers ▪ Do What You Are: Learn your personality type ▪ Learning Styles Inventory: Figure out how you learn best ▪ testGear: Take FREE online PSAT and SAT prep courses |

Source: District of Columbia Public Schools⁷²

Notably, DCPS' IGP allows high school students to access testGear, an online program that offers students the following:⁷³

- Test preparation for the PSAT and SAT exams
- Over sixty hours of online instruction
- A diagnostic test combines self-assessment and objective assessment questions
- Customized lessons for each student
- Customized curriculum with an array of self-assessment and test formats, self-paced tutorials, and effective test-taking strategies

School counselors and administrators may access IGPs to track students' progress toward graduation and identify off-track students. Additionally, parent resources are included in their child's IGP, including grade specific resources, activities for engaging with their children, and other career- and college-planning resources.⁷⁴ Finally, the IGP includes the Scholarship Finder, a tool to help identify scholarships "according to interests, skills, financial need, region, area of study, and more."⁷⁵

Finally, DCPS celebrates October as *College Awareness Month*, a district-wide, collaborative effort of DCPS, college access providers, and stakeholders "to promote college as an option for [all] children."⁷⁶ Activities include College Awareness Day, in which students, teachers, and staff "generate enthusiasm for college—from preschool to senior year" by wearing college gear. In accordance with a College Board best practice, DCPS teachers and staff are encouraged to take pictures with colleagues and to engage students. Additionally, all college assessments—ReadiStep, PSAT/NMSQT, and the SAT—are given during *College Awareness Month*.

⁷² Bullet points taken verbatim from: "Plan Your Future: Individual Graduation Portfolio," Op. cit.

⁷³ Bullet points taken verbatim from: Ibid.

⁷⁴ "Individual Graduation Portfolios Parent Information," Op. cit., p. 22.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷⁶ "October is College Awareness Month." District of Columbia Public Schools.

[http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/College+and+Careers/College+and+Career+Planning/College+Awareness+Month+\(CAM\)](http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/College+and+Careers/College+and+Career+Planning/College+Awareness+Month+(CAM))

MACARTHUR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL, ALDINE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, TEXAS CASE STUDY

Aldine Independent School District (AISD) won the Broad Prize in 2009, and was a finalist in 2004, 2005, and 2008.⁷⁷ Data collected in 2012 demonstrate small growth in SAT participation since 2009. African American students and Hispanic students experienced increases in SAT participation during the time period examined, though participation rates for African American students remain substantially higher than those of Hispanic students.⁷⁸ This case study examines the specific strategies to increase SAT participation and overall college- and career-readiness for a particular high school in the District, MacArthur Senior High School (MSHS).

Figure 2.7: Grade 12 Participation by Racial/Ethnic Subgroup, AISD

| SUBGROUP | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | AVERAGE CHANGE |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| African American | 48 | 52 | 60 | 54 | 3 |
| Asian | † | † | † | † | † |
| Hispanic | 32 | 34 | 38 | 42 | 3 |
| White | 29 | † | † | † | † |
| All | 39 | 42 | 46 | 46 | 3 |

Source: 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education⁷⁹

† Data suppressed for Asian and white students because both represented less than 5 percent of district enrollment.

During academic year 2004-2005, MSHS underwent a comprehensive school improvement plan titled *Structures to Support Learning*.⁸⁰ The program was designed to increase student achievement on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) exams, a consortium of statewide standardized assessments. Although not designed to specifically increase student SAT participation, the same practices established for *Structures to Support Learning* relate to SAT participation and achievement. In fact, the program complements the CCR initiative set forth by the College Board. MSHS's purpose for implementing its *Structures to Support Learning* initiative aligns with CCR goals: to improve academic programs, and increase students' knowledge base and skills to prepare them for success after high school.

Prior to the intervention, the percentage of MSHS students passing the TAKS was below the state average. Three years later, the overall passage rate (including at-risk, economically disadvantaged, and LEP students) exceeded the state average.⁸¹ The *Structures to Support Learning* initiative was designed to align all interventions with the following research-based best practices in high school reform:⁸²

⁷⁷ "Previous Winners and Finalists," Op. cit.

⁷⁸ "Aldine Independent School District, Texas." The 2013 Broad Prize for Urban Education. p. 17.
http://www.broadprize.org/ddr/TX_ALDINE.pdf

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "Comprehensive High School Improvement—MacArthur Senior High School." Texas Education Agency.
http://www.tea.state.tx.us/Best_Practice_Summaries_V2/Comprehensive_High_School_Improvement_MacArthur_Senior_High_School.aspx#resBase

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Bullet points taken with minimal variation from: Ibid.

