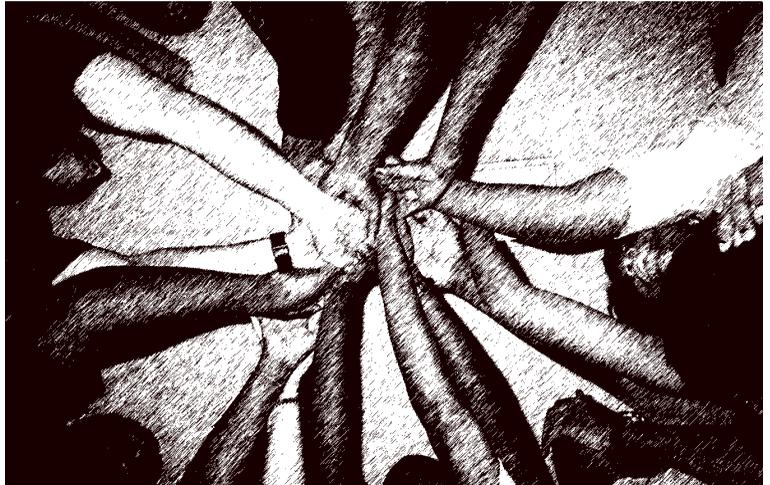


College Access: from the Inside Out



presented by
Oasis/Community IMPACT

February 2006

Combining dropout rates with college admission rates for students in East Nashville schools, approximately 1 out of every 10 entering Freshmen actually make it to college.

A Dream Deferred

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

What happens to a
dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore-

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over-
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Oasis/Community IMPACT:

Mission and Information

Oasis Center's mission is "to help youth grow, thrive and create positive change in their lives and in our community."

For more than 36 years, we have fulfilled this mission through the work of assisting youth in crisis, providing community-based supports and developing youth leadership. Oasis/Community IMPACT (OCI) is a neighborhood-based initiative that empowers youth to develop and lead educational and economic improvement in East Nashville, a low-income, urban neighborhood with failing schools and little economic opportunity. Youth Mobilizers (youth staff) research, network, develop and implement community change strategies that work not just to help youth *beat the odds* but help them *change the odds* of success for themselves, their families and the community.

Special Thanks

We would like to thank John Hilley, the founding Executive Director of Community IMPACT! Nashville whose vision and determination in starting Community IMPACT! made all of this possible.

We would also like to thank those who have funded this project: **Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, CIRCLE Foundation, Kellogg Youth Innovation Project, and Time Warner Foundation**



“At what point will we have the vision, courage, knowledge, and will to push for profound societal change, the kind that moves young people to the center of community life? This change requires altering how citizens and their leaders see and value our young, and it makes responsibility and accountability for kids a personal issue.”

“It’s Time to Rethink Youth Programs” by Peter Benson, from *Youth Today* Feb. 2005

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Executive Summary

There have been many reports written about college access, but what makes this report different is that it is not written from the perspective of a high-profile university professor, rather, it is written from the perspective of US, the students, who are going through the challenges of getting adequate support for our college dreams. We want to tell the story from our own perspective because that is the best way this story can be told, from the inside out. While we obviously do not hold any kind of political seats in our community that will enable us to make policies regarding education in our community, we are the ones going to school and we know what we need to make us successful citizens in future.

Our report will discuss the following key issues related to college:

- Higher education has many personal and community benefits
- Students in East Nashville want to go to college but we have little support to get us there and therefore most of us do not ever make it
- Being the first in the family to go to college means the schools are often our only college support
- Guidance Counselors, who are the only people in the school who officially support college counseling, have too many other responsibilities and do not have time to support our college dreams

We have a number of recommendations for what needs to be done to improve college access for students in East Nashville. One of the most important recommendations is that our community needs to see students like us as resources for changing the odds for college access. **We care about our community and know we have the passion, talent and experience to change the odds of success for our schools and neighborhoods.** The problems in our schools are difficult and everyone is needed if we are going to overcome them. Students are important stakeholders and we want to be a part of the solution.

If a student does not understand the importance of college, or perhaps believes that he or she cannot go, then there is very little motivation to carefully plan classes or to plow through a very complicated application and financial aid process, especially trying to do so almost completely on their own. Why would a student be motivated to work hard to get A's and B's? If his friend completely slacks and gets D's, they end up with the same high school diploma. If neither goes on to college, they also have the same limited opportunities. They will both be fighting for the same low-wage jobs.

– Anderson Williams, OCI Director

History and Problem Statement

In 2003, having awarded 39 college scholarships to low-income East Nashville youth, Oasis/Community IMPACT realized, thanks to one of our scholarship recipients, that many young people, despite scholarships, had not adequately prepared to enroll in college. Many had not taken standard admissions tests like the ACT, or had not filled out their financial aid paperwork and possibly did not know of such a thing, and some, still thinking they were going to college, had not even applied to any schools at the time of their graduation. Quickly, Community IMPACT realized that we needed to change our focus and start to look at the systems that were failing these students. In 2004, our Youth Mobilizers formed an Education Team to begin to find out more about this issue, the issue of college access.

