

**The Bridge Project:
Strengthening K-16 Transitions Policies**

Maryland Case Study

**PHASE II
TECHNICAL REPORT**

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Introduction

This report summarizes findings from a Maryland case study of policies and practices affecting the transition of students from high school to college. The Maryland Case Study is one of six comprehensive state case studies being conducted as part of “The Bridge Project: Strengthening K-16 Transition Policies.” The other five states being studied are California, Georgia, Illinois, Oregon, and Texas. The Bridge Project is a five-year project being directed at the Stanford Institute on Higher Education Research with support from The Pew Charitable Trust and the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI). NCPI is sponsored in part by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

An underlying assumption of the project is that a lack of consistency in curricular content and academic expectations between K-12 and higher education coupled with a lack of communication between these two sectors cause many problems in the high school to college transition. These problems include decreased access to four-year colleges and universities, particularly for under-represented and economically disadvantaged students, an unacceptably high need for remedial education in colleges and universities, and unnecessary costs and administrative burdens for higher education institutions. New educational reforms, although sharing the same goal of improving education, may in fact compound the problems because of the lack of coordination among the various levels of education (Kirst, 1998). According to Kirst (1998, p.1), “The bridge that once led students across the secondary-postsecondary divide has been weakened by conflicting concepts and opposing forces, and it is becoming increasingly unclear how many of the nation’s students will be able to negotiate a successful path

from high school to college.” Consequently, a greater understanding of the disjunctures between elementary/secondary and higher education curricula content, testing practices, and student expectations could help provide a basis for lessening these disparities and, thereby, improving opportunities for all students to gain access to, and succeed in higher education (Kirst, 1997).

The Bridge Project consists of two major phases for each state. Phase I seeks to understand policies and practices related to freshman admissions and initial course placement in the states included in the study. It also examines secondary school curricula and testing requirements in these states and analyzes the compatibility of content and assessment across the K-12 and higher education sectors. Phase II seeks to understand how these policies and practices are transmitted to, and understood by students, parents and school personnel, including teachers, counselors, and administrators. This report presents findings from the Phase II Maryland Case Study.

The Secondary School Level

While Phase I of our research investigated admissions policies, practices and collaborative efforts of higher education institutions in the state of Maryland, Phase II of our research examines how admissions policies and the state’s collaborative K-16 efforts play out at the level of the secondary school. In studying the link between secondary schools and higher education, we look at students’ and parents’ knowledge of college admissions, systemic linkages, and at the provision of school services that can facilitate the transition.

A stronger link between K-12 and higher education could result in more realistic learning incentives for students and provide guideposts for instructors in both K-12 and

higher education institutions. Alignment of standards for graduation and admission could increase the flow of information between the two system parts. Students' and parents' accurate and realistic knowledge about higher education possibilities, options, and requirements could facilitate adequate course taking and other college preparatory activities in high school and help students take advantage of existing educational opportunities in higher education. We assume, in particular, that student groups who are traditionally not college-bound would benefit from this knowledge. From the point of view of the system, such knowledge can foster efficiencies as students chart a realistic course of preparation and as teachers know what colleges expect and what to teach to avert remediation at the college level. But these efficiencies cannot materialize when the two systems are separate and do not know each other's standards, when coordination between schools and universities is weak, and when knowledge on the part of students, parents, and teachers is fuzzy.

In Phase II, therefore, we first wanted to ascertain what students and parents know about college and college admission. Do they have a realistic idea about the cost of various college options? Do they know about various institutions' course taking requirements, tests and grades? And are they informed about the role of social criteria for admission? We wanted to know if such knowledge is differentiated according to student groups based on income, race, track status in school, and college aspirations. Secondly, we asked how teachers, counselors, and administrators construct the link between high school and college and what kind of formal services and informal knowledge they provide to students for admission preparation. Lastly, we inquired about direct links

between institutions of higher learning and local high schools and the effects of these links on students.

Data from Phase I (Milton and Schmidlein, 2000) suggest the link between K-12 and higher education to be fairly weak in the state of Maryland for the following reasons:

- With the exception of very basic college-preparatory requirements spelled out by the University of Maryland System, requirements for admissions are set autonomously by institutions of higher learning; as a result, an array of placement tests that are not consistent across institutions are in use.
- To date, K-16 efforts have been voluntary and take place at a very high level of state leadership; K-16 initiatives do not seem to have filtered down to the lower level of districts and schools yet.
- The fate of high-stakes accountability testing for high school graduation seems uncertain at this point, perhaps with the effect of diminishing the level of concern for school service providers and clients.
- College admission officers that do have direct links to their most important feeder high schools tend to “sell” their college to increase applicant yields, rather than inform potential students of placement requirements.
- Many Maryland students attend college out of state and many students enrolled at Maryland institutions of higher learning are from out of state, making intra-state alignment a potentially less forceful factor in higher education administrators’ decision making.

In the next sections of this report we will show how this peculiar connection between secondary and postsecondary education in the state of Maryland is reflected in the behavior of students and educators. In researching the Maryland case, we followed the design compiled for the national Bridge study at the Stanford Institute on Higher Education Research under the directorship of Michael Kirst and Andrea Venezia. We want to explicitly and gratefully acknowledge their authorship in designing the questionnaires, interview protocols, and sampling procedures that underlie our findings. After a brief introduction of the study’s sample and methods, we present our findings in

two broad sections. First we examine students' and parents' knowledge and aspirations drawing primarily from survey and focus group data. This section is subdivided into nine subsections:

- Students' and parents' postsecondary aspirations, related to high school performance
- Students' and parents' knowledge of tuition and fees
- Students' and parents' knowledge of high school course requirements
- Students' knowledge of selection criteria
- Students' awareness of affirmative action
- Students' knowledge of placement test requirements
- Students' and parents' knowledge of selectivity
- Students' exposure to higher education while still in high school
- Parents' versus schools' responsibility for college preparation

Once we have a clearer picture of how students and parents view the connection between high school and college, we look at schools and their contribution in shaping students' responses. This section will primarily draw from interview data with school personnel. We conclude with a discussion of the policy relevance of our findings.

Sample and Methods

We selected four high schools as sites for the Maryland Case Study. They were chosen for their status as primary feeder schools for Towson University and the University of Maryland, College Park, two of the most popular public universities among Maryland high school graduates who go to school in the state. The schools were chosen in two jurisdictions representative of the state's racial and geographic diversity. Two of the selected schools are top feeder schools of either institution, one was chosen because we could not gain entry to our first choice. One was chosen as a school with a predominantly African American student body. Two of the schools are predominantly white, and the fourth school is more evenly proportioned in terms of ethnic diversity.

The quantitative data reported in this paper are the result of a 28-item survey administered to 9th and 11th graders in their English classes. Four classes were chosen from each school, an honors and non-honors class from the 9th and 11th grades, resulting in a survey of 16 English classes. The students completed the Maryland Bridge Student Survey in their English classes during the spring 2000 semester. The student survey response rates for the four schools were between 56percent and 72 percent. The parents of the students were surveyed prior to the student survey with a similar survey of 17 items to determine socioeconomic background and parental perceptions of their children's aspiration and the admissions process.

Phase II of the Bridge Project has both quantitative and qualitative components. The qualitative component of the study includes interviews with the principals, guidance counselors, and four teachers who teach 9th and 11th grade honors or non-honors English at each school. These interviews attempt to underscore the schools' services and connections with college admissions currently in place for Maryland high school students and their families, as well as school staff members' perceptions of these linkages. Additionally, focus groups were conducted with honors and non-honors 11th grade students who had completed the student survey. Thus, this report is based on findings from the quantitative student and parent survey data, and qualitative findings from student focus groups, and teacher, administrator and counselor interviews.

The quantitative student survey includes questions on student background, academic preparation, postsecondary aspirations, knowledge of high school requirements for college, knowledge of the admissions process (specifically at Towson University and UM College Park), and lastly students' exposure to higher education institutions and

schools' targeted admission preparation services. The parent survey includes similar questions with the addition of socioeconomic indicators and additional questions about parents' responsibilities in the college-preparation process.

Tables 1 and 2 display demographic characteristics of our sample, both for individual respondents and the four selected schools.

Table 1 – Student Demographics and Other Characteristics

Student Demographics and other Characteristics	N=232			
Race/ethnicity	African American	White	Latino	Other
	73 (32%)	115 (50%)	10 (5%)	33 (13%)
Gender	Female		Male	
	140 (60%)		91 (40%)	
Grade level	9 th Grade		11 th Grade	
	127 (55%)		103 (44%)	
English class	Non-honors		Honors	
	99 (43%)		133 (57%)	
High school grade point average	A	B	C	D or below
	76 (33%)	106 (46%)	40 (17%)	3 (4%)

The percentage of female students is larger in our sample than that of males for two possible reasons. The larger number of female students in the sample (60 percent) may reflect a higher proportion of women (64 percent) taking honors courses in the state. The response rates for the honors classes were higher than for the non-honors classes. The low percentage of Latino students in the sample (5 percent) reflects their proportion in the populations of the two Maryland jurisdictions (9 percent and 2 percent) in which the high schools are located.

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the four high schools selected as sites for the survey, student focus groups and staff interviews:

Table 2 - Characteristics of the Four High School Sites

	School A	School B	School C	School D
District Code	1	1	2	2
Total Student Population	1537	1750	1696	1457
No. in 9th Grade	383	482	436	477
No. in 11th Grade	386	423	419	323
Total Minority Pop.	56 %	30%	19%	97%
African American Students	32%	14%	6%	95%
Asian Students	17%	11%	12%	1%
Hispanic Students	7%	5%	1%	1%
White Students	44%	70%	82%	2%
Attend four-year college	72%	66%	76%	54%
Attend two-year college	10%	12%	8%	7%
% completed UM System Course Requirements	73%	73%	77%	27%

As Table 2 displays, the school sites selected for Phase II are similar in student population size and numbers in grades 9 and 11 (although School D had fewer 11th graders). The schools differ drastically in the percent of minority students. School D has the largest minority population of 97 percent, 95 percent of whom are African American. Fewer School D graduates attend four-year and two-year colleges than graduates from the other three schools. School D also has the fewest students by far to complete the

University of Maryland System Course Requirements. These requirements, listed in The University of Maryland's *Policy of Undergraduate Admissions*, set minimum qualification for regular freshman admission for students who have graduated from high school within three years of intended enrollments (University of Maryland Board of Regents, 1990). The minimum requirements for the UM System are listed below (Milton and Schmidlein, 2000):

- A high school diploma or its equivalent
- A high school GPA of C or better
- A score on a nationally standardized admission examination such as the ACT or SAT
- Minimum core content competency proficiency requirements as demonstrated by a grade of C or better in 19 of the 21 required courses listed below:

- English	4
- Social Science/History	3
- Science (at least 2 lab courses and 2 different subjects) (4 years and 3 labs recommended for students interested in math/science field)	3
- Mathematics	3
Algebra I or Applied Math I and II (enhanced version)	
Geometry	
Algebra II	
- Foreign Language (2), or Advanced Technology Education 2 in a State Approved Tech Prep program (2)	
- Academic Electives	<u>6</u>
Total	21

In the last section of this paper, we will discuss possible reasons for the low percentage of students completing the University System requirements in School D. The following sections of the paper provide information on students' and parents' expectations and on their knowledge of college admissions practices and requirements for all four schools.

