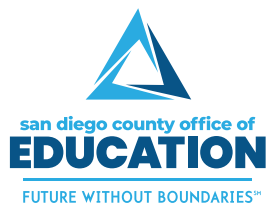




Research and Evaluation Services

College-Going Diagnostic



Full report can be accessed at:
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San Diego County **College-Going Diagnostic**

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San Diego County **College-Going Diagnostic**

Improving college completion rates is critical to meeting economic demands for a skilled workforce in San Diego County and to reducing the opportunity gap for many San Diego County's students who are low-income and first generation college students. While we can celebrate high college enrollment rates (72%) across the county, the average obscures issues in academic preparedness levels across San Diego County high schools and demographic groups. High enrollment rates also divert attention away from issues related to college persistence and completion since only one in three students complete a college degree and that average varies considerably depending on the institution attended and demographics of the student. Simply put, we need to ensure that more college-enrolled students succeed and more college and career readiness students enroll in college to meet the demands of our diverse economy and to ensure all students have a chance to achieve the American Dream.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE ANALYSIS

One of the greatest crises we face in education is the dwindling numbers of high school graduates who are able to achieve the American Dream. Each year, fewer students are more likely to be better off than their parents. In the 1950s, nine out of 10 high school graduates earned more than their parents. Today fewer than 50% do (Chetty, et al., 2017). To address this issue in San Diego County, we must widen the scope of our efforts to ensure that more students have access to and complete a college degree. We must work to guarantee that college and career ready students succeed in college while reducing the opportunity gap for students who have not considered college an option.

A college education is one of the most robust ways to achieve upward social mobility. That is to say, every year of education beyond high school is worth nearly \$6,000 more in annual income. On average, a college graduate earns \$20,000 more than a high school graduate (U.S. Department of Commerce 2017). But graduating from college is not easy. Many students who start college never complete. Currently one in three San Diego County high school graduates earn a college degree in six years. Also, many college and career ready students, especially students who are low-income, either fail to enroll in college altogether or are under-matched to colleges and fail to persist.

As part of the San Diego County Office of Education's (SDCOE) ongoing efforts to increase college enrollment, persistence, and completion, we have developed **The San Diego County College-Going Diagnostic**. This diagnostic serves to support school leaders, district leaders of college and career readiness, university directors charged with K-12-college compacts, and college transition partners to better understand the current reality, monitor progress toward shared goals, and act strategically to promote a college-going and completion culture.

This diagnostic, inspired by SDCOE's work with Harvard's University's Strategic Data Project, is designed to:

1. Better inform leaders of school districts and educational agencies about the college-going outcomes of their students,
2. Identify potential areas for action to increase students' level of academic achievement, preparedness for college, and post-secondary educational attainment.

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Our diagnostic is timely given several influential changes across California. First, in 2018, California deployed the College and Career Indicator (CCI) as part of the state mandates under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The CCI is a collection of measures identifying the extent to which students are college and career readiness. The index captures information related to career technical education (CTE) pathway completion, state testing results, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) test results, University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) “a-g” college entrance subject requirements, and dual enrollment participation. The CCI provides schools with a sense of which students are prepared for college. Our diagnostic uses college readiness information and serves as an important complimentary data point by providing information on college enrollment, persistence, and completion. With this, schools, districts, and higher education institutions can make more informed decisions about the actions they take regarding college and career readiness to support their students.

Additionally, recent changes at the community college level have implications on the college-going community in San Diego County. First, new legislation cleared the path for students to attend community college for free for the first year (Assembly Bill 19, “California College Promise” program), and second, gatekeeping-style placement tests that kept students locked into non-credit bearing courses were removed. This analysis acts as a check on current policy to make community colleges more accessible both financially and academically to students by examining success rates at local two-year institutions.

This report is divided into five sections. The first section summarizes key findings across several areas of interest including seamless college transition rates, persistency, and degree attainment. Section Two describes K-12-to-post-secondary completion for the average student in San Diego County as well as the minimum and maximum rates across schools. The report provides several detailed analyses in Sections Three and Four, where we examined barriers in K-12 preparedness (Section Three) and college enrollment, persistence, and completion (Section Four). Section Five identifies conclusions and recommended actions that address challenges raised by the findings.

AVAILABLE DATA ELEMENTS

We compiled several different sources of data to conduct the analyses. The primary data source is the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). The NSC StudentTracker service is a nationwide source of college enrollment and degree data from over 3,600 colleges and universities. The StudentTracker data set allows researchers at SDCOE to know the number and percentage of students who enroll, persist, and complete college annually in addition to understanding each student’s college pathway (i.e., each college attended, enrollment status, and major) and degree attained. See <https://studentclearinghouse.org/colleges/studenttracker/> for additional information.

Another rich source of data compiled for this report is the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard. The College Scorecard provides in-depth information about the cost and value of colleges and universities, information about student debt, borrowing amounts, employment and earnings information after degree completion, and many other characteristics. College Scorecard data are available at <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/data/>

The final data source compiled for the report is the California Department of Education’s (CDE) downloadable data and research files. CDE makes a variety of data files available to educators and researchers. These files include school accountability and performance data, assessment information, student background data including percent of English learners, high school graduates, students meeting UC and CSU college entrance subject requirements, post-secondary preparation, and others. See <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/dd/> for additional information.

LIMITATIONS

College-going data are limited to schools that participate in the NSC and to students who exit high school by graduation. For example, the dataset available for the Class of 2012 in the Clearinghouse includes 28,124 county students. San Diego County had roughly 42,886 students enrolled in the 12th grade in 2012. Only 34,214 students graduated on time, therefore 8,642 students were not in the data set because they

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exited high school for reasons other than graduation. Secondly, not all schools upload data to the Clearinghouse. Out of the 175 local high schools, approximately 119 use the Clearinghouse, reducing the overall size of this report by another 6,090 students—arriving at the 28,124 students in the 2012 dataset. Therefore, all college-going data for each year from 2011-18 are limited to (a) only students who exited high school as graduates and to (b) the schools that participated in the NSC.

“Fewer than 50% of 30 year olds today earn more than their parents at age 30.”