With a year and a half of research that includes more than 700 students surveys from five different schools, national trends and data, local student focus groups and interviews with adults and students in and around the field of education, our Youth Mobilizers have created this report to address this problem:

Too many students in East Nashville schools, particularly low-income students and those whose parents did not go to college, have the dream of going to college, but do not have access to the support and resources to get them there.

Introduction

Ninety percent of students we surveyed from East Nashville high schools in all four grade levels report that they want to attain some sort of post-secondary education, but of those students, less than one-third had actually met with a guidance counselor about how to get there.

OCI Youth Research

The reason that this paper and the issue of college access is so important is because youth are actually living through it all. A lot of time, adults try to explain how youth feel through research papers like this one. This paper is different from others because it was all compiled by youth and it includes the personal experiences of youth which makes it unique.

The Goal

The goal for this paper is to raise awareness of the issue of college access for students in East Nashville high schools. Our primary focus is on Stratford and Maplewood High Schools because these are the zoned schools in our neighborhoods. These are also the schools serving many low-income students who also hope to be the first ones in their families to go to college. As you can see from the list of youth who have worked on this paper, many are already off to college. Some had family support, some had school support, and all of them had support from Oasis/Community IMPACT.

The Point

The point of this paper is not to tell student's stories of **"beating the odds."** The point is to use the first-hand experience of students to help **"change the odds"** of getting into college for all students in our schools who dream of going to college.

NOTE: *For the purpose of clarity and simplicity for this report, we have chosen to use the term "East Nashville schools" to include Stratford and Maplewood High Schools. When we include data from the third school located in our community, we will clarify by using its name directly, East Literature Magnet. We have done this because, through our research, we have found that experiences of students at Stratford and Maplewood were very similar while East Literature Magnet students reported considerably different experiences. Our focus here is on the zoned schools for East Nashville.*

Our Research

Benefits of a College Education

Receiving a college education provides many benefits to an individual and to his or her community. Many people think that when a student enters college that all he or she attains is a college degree in the study area that they choose. But through our research and personal experience with those who have obtained a college education, we realize that college provides the skills needed to survive in the professional world, and throughout life.¹

Personal

Personal benefits are essential to self growth. Gaining a post-secondary education benefits people in many ways. These benefits include **higher salary, private benefits (insurance), better savings for retirement, improved health,** and even a **longer life expectancy.**

A higher salary offers the financial stability that is necessary in order to live a better life. In 2004, the national average for personal income of workers 25 and older with a bachelor's degree was \$48,417, roughly \$23,000 higher than for those with only a high school diploma.² Clearly, there is a major difference between the two incomes. This goes to show how much money you can allow yourself just by attaining a college education. The job you receive will also expose you to private benefits. Insurance is vital to quality of life, especially when you are trying to survive difficult times, and the majority of the time, the coverage you receive from your employment is much more advantageous than what you would receive from a government assistance program.

In today's society, the majority of stress is generated from the lack of financial stability. Many parents wonder how they will get their bills paid on time, if they will have enough money to buy their children the things that they need, and an array of other things. By having a college education so that one can receive a good, steady job which will lead to financial betterment, this stress is relieved. This also can better prepare you for the "long run," and you will be more likely to acquire and save enough to be able to retire at a younger age.

Income Levels by Education 2003

H.S. Graduate ONLY: \$30,800
Associates Degree: \$35,700
Bachelors Degree: \$49,900
Professional Degree: \$95,700

Source: Internal Revenue Service. (2003). *Statistics of Income, 2000-2002*. Online.; McIntyre, R., et al. (2003). *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems of All Fifty States*. 2nd Edition.; U.S. Census Bureau, PINC 03. (2004). *Current Population Survey*.

"Without going to college you limit yourself, your family as well as your community. In today's society getting a high school diploma isn't going to get you very far. To change East Nashville and to stop crime and bring people out of poverty, we have to raise awareness and opportunity in the community about the importance of higher education. You need that piece of paper!"

—LaKishia Harris, Youth Mobilizer

Public

A college education not only provides personal benefits for one individual and his or her own household, but public benefits as well, which help the entire community. There are various benefits, but some of the most important are: **a decreased need for public assistance programs, an increase in the number of citizens voting, and a decrease in the crime rate.** These things would greatly improve our community, which presently suffers from a low percentage of civic participation, a high crime rate, and a high percentage of individuals on public assistance.