Aspirations for College Attendance and High School Performance

We begin our presentation of findings by looking at students' postsecondary aspirations, i.e. at their stated intentions to pursue a particular type of postsecondary education. These aspirations are examined in their relationship to reported high school performance. If students have a realistic picture of their postsecondary options, we would expect a match between higher goals and higher high school performance. High school students who earn high grades and complete honors courses may be more likely to set higher goals for their postsecondary schooling than students earning lower grades who complete standard courses. The overall self-reported high school grade point averages for the students surveyed were in the B range. Compared with this performance level, student aspirations tended to be very high, as Table 3 shows.

Table 3 – Schools Considered by Students after High School (Percent Marked)

Postsecondary Options*	9 th grade	11 th grade	Dual Honors 11 th grade	Non-Honors 11 th grade
A four-year college or university outside of Maryland	61	70	80	53
University of Maryland, College Park	37	59	58	38
A four-year private college or university within Maryland	21	38	26	20
Historically Black College or University	9	13	11	14
Towson University	17	34	20	25
A two-year community or junior college	7	15	3	20
A technical/trade school (e.g., Lincoln Tech)	8	8	6	8
A U.S. military academy	10	6	5	13
Other type of school	7	8	8	7
I haven't considered any schools	10	4	2	8

*multiple responses accepted

Conspicuously, the majority of students aspired to a four-year school outside of Maryland. Most students surveyed who were taking more than one honors course (dual honors students) aspired to attend college outside the state (80 percent), compared to 67 percent of single honors and 53 percent of the non-honors students. Though not as pronounced, this pattern is consistent across other postsecondary options. Honors

students tended to choose more selective options while non-honors students tended to choose less selective options. Thus, students' performance background made a difference in their aspirations. By contrast, there were no significant differences in students' aspirations based on their parents' educational and economic background. Race, but not socio-economic background, played a role in students' choice of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In Maryland, HBCUs are an important option to consider because so many minority students attend these institutions. One-third of black students indicated an interest in an HBCU whereas no white students chose this postsecondary option.

Students' aspirations to attend the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) exhibit an interesting pattern. UMCP is the primary four-year college in the state and as the flagship campus of the University of Maryland System the most selective of the public universities. Traditionally a comprehensive university for all Maryland high school students who fulfilled the minimum admission requirements, the university has strenuously worked at becoming more selective in recent years. Despite these efforts, a large percentage (58 percent state-wide) of Maryland high school graduates are still eligible for admittance to the UM System (MSDE Website, 2001). Overall, students surveys expressed a high percentage of interest in UMCP. Again, dual honors students showed the most interest in UMCP (58 percent), followed by single honors (49 percent) and non-honors students (38 percent). Generally speaking, a larger number of higher performing students than lower performing students were attracted to UMCP, but many non-honors students considered UMCP as well. More eleventh graders (59 percent) selected UMCP as a school of their choice than 9th graders (37 percent), and more male

students (55 percent) than female students (41 percent). White students (46 percent) were also more likely than African American students (33 percent) to choose the state's flagship.

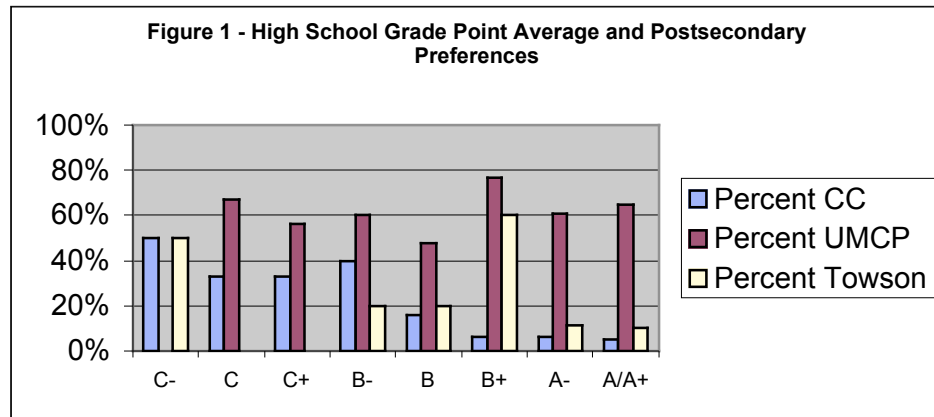
Students showed very little interest in less selective institutions, such as Towson. One-quarter of the non-honors students in the study selected Towson compared to one-fifth of the dual honors students. The university was neither particularly popular among whites, nor among blacks. Of the white students surveyed, 28 percent selected Towson as a postsecondary option, of the black students 18 percent. Community colleges were even less desirable for students. They were chosen by 20 percent of the non-honors students and by only 3 percent of dual honors students. Differences between African American (15 percent) and white (11 percent) students were small, contrary to national data (NCES, 1998).

While large proportions of students favored four-year out-of-state colleges and the in-state flagship campus and felt neutral about the less-selective schools, such as Towson, the community colleges garnered some negative responses in the focus groups. When students were asked about community colleges in the area, they replied, "Usually, we're making fun of somebody [who goes to community college]." Students described community colleges as "last resort" -- "You don't want to go there." Even so, some students pointed to the financial benefits of attending community college prior to transferring to a four-year school:

It's cheaper. If you want to go to community college for, like, your first two years, you can get your credits transferred, and then, I mean, it will still be just as good, but then you can go to a university for, like, the next two years. (AS11-1)

In Maryland, as Figure 1 illustrates, students with lower high school grade point averages (GPAs) did not exclude the more selective UM College Park in their postsecondary aspirations. But the top students tended to find community colleges and the less selective Towson less attractive options.

Figure 1 - Student High School Aspirations to Attend Community College, UMCP or Towson University by GPA



The reality of college selection in Maryland, however, contrasts quite remarkably with the sampled students' desires expressed on the questionnaire. Approximately three-fourths of Maryland's college-going high school graduates attend college in Maryland and do not leave the state. Community college enrollment constitutes 40 percent, and public four-year campuses comprise 43 percent of all Maryland undergraduate enrollments (MHEC, 2000). This contrast between stated aspirations on the survey and college attendance patterns is of course partly due to the distinctly college-preparatory character of three of the high schools that were selected for this study.

The literature on college choice has found that parental expectations have a strong influence on students' aspirations (McDonough, 1997). On the parent questionnaire, we asked parents to indicate their postsecondary preference for their students. Our data does

not allow constructing a direct match between parents' and students' preferences (students were allowed multiple options, parents only one), but we can compare parents' and students' rank order of choices.

**Table 4 – Students' and Parents' Postsecondary Choices
(Percent Marked and Rank-Ordered)**

Postsecondary Option	Student Selections (n=225)	Student Rank Order	Parent Rank Order	Parent Expectations for Child (N=225)
Community College	11	5	4	5
UM College Park	47	2	2	20
Historically Black College/University	11	5	4	5
Towson University	25	4	5	3
4-yr Private in Maryland	29	3	3	18
4-yr Outside Maryland	64	1	1	36
Technical/Trade School	8	6	6	0

Table 4 shows that parents' rank order of choices is very similar to that of students. Four-year out-of-state college was the parents' top choice, followed by the in-state flagship campus and four-year private colleges. The less-selective Towson garnered even less favor among parents as it did among students. HBCUs were not an attractive option for non-black students and parents. Overall, in the eyes of students and parents from these four schools, the state of Maryland has deficits in attracting particularly talented students whose sights are set on out-of-state options.

Student Knowledge of Tuition and Fees

The presumed high cost of a college education has often been cited (Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper 1999) as a deterrent for students to envision attendance of a high-status postsecondary institution. In order to better understand what students know about the practicalities of college admissions, in this case the financial commitment required, we asked them to estimate how much they think it costs to attend college. In order to ascertain whether they make distinctions between the financial requirements of institutions, they were asked to estimate yearly tuition at UMCP, Towson University, and a community college.

In 1999, the average tuition for Maryland community colleges was \$74 per credit hour. Therefore, an average full-time Maryland community college student (24 billable hours per year) paid \$2,171 per year for tuition and fees (MHEC, 2000). Among Maryland public four-year undergraduate institutions in 1999, students paid an average of \$4,310 per year for tuition and fees. Tuition and fees were \$4,939 for UMCP and \$4,520 for Towson University for Maryland residents. It is evident, according to students' estimates displayed in Table 5, that the sampled 9th and 11th graders were not aware of actual tuition costs. Although less off-target for estimates of community college costs, the overwhelming majority grossly overestimated the expenses of both two-year and four-year tuition. 11th graders were slightly more realistic, but not by much.

Table 5 - Student Estimates of Yearly Tuition Costs (Percent Marked)

Estimate Comparison with Actual Costs	Two Year College			Four Year Institutions				
	Student Estimates of Yearly Tuition Costs	Community College		Student Estimates of Yearly Tuition Costs	UM College Park		Towson University	
		9 th grade	11 th grade		9 th grade	11 th grade	9 th grade	11 th grade
Below Target	Less than \$2,000	16	31	Less than \$4,000	11	8	9	11
On Target	\$2,001 - \$3,000*	6	13	\$4,001 - \$5,000*	3	11	2	11
Above Target	\$3,001 - \$7,000	21	19	\$5,001 - \$9,000	7	18	11	22
Far Above Actual Costs	Greater than \$7,000	58	37	Greater than \$9,000	79	63	77	56

*On target with actual yearly tuition costs.

When it comes to paying for college, it is often the parents who are called to foot the bill. Parents' beliefs about college costs may shape students' ideas of the affordability of postsecondary options and may in turn constrain their choices. We wanted to know how parents estimated college costs and to what degree their estimates matched those of their children. If both parents and their children overestimated college costs, aspirations might be tempered by notions of affordability.

As displayed in Table 6, students' and parents' answers were similar on estimates of tuition costs. Overall, parents tended to grossly overestimate costs, though they were slightly more realistic, but in many instances in agreement with their children. Of the 225 student/parent pairs examined, 86 (38 percent) matched on estimates of community college tuition, 135 (60 percent) matched on UM College Park estimates, and an equal number 135 (60 percent) matched on their estimates of yearly tuition at Towson. Both parent and student respondents tended to overestimate the more selective UMCP more so than either Towson or the community colleges. Socioeconomic status or race did not make a difference in parents' and students' estimates.

