

The Role of the Parent

To prepare students for college, a solid academic education is needed. A high school student's selection of a realistic career and the appropriate preparation for that career is of major concern to a student's parents (Herbert, 1996). If the career selection involves completing college, parents know that a broad academic high school education is needed.

One aspect of selecting a realistic career involves advance planning. Parents who envision their child attending college need to prepare early. Planning should start as early as grade seven or eight. Parents need to become aware of the course offerings at the student's high school as well as the admission requirements of post secondary institutions (Consumer Information Center, 1996).

Another area in which parents play a role in preparing their student for college relates to the use of standardized assessments like the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT). Birrell and Ross (1996) found that standardized testing provides a means of gathering and interpreting information to evaluate a student's performance. Their findings also support the contribution standardized tests make in the decision making process for students, parents, and teachers.

Standardized assessments are part of the portfolio of high school students. They are used rigorously by school systems and colleges to make decisions about the test taker. However, parents often underestimate the value of test results when used to assist their child in making curricular decisions. Standardized assessments are not only required for college admission but are regularly used for placement in remedial college courses. Standardized assessments are common in public schools and their results have an affect on college admission. Knowing the right courses and standardized test to take from the beginning of high school may enable parents to help their students avoid college admission problems after graduation (Consumer Information Center, 1996).

College admission officers rely on the results from standardized tests such as the SAT or the American College Testing (ACT) assessment as a criterion for college admission. Therefore, high schools offer pre-college standardized testing, like the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) as an opportunity for high school students and their parents to receive input on how students may perform on the SAT. Encouraging their child to participate and prepare for these exams, as well as reviewing test results, increases parental involvement in preparing their student for college (Consumer Information Center, 1996; Feller, 1994).

But parents also play other roles in their students' development beyond reviewing standardized tests. One role is helping them decide which classes to take. Taking the appropriate courses or participating in assessments does not guarantee admission into college or credited college courses (Hamilton, 1992). Course titles alone cannot predict what learning occurs in classes. The standards in the high school class should challenge the student (Mathews, 1998). By communicating with school personnel, parents learn what courses are required for college admission and what type of elective courses will enhance their student's academic preparation (Consumer Information Center, 1996).

Parents should make sure that the materials taught in high school courses reflect high academic standards and high expectations for what the student should know and be able to do. Parents need to ask school personnel if their student is learning and what students should know by the end of each grade.

Efforts to increase high school students' academic performance and achievement have also been linked to family involvement. Assisting students with school work assignments, providing emotional support, and general parental involvement in the student's high school activities have attributed to school success (Valery, O'Connor, & Jennings, 1997).

Peer socialization is another factor associated with academic motivation among adolescents. Schickedanz (1995) found that peers are an important source of support, companionship, and social development for adolescents. Peer interactions help build positive school experiences. Therefore, parents who are aware of the relationships their child maintains and encourage those that result in a positive school experience are likely to encourage positive peer relationships.

While older adolescents appear to spend less time than younger students with their families, research suggests parents are a preferred source of support. Adolescents usually do not openly invite parental support; however, there is strong support for the notion that the student's self perception is associated with how members of the family are perceived to interact with one another (Necessary & Parish, 1996). These findings suggest that family members need to be attentive to the messages that adolescents convey through their actions as well as their attitudes, and strive to be as positive as possible if they truly wish to benefit the student.

Parents provide varying types of support for their adolescent students. Emotional and tangible support reinforce students' confidence in their academic performances. Positive interaction between parents and students results in positive relationships that influence how well students perform at school (Valery, et al. 1997).

The appropriate preparation of students for career and college related decisions are even more important for the parents of African- American students. An analysis of survey data revealed that parents of African-American students who become aware of college preparation procedures, involved their student's in pre-collegiate preparation programs, and have their students participate in college admission examination, increase the probability that their students will pursue postsecondary education (Monahan, 1993). In addition, Monahan found that ninth grade African American students and their parents were able to demonstrate an increased awareness of postsecondary opportunities as a result of participation in a pre-collegiate program.