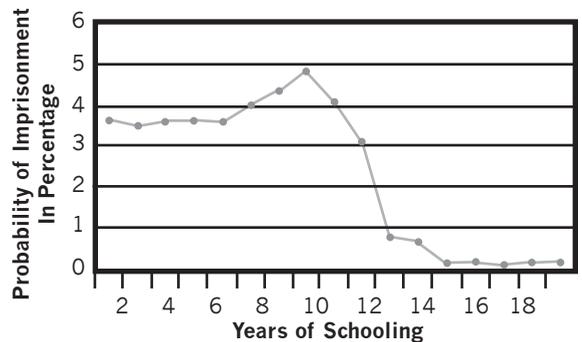
- In our community today, many people rely on government assistance programs due to poor-paying jobs, which stems in large part from lacking education. For instance, 50 percent of residents of James Cayce Homes, the oldest and largest housing project in Nashville, located in East Nashville, do not even have a high school diploma.
- In the democratic society that we live in, voting is every citizen's opportunity to participate in our nation's civic process. Yet many people in our community do not know exactly why or how they should vote. The more educated a population, the better they will realize the significance of his or her vote. In 2000, only 56 percent of U.S. citizens who were age 25 and older and had a high school diploma responded that they had voted in the 2000 presidential election, compared to 76 percent of bachelor's degree recipients.³
- The likelihood of someone with a college education committing a violent crime is less than those who do not have one. Crime rates are lower in neighborhoods where the average education level is high. This is attributed to the fact that people in these neighborhoods are less likely to be hanging around in the streets with nothing good to do.

College Aspiration vs. College Attainment

The majority of East Nashville students never receive these benefits. Every year, Metro Nashville Public School System compiles a survey for seniors. The statistics from this survey clearly show that the number of students that actually go to college versus those that planned on going is very low. In 2003 at Stratford High School, in April of their senior year, 65 percent of seniors said that they planned on attending a four-year college or university. The following fall, only 35 percent had actually enrolled. At Maplewood High School, again in April of their senior year, 88 percent expressed the desire to go on to continue their education. The following semester, only 30 percent actually went to college after graduating.

Crime Rates and Education

The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests and Self-Reports (National Bureau of Economic Research)



“In almost every meeting I go to, I ask what are the impediments to your (Japanese companies) expanding of this site and what can we do about it? In one of them that I remember well...they just said that we can hire lots of good workers. We cannot find management.”

Gov. Phil Bredesen,
quoted in “Education System
Stymies Job Growth,”
by John Rodgers
The Nashville City Paper
October 20, 2005

US Occupational Projection By Educational Level

Education Level	% of Jobs 2000	% of all Projected Jobs Growth, 2000-2010	Projected Rate of Growth, 2000-2010	Mean Earning
College Degree	21%	29%	22%	\$56,500
Vocational Degree (2-yr College)	8%	13%	24%	\$35,700
Work-Related Training	71%	58%	12%	\$26,000

National Center for Educational Statistics

Source: Internal Revenue Service. (2003). *Statistics of Income, 2000-2002*.
Online.; McIntyre, R., et al. (2003). *Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems of All Fifty States*. 2nd Edition.; U.S. Census Bureau, PINC 03. (2004). *Current Population Survey*.

It is very valuable to note that the number of students that actually went to college from East Literature Magnet High School was greater than those at Maplewood and Stratford. Several students from East Nashville that we interviewed who go to East said that they began receiving information about the importance of college at the beginning of their freshman year. We believe that one reason that many students at Stratford and Maplewood are not going to college is because it is not a focal point of the education, and as a result, they do not receive the necessary information and college counseling that they need. Students that we interviewed at Maplewood and Stratford report that they did not begin receiving information about college and the required preparation until maybe the spring of their junior year, and in many cases even later or not at all. Because of this, many of them are not as prepared as they should be. Consequently, many that had the initial desire, do not end up going to college. We also believe that students who have the dream of going to college *and* the support will work harder in school and be more focused because they have a reason.

This lack of information, or the lack of college counseling, is one of the reasons so few East Nashville students make it to college. One hundred percent of almost 400 East Nashville students who we surveyed expressed the desire to receive some sort of post-secondary education, but most of them have no idea how to get there. For example, during one of the focus groups we held, one student in particular expressed an interest in going to college to major in computer technology. During this discussion, it was evident that he did not even know the very basic information about college and how to get there. He realized that he had not taken the proper courses in order to begin work attaining this degree.

WHAT IS AVID?

AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is a fifth - through twelfth-grade program to prepare students in the academic middle—B, C, or even D, students—for continuing their education after high school. All of the participants are enrolled in their school's toughest classes, such as Honors and Advanced Placement. They are also in the AVID elective class. The main focus of this class is to develop organizational and study skills, work on critical thinking, receive academic help from peers and college tutors, and partake in enrichment and motivational activities that make the dream of college attainable

(SOURCE: Avid website).

During a focus group with students enrolled in Maplewood's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, many of them expressed their feelings regarding college counseling. They have recognized that they are receiving much of their support because they are in that particular program. They also have realized that many of their friends are being neglected in some ways because they are not receiving as much support in the area of college preparation as they are. In reference to trying to get information on college and transcripts for college from the guidance office, one student said that "if you ain't in AVID, you ain't recognized as a student."