SECTION I: KEY FINDINGS

Seamless Enrollment

The majority of San Diego County high school graduates immediately enroll in college. Seamless enrollment is defined as the percentage of high school graduates enrolled in college the fall immediately after high school graduation.

Nearly three in four San Diego County high school graduates (72%) immediately enrolled in college in 2018 compared to 67% in 2011. Enrollment rates were split between two (38%) and four-year institutions (35%)¹

Seamless Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity

College enrollment rates vary dramatically across student groups. White (80%) and Asian (81%) students were more likely to be enrolled in 2018 compared to African-American (72%) and Latinx (67%) students. English learners (51%) were the least likely to be enrolled followed by students who are low-income (67%).²

Persistence

Enrolled students tend to stay enrolled for at least a year regardless of the type of institution attended or demographics. College persistence is defined as the percentage of students enrolled in college in the first year after high school graduation who returned for a second year. Current persistence rates are described for the class of 2016 due the lagged nature of persistence data (i.e., students must be a second year college student to assess persistence).

Approximately 90 out of every 100 San Diego County high school graduates who enrolled in college in their first year after graduating high school in 2016 returned for a second year in 2016.³ Our countywide persistence rate has remained steady since 2011.

Students are more likely to persist at four-year institutions (96%) compared to two-year (82%). Student groups tend to persist at similar rates with a 17 percentage point gap between the group with the highest persistence rate (Asian, 92%) and the group with the lowest (English learner, 75%).⁴

Completion

Many students fail to obtain a college degree in six years. Completion rates are defined differently for two and four-year institutions. Completion rates for four-year institutions are defined as the percentage of students completing a degree within six years. For two-year institutions, completion is defined as the percentage of students completing a degree within three years. For this analysis, we report on a six-year completion rate for both two-and four-year institutions.

The six-year college completion rate for students who graduated high school in 2012 from two and four-year institutions was low (37%). Additionally, students attending four-year institutions were more likely to complete (27%) compared to two year attendees (9%).⁵

Completion Rates by Race and Ethnicity

Completion rates vary across student groups.

Based on the 2012 high school graduation data, white students (49%) are more likely to complete compared to African-American (28%) and Latinx students (26%). Students who are low-income (25%) and English learners (16%) are the least likely to complete. Furthermore, completion rates for students who are low-income declined .2% from 2011-12 compared to a 6.3% increase for students who are non-economically disadvantaged during the same time frame.

¹ The county had 27,620 high school graduates reported in the NSC in 2011 and 18,462 enrolled in college; 20,040 enrolled in 2018/27,701 high school graduates in 2018.

² The county had 27,701 graduates reported in NSC in 2018 with 375 of 521 black students enrolled in college, 6,139 of 9,128 Latinx, 5,236 of 7,856 economically disadvantaged, and 623 of 1,228 English learners.

³ The county had 27,620 graduates reported in NSC in 2011, 20,069 enrolled in year 1, 17,763 returned for year 2; 26,333 reported in 2016, 20,028 enrolled year 1, 17,729 returned year 2.

⁴ The county had 20,028 persisters reported in the NSC in 2016 with 335 of 387 black, 4,955 of 5,824 Latinx, 3,910 of 4,260 white, 3,844 of 4,519 economically disadvantaged, and 380 of 505 English learners persisted.

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College Readiness

College readiness varies widely across high schools.

College readiness is defined by the “prepared” level on the California College and Career Indicator (CCI). Completing college is often dependent on factors such as academic preparation in high school.

About four in 10 San Diego County high school graduates are ready for college according to the CCI. But averages tend to obscure variability across schools and student groups. For example, school level preparedness percentages vary from 0% of students college and career readiness at some schools to 90% ready at others. African American students are the least prepared (37%) while nearly half the white students (47%) and most Asian students (76%) are prepared.⁷

“In addition to our state’s definition of college and career readiness, we at the San Diego County Office of Education believe students are college- and career-ready when they are qualified to attend a four-year college. We recognize that not every student will attend a four-year college, but that decision is the students, not the systems.”

– Dr. Paul Gothold

⁵ The county had 28,124 reported in the NSC in 2012, 10,357 with degrees, 7,708 four-year, 2,649 two-year.

⁶ The county had 28,124 graduates in 2012, 892 of 1395 Asians completed, 258 of 917 black, 1,959 of 7,408 of Latinx, 3,953 of 8,034 whites, 1,524 of 5,920 low-income, and 260 of 1,613 English learners.

⁷ The county had 14,621 prepared students of 39,625 in 2018, 1,601 of 2,107 Asian, 615 of 1,663 black, 6,978 of 19,385 Latinx, and 5,508 of 11,646 whites.

SECTION II: POST-SECONDARY PROGRESSION

The Post-secondary Progression section of this report illustrates the different milestones students must accomplish to earn a college degree including graduating high school on time, seamlessly enrolling in college, persisting to year two of college, and finally, earning a degree. Completing a college degree is an important milestone in achieving the American Dream. If we expect our high school graduates to be better off than their parents, many, if not most, need some additional education and/or credential beyond high school. By increasing academic readiness, supports and resources as students apply and transition to college, and improving collaboration and accountability between K-12, community college, and universities, we can increase the likelihood that all students have a fighting chance to be better off in the future.