Table 6 – Parents’ and Students’ Estimates of Postsecondary Costs (Percent Marked)

Estimate Comparison with Actual Costs	Two-Year College			Four-Year Institutions				
	Parent and Student Estimates of Yearly Tuition Costs	Community College (N=224)		Parent and Student Estimates of Yearly Tuition Costs	UM College Park (N=224)		Towson University (N=224)	
		Parent	Student		Parent	Student	Parent	Student
Below Target	Less than \$2,000	23	22	Less than \$4,000	5	10	10	11
On Target	\$2,001 - \$3,000*	20	9	\$4,001 - \$5,000*	10	7	9	6
Above Target	\$3,001 - \$7,000	25	20	\$5,001 - \$9,000	23	13	27	17
Far Above Actual Costs	Greater than \$7,000	32	48	Greater than \$9,000	62	71	54	67

*on target estimates

Student Knowledge of High School Course Requirements

One key prerequisite for college attendance is a sufficient number of high school courses that qualify for college admission. We wanted to find out whether students who want to attend college were aware of the minimum high school course requirements for admission at the two most popular public universities in Maryland. Students and their parents were asked to estimate the UM College Park and Towson University admission requirements in each of five required subjects.

UMCP’s and Towson’s minimum requirements for admission and the students’ and parents’ estimates of the requirements are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 - Student/Parent Estimates of High School Requirements for College Admission (Percent Marked)

UMCP/Towson Requirements	%Student/Parent Estimates Below Target				%Student/Parent Estimates On Target				%Student/Parent Estimates Above Target			
	UMCP		Towson		UMCP		Towson		UMCP		Towson	
	Pts*	Sts*	Pts	Sts	Pts	Sts	Pts	Sts	Pts	Sts	Pts	Sts
Four years of English	21	16	20	16	75	73	74	70	2	2	3	2
Three years of mathematics**	9	7	6	7	35	30	39	32	53	53	50	48
Three years of history or social science***	19	24	21	23	55	42	50	43	22	25	25	1
Two years of laboratory science	9	9	10	8	22	26	25	28	65	65	64	64
Two years of a foreign language	12	9	14	10	60	57	60	55	24	35	33	35

*Pts=Parents, Sts=Students

** including Algebra II and plane geometry (Towson includes Algebra I as well)

*** Towson does *not* include history

Students tended to overestimate mathematics and laboratory science requirements at both schools. In the eyes of students, college admission requirements loomed larger than they actually are, a fact that may temper their college aspirations. As Table 4 illustrates, student estimates of UMCP and Towson requirements were quite similar, but the actual high school requirements at the universities differ. Towson actually admits students who have not completed the posted high school requirements if students complete them within the first college semester. Students were only dimly aware of the varying degrees of selectivity between the two institutions.

Parents' estimates of high school requirements for college admission closely matched the estimates of their children. As illustrated in Table 7 above, parents and students were equally matched on percentages below target, on target and above target

estimates, tending to overestimate science and math, and being more accurate on estimates of English and foreign language requirements. There were only slight differences in parent and student matches according to universities. Thus, parents as well did not show much discernment between the more and less selective universities.

Student Knowledge of Selection Criteria

Reports have indicated that high school students are often unaware of the specific admissions criteria used by the colleges that they are considering (NCPI, 1997). We wanted to know to what degree Maryland students were aware of this information for the two universities that many students from three of the four high schools are likely to attend. As mentioned earlier, in the University System of Maryland individual universities have autonomy in setting admissions criteria within certain guidelines. Often universities use a plethora of criteria to make decisions about admissions. It is in the strategic interest of students to know these admissions specifics.

For both Towson and UMCP admission, SAT score and high school grade point average are the most important criteria used for selection. UMCP, however, focuses more on qualitative criteria similar to other more selective schools. In addition to SAT score and grades, the following list of additional criteria is considered at both institutions (University Catalogs, 1999). Differences between UMCP and Towson are noted in parenthesis.

- Class rank: although Towson does not use it, UMCP uses it, when available
- Required coursework: both require the minimum USM requirements, but Towson will allow deficiencies to be remedied by the end of the first semester
- Quality of coursework: UMCP will consider AP, honors, etc., Towson does not consider, if the minimum requirements are met

- Personal statements: UMCP does not always use as key factor, Towson uses only for borderline cases
- Recommendation letters: used similarly to personal statements at the two institutions
- Maryland residency: out-of-state limited by state to 30 percent--UMCP states that in-state students have somewhat higher SAT scores and grades than out-of-state enrollees
- Geographic diversity: state policy states that enrollees should be drawn from all regions of the state
- Status of high school attended: key factor at UMCP, only for borderline cases at Towson
- Extracurricular, work and community activities: positive influence, if noteworthy, at UMCP, only used for borderline cases at Towson
- Applicant background information: both UMCP and Towson list Special Talent/Skills here. UMCP lists three more specific criteria than Towson, including race/ethnicity, breadth of experience, and demonstrated interest in the university

In order to narrow the list of important criteria which are actually used in the admissions process, follow-up interviews with the admissions staff at both Towson University and UM College Park were conducted. From these interviews the following were offered as the most important criteria in the decision-making, ranked in order of importance:

Towson

1. GPA grid
2. SAT grid
3. Application essay
4. Geographical background
5. Rank in class (if top 10 percent)

UM College Park

1. Nature of courses taken in high school
2. GPA
3. Rank in class (if available)
4. SAT
5. Diversity (geographical background)
6. Involvement in extra-curricular, leadership activities

In order to find out how well students are informed about admissions criteria of the two primary public universities in the state, students were given a list of possible selection criteria on the student survey. They were asked to rate their degree of

importance for admission to UMCP and Towson. Student responses to these items are presented in Table 8.

Students estimated correctly that high school grades and SAT scores are the most salient criteria for both institutions. These two items received the highest percentages as the "Single Most Important Factor." But fuzzy knowledge of the selection criteria is evidenced by several patterns (see Table 8):

- Generally, students perceived more criteria as important than are actually used by the two institutions (for instance, the majority of students rated academic reputation of high school, extra-curricular involvement and numbers of college preparatory courses as "Most Important" or "Very Important" at Towson when they are actually only considered for borderline cases);
- A large percentage of students thought that social criteria are not considered by universities (such as racial/ethnic background, first generation in college, and first generation to speak English), when in fact they are;
- Students tended to overestimate the importance of essays, personal statements, and letters of recommendation for admission to both schools;
- Students showed little awareness of the importance UMCP places on the status of their high school for selection or that university's consideration of factors other than test scores;
- Students were not aware of the differences between the more selective and the less selective campuses. Estimates were fairly similar for both schools.

Table 8 - Student Responses to Importance of Selection Criteria (Percent)

Selection Criteria Listed on Survey	Single Most/Very Important Factor		Moderately Important/Minor		Not Considered	
	UMCP	Towson	UMCP	Towson	UMCP	Towson
High school grades	94	89	6	10	0	0
Senior year grades	62	65	37	34	1	2
SAT-I or ACT score	87	81	11	17	2	2
Geographic residence	12	15	69	64	20	20
Exceptional talent	53	47	46	49	2	4
Application essay	72	68	28	31	1	1
Academic reputation of high school	40	39	50	51	11	9
Involvement in volunteer work	37	40	57	55	6	5
Your rank in graduating class	48	50	48	46	4	4
Involvement in extra-curricular activities	56	55	41	43	4	3
Number of college prep courses completed	38	49	57	45	5	6
Ability to pay tuition	50	48	46	48	4	4
Letters of recommendation	55	53	43	44	2	2
First generation college student	14	15	49	49	37	37
First generation in family to speak English	9	14	42	41	49	45
How much money your family has	25	27	51	52	24	21
Parents or siblings went to UMCP	14	17	53	48	34	36
Racial/ethnic background	14	20	41	38	45	43

The focus groups also revealed vagueness of knowledge of specific admissions criteria:

Different schools say different things. Like at one it could be the essay you write, you know. One could be, like your grades, your GPA, your SAT. It depends on

where you're applying (BS11-2).

[Towson is] much easier [than Maryland] (CS11-1).

Colleges say now, like, they're not counting the SAT as much as they used to, but I don't believe them. It's like that's all they want now (BS11-2).

Others guess, often inaccurately, the specific requirements:

[Towson is] 2.6 and 900 or more on the SAT (DS11-2).

If you go wrong on the SATs, it basically screws you for college, but if you do good in school and you do good all the time, that stands out more than the SAT (BS11-1).

(Maryland) I heard it's pretty difficult. I have a couple of friends who go there. They're freshmen this year. It's harder for out of state kids, but for us, as long as you get good grades and you have a good teacher recommendation [you'll be fine.] (CS11-2).

It's like they don't give you a chance. Like UNC Chapel Hill. They say, when we asked them, they were like well, we're looking for people with solid A averages and an average of 1450 on their SATs. It's like that's not average for a person. That's like a scholars program. (CS11-1).

As Table 8 shows, students thought that geographic residence was not an important criterion for admission when in fact it is used by both universities as a diversity measure. Students ranked the application essay to be of equal importance at both schools, when only Towson listed it as one of the more highly used criteria.

Interestingly, approximately half of the students saw "ability to pay tuition" as a most/very important factor for admission. When examined by socioeconomic status, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds overestimated the importance of "ability to pay tuition" (37 percent) less than middle to lower income students (60 percent). Students' socio-economic situation may strongly influence postsecondary aspirations when over half of middle to low income students think that their ability to pay

will be a decisive factor in the universities' decisions to admit them, particularly in view of parents' and students' tendency to overestimate college costs. On the other hand, perceived economic limitations contrast with students' buoyancy in selecting their college of choice (see the high percentage of students who wished to attend a four-year university out of state).

Table 9 displays students' knowledge of admissions criteria in a more condensed way. Only those criteria that were identified as crucial in interviews with admission staff from both universities and only 11th graders' responses are displayed. Honors students were not better informed of the most important criteria for admission than non-honors English students. However, as Table 10 illustrates, honors students were more in tune with the importance of extra-curricular leadership involvement to college admissions.

Table 9 - Items Rated Most Important/Very Important for Admissions by Students (Percent Correct)

Towson University % Correct 11 th graders			UM College Park % Correct 11 th graders		
	Non-Honors	Honors		Non-Honors	Honors
GPA	90	92	College Preparatory Courses Completed	39	33
SAT	74	78	High school GPA	97	95
Application essay	79	57	Rank in class	44	43
Diversity	21	5	SAT	87	84
Rank in high school class	41	43	Diversity	19	7
			Leadership involvement	46	61

In summary, students in the sample tended to know about the centrality of GPA and SAT scores for college admission, but their understanding of the importance of the other criteria was murky. The perceived importance of diversity to the admissions process was particularly low.