First Generation Students

According to the School Improvement Plans, in East Nashville, 75-80 percent of the students from Stratford and Maplewood are potential first-generation college graduates. The likelihood of enrolling in post-secondary education is strongly related to parents' education even when other factors are taken into account. In 1999, 82 percent of students whose parents obtained a bachelor's degree or higher enrolled in college immediately after completing their high-school education. Students whose parents had completed high school but not college had a college enrollment rate of 54 percent and those students whose parents had less than a high school diploma had a college enrollment rate of 36 percent.⁴

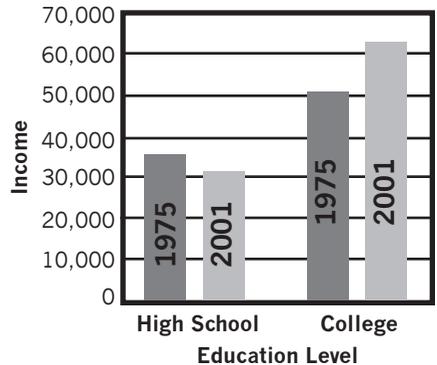
“For students with parents that know how to navigate through the college administration maze, they are okay. But for first time college attendees, without lots of support they are ‘left behind’ and thus our college attendance rate reflects our poverty rate. i.e. 65 percent of students on free/reduced lunch or 35 percent of students NOT on free/reduced lunch = 35 percent attending college. We are truly a school with unlimited potential, but limited resources. These resources are critical in changing this frightening statistic.”

– Brenda Elliott, Principal, Stratford High School

If we do not do anything to change this pattern, we will stay in a deadly cycle of lack of education that continues to limit the potential of East Nashville students and our community.

A Changing Economy: Education is the ONLY Option

With so few East Nashville students receiving a college education, the economy in our community will suffer. Since the manufacturing days of the early 20th century, the economy has been gradually evolving from one which demands workers' *hands* to one which demands workers' *minds*. This transformation has been generated primarily by the computer and all of the resulting innovations in technology and communication, as well as from the increased competition of globalization. Consequently, an increasing number of jobs require workers who have a college education, while the number of job opportunities for less-educated workers is decreasing. For example, during the 1980s, New York City lost 135,000 jobs in industries in which the workers averaged less than 12 years of education, and gained almost 300,000 jobs in industries in which workers had 13 years or more of education.⁵ The changing nature of labor needed is a nationwide phenomenon, and current predictions indicate that this trend will only continue.⁶ Thus, a college degree in this new economy is more critical than ever for obtaining and sustaining a good job.



In 1975, the difference was \$17,391, and in 2001 the difference was \$30,891.

Surveys distributed to high school students by the Tennessee Higher Education Facilities Commission indicate that students' plans reflect the changing nature of the economy; in 1968, 66 percent of the respondents said that they intended to continue their education after high school, and nearly one-fourth planned on working full-time immediately upon graduating from high school. In 2002, however, 85 percent reported that they planned on attending a post-secondary institution, and less than one-tenth said that they intended to enter the workforce directly out of high school.⁷ Our own surveys of students in East Nashville show similar numbers and desires for current high school students. Though these 2002 numbers accurately represent the *desires* of East Nashville students according to our own surveys, the East Nashville reality is far from matching it, with roughly only 10 percent (drop rates included) of high school freshmen continuing on to college. Thus, as the economy continues to become more competitive and to require a higher level of educational attainment, it will be more and more difficult for the overwhelming majority of students who pass through our schools to find steady jobs.

“Parents don’t know like about ACT, my momma didn’t know nothing about it when I was a freshman and sophomore, she just found out this year (junior)... when they was growing up they didn’t have to take the ACT, so they can’t really help”
–MHS focus group participant

Our students simply will not be qualified.

College Counseling

“I think it all starts with kids needing to know what college is. How does college benefit me, and what I want for myself in life? Once you answer those questions you can answer the rest of the questions. The kids have to know what they have to do to apply. They need to know what a minimum requirement is. They need to know about FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and other requirements to get to college.”

- Jennifer Marciano,
SHS Guidance Counselor

Sample of the type of work our guidance counselors are responsible for:

Scheduling Classes

Make sure students are in appropriate classes

State Test Requirements

Coordinate state-mandated testing

Personal Issues

Provide guidance in crisis times and for behavioral problems

College Counseling

Assist with financial aid, scholarships and ACT/SAT

So how do we define college counseling?

College Counseling is a process by which students are provided information, support and useful strategies to: 1. build the academic foundation for college, and 2. navigate through the complicated application and admissions process.

We believe that college counseling should begin in middle school, but our focus in this report is the process for our high schools. High school college counseling is a four-year process, no more, no less. College counseling should not only consist of students receiving information on the application process, but also gaining insight on the importance of college, learning how to plan for it, receiving the support for their education, and encouragement that he or she may need to succeed. We should definitely celebrate the recent improvements in test scores and graduation rates at our schools. But if we only focus on these improvements and do not use them to send more students to college, we stop short of what students need to succeed.

Now, we know that freshman year students are required to sign a four-year plan that was supposed to put us on the college track. But, many of us do not even remember what that plan was and are not even taking the classes that were in it. So, what good is a Four-Year Plan if you do not even follow it?

We believe that students who are trying to be the first in their families to go to college must have a quality four-year plan. We cannot just decide as juniors or seniors that we want to go to college because we may have already messed up and not realized it. If we are thinking about college starting our first day of high school, we will have more ambition and more focus and we will have a reason to do well in school. Our schools have a lot of dropouts and part of the reason is that students do not see a reason for going to school. They go because the law says they have to. We want to keep college on the brain! With the help of Principal Brenda Elliott, we put together a four year plan on the college process. We believe that if each student could achieve these goals each year of high school, many more students from our schools would actually make it to college.