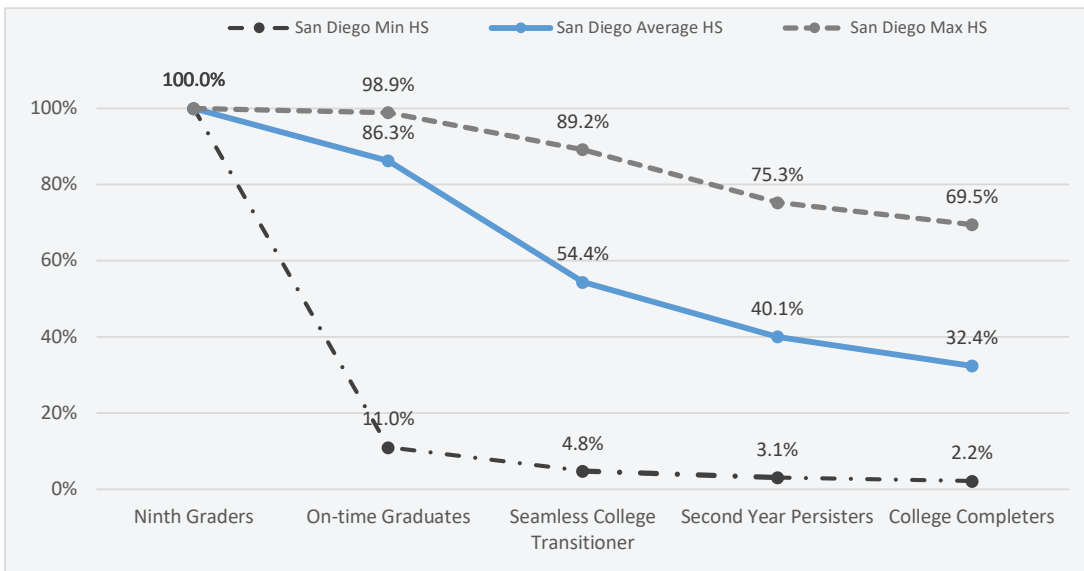
In Figure 1, we plotted the progression for ninth grade students who first enrolled in high school in 2008.

On average, for every 100 ninth grade students in San Diego County, 86 graduate high school on time, 54 enroll in college immediately after graduation, 40 persist into year two, and 32 complete a two- or four-year college degree within six years (blue line).

However, not all students have an “average” experience. We are able to observe the max progression figures using the top dashed line, and the minimum progression figures using the bottom dashed line. These are the highest and lowest school performances across the county, and all three progressions allow us to see the range and variability in our data. For example, at one local high school, only 11 out of 100 students graduated on time, five of those students enrolled immediately in college, three persisted, and two earned a degree in six years. In another high school, 99 out of 100 students graduated on time, 89 of those graduates enrolled immediately in college, 75 persisted, and nearly 70 earned a degree. While numerous factors affect college success rates, academic preparation in high school is a significant contributor.

This graph presents some real possibilities of what college success could be along with the challenges and barriers faced at all points along the progression. The next section of this report is devoted to those barriers and challenges and ways to improve college completion.

Figure 1. Student Progression from 9th Grade through College/University Completion



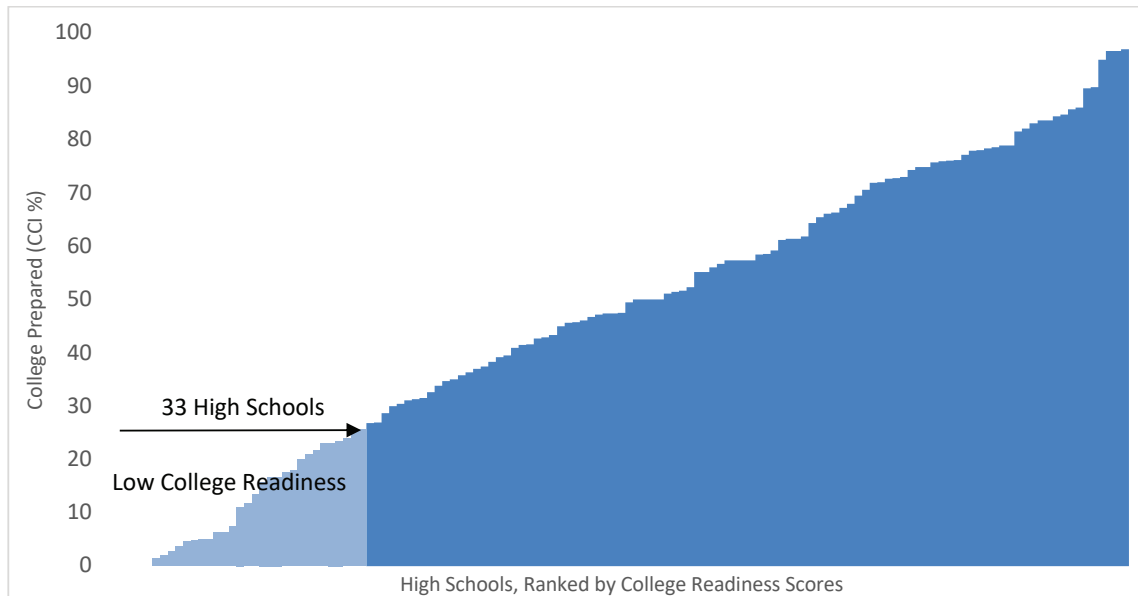
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SECTION III: POST-SECONDARY BARRIERS I

Variability in College and career readiness

Students with strong academic preparation are far more likely to get to and through college.

Figure 2. Students Meeting College and Career Readiness Index “Prepared”



College and career readiness is determined primarily by access and success in rigorous high school coursework. For example, students successfully completing CTE pathways, taking AP/IB tests, enrolled in college courses while in high school, and completing “a-g” subject matter coursework are considered prepared for post-secondary work. However, as depicted in the graph, not all students currently have access to and/or success in a rigorous curriculum. Should these students enroll in college, they are more likely to drop out (Adelman, 2006; Long, Conger, & Iatrola, 2009). To improve students’ chances of completing college, we must ensure all students have access to and success in a rigorous curriculum.

In Figure 2, 175 San Diego County high schools are sorted based on their share of college and career ready students. Every bar on the chart therefore represents a school and its percentage of college prepared students. On average, four in 10 students are prepared for post-secondary work according to the CCI, but the average masks variability that exists at the school level. For example, at 20 high-performing high schools in San Diego County eight out of 10 graduates are prepared for post-secondary work, while in 33 other high schools (light blue), less than 25% of the students are academically prepared for college work. Students who enroll in CSUs academically prepared are nearly twice as likely to complete a degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Unprepared students are far more likely to drop out of college, or are restricted to remedial courses that dramatically increase time to degree.

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Readiness Gaps across Groups

The average level of preparedness provides some insight into the challenges of college completion, but averages obscure variability. In addition to preparedness gaps across schools, we also have notable readiness gaps across student groups. Figure 3 illustrates the same 175 schools from Figure 2 ranked according to the magnitude of the performance gaps in college and career readiness between students who are low-income and other students.