The role of the parents in preparing their student for postsecondary options has not shown any level of gender bias. The research in the area of career preparation indicates that parents treat their female and male students the same.

In summary, research suggests that parents play an important role in preparing their student for postsecondary activities. Their role includes being involved in the student's selection of high

school courses and encouraging their student to participate in standardized testing. Parents who communicate with their student's teachers and counselors throughout their schooling and actively participate in their student's educational program will increase the likelihood of improved school performance (Necessary & Parish, 1996).

Teachers, high school guidance counselors and parents play an integral role in preparing students for college. However, ultimately the commitment of students and their motivation to achieve their potential rest within themselves. Students' self-efficacy is a factor that adds to their college preparation.

The Role of the Student

Most evaluations of high school student performance are based on test results or course grades. Assumptions about students are made by high school and college personnel from these quantitative measures. In an attempt to give the students a voice in the debate about their education and to verify the assumptions made about them by adults, some scholars suggest students should be given an opportunity to assist in the decision making process. Students' self-assessment of their performance is a strong indication that they are more involved in what is occurring in their lives (Sosniak, Perlman, Foster & Rice, 1987).

Studies that track the effectiveness of secondary students' performance have provided useful information on the effectiveness of high school programs (Allen, et al. 1988; Gilmer & McElroy, 1993; Sosniak, et al. 1987). In studies by Allen, et al. and Gilmer & McElroy surveys were used to solicit information from high school graduates. In Allen's study, a high school training manual was developed from the results of a survey of previous students. Information was collected from students on variables such as their current occupation, employment history, post secondary education, vocational training, social service utilization, and residential status. From the collection of this information, a training manual was written to assist school systems in planning and implementing follow-up studies for secondary special education students.

Three research studies conducted on high school graduates' perceptions found that using students to collect information about their high school experience is an effective means to assess the outcomes achieved by high school graduates (Allen, et. al. 1988; Gilmer, 1993; Sosniak, et al. 1987).

Gilmer (1993) surveyed high school graduates to develop an instrument that could be used by local educational agencies. The information collected was used by the educational agency to review its high school programs and make modifications. Both studies (Allen, et al. 1988; Gilmer, 1993) were used to evaluate the transition process high school graduates experience after they leave school by soliciting information on students' current occupations, employment history, post secondary education, and/or vocational training.

Researchers surveyed high school graduates to determine their perception of their high school academic course work. The findings from the study indicated that the graduates were content

with their academic course work, although not all courses were thought to be equal. Of the four subjects rated in the study, mathematics and English are rated more important than science and social studies (Sosniak, et al. 1987).

Motivation to learn is a critical element of academic performance. Student motivation was perceived differently by the student, school personnel, and parents (Gorham & Millette, 1997; Stone, 1997; Wambach, 1993). Gorham and Millette's study examined the degree to which teacher perceptions influence student motivation. There is a sharp division between the teachers' and students' perceptions of the factors that affect motivation. Student motivation for learning cannot be evaluated by the parent and school personnel in isolation from the student. If it does occur in isolation, decisions regarding students are made based on insufficient or adult-perceived information.

Stone (1997) conducted a study on 26 high school students to determine if a correspondence existed among parents, teachers, and students on how they perceived the students' skill areas. The study found that parents' ratings are consistent with teachers' ratings. However, the student-teacher and student-parent ratings are different. The students' ratings are generally higher than those of their parents and teachers. The student-teacher differences were significant in 6 areas, whereas the student-parent differences were significant in 11 areas.

Greater clarity in interpreting students' motivation increases their effectiveness in college (Wambach, 1993). Wambach's study consisted of interviewing 29 college freshmen to determine the factors that influenced their preparation for college. The study found that a lack of academic success results from multiple factors: lack of student effort, poor study habits, inadequate academic preparation, and lack of parental support contributed to freshmen students' academic difficulties.

Tjeerd (1997) suggests that the nucleus of an effective learning environment occurs when both the teacher and the student have the same perception of what is being taught. Little congruence was reported when a study was conducted to investigate teachers' and students' perception of learning. If there is a disparity between what the instructor and learner perceive is occurring in the classroom, the likelihood that the teacher is addressing the student's needs is minimized.