What the Law Requires

Course Requirements

22 Credits Required for Graduation

Required classes

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| 4 years of English | 3 years of Social Studies |
| 3 years of Math | 2 years of Arts |
| 3 years of Science | 2 years of Foreign Language |
| 5 Elective Courses | |

What We Recommend

College Track Requirements

Freshman

- ▶ Create a Five Year Plan
- ▶ Attend a “College Workshop” to understand the importance of college and how to plan
- ▶ Check out three college websites
- ▶ Interview a college student
- ▶ Interview a recent college graduate
- ▶ Take the Pre-ACT
- ▶ Post-testing conference with counselor
- ▶ Make the honor roll

Sophomore

- ▶ Visit a college
- ▶ Complete an ACT prep program
- ▶ Research 5 colleges
- ▶ Student and Parents attend a college workshop
- ▶ Make the honor roll
- ▶ Pass two Gateway exams
- ▶ Practice completing a college application

Junior

- ▶ Take the ACT
- ▶ Pick 10 colleges you may be interested in
- ▶ Research scholarship opportunities
- ▶ Complete a Financial Aid Workshop
- ▶ Complete practice college admission packet
- ▶ Visit three colleges
- ▶ Make the honor roll

Senior

- ▶ Apply to at least three colleges
- ▶ Retake the ACT if you scored less than a 25
- ▶ Attend FAFSA workshop and complete your FAFSA
- ▶ Apply for at least five scholarships
- ▶ Make the honor roll
- ▶ Receive your letter of acceptance

(Above plan created with Brenda Elliott and OCI Youth Mobilizers)

Each student who achieved their Course Requirements and their College Requirements could be recognized by the school in assembly and maybe be presented a certificate or a t-shirt that says that “I have college on the brain.” Each year, the t-shirt could be a different color to show where you are in the process. This way, the whole school can recognize people who are on their way to college so the whole school keeps college on the brain.

“College counseling should start from middle school...It is supposed to begin in middle school, but it begins in second semester of senior year. The best I can do with the resources that I have is to help them with the process.”

- Jennifer Marciano, SHS Guidance Counselor, from OCI interview

Guidance Counselor:

A guidance counselor or guidance teacher is responsible solely for providing counseling and guidance to the students at the school or schools at which the counselor is employed. If a counselor is employed as such on a less than full-time basis, those hours devoted to the guidance and counseling shall be specified and adhered to closely. A guidance counselor is not responsible for the general school administration or reports, except such as may be connected with the school's guidance program. (Tennessee Code Annotated, Volume 9, Title 49- Education: 49-5-302 Guidance counselors and guidance teachers).

So who is in charge of college counseling?

Unfortunately, college counseling falls under the overwhelming responsibilities of our guidance counselors. They seem to be the only ones officially responsible for helping us get to college. Because of this, when we started our research, we wanted just to blame them.

Through the research, we found that the real problem is that our guidance counselors are in charge of too many students and already have too much to do. So, college gets dropped off. In Metro Nashville Public Schools, one guidance counselor is responsible for as many as 600 students. In 2003, at Stratford High School, our senior guidance counselor was responsible for 200 students. She reported that she was only able to spend 20 percent of her time on college counseling, and she was responsible for Seniors!

As Principal Brenda Elliott of Stratford told us, “*When we look for faults in the process, few fingers can honestly point to guidance, unless we are expecting guidance to do everything in the process. And in all honesty, the way the current process is set up, **guidance is really the only program working to get students college ready and that is the problem.** The senior counselor has 200 students and each of the underclassmen counselors have 500 students. In addition to these guidance and counseling responsibilities, they have to coordinate state mandated testing, schedule students, handle student crisis situations, parent concerns, and make sure that students are able to graduate on time. When we sit down and look at the hours, unfortunately very few remain for college advisement, meaning students have to do most of it themselves.*”

While guidance counselors are hard-working and dedicated to their responsibilities, they need additional resources to get more of their students enrolled in post-secondary institutions. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has also greatly impacted the duties of guidance counselors by adding additional responsibilities for maintaining the NCLB rules and regulations. In our interview with Maplewood guidance counselor, Richard Bowers, we learned about some of the additional duties that have resulted from NCLB; Guidance counselors are now responsible for processing test scores, ensuring that students who need extra help are placed in test-prep classes, creating and following through on individual student program plans and 501 service plans. “A guidance counselor has become a high-priced secretary,” said Bowers.