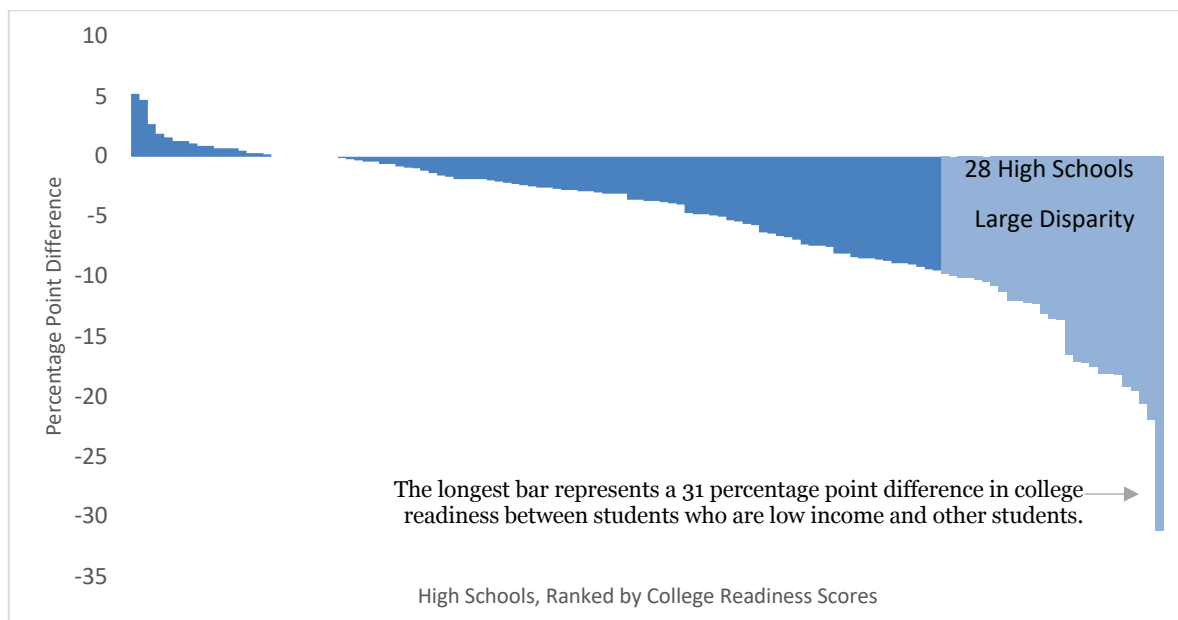
As depicted in the graph, some students attend schools where students who are low-income outperform other students (far left). The majority of students, however, attend county schools, where students who are low-income lack access to or success in rigorous courses compared to other students.

Twenty-eight schools have readiness gaps 10 percentage points or greater. Access to and success in rigorous coursework predicts college persistence and completion (Muraugh, P.A., Burns, L.D., & Schuster, J., 1999). When opportunity gaps exist for students who

are low-income, they are either tracked into lower paying jobs after high school or enroll in college where they are far more likely to drop out.

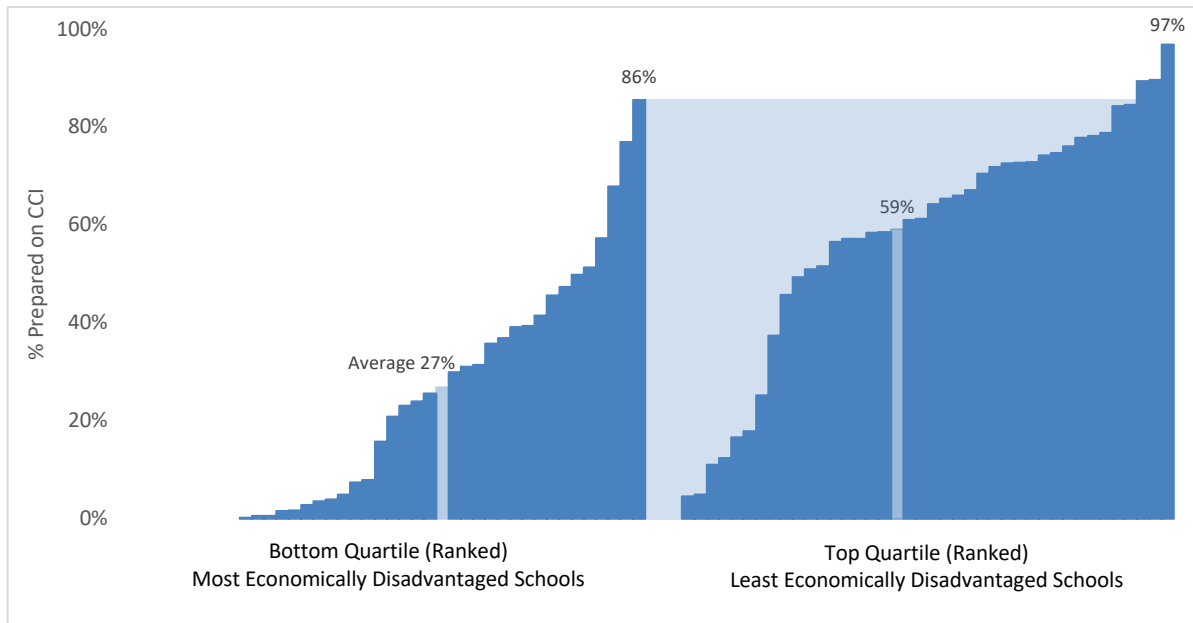
While opportunity gaps are distressing, some schools are beating the odds and students who are low-income are thriving. Figure 4 illustrates that in some low-income schools students are better academically prepared for post-secondary work than students in more affluent schools. Figure 4 depicts a distribution of 40 schools with the highest percentage of students who are low-income (left) compared to 40 schools with the lowest percentages (right). One low-income school prepared 86% of its students for post-secondary work, while several other low-income schools exceeded the average level of academic preparedness for the more affluent group of schools. While the disparity between students who are low-income and other students explains some of the variability in college readiness across schools, a handful of low-income schools are beating the odds.