Awareness of Affirmative Action

Affirmative action has been quite controversial in recent years. The official University of Maryland System policy (UMCP Catalog, 1999) includes race/ethnicity as a factor listed under the following statement:

Applicant background information: All of the factors listed below are given some consideration in making enrollment decisions, particularly in cases where test scores and/or GPA may be somewhat lower than is usually acceptable.

- First generation college
- First generation English-speaking
- Economically disadvantaged
- Race/ethnicity
- Legacies
- Extenuating circumstances
- Special talents/skills

As mentioned, Maryland universities have autonomy in defining their selection criteria within certain guidelines. Although the above are listed as criteria options by the University System, race/ethnicity is listed by UMCP, but not by Towson. Generally, neither university is very clear on how it handles race in its admission process.

Students' perceptions of the use of race or ethnicity as selection criteria may affect which institutions they consider viable options when making their postsecondary choices. Students were asked whether they think race/ethnicity will affect their chances for admission to UM College Park or Towson University (see Table 10). Students did not relate to the debate on affirmative action: over two-thirds responded that race was either not considered or that they didn't know its effect on admissions to college. Table 10 also shows that the majority (83 percent) of white students did not see affirmative action as an issue and few black students viewed it as advantageous. Twice the number of dual honors students, compared to non-honors students, responded that this social criterion

was not considered. Only a small percentage of African-American students actually thought that their admissions chances increased as a result of their ethnic affiliation. Thus, overall race and ethnicity appears largely irrelevant for admission to the two Maryland schools in the eyes of the sampled students. Affirmative action, so controversial in other states, is a rather low-key issue for these Maryland students.

**Table 10 – Student Perceptions of Effect of Race on Admissions
(Percent Marked)**

	Positive Effect	Negative Effect	Not Considered	Don't Know
Total Student Responses (N=232)	16	7	33	45
African American	19	10	21	49
White	11	6	43	40
Academic Track				
Non-honors	21	11	23	46
Single honors	16	5	37	42
Dual honors	8	5	41	46

Knowledge of Placement Testing Requirements

Postsecondary remediation has become a state and national concern. Many high school students may not be able to enroll in college-level programs, even at open enrollment institutions (typically community colleges with no SAT or minimum high school GPA requirements) without taking a semester or more of remedial course work. Although most postsecondary remediation takes place at community colleges, four year colleges and universities do require certain placement tests and remediation for those who do not pass entrance placement tests in specific subjects (typically mathematics, English and college-level reading). Maryland students are often unaware of the realities of placement tests and their implications (Nunley, 1998).

At UMCP, there are no required placement tests in reading or English. They were discontinued more than five years ago. Placement testing in technological readiness is also not required. However, UMCP does require math placement testing. In Fall 1998, 18 percent of new UMCP freshmen were placed in Remedial Math based on the math placement test scores.

Towson University requires all students who do not meet specified exemption criteria to take placement tests in reading, English, and mathematics. Among 1997-1998 entering Towson students who had completed University System of Maryland requirements, 11 percent required remedial English, 6 percent remedial Reading, and 19 percent remedial Math. For new Towson freshmen who had not completed the University System requirements, the percentages were higher: 18 percent English, 7 percent Reading, and 31 percent Math.

Detailed knowledge of placement requirements and criteria could be particularly useful information for students who have to calculate their chances of advancing through academic programs of various universities. Students were asked to indicate what they thought were the required placement testing subjects at UMCP and Towson (see Table 11).

Table 11 - Students Indicating Placement Test Requirements for UMCP and Towson University (Percent Correct)

Placement Test Subject	UM College Park	Towson University
English	89	87
Math	90	88
Laboratory Science	53	53
Foreign Language	60	59
Advanced Technology	71	70

*N=232, multiple response question

The overwhelming majority (87 percent) were accurate in their indication that Towson requires an English placement test, however, they also indicated similarly (89 percent) that UMCP requires an English placement test, although only math is required. Additionally, half of the students indicated that both UMCP and Towson required placement testing in laboratory science, when neither have such a requirement. Percentages for foreign language and technology were even higher. No placement testing exists in these fields. Thus, students lacked specific knowledge of placement test requirements.

Responses from the focus groups corroborate students' confusion, though some were not completely off-base. For instance, when the discussion turned to placement testing in community colleges, students guessed what criteria decided course placement:

By your SAT scores (AS11-1).

I think they look at what math classes you have taken and then place you in a math class (DS11-2).

Depending on what you get on that (entrance test), depending on how well you do on certain sections, will determine which math class you'll be put in and stuff like that (DS11-1).

When asked about UMCP or Towson, students mused:

Um, I just thought there was some kind of test or something (CS11-2).

I think that at Maryland [UMCP] they make you take a placement exam when you are trying to get in so that they put you in a certain math class (AS11-1).

[It depends on] your plans, like what you want to major in and what you did in high school (CS11-1).

You take the SAT, I think. There's some kind of test that you have to take (CS11-2).

Maybe, like, an entrance exam if you didn't take like, high math. Like if you didn't take an AP exam (DS11-2).

There were no differences by grade level or academic track for this pattern. On the whole, students were aware of the existence of placement tests, particularly in math, but they lacked detailed knowledge in this area.

Knowledge of Selectivity

In recent years, UMCP has become more selective and has been able to improve the academic credentials among its admission pool. As mentioned earlier, from Fall 1988 to Fall 1999, the mean high school GPA of entering freshmen rose from 2.98 to 3.61 and the percent of entrants with SATs of 1400 or over increased from less than 4 percent to 15 percent. Qualitative criteria are also emphasized in making selections.

Towson University has remained fairly non-selective over the years. The academic credentials of students admitted to Towson have remained stable over the past five years. The selection of entrants is based on quantitative factors (SAT/GPA grid) and enrollment targets. The SAT scores of those admitted remain in the middle range.

We inquired about students' perceptions of the two schools in the focus groups and in the survey. When we asked these 11th graders what they knew about UMCP, students provided a variety of responses ranging from "really big" (BS11-2), "too much money" (DS11-2), to "nice party school" (DS11-2). Some of these comments were echoed in more than one focus group, but the most consistent comment was that it is becoming more competitive to gain admission into UMCP.

It's hard to get in there...high SAT scores, high grade point average and all other stuff, they try to make it...um...some kind of national university now." (DS11-1)

It's a lot harder than it used to be I know. It used to be like anyone who wanted to go to Maryland could go to Maryland (DS11-1).

They say it's getting better. It's harder to get into. Yah, it's harder to get into each and every year. (BS11-2).

Well, I heard the SAT (at Maryland) is going up and up each year (BS11-1).

Survey data are similar. Over three-quarters of the surveyed students (77 percent) answered that it had become more difficult to gain admission to UMCP. Parents responded similarly to the same question. Over two-thirds (76 percent) of parents responded that it had become more difficult to gain admission to UMCP.

Students and their parents estimated correctly that UMCP has become more selective. However, almost two-thirds of the students and more than half of the parents also agreed that Towson had become more selective (63 percent and 54 percent respectively). This lack of distinction between UMCP and Towson undergirds the vagueness of students' and parents' knowledge in this area. More typical is this student's comment:

I've heard a lot of the schools in Maryland have gotten harder. It gets harder and harder every year (CS11-1).

In summary, students' and parents' responses to the issue of selectivity may be more indicative of their general anxiety than of solid knowledge about admission criteria.

Exposure to Higher Education

One way of facilitating the connection between high school and college is to provide opportunities for conversations about college and to expose students directly to college campuses. This is especially true for students who grow up in families that have not traditionally attended college (NCES, 1998). Students were asked what types of

exposure to higher education they had experienced since entering high school. They were given a list of five activities, including visiting a college or university. Table 12 indicates student responses to this survey item.

**Table 12 – Exposure to College since Entering High School
(Percent Marked)**

Activities Listed on Survey	Student Responses	
	Yes	
	9 th grade	11 th grade
Visited a college or university	32	63
Participated in varsity athletics	24	54
Took an SAT/ACT test prep course	14	66
Attended a college information workshop or "college night"	8	54

As the figures in Table 12 indicate, few 9th grade students had participated in specified college exposure activities since entering high school compared with the majority of 11th graders. Dual honors students (59 percent) reported visiting a college or university more than single honors (48 percent) and non-honors (34 percent) students in the sample. 9th grade student responses reveal a lack of early exposure to college. While by 11th grade, the majority of students had been involved in some exposure activities, a group of about one-third of respondents among 11th graders was not reached with any of the listed activities by their schools. Level of parent education or income makes no difference in participation rates, but race does: 73 percent of white 11th graders attended SAT preparation workshops compared to 50 percent of African American 11th graders who responded to the survey. Therefore, white students in the 11th grade sample gained more exposure to SAT preparation than African American students.

To better understand the school's role in forging the connection between high school and college, we asked students how often they discussed college admission

requirements with parents, other significant individuals, and school staff. We wanted to know which individuals, especially among school staff, play an important role in this dialogue. Student responses to this question are presented in Table 13.

Table 13 - Frequency of Student Conversations about Admission Requirements with Others by English Class Level (Percent Marked)

Significant others	Many Times		Once or twice		Never	
	Non-honors	Honors*	Non-honors	Honors	Non-honors	Honors
Your parent(s)/ guardian(s)	57	71	34	26	9	4
Your brother or sister	26	25	33	30	42	45
Another relative	17	19	35	41	48	40
Friends/other students	41	52	38	40	20	8
A family friend	22	14	32	42	46	43
A high school counselor	14	14	32	42	54	44
A high school teacher	11	17	42	50	47	33
A high school coach	6	11	20	22	74	67
A college recruiter	6	8	17	24	77	68
A private college counselor	2	2	9	8	89	91

*Honors includes single and dual honors students in this table.

Table 13 illustrates that parents, friends, and siblings were key sources for conversations. Teachers did play a role here, but students' frequency of conversations with them was very low. The same was true for college counselors. Almost half of the responding students had communicated about college with teachers "once or twice," only 14 percent "many times."

In the focus groups, students said that they had some conversations about college in their classrooms, but these conversations were not described as rich, sustained, or consistent. Some teachers were described as frank and informative; others as relishing in

their own college day experiences, many as being silent on the issue. For students in the focus groups, English classes seemed the most important venue for college information. But overall, students clamored that conversations about college in their schools were few and did not provide them with the information they needed to make a good decision on college. Typical is the comment of this student:

Well, yes and no. They only give you 45 minutes worth, and that's not enough really. You don't get a chance to get into detail and stuff like that. (BS11-2)

College counselors played an even lesser role than teachers in students' conversations about college. A lack of counseling time available to students was a recurring theme in the focus group conversations:

Some of my friends' parents, like, made them go (for college counseling) their freshman year so they'd have, like, a relationship with their counselor. [But] there are just too many kids here, so a counselor can't just search after all their students. That's like 400 and some kids (CS11-1).