The Myths and Truths on College Counseling

	What Works	What Doesn't Work
School Responsibility	One-on-One attention around college counseling	Class-meeting style college counseling (i.e. a meeting of the entire Senior class)
	Teachers/ Counselors supporting college aspirations for ALL students not just the ones <i>they believe</i> can or should go	Teacher/Counselor supporting only those who they believe can succeed in college
	Teachers/Counselors expecting college of their students starting their freshmen year	Teachers/ Counselors just trying to get students through High School
Student Responsibility	Researching/Understanding the variety of post-secondary education opportunities	Only exploring opportunities that you are already familiar with
	Having self-expectations and motivation toward college	Low motivation, believing that college is not an option or not important
	High peer expectations, peer pacing	The “I got mine” mentality
	Having a family-support system including parents in the college counseling process	Involving family only when you need something from them
Student & School Responsibility	Understanding personal, economic and career impact of college education, and understanding how short-term sacrifice leads to long-term success	Thinking college is a waste of time and too expensive, or believing that a high school diploma is all you need
	Developing a personal and individual goal and reason to go to college	Following someone else’s “Because I said so...”
	Telling students about the benefits of college in the long run	Focusing on college as merely “4 more years of school”
	Meeting deadlines for applications and scholarships and test dates	Developing the symptoms of “Senioritis” and expecting things to just work out
	Peer motivation and accountability	Peer procrastinating ,not caring and trying to persuade their peers to feel exactly the same way

(from peer-to-peer research by OCI Youth Mobilizers)

Scholarships & Systems

Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarships

In 2004, the first class of high school seniors earned Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarships (TELS) thanks to the state's newly implemented lottery system. TELS include the HOPE Scholarship, the HOPE Access Grant, and the Wilder-Naifeh Technical Skills Grant. The most popular of the three, the HOPE scholarship, is a form of 'targeted' merit aid worth \$3,000 yearly at a four-year school and \$1,500 at a two-year school. Over 35,000 students received this form of financial help from the lottery.

Two primary reasons for introducing these scholarships were: 1. to improve high school academic performance by offering students the incentive of scholarship money, and 2. to provide financial assistance as a means of increasing college access for all students. To address these aims, the HOPE scholarship program offers students two opportunities to earn the aid, either with a 3.0 GPA or at least a 21 on the ACT. Tennessee is the only state that offers a dual standard as a means of increasing opportunities and avenues for students to receive the scholarships. Tennessee also provides need-based support of \$1,000 for students whose family income is below \$36,000.

Although they have helped many people get to college, including some of our peers, whether HOPE Scholarships have been a success overall is debatable. We posed this question in an interview to Erik Ness, Associate Director of Policy, Planning, and Research at the Tennessee High Education Commission, who has researched the lottery scholarship program extensively. He replied, "It depends on your definition of success. The state gave out twice as much money to students than ever before, and there was a 7 percent increase in the number of first-time freshman in Tennessee public institutions, but the trend seen in other states was not avoided in Tennessee, despite our efforts to do so: African American and low-income students received a disproportionately low percentage of the money."

Compared to other states, Tennessee should be applauded for making efforts to increase opportunities and eligibility for low-income students to receive HOPE Scholarships, but the reality is no different.⁸ Middle and upper class individuals received a disproportionate number of scholarships in 2004; low-income students received only 26 percent of all TELS, though they comprise 42 percent of Tennessee public school students.

To make matters worse for low-income students, schools and communities, study after study from programs around the country have demonstrated that lotteries act as a drain on low-income communities. According to one study, when the money expended on the lottery is measured as a percentage of total income, low-income individuals spend eight times more than the wealthy.⁹ If more money re-entered low-income areas by way of the scholarships, then this high front-end price might be more justifiable. Currently, however, the lowest-income group is the only group not to receive a net gain from the lottery.¹⁰

If the scholarships are intended to be a motivational instrument in high school, then not only their availability, but also their significance and their requirements must be widely known at the *start* of the high school career. If an individual doesn't see college as a feasible reality as a freshman and sophomore, and doesn't understand what is necessary to reach the goal of college, then a substantial incentive for working hard and succeeding academically is lacking. Ensuring an early awareness, particularly for low-income students, about HOPE and other scholarships as well as an understanding college's benefits and entrance requirements must be an institutionalized system-wide practice.

No Child Left Behind, No One Looking Ahead

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has created a system of accountability and standards by which to measure a school's success, a system which has impacted and perhaps even redefined the role of both teachers and guidance counselors. The teachers must devote more of their classroom time to ensuring that students are well prepared for the mandated testing. This has meant less time can be spent on generating enthusiasm and optimism about college through direct information about college and its benefits as well as through teaching students outside of the NCLB curriculum that excites them about learning.

The teachers' and the schools' success now hinges on their students' passing rates on these tests; a school is deemed successful only if adequate yearly progress (AYP) is made in increasing these numbers. While it is debatable as to whether or not these requirements truly ensure that all children and youth are pushed to succeed academically, NCLB does not, by any measure, attempt to track the success of students post-graduation. An "on-time" graduate from Stratford High School who passes all standardized tests and then immediately enters the workforce with a job at a fast food place is considered by NCLB standards to be just as successful as one who goes on to college and graduates at the top of her class.

Currently, there is no system in place for incorporating the future success of students into a school's progress rating. If the standard of success were expanded to include more than test scores, schools would have a much stronger incentive to help their students not only earn high scores, but also achieve a level of success necessary for college admission as well as actual acceptance into a post-secondary institution.

"It's all about having the desire. You gotta be in their (the guidance counselors) face at all times to get what you want to get."