Figure 3. Disparity in College and Career Readiness between Low-income and All Students



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Figure 4. College And Career Readiness Rates by Schools' Economically Disadvantaged Status

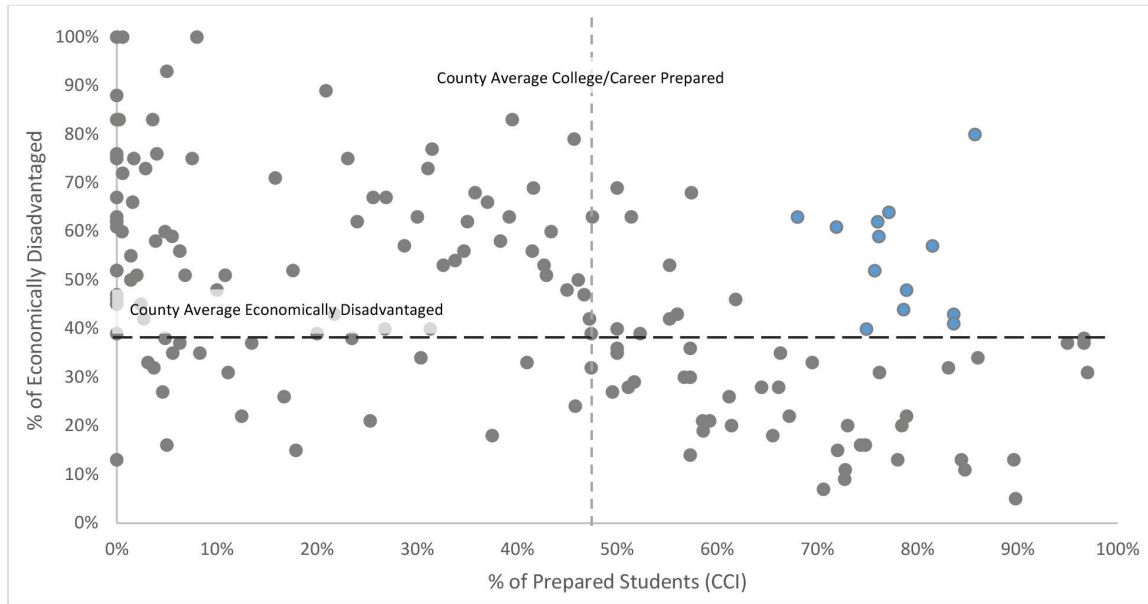


While economics certainly plays a role in educational attainment, we can further observe how some schools are beating the odds in the figure below.

Figure 5 plots 119 high schools on two axes divided into four quadrants, where schools in the top right quadrant have high academic preparedness (as defined by the CCI) and high rates of students who are low-income. Schools in blue are defying the odds. We know that high-performing, low-income schools

mediate poverty by focusing on quality instructional practices, a rigorous curriculum, positive school culture, and leadership (Johnson, 2012; Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011). If we assume all students are capable of social mobility and achieving the American Dream, we must design environments for them that create the conditions for these transformational changes. It is not a matter of knowing what works, but a matter of the courage to use what we know.

Figure 5. Variations in San Diego County High School Preparedness based on Students' Economic Status



“In some low-income schools in San Diego County, students are better academically prepared for post-secondary work than students in more affluent schools.”

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SECTION IV: POST-SECONDARY BARRIERS II

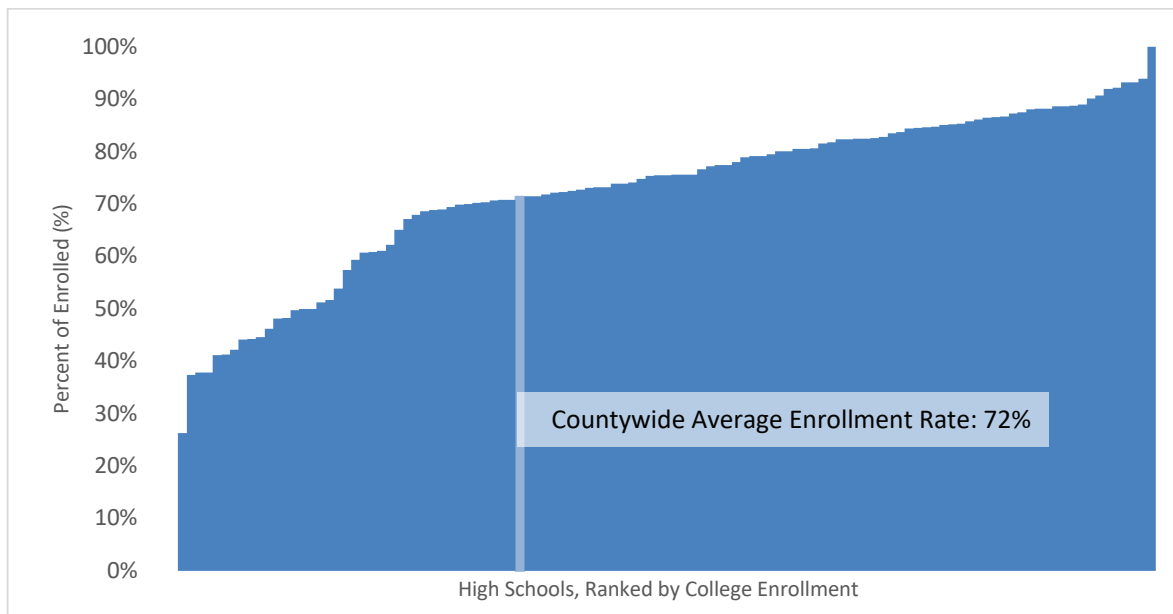
Variability in College Enrollment Rates

More than 90% of high school freshman intend to enroll in a post-secondary institution (ACT, 2018). However, fewer than 20 San Diego County high schools have college enrollment rates of 90% or higher. Many students fall off track as early as the end of the first semester of their ninth grade year. Others fail to enroll in college due to much simpler reasons including failure to send college transcripts, completing Financial Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), paying college orientation fees, and others (Castleman & Page, 2008). Figure 6 illustrates differences in college enrollment across 119 San Diego County high schools. Schools are ranked according to their rates of college enrollment. On average seven out of 10 San Diego County graduates enroll immediately in college.