Even so, students were insistent on their need for individual assistance in their preparation for college, though they recognized that they were not receiving it. One focus group had this to say about the counseling sessions at their school:

It's too general.You don't get, like, specific help, and its hard to find things on the colleges, you know, just general things. (BS11-2).

A critical issue is the time frame in which schools prepare students for college. It has been argued that the critical foundation for college attendance, both in terms of students' attitudes and requisite course-taking, is laid in the late middle school and early high school grades. We wanted to know when, in the perceptions of students, schools began with the college preparation process. On the survey, students were asked when they first received advice from school on the proper courses to take.

Table 14 - Students' First Advice Received on Proper Courses for College (Percent Marked)

First Advice Received	9 th graders (N=120)		11 th graders (N=100)	
	Non-honors	Honors	Non-honors	Honors
8 th grade or earlier	44	62	18	23
9 th grade	27	29	23	40
10 th grade	0	0	30	18
11 th grade	0	0	10	10
I haven't received any advice	29	9	20	8

In looking at Table 14, one could interpret that the 9th graders of today received more advice on what courses to take in high school than the 9th graders of yesterday, especially those placed in 9th grade Honor's English (62 percent). While overall 54 percent of the 11th graders said they had received advice on the proper courses to take in the 8th grade or earlier, overall 82 percent of the 9th graders had received this advice. It is conceivable however, that 11th graders simply did not remember earlier instances, while the 9th graders' memory of middle school was still fresh.

In the focus groups, this issue generated some controversy. For instance, one student suggested, "I'd do it in the tenth, maybe lower than that, like elementary school"(CS11-1). Other students felt that receiving information so early was a futile effort because students are not ready to pay attention. For many 11th graders, it seemed highly unlikely that freshmen would be poised enough to begin their college preparation any earlier than the latter part of the sophomore year or sometime during the junior year.

Like in the 9th grade, you don't really need to think about it in 9th grade.

Well in 9th grade it seems so far ahead, so you don't really care. It's just like, whatever, that's in three years.

Parents and Schools

We saw earlier that students communicated with parents and school personnel in their decision making process, but parents were the more important sources. In this section we relate how parents saw their role in their child's college choice process. Our first question asked parents who, from their point of view, has the primary responsibility in preparing their children for college (see Table 15). In the view of parents, college preparation was a shared responsibility, with schools seen as more responsible for appropriate course taking and families more responsible for the actual application process.

Table 15 – Parent Responses (Percent Marked) if School or Family Responsible for Student College Preparation

Responsibility for child's college preparation (n=224)	Agree Somewhat or Strongly	Disagree Somewhat or Strongly
School primarily responsible for college application preparation	71	25
Family primarily responsible for college application preparation	91	4
School should inform child of course requirements for college	89	7
Family should inform child of course requirements for college	72	21

*9 missing cases

Parents were also asked how often they talked to their children about college preparation topics. The data in Table 16 show that parents talked with their children frequently about college plans, though they more frequently addressed general topics than

the specifics of the process. This perhaps partially explains why children had such information deficits on the specifics of college requirements.

**Table 16 - Parents Responses to College Topics Discussed with their Children
(Percent Marked)**

	Many times	Once or Twice	Never
Discuss plans after high school	82	13	1
Discuss interest in attending college	79	14	3
Discuss specific college requirements	51	36	9
Discuss child's course planning	59	29	8

Parents of honors students were reportedly not much more involved in their child's planning for college than other parents. Only 10-15 percent more parents of students placed in Honor's English reported discussing these topics with their children than non-honors students. There were no significant differences in parental discussion of these topics by race or socioeconomic background (parental education attainment and income). Thus, in terms of parent involvement, the honors students surveyed discussed college with their parents often, but reported parent involvement was not strikingly different for students based on English class level, parent education level, income, or race.

Summary of Findings from Student and Parent Data

Our findings thus far are based on the analysis of the pertinent student and parent survey data collected from 232 students in their 9th and 11th grade English classes in two Maryland jurisdictions during the Spring, 2000 school term. Several key findings emerge

from the data. First, the surveyed Maryland high school students tend to aspire to four-year college attendance outside of Maryland. For almost half of the students UMCP presents an attractive choice. Parents are also interested in these options for their children. These high aspirations are not matched by students' grade point averages or, in all likelihood, by the reality of college choice in Maryland.

Secondly, students and their parents are generally unaware of the specifics of college admissions requirements, recommended high school courses, and selection processes for those universities for which their schools are important feeders. An exception is knowledge about the importance of high school grades and the SAT. With regard to selection and admission criteria, students or their parents cannot clearly distinguish between more selective UMCP and less selective Towson, though general knowledge about different levels of selectivity exists.

Although a sizable number of Maryland high school graduates will require postsecondary remediation in math, reading, or English prior to being admitted into college-level courses, they do not have knowledge of the specific placement test requirements at Towson or UMCP. Overall, their knowledge is fuzzy and incorrect on many points.

Schools' involvement in the college choice process is sketchy and infrequent. Schools do a better job at giving advice about course taking, but are remiss in informing students of the essentials of the admissions process. Parents view planning for college as a shared responsibility of schools and families.

The Role of Schools in Preparing Students for College

The focus of this section is the role of schools in connecting high school students to college. To this end, we inquired about educators' knowledge of college admissions in the state of Maryland, the type of information they share with their students, and the way they define their role in the college preparation process. We saw earlier that students do talk with teachers and counselors about college, but in the students' eyes communication is sketchy and infrequent. Subsequently we will look at quantitative and qualitative differences between two of the four schools to find out if specific school site cultures and service features of the schools make a difference in students' knowledge. Our analysis is based on interviews with 12 teachers at four schools, four counselors and principals, as well as pertinent data from the focus groups.

Communication with Teachers

According to teachers, students showed great interest in talking with their teachers about college. When asked if students came to them with questions, teachers responded: "Yes, they always want to know where I went to school." (B11-2), or: "All the time. I have both 11th and 12th grade classes, and of course both of them are intensely interested in anything they can learn about college." (D11-1). While students' articulated interest in communication seemed a fairly common occurrence, frequency of communication may actually be low as we saw in the previous section. Ninth grade teachers felt that in the lower grade level students asked them questions less frequently than older students did. One teacher claimed that no conversation of college took place in her classes. That

teacher said she avoided conversation about college because she had only been a teacher for three years and did not want to give students the impression that she was new to the profession.

Teachers' Knowledge of the College Admissions Process in Maryland

We found in the previous section that students' knowledge about college was generally fuzzy. Teachers could be a source of information for students if they themselves were knowledgeable about the topic. We inquired in the interviews what teachers knew about admissions policies and procedures, college placement exams, and their former students' performance at the college level. When asked about their knowledge of admissions policies and procedures at the UMCP, Towson and other colleges, teachers responded as follows:

I guess I know what everyone else knows. The approximate SAT scores. The idea that they like to see an active, well-rounded student. (D9-1)

I don't really know that much about College Park. Towson I attended a few years ago. I was a transfer student from another college, and I got a scholarship, so what else, I don't know. (CTE-4)

I know nothing. I'm from Pennsylvania, and I went to college in Pennsylvania, so I know nothing. I could probably guess there would be the same things [as in Pennsylvania] or that the expectations would be a little higher. But to be factual, I don't know anything. (D11-2)

I know that College Park is working to become more competitive, so I've heard that their minimum SAT score is around 1200, and then that varies. I think that if you complete community college in Maryland it's quite easy to transfer. I don't know about GPAs, what the requirements are, but I would say that probably at least a B, maybe higher. Towson I know, it's another school, they became a university. I know that they are looking to become more competitive. I don't know what their minimum scores are. (D11-1)

Most frequently, teachers knew about the importance of the SAT. A few teachers showed some familiarity with the SAT ranges for admissions into UMCP. One teacher

mentioned requirements such as letters of recommendation and essay. Mostly, teachers admitted to be uninformed and were sometimes embarrassed about their lack of knowledge. Only two of the interviewed teachers felt comfortable with their knowledge of admissions requirements. But even they had to pass when asked about specifics. One of those teachers had previously served as a guidance counselor:

I think my knowledge is probably as good as, maybe slightly better than most ninth grade teachers because of my guidance background. But I know there have been some changes, and I know for a fact that it's becoming more challenging to get into the state system than it has been in the past. And my guess is that the standards continue to rise each year, but I don't know that for sure. (CTE-2)

The interviews also touched on the subject of college placement tests.

Considering that we inquired about the two largest public universities in the state for which the schools are primary feeders, information about these tests could be quite useful to teachers in gauging adequate college preparation standards. We found that most teachers were completely uninformed about placement and unaware of the issue of remediation. When asked about freshman knowledge standards, some interviewees reflected back to their own experiences: "I simply remember what I took a thousand years ago." (CTE-3). Another teacher commented: "I've never seen [a placement test], so all of my presumptions are based on my experience with the placement test ten years ago at a state college." (B11-2) One teacher expressed astonishment: "No kidding, every freshman has to take these tests?" (A11-2)

When asked if they received any feedback on whether or not their former students had had success in college, one teacher responded, "No, unfortunately we only hear about that when students come back to say to you, either I'm doing well when compared to everyone else or I'm struggling." (A9-2). Another teacher described the lack of feed-back

this way: "I haven't ever received [information], maybe our 12th grade teachers would. But I haven't received anything." (CTE-1). Though some schools did receive data on students' college acceptance and scholarship awards, most teachers did not receive any formal and systematic feedback on their former students' success in college. One of our interviewees concluded this about the feedback schools received on former students:

I think one of the problems in our educational system is, there is no link once kids graduate from high school. It's as if they aren't our kids anymore, and that is not the case for K-12. There is a scope and a sequence and there are learning activities that are supposed to go on throughout the 12 years. Then they drop off the face of the earth. (D11-2)

According to information gathered in the first phase of this project (see Milton & Schmidlein, 2000), schools are supposed to receive the Student Outcome and Achievement Report (SOAR) data. SOAR data track students' success at the college level by high school attended. These data have the potential to provide systematic feedback to schools, but were not mentioned in any of our interviews. Teachers, on the whole, had no specific information on college admissions policies and procedures and lacked knowledge of how well their former students were performing at the college level.

Information Teachers Provide

In the interviews with teachers we probed to find out the types of conversations teachers engaged in when students asked them about college. While responses varied, most commonly teachers would tell stories and anecdotes about their own college experiences:

I tell them I was assigned Moby Dick on Friday and it was due Monday and that was my weekend. And I do the same with my kids, just two weeks ago, I said okay we finished Huck Finn, it's Wednesday, a paper is due Friday. And that's it for the instruction. That is what will happen. (CTE-3)

I have conversations about things I went through in high school, a lot. Things I went through in college. What difficulties I overcame. What bad habits I had and how they can avoid some of the things I did wrong. (D9-1)

I'm currently working on my master's at Johns Hopkins, so they know that I have obligations with them, and I have told them that I went to University of Maryland as motivators many times because those are two schools that are accessible to these students. (D11-1)

Given that teachers lacked solid and accurate knowledge about the college admission process, this emphasis on anecdotes and stories is not surprising. While students may benefit from teachers' vivid personal experiences, they are also in need of current and detailed knowledge to devise appropriate strategies for their own transition from high school to college. This kind of knowledge was absent from teacher-student communication about college in the schools we studied. Teachers primarily relied on their own college experiences when they provided information to students about college.