- MHS focus group participant

"We need to get more teachers to talk about (college). Honors classes push it already but standard classes don't know anything about college."

- MHS focus group participant

"28 dollars...for a test (ACT) I might not even pass!?"

- MHS focus group participant

"They (teachers) need to let students know that life is more than living in the projects or working at fast food places flippin' hamburgers...life is more than living off a \$500 check."

- MHS focus group participant

Conclusion

What we hope this report shows is that there is a gap — a gap between the hopes and dreams of East Nashville students and what our schools and our city support us to achieve. This report shows and our surveys show that adults cannot blame the youth by saying we are lazy or we have no aspiration. Many of us just need some support.

We want to thank you for reading **College Access: From the Inside Out** and we hope that you will look at the NEXT STEPS section below to help us take action to make sure that every Metro Public School student has the opportunity and support to realize his or her dreams.

Next Steps

Make Sure Metro Nashville Public Schools Support Access to College

- Protect the budget for Guidance Counselors in low performing schools. Students in low-income, low-performing high schools cannot take any more cuts in staff who help them prepare for college.
- Hire part-time support staff to handle routine paperwork that now falls to Guidance Counselors OR pay Guidance Counselors to work two additional weeks in the summer. If this cannot be done at all high schools, do it at schools with a large number of students who would be the first in their family to attend college.
- Create and fund a College Counselor position at schools with a large number of first-generation college prospects.

Strengthen Accountability for Student Success After Graduation

- Track MNPS students for one year after graduation and use this data as part of the definition of a successful high school and a successful School District.

Strengthen Guidance Strategies in High Schools

- Assign individual Guidance Counselors to a single class of students that they follow freshman through senior year. In other words, someone would be the guidance counselor for the class of 2008, not for freshmen, sophomores, etc. This has the potential to build relationships and improve accountability – both for students and counselors.

Leave No Child Behind When You Encourage Youth to Go to College

- Teachers should promote post-secondary education by talking with students about education and its benefits and by putting calendars and posters about college up in their classrooms.
- Encourage and train all teachers, principals and coaches to support our college dreams and to create a school climate where college is the expectation and not the exception to the rule.

Make Student “Four-Year Plans” Vitrally Important

- Hold schools and students accountable for following Four-Year Plans toward college. Make Four-Year Plans mean something to everyone.
- Require any student on the college track to take four years of math. This will dramatically improve standardized test scores and post-secondary preparation.
- Offer an Elective class that focuses directly on college, its importance, and the process of getting and staying there.

Show Schools and the School Board that College Access is Important to You

- Write your MNPS School Board member and tell them that college access is an important issue to you and that you support the protection of Guidance Counselor positions and the development of a College Counselor position.
- Get to know your high school and find ways to offer your time to help support its students.
- Encourage community, government, and business leaders to support high schools and promote college access. Our city has been recognized as a good location for businesses, but we must recognize that we cannot support businesses without supporting education.

Include Students Themselves as Resources for Change

- The Nashville community needs to see students like us as resources for changing the odds for college access. **We care about our community and want to bring our passion, talents and experience to creating success for our schools and neighborhoods.** The problems in our schools are difficult and everyone is needed if we are going to overcome them. Students are important stakeholders and we want to be a part of the solution.

Research/Process

In researching for this report since 2004, we have used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods included looking at census data, data from School Improvement Plans, Senior and Graduate Surveys done by the schools, peer-to-peer surveys that we have created and distributed to find out about student access to college counseling, and national research about college access and its relationship to parent educational attainment, poverty, and race. Qualitative methods include interviews of guidance counselors and students, student focus groups, and youth, family and community interviews, observations and personal experiences.

Existing Data

In order to avoid repeating data collection for information that is already available, we have utilized a variety of resources including the schools, Oasis/Community IMPACT, neighborhood partners and national research on the issue of college access to inform our work (pg. 23). Through this process, we have found a direct relationship between our experiences in our neighborhoods and schools in East Nashville with what national data tells us about low-income, minority, and first-generation students.

Peer Surveys

Our peer surveys (pg. 27) focus on finding out how many students want to go to college compared to their access to support to help get them there. We have chosen to focus our questions on access to guidance counselors because in our experience the guidance counselor is the ONLY person at school who formally supports the college process.

Peer Focus Groups

We have held focus groups with several different groups: 1) random selections of currently enrolled juniors and seniors, 2) students currently participating in the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) Programs at Stratford and Maplewood High Schools, 3) students who have graduated from Stratford or Maplewood and are currently in college. In total, we have held focus groups with more than 30 student or former student peers.