Figure 6 raises the question of who fails to enroll in college and why. Approximately one in six schools ranked in the graph have less than 50% of their students enrolled in college. Some reasons for low enrollment have been mentioned previously including student access to a rigorous curriculum. Other reasons include students' perceptions of college (Attinasi, 1989; Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T., 1998; Tinto, 2007).

Most students question whether college is the right choice for them at some point, and students who are low-income and/or first-generation tend to vacillate on the question more than others. When these students are suspicious about the rigor of their high school curriculum, it factors into their college enrollment

Figure 6. Differences in Shares of Enrolled Students by San Diego County High Schools



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decisions. When these students lack the necessary supports to navigate the college application and enrollment experience, it affects their decisions about college. For some of these students, these concerns may become insurmountable barriers for college enrollment. For others, it may affect where they apply. Some students may opt to attend community college where they are much less likely to complete a degree and/or transfer to a four-year college. On average, 9% of students complete a degree at a community college in three years and as few as 14% transfer to a four-year institution within that timeframe (California Community College Chancellor’s Office, 2019). Therefore, many college-intending students need additional support navigating the college process, and ensuring they are properly matched to colleges where they have the greatest chance of succeeding (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011).

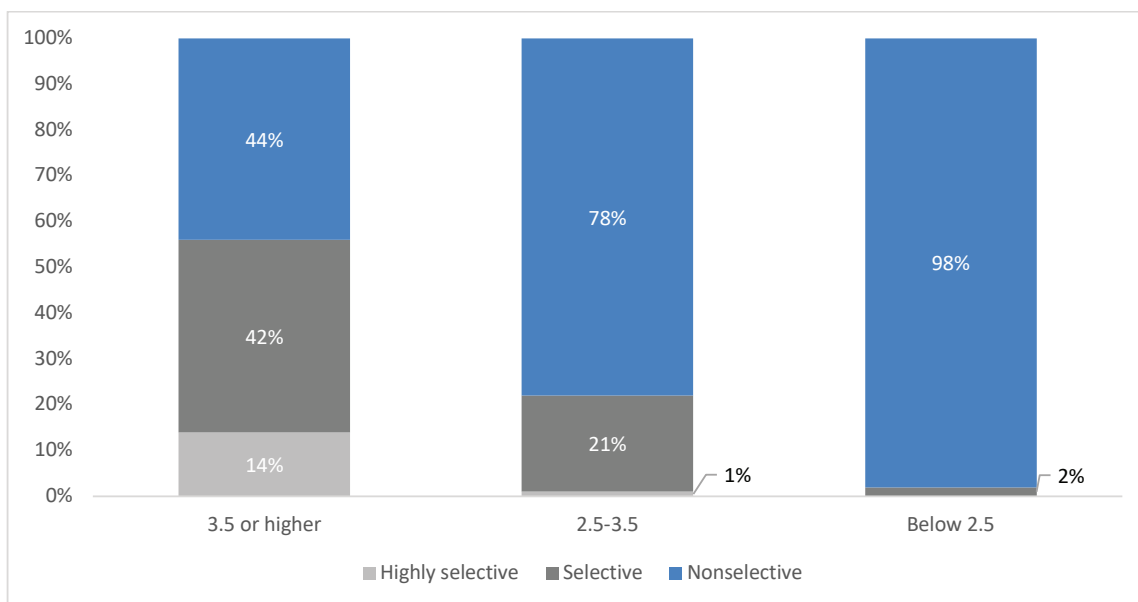
Matching

We often make the assumption that the most talented students attend the most prestigious colleges and universities. *The Boston Globe* published a story on valedictorians that illustrated the life journeys of these students, some of whom never obtained a degree (25%), 40% earned less than \$50,000 a year, and four were homeless (The Boston Globe, n.d.).

College matching is a potential reason for why high-performing students fail to complete a degree. Under-matching is a term that is used when well-qualified students who are low-income do not apply to colleges they are academically qualified for and instead attend a less challenging school or do not attend college at all. Tools that support college matching ensure that students have the greatest chance of not only getting to college, but getting through it.

Figure 7 illustrates college decisions for a cohort of 6,746 on-time high school graduates in San Diego County. Each bar represents a GPA range, and the different colors of the bar represent college type from non-selective to highly selective. Selectivity is a product of admission rates where highly selective colleges and universities have low admission rates; non-selective colleges accept all students. As depicted in the graph, students with lower-end GPAs (2.5 or lower) are most likely to enroll in non-selective two-year colleges (98%), as are students with GPAs between 2.5-3.5 (78%). Strikingly, students with the highest GPAs are also most likely to enroll in non-selective institutions (two-year community colleges). Essentially, half of the most talented students across this cohort enrolled in the least selective institutions.

Figure 7. Enrollment Rates by GPA Band and Local College and University Selectivity