Teachers' View of Their Role in Preparing Students for College

Teachers envisioned their role in students' college choice processes as limited, like this 11th grade teacher who said: "I don't sit down and have heart-to-heart conversations with them about what they need to do to be ready for college. That's, more or less, [what] the counselors drone into them." (B11-2). Teachers held students responsible for their own progress and motivation to succeed. Parental guidance was seen as essential: "I think we have got a middle group -- and a lot of public schools are facing the same thing --they really don't have the direction; the parents haven't inspired that in them." (B9-1). Teachers deferred to the authorities when asked how they knew they were doing an adequate college-preparatory job in their classrooms: "Well, I guess, I also see

that as my county's responsibility. I am expected to teach my county's curriculum. My county's curriculum is designed to prepare them for college." (B11-1)

Whereas teachers assigned limited responsibility to themselves when it came to the provision of information (the counselors' task), the adequacy of standards (policy makers' task), and the motivation for college (students' and parents' task), they saw their college-preparatory work primarily expressed in classroom instruction:

I try to explain to them, in my class anyway, with the pace, the tone I set in my classroom, the level of responsibility. Independent responsibility. I don't haggle with them over assignments. I don't keep reminding them over and over when things are due. They have independent things that they have to have done by a completion date. So I think I try to model ethics, study ethics and guidelines that they would have in a university situation. (A11-2)

I teach an AP course which is taught at the college level. When I give them something to do, they know I am challenging them at a higher level than an on-level 11th grade class, and I always tell them it's because I think they need to be more prepared for college, and I am challenging them at a higher level because I think a lot of teachers don't. (A11-1)

Thus, when teachers constructed their role in students' preparation for college, they were primarily classroom instructors. Their lack of detailed knowledge and the informal and sporadic nature of student-teacher interactions about college were not of great concern to them because the college choice process was seen as falling outside their responsibility. Often, our interviews prodded teachers to see the missing link between secondary and higher education as a problem. But first and foremost, in teachers' minds that link needed to be forged by the counseling department. Teachers felt that their job was to set a college preparation tone in the classroom, and then they mostly looked to counselors to help students with the details of transitioning from high school to college.

Counselors

Counselors at the four schools acted as the primary knowledge source for information on college admissions. Often they counseled students one-on-one, sometimes they worked through teachers:

Today is the college fair. Guidance [counseling] came to all my eleventh grade classes and told them about the college fair and gave them permission slips. They do speak to every class and every kid. (A11-1)

Counselors come in frequently to provide college fair information. Counselors come in to encourage them about what looks good to different universities and colleges. (B11-2)

Counselors had a better connection to colleges than teachers. Higher education institutions tended to seek out the college counselors to share timely information.

Counselors felt they were experts in the field of student college choice, such as this counselor:

Well, every year College Park invites our local counselors on campus for a review of what the admissions procedures are. As you might know, the procedures at College Park have been changing very much lately. The students that easily got into College Park in the early part of the nineties aren't getting in now. The ability to get into that University is becoming more and more difficult because their standards are going up. And then the same with Towson. Towson visits us every year, gives us information, and also invites us onto campus. Same with Baltimore County, Eastern Shore. We are well informed by all the Maryland State schools. (C11-2)

The guidance counselors in this study recounted that they would generally begin advising students on college as early as the 9th grade. Counselors also believed it was their job to match student aspirations with actual course taking and preparation: "I say to students that you can't be a 12th grader and decide that you want to go to Duke University and you haven't done the work in grades 9, 10, 11." (CTE-3). Many students

confirmed (see previous section) that they had received advice on course taking, and some of them said they had received counseling quite early in their careers.

Counselors, it seems, held almost a monopoly on college admission preparation in the four schools. As previously mentioned, teachers looked to counselors to provide support to their students through one-on-one counseling, college fairs, and hosting college representatives on campus. Principals, as well, lacked detailed knowledge of policies and procedures related to college admissions and preparation and referred to their counselors as the experts in this field. But all counselors in this study had duties that went beyond college preparation or transition counseling. None of the interviewed counselors spent their entire working hours on college counseling because they were required to work with students on other personal issues as well. In the four schools we studied, counselors were assigned a portion of the student body as their caseload. One school had six counselors to serve 1800 students, so each counselor was responsible for 300 students. Another school had five counselors for 1700 students. Yet, even with these heavy caseloads and multiple responsibilities, guidance counselors were the only ones at their schools to provide information to students, parents, and teachers and to serve as the primary contact for college representatives and recruiters. It is no wonder that about half of the surveyed students reported no communication with their counselors on college admission.

In summary, teachers in the four schools studied in this research tended to be sought out by students interested in information about college. Teachers lacked a solid knowledge base on admissions and placement. The information they shared was often anecdotal and based on teachers' own college days. Interviewed teachers did not see this

state of affairs as a great problem as they constructed for themselves a very limited role in preparing students for college. Counselors were the primary service providers, but their case overload made on-going contact with students difficult.

As a result, students' information on the college choice process was often based on unfounded information. During each of the focus group sessions students frequently answered our knowledge questions with second hand information or hearsay. Usually it was information they had learned from friends. Principals and teachers also provided information based on what they had heard from someone else as opposed to primary information sources. As mentioned previously, teachers lacked formal contact with colleges and universities that could provide them with the type of credible information they could relay to their students on issues of college admissions and attendance, so they too relied on hearsay.

Principals, who, in discussing college preparation, made no mention of teacher involvement in this process, verified the role of counselors as knowledge brokers. Counselors were the primary subjects in these conversations, as principals discussed the process by which their students were prepared for college. While they seemed to be comfortable with the level of attention their schools were giving to college preparation, all four principals also felt that that they believed their counselors' duties were either overly broad in scope or they had exceedingly heavy caseloads, or both.

I think guidance counseling is such a broad job. And there is so much involved. I mean there's everything from, 'I'm advising you to take this kind of class' to helping you get ready for college. But there are also all the personal things, if the kids have the confidence to talk about the personal things. 'You know, I'm having this issue and that issue,' whether it's my boyfriend or at home or if there are medical issues, or whatever there is, a death in the family, whatever.

...the [county school district] ratio is one counselor for every 270 students, which means that every counselor has an unbelievable workload. An almost undoable workload.(A-A).

Other principals echoed the issues surrounding counselors' workloads, the affect on college counseling, and the splintering of their duties.

They divide the students alphabetically here. And the reason they do it alphabetically by grade level is because we have 90 percent of our students going to college. A single counselor dealing with the 12th grade, that's a death wish. You couldn't possibly handle all those college applications. (B-A)

And their responsibility is to work with those 300 kids for the four years that they're here at school. So, they start with the 9th grade and look at their programs and the do everything from helping them select courses to actually counseling about family problems and everything else. So it's a catch-all type of situation. (D-C)

One school dealt with the counselors' overload by postponing college preparation counseling to the summer months. The school started a summer program during which counselors would reach out to families directly:

...we were finding that so many kids are sliding through the cracks because they just don't know and our counselors end up spending most of their time dealing with the he/said, she/said and other [type] crises that at times, they don't have the opportunity to provide our students with the real focused effort that will help them with that transition from here to the work world or to higher education. (0272)

While principals expressed concern that the job of counselor was too broad and that student caseloads were unmanageable, they nevertheless defended their schools' record in preparing students for college by pointing to a number of programs geared to ease the transition from high school to college. Principals were oblivious to students' complaints about lack of communication and teachers' lack of detailed knowledge and concern.

Programs

All schools have developed formal or informal bridge programs that help students get acquainted with college. The principal at school D described his school's efforts in this way:

One of my counselors, Mr. X, has spent a lot of time going to each 11th grade English class so he could try and touch all of the students there, and he came for two days. So he spent three hours with them telling them all the things that they need to have in mind for the next year. (D11-1)

The counselor at School D also mentioned that the Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search programs were very visible in the school. These programs are aimed at assisting low-income and minority youth in gaining access to college. College fairs were mentioned as well:

We're getting the eleventh graders ready for the [county school district] college fair, which is coming up in late May, and we work very closely with the 11th graders in giving them hints about how to accumulate a list of colleges they want to visit, etc... (A-C)

School A also developed ties with the local community college:

[The local community college] every year gives us a lot of help in, like for instance just yesterday 56 of our seniors took the Accuplacer test for [the local community] College, which is, they visited they campus, our campus here, and these 56 students took placement tests for both English and Mathematics on a computer in our computer lab, and so these students are probably headed for [the local community] College next year. (A-C).

School D, as well, stressed their connection to a local community college. In School B, face-to-face interaction between counselor and student was organized through a pull-out program:

Well, we began, as part of the program, we do an extensive college orientation, I guess you want to call it, or just a preparation with the career center and with counselors. There are a number of times that the counselors pull the students out of class during their senior year and also during their junior year and do all the

college searches and all that kind of thing, and we have made one part of our preparation dealing specifically with that fear of moving on. (B11-2)

Occasionally teachers took the initiative for a self-designed, informal bridge program, such as this teacher: "I have a five-week every Friday session with one of the guidance counselors, who comes in and talks to my honors kids about the whole process."

As for sustained partnerships between schools and postsecondary institutions, community colleges were much more visible in schools than the four-year institutions. But the four-year institutions did provide services and programs to area high schools. The most noted contacts focused on providing admissions information to counselors. But other contacts established through summer programs, workshops, etc. existed as well, though these were not described as intense or institutionalized.

Well, we send our kids on the Lit[erature] Mag[azine] to a training, the University of Maryland sponsors during the summer, in Pagemaker and Photoshop. So the kids go to a five-day camp there. There are contests at the University of Maryland that we'll enter their writing in, but I don't speak to any professionals there. (A 11-1)

I know the zoology department [at University of Maryland], for example, was doing a program, an outreach program... Unfortunately, they just lost their funding for it. I just got a letter last week saying they were canceling the program. (B-A).

School A and B are located near UMCP and developed these contacts with their neighboring university. Likewise, School D developed a relationship with Johns Hopkins University, a university relatively close to the high school.

School Differences

Of the four schools selected for this study, two of the schools—Schools C and D—revealed considerable contrasts. The schools are located in fairly close proximity to each other and share the same district administration. According to our inquiries, both schools receive similar resources from their district for counseling and college preparation. The schools, however, serve very different student populations. School C serves a largely upper-middle class, suburban, and white student population; and School D, a largely African American, lower to middle income student population. According to data reported by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), 75 percent of School C’s students go to college. For School D, this proportion is 54 percent.