- Foster a positive school climate by enhancing school safety and promoting a respectful environment
- Assist students who enter high school with poor academic skills
- Provide academic supports and extended learning opportunities, such as summer bridge programs, supplemental educational services, and Saturday academies
- Design systems of support to address the needs of students who are “stretching” to take more rigorous coursework
- Incorporate time within the school day for teachers to collaborate on ways to address needs indicated by data and classroom observations
- Promote distributed leadership and encourage multiple roles for teacher leaders
- Provide increased opportunities to learn

The strategies and approaches MSHS chose to incorporate into its *Structures to Support Learning* initiative are summarized in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8: Structures to Student Learning Strategies and Approaches

| |
|---|
| Data Review, Goal Setting, and Improving School Climate |
| Extended Week/Year Programming to Provide Credit Recovery, Immediate and Timely Support, and Academic Enrichment Opportunities |
| Supervision Structure and Planning Schedule to Support Collaborative Improvement Efforts |
| Focus on Participation in Extracurricular Activities, College Planning, and Dual Enrollment |
| Professional Development and Hiring Practices to Focus on High Expectations, Enhance Curricular Expertise, and Provide Additional Support |

Source: Texas Education Agency⁸³

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The *Structures to Support Learning* initiative includes a number of program elements, but the three strategies stand out for their relevance to increasing SAT participation or developing college- and career readiness among students: Extended Week and Year Programming; Focus on Participation in Extracurricular Activities, College planning, and Dual Enrollment; and Professional Development and Hiring Practices.

Extended Week and Year Programming was funded by the Aldine Independent School District to implement free, extended-year programs to support struggling students. Initial course offerings included summer credit-recovery in core areas of instruction for struggling grade 9 students, ESL credit-courses for new students, and optional SAT enrichment classes. The program has grown to offer targeted Saturday classes during the academic year to proactively address specific student needs before falling behind, in addition to offering academic enrichment programs to help prepare students for the next grade level.⁸⁴

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

MSHS's **Focus on Participation in Extracurricular Activities, College Planning, and Dual Enrollment** addressed SAT participation and included elements that align with CCR initiatives. Program components included: PSAT requirements, college support programs, ongoing college planning and counseling, curriculum adjustments, high stakeholder engagement, "Adopt-a-Senior," and increasing extracurricular activity participation.⁸⁵

- Every grade 10 student was required to take the PSAT and to register for an online SAT preparation course for credit. Exam and course fees were waived for all students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch. Furthermore, all exams—PSAT and SAT—were administered on campus to make participation more convenient.
- Counselors played a critical role in the *Support to Student Learning* by acting as a facilitator of college support programs for students and families. For example, counselors may have referred the Jump Start program to disengaged students, arranged local campus visits, or scheduled representatives from colleges to visit the MSHS campus. Additionally, counselors involved in the Jump Start program provided ongoing support and academic advising to students throughout the college application process.
- Ongoing college planning and counseling was offered to all students in grades 10 through 12. Additionally, three college-focused parent meetings were provided each academic year. Counseling activities were supplemented by regular mailings and announcements regarding college planning and support, as well as information for students and parents about upcoming deadlines.
- To support the college admissions process during the 2009-2010 academic year, students were assigned to write a college essay for their English class. The assignment was intended to help students practice applying for scholarships and admission, as well as to provide a draft essay for students to use when they applied to schools.
- The "Adopt-a-Senior" program was instituted by MSHS to help seniors through their last year of high school. Every faculty member would "adopt" two to three seniors to meet with regularly to ensure that they were "on the right track," and to intervene if they were struggling. Participating faculty were provided professional development training and resources.

The final program component, **Professional Development and Hiring Practices**, was also aligned to CCR. Through more demanding professional development and hiring practices, MSHS was able to provide more rigorous course offerings to better prepare students for exams such as the TAKS and the SAT. Teachers were required to complete 40 hours of professional development annually, including several hours of Gifted and Talented training.⁸⁶ Finally, all teachers were encouraged to participate in pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement training.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

LESSONS LEARNED

The *Structures to Support Learning* program helped MSHS faculty and staff to identify school-wide and program-specific strengths, in addition to identifying areas for improvement. Program strengths included the following:⁸⁷

- Although initially intended to increase safety and security on campus, the program ultimately decreased student distractions and discipline issues. As a result, school leaders noted increased student engagement and higher quality instruction.
- During the course of the program, both the interventions and student and faculty expectations had become “effectively embedded into the campus culture.” As a result, the campus saw a “significant decrease in the number of repeat ninth graders and a large increase in the number of students taking advanced courses.”

The program identified the following policies and practices with room for improvement:⁸⁸

- Convincing some staff to change their instructional approach proved to be a challenge. According to the principal, the established emphasis placed on teacher training to maintain certification was focused exclusively on content, as opposed to best practices in student engagement. As such, additional professional development training was needed to address instructional skills and techniques.
- Staff members emphasized that in order to build strong intervention teams, all individuals placed in a leadership role needed to have the requisite knowledge and experience.