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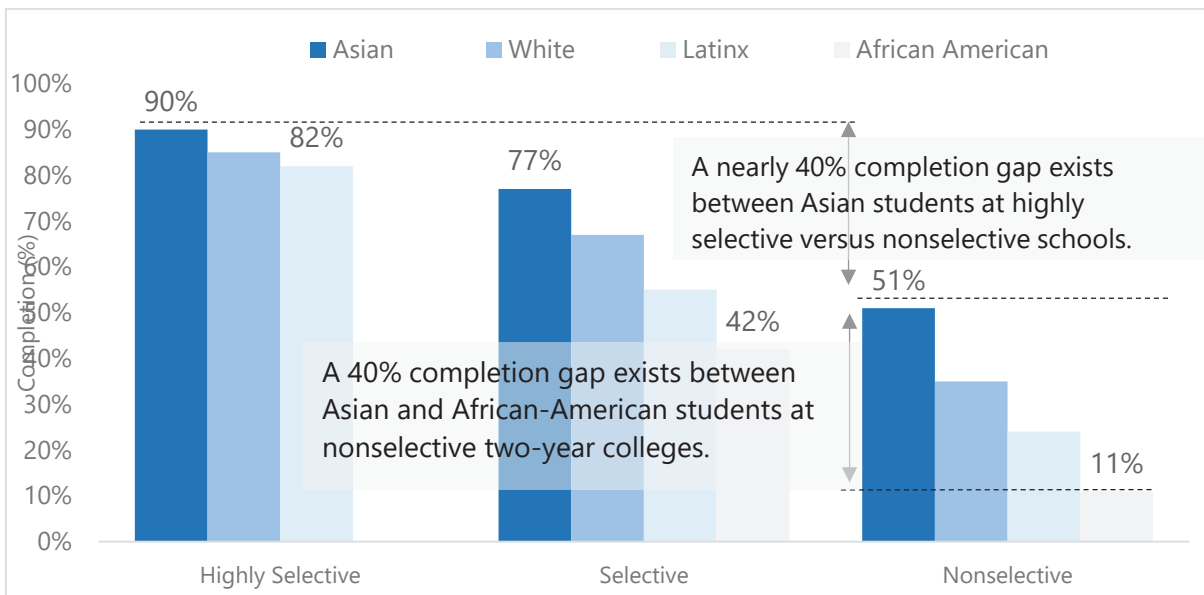
Non-selective institutions incentivize students with low- to no-cost tuition and transfer pathways to more selective colleges and universities. However, many students fail to obtain a degree from these institutions or they fail to transfer to four-year colleges. One reason is that students, especially students who are low-income and first-generation, need more than financial aid to be successful in community college. The community colleges in San Diego County serve the largest proportion of high school graduates, which can overwhelm the community college's support system. Additionally, the path to a four-year college from community college can be a daunting transition fraught with complicated steps. This complex process may serve as a barrier to completing a four-year degree (Laanan, 2001). Furthermore, many students who are low-income and first-generation value relationships and connectedness, but community colleges serve high percentages of part-time students who have little connection to the institution, which acts as a barrier for certain students to persist and complete a degree (Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, & Burgos-Cienfuegos, 2014). These and other reasons are why non-selective colleges may not be the best match for certain students.

The bottom line is that persistence and completion are complex outcomes that require more than financial aid to achieve. In San Diego County, if we combat under-matching and help students make college enrollment decisions using factors like net cost, college graduation rates, and other relevant aspects, we are more likely as a community to ensure we can meet the workforce demands for college degrees in our region, reduce opportunity gaps for students, and support the broader goals of helping more students achieve the American Dream.

Variability in College Completion Rates

Boosting college completion is a critical milestone along the path to achieving the American Dream. Many students have little chance of achieving the American Dream without some form of post-secondary education. While three in 10 San Diego County high school graduates complete a college degree on average, significant variability exists across both race/ethnicity and institution attended.

Figure 8. Variability in 6-Year Completion Rates across College (Local) Type and Race/Ethnicity



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Figure 8 categorizes students by college type, college completion, and race/ethnicity. The graph illustrates the variability that exists across race/ethnicity, especially at non-selective institutions, where one in 10 black students complete a degree compared to five in 10 Asian students. The graph also depicts considerable variability in outcomes across both race and college selectivity. For example, five in 10 Asian students complete degrees at non-selective schools compared to nine in 10 Asian students who complete at highly selective institutions.

College selectivity is a factor in college completion and therefore should be an aspect of the college selection process. These data suggest college graduation rates should be criteria for choosing a college. Knowing a school's graduation rate may lead students to select schools with better outcomes. Additionally, school counselors could use graduation rate as part of their college advising to address issues of equity at the postsecondary level. For example, encouraging black students to enroll at CSUs might boost their completion rates fourfold.

Furthermore, this graph suggests colleges and universities must develop stronger partnerships with K-12 institutions and focus their efforts on retention and completion as much as enrollment. As college fund-

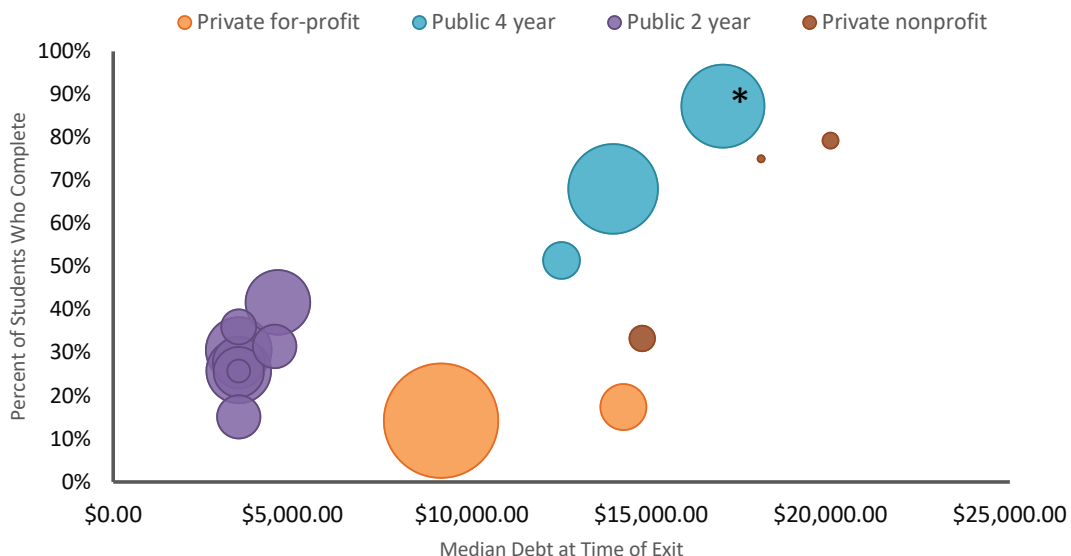
ing models shift to become more outcomes-focused, strategic partnerships will become critical factors in student success.