We wanted to know whether school differences influenced the way educators and students construct the link between high school and college. We looked at educators’ attitudes, the schools’ college-preparatory services, and the students’ general college admissions knowledge and aspirations. The following sections we present findings on these topics between the most contrasting schools, Schools C and D.

Teachers and Counselors on Student College Attendance

Educators in Schools C and D both contended that their schools prepare students for college and that they send a majority of their students on to postsecondary education. But the belief in the college-preparatory mission was more strongly developed among teachers from School C. Teachers from that school tended to overestimate the percentage of students going to college:

You probably know [that] better than I, 80 or 90 something percent go somewhere. (CTE-3)

Well, I have always heard that we had a 95 percent rate of kids that go to college. (CTE-4)

School D teachers, by contrast, were more cautious and tended to underestimate the proportion of students from their school going to college:

I'd say between 40 to 60 percent. (D9-2)

In any kind of college, maybe 50 to 60 percent I would say at least enroll in a community college, I would hope.

Thus, School C teachers assumed more strongly that college was in their students' educational futures, whereas teachers at School D were not as sure that their students would attend college.

Why Some Students Go to College and Some Do Not

We asked staff at both schools about the main reasons why some students are college bound and others don't seem to be. While interviewees at both schools pointed to families and parents as key to student college-going behavior, teachers and counselors at the two schools focused on the issue in very different ways. Staff at School C focused on student academic motivation and students' beliefs in the value of college:

[College-bound students] buy into learning and the commitment and what this will do for me. [It is] those [students] who don't say: "What do I need algebra for?" "What do I need to know Comp [English Composition] stuff for." And there is a lot of self-motivation for kids who [have] heard it all their lives, the academic kids. "You do this, you get this reward." (CTE-3)

The kids are very focused. (CTE-1)

It's been my experience that the college-bound student is self-disciplined and largely self-motivated. There is a focus...They either truly believe, or they've been brainwashed into believing, that this is the right path for them. They bought into it. (CTE-2)

Responses from School D teachers to this question were quite different:

I think at this age they can't possibly see that they need college for their future. I think it's related to the area that they live in and the culture and what they see other people doing. And it may be easier for them to think they can get a nice paying job and support themselves and a family. (D9-2)

Other reasons, conveying doubt in similar ways, were given:

Parental involvement, history of the family, their own concept of what college is and what it will provide for them. (D11-2)

I don't think that they're really at a point where they can conceive true money and how much they would be making with a degree instead of not having a degree. (D9-2).

Thus, for School C teachers students are destined to go to college as a result of ingrained parental and self-adopted expectations that are rooted in broader cultural values, whereas School D teachers discussed this issue on utilitarian grounds, i.e. in terms of the economic benefits a college education may entail.

College Destination

Teachers from Schools C and D differed with respect to the institutions they envisioned their students attending. When asked where they expected their students to go after graduation, School D teachers said:

I wouldn't assume they go. (D9-2)

Morgan...or Coppin. [HBCUs in Maryland] (D9-1)

I found a lot of students at [School D] are very interested in traditionally black colleges like Morgan and Coppin, and some out-of-state schools like Howard or Hampton. (D11-1)

Most of them go to historically black colleges. (D11-2)

While most of the teachers at School D envisioned their students to go to HBCUs, none of the staff at School C mentioned HBCUs. Out of state colleges were the most conspicuous option envisioned by School C teachers whom we interviewed:

They go everywhere. That, I think, is representative of the economics of who can afford to look at some very pricey upper-end schools. (CTE-2)

Very, very many of them go out of state. (CTE-3)

My GT (Gifted and Talented) students seem to go out of state. As I said, this is an unusual year where it seems like a lot of them really have opted for Maryland. (CTE-1)

It's not unusual for me to write five or six letters of recommendations to schools [like] Harvard and Duke and Princeton and a lot of the Ivies. (CTE-1)

Students at School D were said to be more likely to attend HBCUs, while students at School C were said to be more likely to go out of state and to expensive private schools to attend college.

Schools' Contact with the State's Flagship University

The two schools differed quite markedly in the way they maintained contact with the state's flagship institution, the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP). Essentially, School D had no formal relationship with UMCP and maintained no communication with this institution. When asked if contact and interaction was maintained with UMCP the counselor we interviewed responded, "College Park? No." (D-C). Another teacher responded with a curt, "None" (D11-2). A third teacher gave the following explanation:

I wouldn't say that there's very much [interaction], at least from this school as far as I know, and that may just have to do with proximity. (D11-1)

School C is in the same school district as School D and approximately the same distance from UMCP, but seemed to maintain a very different relationship with the university. When we asked the counselor at School C if the school received information from UMCP, he said:

Oh yes, yes. In fact right here, I had a call today [from a parent], “My child got into scholars [program at UMCP], we want honors [program at UMCP], why’d that happen... Since College Park is so popular, I have it right in front of me, so I can say, “Well, the standard for scholars was...” and I give the SAT range, the GPA [for] honors. (C-C)

According to interviewed School C educators the school maintained a fairly close relationship to UMCP despite the fact that many School C students were interested in out-of-state college attendance. Conversely, for School D interviewees, who placed emphasis on historically black colleges, UMCP was not a major consideration.

Summary

Schools C and D differed in teacher and counselor views and attitudes toward the number of their graduates who would go on to college. School C teachers believed that they had a college bound population of students that would attend some of the best schools. This perception led them to overestimate the number of students that did go on to college. This was a distinct contrast to the views of the counselor and teachers interviewed at School D. They were not always sure that their students would go to college, tended to underestimate the number that did go on, but they still maintained hope that the majority would go on to some sort of post high school training.

Teachers and counselors at Schools C and D also took different views of why some students go on to college and others do not. Teachers at School C focused on the values and beliefs of students and how that affects academic motivation, while teachers at School D focused

on their students' need for knowledge related to practical and economic benefits involved with gaining a college education.

Finally, teachers and counselors differed in their perceptions of the types of schools their students would attend. Teachers at School D thought that most of their students who would continue on to college would attend HBCUs. Teachers at School C thought most of their graduates with college aspirations would go out of state. School C also maintained strong contacts with UMCP while school D seemed to maintain no ties with the institution at all.

Students on College Attendance

So far, the analysis of differences between Schools C and D has shown that the two schools, apart from being different in terms of racial composition and socio-economic status of their student population, also differ with regard to educators' beliefs about their students' postsecondary career paths and in the services the schools offer to their students. In this section we show how these differences are reflected in students' attitudes and knowledge about the college selection process. This does not imply that one is caused by the other. In all likelihood, what schools do and what students believe is a result of mutual adaptation between educators and students. That is, the schools tap into the perceived traditions and interests of their students and communities, in the process reinforcing established patterns in students' knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes.

We began this report with an analysis of students' aspirations for postsecondary education, their knowledge of tuition costs, selection criteria, and placement procedures. Additionally, we looked at college exposure activities and communication patterns that might provide some explanation for differences in students' knowledge and attitudes. In the following

section, we will revisit this analysis with an emphasis on the differences between Schools C and D.

Aspirations for College Attendance

In considering the different profiles of the two schools, it is quite plausible that postsecondary aspirations would differ between students from the two schools. Table 17 shows that student aspirations were, in fact, higher among respondents from School C compared to School D, as evidenced by larger percentages of students from School C indicating an interest in high-status postsecondary options. But the School D students' aspirations were fundamentally the same. In both groups, four-year universities outside the state, followed by UMCP, were the most frequent postsecondary choices. A higher percentage of School D students—compared to School C—opted for a military academy. Slight differences notwithstanding, percentages for two-year community colleges and for the less selective Towson were very similar. Both School C and D students found these institutions less desirable. Thus, while students from School C exhibited a stronger interest in high-status choices, patterns were similar for both schools.

**Table 17 - Options considered by students after High School
(Percent Marked)**

Postsecondary Options	School C	School D
A four-year college or university outside of Maryland	68	42
University of Maryland College Park	50	26
A four-year private college or university within Maryland	43	18
Historically black college or university	2	28
Towson University	37	20
A two-year community or junior	5	12
A technical/trade school (e.g. Lincoln Tech)	8	6
A U.S. military academy	7	8
I haven't considered any schools	8	12

Interviews with students revealed that both schools have students with high aspirations for their educational futures. Students also verified some of the projections of their teachers and counselors in that some students at School C mentioned private schools they were interested in and some students at School D mentioned attending HBCUs. This was supported by the data, in that 28 percent of students at School D selected HBCUs while only 2 percent of students at School C did so.

Attitudes towards UMCP and HBCUs divided students from the two schools. Students at School C talked about the quality of UMCP, and the fact that it is a popular school with their friends. Some of their comments about UMCP are as follows:

A lot of people have siblings who go there. My brother's going there next year. (CS11-2)

...so, like people that, like, didn't do that good in high school, they say don't go to UMBC, but if they're a little better than others, they go to College Park.(CS11-1)

I know people in school very frequently talk about going up to College Park. (CS11-2)

The students at school D had comments that contrasted with the more positive comments of School C students. They talked about the undesirable traits of UMCP, mentioning that the campus was too large, too far, too expensive, and a party school:

...They [someone this student knows] went to College Park for a year and they weren't getting any work done because all they did was party. (DS11-2)

Students at School D displayed a strong familiarity with Morgan State University—an HBCU.

When asked if students at School D had heard anything about Morgan, they responded:

Yeah, everybody! (DS11-1)

There are a lot of people from around here that go to school there. (DS11-1)

It is [school D] all over again. (DS11-2)

It’s mainly a Black college so its [School D] because we have like 20 people that are not Black in this school, so... (DS11-2)

Most students at School C had never heard of Morgan specifically and seemed to know little about HBCUs in general. One African American student at School C responded this way, “I heard a lot about it in the city, but not around here” (CS11-1). Not unlike their teachers, principal, and counselor, students made almost no mention of HBCUs. Few students at School C had even heard about them. Students’ responses corresponded with educators’ responses.

Knowledge

As was mentioned above, accurate information about tuition costs enhances a student’s ability to make realistic plans for college. Overestimation of costs may deter students from pursuing options that are actually within their reach. This is a particularly salient concern for students from socio-economically lower social strata. This could be an area where schools can easily provide students with the right information. Students at Schools C and D differed in their knowledge of college tuition costs. Though neither of the groups was very accurate in their estimates, students from School D overestimated costs in larger proportions in all three categories.