According to MSHS’s faculty and staff, outcomes from the *Structures to Support Learning* pilot program led to the conclusion that to truly affect student participation and learning outcomes, “comprehensive, not isolated strategies needed to be undertaken.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEYS, STUDENTS AND STAFF

Figure A.1: Sample Needs Assessment Survey for Students

| We value your opinion and will make specific changes based on these results. | | | | |
|--|---|---------|------------|----------------------|
| | SA=Strongly Agree | A=Agree | D=Disagree | SD=Strongly Disagree |
| 1. I plan to go to college after graduating. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 2. I do not want to go to college after graduating. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 3. I do not think that I CAN go to college after graduating. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 4. I have not even thought about college. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 5. I feel my teachers believe I can succeed in college. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 6. My teachers talk about college issues like requirements and majors. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 7. I know what the SAT and ACT are. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 8. My counselor has talked with me about my future after high school with college as the goal. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 9. I am challenged in my classes. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 10. My parents expect me to go to college. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 11. I know at least five people who graduated from college. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 12. My family cannot afford college. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 13. I wish our school had more college resources. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 14. I can make more money if I have a college degree. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 15. List five colleges and/or universities of which you have heard: | <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> | | | |

Source: The College Board⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Figure text taken verbatim from: "CollegeEd: Creating a College-Going Culture Guide," Op. cit., p. 6.

Figure A.2: Staff Input Survey

| We are planning to make our school more college focused and college preparatory. Please answer the following honestly so we can properly support you. | | | | |
|--|--|---------|------------|----------------------|
| | SA=Strongly Agree | A=Agree | D=Disagree | SD=Strongly Disagree |
| 1. I believe our school can be more college focused. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 2. I believe every student at our school has the potential to earn a degree post high-school. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 3. I am knowledgeable about the ACT and the SAT. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 4. I know the entrance requirements for our state university. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 5. I know about the local community college and its programs. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 6. Our school benefits from (or would benefit from) an AP curriculum. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 7. I regularly mention college issues in my classroom. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 8. I believe that college counseling is the counselor's job. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 9. I would be willing to alter my curriculum on a small-scale to make my classroom more college friendly. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 10. To make our school more college focused, we need to adopt a large-scale program such as AP or CollegeEd. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 11. I know at least five people who graduated from college. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 12. If we make our school more college focused, I would like at least one faculty meeting a month dedicated to college issues. | SA | A | D | SD |
| 13. I have a specific idea on how to make our school more college focused: | <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> <div style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; margin-bottom: 2px;"></div> | | | |

Source: The College Board⁹¹

⁹¹ Figure text taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 7.

APPENDIX B: NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Figure B.1: College Planning Handbook Table of Contents

| LETTER TO STUDENTS | |
|---|--|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | |
| INTRODUCTION | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Options after High School College is Possible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You Have the Resources to Help Get You to College Student Perspectives |
| CHAPTER 1: WHY SHOULD I CONSIDER COLLEGE? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why Consider College? Career Freedom and Flexibility <i>Highlight:</i> Education and Skills for the 21st Century: An Agenda for Action Financial Security <i>Highlight:</i> Median Annual Income by Educational Attainment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adventure and Challenge Meeting New People and Making New Connections College Access Programs The Military and College Tips to Consider When Thinking About College as an Option <i>Highlight:</i> Career Interest Inventories |
| CHAPTER 2: CAN I HANDLE COLLEGE? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You Can Handle College You're Not a Born College Student—You Grow into One Admission to College GED Scores for College Academic Profile <i>Highlight:</i> Sample Freshman Academic Profile | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differences Between High School and College <i>Highlight:</i> Successful College Students Use a Variety of Available Resources A New Start Skills You Can Use Tips for Making College Manageable |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overview of College Options <i>Highlight:</i> Legal Status Types of Degrees and Certificates <i>Highlight:</i> College Timeline Two-Year or Four-Year: What's the Difference? New York State Public Colleges and Universities Transferring from Two-Year to Four-Year Schools Public and Private Colleges and Universities: What's the Difference? Out-of-State Public College <i>Highlight:</i> Examples of Public and Private Colleges and Universities Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Proprietary Colleges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Highlight:</i> Understanding Proprietary Colleges Types of Academic Programs <i>Highlight:</i> Learning Outside the Classroom: Internships and Co-ops Other College Characteristics New York State Opportunity Programs <i>Highlight:</i> What are the New York State Opportunity Programs? Admissions to New York State Opportunity Programs <i>Highlight:</i> Select CUNY Schools with General Admission and Opportunity Program Average Grades and SAT Scores Student Services Full-time Versus Part-time Tips for Learning More about College Options |

| CHAPTER 4: HOW DO I FIND THE RIGHT COLLEGE FOR ME? | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding the Right College What is a Good-fit College? How Many Schools Should I Apply to? College Access and Transition Assessing Your College Preferences Self-Assessment Chart College Search Process Researching Colleges College Research Chart | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrowing Down Your List Get Advice and Insight from Your Counselors/Advisors, Family, Friends, and Mentors <i>Highlight:</i> Some Helpful Questions to Ask College Students or Graduates Keep an Open Mind Tips for Finding a College that is a Good Fit for You |
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| CHAPTER 7: HOW DO I GET FINANCIAL AID? | |
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Source: New York City Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Readiness⁹²

⁹² "College Planning Handbook," Op. cit., pp. 4-7.

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