High College Costs

College costs are also an important factor in whether students enroll in college. The costs at many colleges have reached unsustainable levels and may act as a potential gatekeeper for many students (Kim & Ard, 2019). Students who are low-income often tend to weigh cost factors as much or more than other important factors such as a historical graduation rate. Students who are low-income often make the mistake of equating “sticker price” with the actual cost of college versus net cost. A college's net cost is what students pay for college after aid is considered (need-based, merit-based, loans, etc.). For example, the “sticker price” to attend a UC school may exceed \$29,000 annually. However, a student whose parents earn less than \$50,000 annually may only pay a third or less of the sticker price (De La Rosa, 2006).

Figure 9 categorizes 19 local colleges and universities serving more than 279,000 students in terms of average debt at time of exit and degree completion. Each bubble represents the number of students enrolled in the institution. The colors refer to different types of institutions from two to four year, public or private.

Figure 9. San Diego County College and University Completion Rates by Median Student Debt



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As depicted, students tend to complete at two-year colleges with less debt than four-year graduates, but students, on average, are more likely to complete at a four-year institution. In the marked bubble, 90% of students completed a four-year degree with a median debt of \$18,000 at time of exit compared to the lower debt load at two-year institutions clustered in purple at the far left. However, this cluster of two-year institutions have much lower completion rates. Students should use debt and graduation rate and degree attainment information to make the most informed decisions about which college to attend. Students with \$5,000 in debt and no associate's degree are far less socially mobile compared to students with \$18,000 in debt and a bachelor's degree.

Furthermore, another common misunderstanding is the difference between the price of college and the net cost of college. Determining net cost requires students to both apply to the college and complete a FAFSA. Students cannot truly know the net cost of college until the students receives an award letter, which is based on the successful completion of the application and the FAFSA. However, many students fail to complete applications or the FAFSA. Application fees may deter students who are low-income; com-

pleting the FAFSA is a complicated set of steps and procedures that may also present a significant barrier to four-year college enrollment. Currently, only 48% of students in San Diego County complete a FAFSA annually.

If we want higher college graduation rates, we need more students attending four-year colleges. Boosting four-year college success rates, therefore, requires districts provide more support to students in these processes. Students who are low-income and/or first-generation especially need to be aware of the potential financial aid available to them and the process for claiming that money. Currently, our local CSUs serve approximately 12% of San Diego County students even though they were designed to support 25%. To increase enrollment rates, we must help students complete four-year college applications, get fee waivers when eligible, accurately complete financial aid documents, and make decisions about four-year colleges that consider more than the sticker price. Creating this system of support increases our chances of meeting the demands of our diverse economy and increasing access and success to college for all students.

“On average, 9% of students complete a degree at a community college in 3 years and as few as 14% transfer to a four-year institution within that timeframe.”

SECTION V: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary goals of the San Diego County College-Going Diagnostic were to inform leaders of school districts and educational agencies about college-going outcomes in San Diego County, and identify potential areas for action to increase students' level of preparedness for college and post-secondary educational attainment.

The diagnostic examined San Diego County evidence regarding college readiness, enrollment, persistence, and completion in an effort to build a picture of our current reality and the needs we must address.

We certainly have reasons to celebrate. We have a relatively high percentage of college and career readiness students compared to state and national levels—a percentage that continues to grow. We also have large numbers of students enrolled in college immediately after high school. San Diego County educators and stakeholders have a solid foundation from which to launch the next level of work to increase college completion.

In addition to our strengths, we have some notable areas for improvement. As the key findings and subsequent analyses suggest:

1. Many San Diego County students lack access to a rigorous curriculum, some lack success in rigorous courses, and others are less prepared for post-secondary work due to where they attend school or the group to which they belong. It is distressing that some students graduate from San Diego County high schools where no students are ready for college and career according to the CCI. To increase the likelihood that every student has the greatest chance of succeeding after high school, we must develop a system-wide focus on college and career readiness that increases access to and success in a rigorous curriculum for ALL students. We must ensure that every student navigates a path in high school that leads to readiness for post-secondary work, which includes completing a high school pathway that meets the entrance requirements for a four year college and/or the UC/CSU a-g subject matter requirements. Additionally, every student must receive the requisite resources and supports necessary for success on that path. All educational stakeholders should have reasonable assurances that our students are graduating from high school prepared to attend a four year college. If the student chooses not to enroll in a four year college, then it will be his or her choice and not the system's.
2. Educational leaders across the P-20 pipeline have failed to develop a coherent focus on equity, resulting in racialized outcomes in college readiness, enrollment, persistence, and completion across the county. Therefore, we must build the equity mindset of K-12 teachers and school leaders, counselors, and post-secondary partners to ensure comparably high outcomes in college readiness, enrollment, persistence, and completion for ALL student groups. The entire system requires an intentional focus on equity with the professional support needed to raise equity consciousness along with an improvement mindset to address equity-based challenges. In our community, every student has a fundamental right to a quality education free from the oppressive barriers that restrict access to post-secondary work, and we should be able to guarantee parents and stakeholders that right.
3. The K-12 system contributes to inequities in the college application and enrollment process by not supporting students in ways that ensures fairness in the process. Students who are disadvantaged and/or first-generation enroll in college at vastly different rates in college, while students whose parents went to college, or whose parents earn more than \$110,000 a year, get into college and persist more frequently. These inequities exist as a result of our (K-12 systems) limited response

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to the complexities of, for example, applying for and claiming federal financial aid or selecting a college that matches a student’s qualifications. Therefore, we must guarantee all students have the necessary resources to navigate the college enrollment process including tools that support college matching; accessing fee waivers; information about net cost and graduation rates; application and FAFSA completion; understanding award letters; and transitional summer support. Every parent of a college-going student deserves access to the resources necessary to get to and through college.

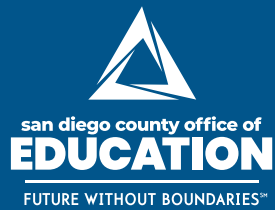
Addressing these recommendations are critical for boosting college completion rates while ensuring more students are academically prepared for post-secondary work. Reducing the friction in both the K-12 and higher education pipelines allows us to meet the labor market demands in San Diego County and to help ALL students achieve the American Dream.

“For every 100 ninth grade students in San Diego County, 86 graduate high school on time, 54 enroll in college immediately after graduation, 40 persist into year two, and 32 complete a two- or four-year college degree within six years.”

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