The role of the student is important in insuring the adequacy of the teaching environment. A four-year study was conducted to investigate students' perceptions of their high school science program. The results indicated that students not only appreciate the opportunity to use their ideas but also are aware of the role of the teacher within the classroom. This study also indicated that a clearer understanding of the classroom perception by the teacher and the student creates a more powerful learning approach (Hand, Treagust, & Vance, 1997).

The review of literature on student efficacy did not yield any references to differences by race or gender. Self-efficacy has been studied in terms of its effect for students in general; however, race and gender have not investigated as separate analytical categories.

In summary, teachers, high school guidance counselors, parents and students themselves play an important role in the preparation of the high school student for college. With enrollment in college remedial classes remaining high, the focus on developing programs that will provide solutions to this phenomenon rest with the participants at the pre-collegiate level.

This review of the literature on the role of the high school teacher highlighted the importance of the teaching style for preparing the student for college. Kagan (1993), and Southard & Collier (1997), found that the mere completion of a high school curriculum was not a guarantee that students are prepared for a college course of study. It was found that many high school college preparation programs do not focus on the specific skills needed to prepare the high school student for college (Fenske, et al. 1997). Unfortunately, research supports the findings that the completion of the high school curriculum does not exempt the student from having to take college remediation courses. Research has indicated that teaching strategies employed in the high school classroom are more effective in preparing a student for college than the completion of the high school curriculum (Florida State House of Representatives, 1996; Hamilton, 1992; Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 1993).

Teachers who individualize instruction, interact with the students and keep students task-oriented are more effective in the classroom (Waxman & Huang, 1997). Teel et al. (1998) found that effective teachers enhanced student performances by recognizing students' strengths, talents, creative expression and creative thinking skills. The student-centered classroom, discovery learning, and compacted learning strategies promote problem solving and higher level thinking skills for the students (Kagan, 1993).

The role of the high school guidance counselor is also important for the preparation of the college bound student. By helping students develop strategies to analyze their self knowledge, educational aspirations, goal setting and career objectives, high school students are more prepared for post secondary activities (Feller, 1994; Stringfield, 1997). Feller (1994) and Stringfield (1998) also found that the high school guidance counselor plays an important role in guiding the high school student about the number and type of courses needed for college preparation.

Parents have also been examined with respect to their role in preparing their student for college. With the appropriate information, parents can assist their student in the selection of a realistic career and the preparation for that career (Herbert, 1996). Through increased awareness, parents know they need to be involved early in their student's educational program and they understand the importance of standardized test results (Birrell & Ross, 1996; and Monahan, 1993). Mathews (1998) found that parents should assure that the curriculum materials their students' use and subjects their students participate in are challenging. Research has also shown higher-achieving students have parents who are more involved in their educational program (Necessary & Parish, 1996; Valery, et al. 1997).

Finally, this review investigated the role of the student's self-efficacy. Research has shown that students' self-assessment of their performance is a good indicator of skills (Sosniak, et al. 1987). Collecting information on a student's high school program has been found to be an

effective means of determining the value of that program (Allen, et al. 1988; Gilmer & McElroy, 1993; Hand, et al. 1997; Sosniak, et al. 1987). Studies were conducted to examine the variance between students' self perception and those held by their parents and teachers. In these studies, merit is given to the student's perception as an effective tool to rate their performance and the high school's effectiveness (Gorham & Millets, 1997; Hand, et al. 1997; Stone, 1997; Wambach, 1993).

In summary, the research on the role of teachers, counselors, and parents in preparing high school students for college is fairly extensive. However, those bodies of literature do not frequently analyze results by race and gender. Studies that examine students' roles in preparing for postsecondary education are more limited and these investigations also ignore the issue of race and gender. It would appear, therefore, that there is a gap in the existing body of literature on college preparation among high school students. More studies are needed that employ data solicited from students themselves, and additional research is needed to explore student perceptions by race and gender. The present study was designed to address these gaps in the existing literature.