Table 18 - Knowledge of Yearly Tuition Costs

Estimate Comparison Actual Costs	Two Year College			Four Year Institutions				
	Student Estimates	Community College		Student Estimates	UM College Park		Towson University	
Below Target	Less than \$2,000	Sch C	Sch D	Less than \$4,000	Sch C	Sch D	Sch C	Sch D
			32		22		5	14
On Target	\$2,001- \$3,000	13	8	\$4,001- \$5,000	10	4	18	0
Above Target	\$3,000- \$7,000	23	10	\$5,000- \$9,000	30	4	22	8
Far Above Target	Greater Than \$7,000	32	60	Greater Than \$9,000	55	78	52	80

*Sch=high school

We saw that in all four schools that knowledge of college course requirements were fuzzy, but the comparison between Schools C and D reveals an interesting pattern. Students from School C tended to be more accurate or overestimated course requirements while students from the majority African-American School D tended to be either less accurate or underestimate course requirements. Here, School D educators would have to fill a knowledge deficit.

Table 19 - Student Estimates of High School Requirements for College Admission (Percent Marked)

UMCP/Towson Requirement	% of Student Estimates Below Target				% of Student Estimates on Target				% of Student Estimates Above Target			
	UMCP		Towson		UMCP		Towson		UMCP		Towson	
	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D
Schools	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D
Four years of English	9	40	11	25	91	54	88	67	0	7	2	9
Three Years of Mathematics	2	22	2	16	53	41	59	32	45	37	39	52
Three years of history or social science	5	35	9	31	57	33	57	29	38	33	36	40
Two years of Laboratory science	4	20	4	20	23	22	25	24	73	59	72	55
Two years of a foreign language	5	20	7	24	69	57	74	51	26	24	19	24

Students at Schools C and D gave fairly similar responses on questions related to the importance of individual selection criteria. One college selection criterion on the importance of which students at these schools did not agree was senior year grades. Students at School D believed that senior year grades were the single most important or at least a very important component of the selection criteria at both UMCP and Towson. Conversely, the majority of students at School C felt that senior year grades were of moderate or minor importance (see Table 20). Because admissions decisions are, most often, made prior to the completion of the senior year of high school, students who believe the grades from the last year of high school will give them a boost in the competition for admissions are ill informed.

Table 20 - Student Responses to Importance of Selection Criteria

Selection Criteria Listed on Survey	Single Most/Very Important Factor				Moderately Important/Minor				Not Considered			
	UMCP		Towson		UMCP		Towson		UMCP		Towson	
	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D	C	D
High school grades	91	96	81	92	9	4	19	9	0	0	0	0
Senior year grades	57	77	53	81	43	21	47	17	0	2	0	2
SAT-I or ACT score	85	81	83	83	16	11	17	13	0	9	0	4
Geographic residence	3	15	5	23	70	68	67	56	27	17	28	21
Exceptional talent	55	48	42	53	44	50	56	40	2	2	3	7
Application essay	66	74	64	67	34	24	36	29	0	2	0	4
Academic reputation of high school	25	36	40	38	46	37	47	49	19	17	14	13
Involvement in volunteer work	25	35	25	45	68	51	67	45	7	15	9	11
Your rank in graduating class	46	59	45	60	49	35	50	37	5	7	5	4
Involvement in extra-curricular activities	49	48	43	45	48	46	55	49	3	7	2	6
Number of college prep courses completed	50	45	57	53	48	47	40	40	2	9	3	6
Ability to pay tuition	41	75	41	63	60	21	55	35	0	4	3	2
Letters of recommendation	58	60	50	60	39	38	45	39	3	2	5	2
First generation college student	11	16	11	22	45	48	50	49	44	37	40	30
First generation in family to speak English	4	19	9	24	37	33	40	37	59	49	52	40
How much money your family has	23	34	26	32	51	45	50	51	25	21	24	17
Parents or siblings went to UMCP	10	13	13	24	49	43	48	32	41	45	40	45
Racial/ethnic background	7	23	9	30	40	36	40	26	53	40	52	45

Ability to pay tuition and consideration of race are two points on which student populations from the two differed. More School D students thought that money mattered and that race was a criterion of selection, though as to the latter, most students from both schools believed it was irrelevant. Interestingly, in the sample from the predominantly white school, ten percent of the respondents thought that race could have a negative effect on college admission while no student at the predominantly black School D thought so. These differences notwithstanding, views on the role of race in college admission did not divide students from these two schools, one predominantly white, and one black.

Table 21 - Student Perceptions of Effect of Race on Admissions (Percent Marked)

	Positive Effect	Negative Effect	Not Considered	Don't Know
School C	11	2	46	42
School D	14	11	18	57

In summary, students from School D tended to mark high-status postsecondary choices with less frequency, be more undecided on the type of institution they would attend, overestimate the cost of tuition, and be more unclear about admission criteria.

Exposure to Higher Education

In contrast to knowledge deficits of students attending the predominantly African-American school, School D was doing a better job at providing services to students if the four activities listed in Table 23 are any indication. Higher percentages of students were involved in college exposure activities in the majority African-American school compared to the majority white school. Thus, if one assumes similar resources for both schools, School D actually reached more students, but this was not sufficient to compensate for existing knowledge deficits. These

numbers for School D are remarkable given the overall lesser exposure of African American 11th graders (see p. 32).

Table 23 - Student Exposure to College since Entering High School

Activities Listed on Survey	Student Responses	
	School C	School D
Visited a college or university	50	48
Participated in varsity athletics	35	32
Took an SAT/ACT test prep course	29	41
Attended a college information workshop or "college night"	29	34

Table 24 corroborates this picture. Students from School D were more likely to have spoken with their teachers about college than students from School C. Teachers in School D did make themselves available as frequent communication partners to about a quarter of the sampled students, but School D students were also more likely to have had no contact with teachers. Perhaps in School D, teachers focused their time and energy on the group of college-going students while neglecting others. As was previously mentioned, School D instituted a summer program, aimed at getting teachers out to meet with students and their families to discuss the college preparation process, that may have borne fruit, though it could not compensate for the information needs of School D students.

Table 24 - Frequency of Student Conversations about Admission Requirements with Others by School. (Percent Marked).

	Many Times		Once or Twice		Never	
	School C	School D	School C	School D	School C	School D
Your parent(s)/ guardian(s)	66	64	31	28	3	8
Your brother or your sister	9	8	41	34	51	58
Another relative	21	26	33	34	47	40
Friends/other students	53	60	36	28	12	12
A family friend	12	34	41	36	48	30
A high school counselor	9	8	41	34	51	58
A high school teacher	12	26	61	42	27	32
A high school coach	12	15	24	17	64	69
A college recruiter	9	12	20	26	71	62
A private college counselor	0	6	5	10	95	84

Student focus groups shed more light on general resource disparities between the two groups of students. A significant contrast between the two schools surfaced in the analysis of the 11th grade honors class focus groups. Students at School C viewed strategizing for college more as an affair of the family whereas students at School D indicated a reliance on their school's curriculum for adequate college preparation. A School C student commented:

I had my first [college counseling session] like the beginning, probably like the middle of this year. My mom started getting on me, so I made an appointment. And now I feel like I know a lot more. (CS11-2)

The assistance that students at School C received from their family in preparing, and strategizing about preparing for college is repeated in many comments, such as the following:

Some of my friends parents, like, made them go [for college counseling] their freshman year so they'd have, like, a relationship with their counselor. There are just too many kids here, so a counselor can't just search after all their students. That's like 400 and some kids. (CS11-2)

Students at School D, as mentioned above, seemed to rely more heavily on the school, its curriculum and the resources that the school provided. They seemed to have less access to information and resources outside of the school environment. One student described how she felt she was prepared for college:

Being in this class. We are learning more and more everyday... And I think she (the teacher) is preparing us by giving us 16 assignments, due all at one time... so you have to prioritize. So we are learning in this class. (DS11-2)

When asked about the best preparation for college, another student in the School D honors focus group voiced a similar emphasis on her experience in the school's honors tracks:

I think the biomedical or the communications program [prepares you for college], because in biomedical we have to take eight credits in science and, like, a lot of math. So it like prepares you because you double up and you're not taking all these stupid courses such as... (DS11-2)

Similarly, when asked about adequate preparation for college, students at School D spoke more about the skills and knowledge they gained from their high school, School C students referred more to knowledge they gained from friends or siblings that gave them a glimpse of what to expect in college:

My brother said that college is gonna' be, like, so hard. There is almost no way to prepare for until you are actually going through it for a little bit. (CS11-2)

Focus group discussions revealed that friends played a different role for students from School C compared to School D. We saw this divergence primarily among honors students. When asked if they discussed college at school, honors students at School C overwhelmingly affirmed that they often discussed school with a wide circle of friends. Conversely, honors students at School D said that their discussions of college were restricted to a small circle of fellow honors students:

Yeah, a lot of people that are in standard classes, they don't really care about college, all they really care about are material things. (DS11-2)

They think it is real easy to get paid high salaries like \$5.15 an hour, or whatever they think is high, just to get by. But I don't think they know [about] careers. (DS11-2)

But not only do honors students from School C talked to a wide circle of friends, they could also count on weighty parental involvement. Honors students at School C said that they would make a decision on their postsecondary plans with the assistance of their parents. By contrast, honors students from School D voiced in the focus groups that making college attendance decisions would be left up to them and would be their own choice. In this case, students from School D would have to rely more heavily on the information received from school. Unfortunately, although exposure to college and communication about college choice was a more frequent occurrence for School D students as compared to School C, many information needs were still unmet.

Summary

Of the four schools that took part in this study, Schools C and D had the most noticeable differences with regard to students' aspirations for, and knowledge of, college admission. Teachers and counselors at the two schools differed as well. Teachers at School C were confident that their students would go on to college—and even overestimated the rate at which they did so—and they projected that they would primarily go to private colleges and/or colleges outside of the state of Maryland. Teachers at School D had less confidence that their students would go on to college.

Another area where these two schools differed was their relationship with UMCP. While counselors and teachers at School D did not maintain any formal connections to UMCP and

students showed less enthusiasm for attending this university, the counselor at School C definitely had a strong tie to the institution and, correspondingly, the students at School C spoke highly of the school, its students and its programs.

The counselor and teachers at School D did have a good knowledge base on Morgan and other HBCUs. Students at School D had a good knowledge base on Morgan and other HBCUs as well. This was a definite contrast to the counselor and teachers at School C, who never mentioned HBCUs once. Similarly, the students at School C showed very little knowledge or interest in HBCUs. Student knowledge and attitudes corresponded to educator attitudes and knowledge. Students' knowledge in the predominantly African-American school was less accurate compared to the overwhelmingly white school, but their exposure to college through planned activities of the school and through communication was greater. School D seemed to have provided more services, but the needs of the students for help from the school outpaced these school efforts.

Summary

Our analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from students and educators will be available in January 2003, as part of the Bridge Project's policy report. For more information, please contact Andrea Venezia or Julie Slama at 650-723-7724.

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