Counselor and Staff Interviews

In addition to other students, we have interviewed the following adults about college access:

- **Brenda Elliott**, Principal, Stratford High School
- **Jennifer Marciano**, Guidance Counselor, Stratford High School
- **Jeanne Vaughn**, Librarian, Stratford High School
- **Richard Bowers**, Guidance Counselor, Maplewood High School
- **Priscilla Marable**, AVID Director, Maplewood High School
- **Jessica Lyons**, Parent and Director of the Family Resource Center, Maplewood High School
- **Michelle Demps**, AVID Instructor, Whites Creek High School
- **Erik Ness**, Associate Director of Policy, Planning and Research, Tennessee Higher Education Commission
- **Linda Shaw**, Former Guidance Counselor, East Literature Magnet
- **Pat Cole**, Former Metro Director of Guidance Counselors
- **Courtney Dillard**, Lottery Scholarship Marketing, TSAC
- **Alan Deusterhaus**, Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association
- **Lisa Hunt**, Metro School Board Representative for East Nashville
- **The Ayers Scholars Program**

Publication Information

The research and writing for this report was done by the Youth Mobilizers of Oasis/Community IMPACT (see below). Research began in the Spring of 2004 and was completed in the Summer of 2005.

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Resources

School Data from 2003- 2004 School Improvement Plan

	SHS	MHS	ELMS
School Grades	9-12	9-12	5-12
Enrollment	1070	1054	700
% Female	49.1%	49.6%	56.4%
% Male	50.9%	50.4%	43.6%
% Asian	2.6%	2.1%	2.4%
% Black	67.6%	77.5%	59.0%
% Hispanic	4.3%	1.3%	0.9%
% American Indian	0.1%	0.1%	.0%
% White	25.4	19.0%	37.7%
% Free/Reduced Lunch Program Participation	56.3%	58.6%	32.9%
% NCLB “On-Time” Graduation Rate	38.2%	43.1%	56.1%
Senior’s Mean Composite ACT	16.3	15.8	19.2

SHS- Stratford High School

MHS- Maplewood High School

ELMS- East Literature Magnet High School

General Education Resources

Southern Region Educated Board	www.sreb.org
TN government website on Education	www.state.tn.us/education/
National Education Association	www.nea.org
National Center of Education Statistics	www.nces.ed.gov
Davidson County Schools' Report Card 2004	www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd04/
Institute for Higher Education Policy	www.ihep.org
National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators	www.nasfaa.org

Benefits of College Resources

Day, Jennifer & Newburger, Eric. "The Big Pay-Off: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings." Published by the U.S. Census Bureau, July 2002.

Lochner, Lance & Moretti, Enrico. "The Effect of Education on Crime: evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports." Published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, November 2001.

Changing Economy Resources

Wilson, William Julius. *When Work Disappears*, 1996. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY.

"Making A Difference in the South," 2004. MDC Inc: Chapel Hill, NC.

Lottery-Scholarship Resources

College Pays: a Tennessee government-funded website to help students pay for college
www.state.tn.us/tsac/

"An Overview of the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship Program." Compiled by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, January 2005.

"Who pays and who benefits? Examining the distributional consequences of the Georgia Lottery for Education." *National Tax Journal*. June 2002.

Ness, Erik & Noland, Brian. "Targeted Merit Aid: Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarships." Paper presented at the 2004 Annual Forum of the Association of Institutional Research, June 2004.

Noland, Brian & Davis, Houston. "Postsecondary Opportunities in Tennessee: Results of the 2002 Senior Opinions Survey." Paper presented to the Tennessee P-16 Council, March 2003.

No Child Left Behind Act Resources

U.S. Department of Education's Official NCLB website

www.ed.gov/nclb/

ACCESS: A Project of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Inc., NCLB News and Resources

www.schoolfunding.info/federal/federal.php3

American Federation of Teachers: "NCLB—Let's Get It Right"

www.aft.org/topics/nclb/index.htm

National Education Association: "No Child Left Behind Act/ESEA"

www.nea.org/eSEA/index.html

Successful Programs, Initiatives, and Models

Chattanooga's College Access Center

www.collegeaccesscenter.org

College Summit: a national initiative to increase college access amongst low-income students

www.collegesummit.org

KIPP Academy in Nashville, TN: a charter middle school focused on college prep

www.kippacademynashville.org

Official Advancement via Individual Determination website

www.avidonline.com

Footnotes

¹ “The Investment Payoff: A 50....” Published by Institute for High Education Policy, 2005.

² “The Investment Payoff: A 50....” Published by Institute for High Education Policy, 2005.

³ “The Investment Payoff: A 50....” Published by Institute for High Education Policy, 2005.

⁴ The Condition of Education 2001

⁵ Wilson, William Julius. 1996. *When Work Disappears*, p. 32. Alfred A Knopf, Inc.: New York, NY.

⁶ Jobs requiring a college degree are predicted to grow 8 percent between 2000 and 2010, from 21 percent to 29 percent. During the same time period, jobs requiring only work-related training are projected to fall from 71 percent to 58 percent. “Making A Difference in the South,” p. 10. 2004. MDC Inc: Chapel Hill, NC.

⁷ Longitudinal Comparisons of College Choice cited in “Postsecondary Opportunities in Tennessee: Results of the 2002 Senior Opinions Survey,” by Brian Noland & Houston Davis, 2002. Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

⁸ “An Alternative View of Merit-Based Financial Aid: Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarships Program” power point presented by THEC.

⁹ Study conducted by Herring and Bledsoe in the Detroit metropolitan area in 1994.

¹⁰ “Who pays and who benefits? Examining the distributional consequences of the Georgia Lottery for Education.” *National Tax Journal*. June 2002.

