

A GUIDE FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN PARENTS

# How to Help Your Child Prepare for College and Career



The Education Trust

## THIS GUIDE SHOWS YOU

- ▶ Why your child needs to prepare for college and a career
- ▶ How to tell if your child's school has college-ready academic standards
- ▶ The special hurdles facing African-American students
- ▶ How to be an effective advocate for your child.

The adolescent years often bring stormy weather for teens and parents alike. When you're arguing over grades, dates, chores, or simple respect, it's easy to lose sight of long-term goals that could secure your child's future. But now's the time to plan for success.

Just as President Obama has set a goal of returning America to world leadership in college attendance, you and your family need to focus squarely on the road to opportunity for your child: a rigorous high school academic program that leads not just to college admission but to college success as well.

Because equality for our kids remains a work in progress, African-American parents must be prepared to stand up for their child's right to a good education. And that means helping them get the classes they need now for success beyond high school.

## HELP YOUR CHILD PREPARE FOR COLLEGE AND A CAREER

**Consider this:** In 1950, 60 percent of jobs were filled by unskilled workers, but by 2005, just 14 percent of jobs fell into this category. Today, even fewer jobs exist for people without education beyond high school. What's more, many entry-level jobs that don't require a college degree require the same skills all colleges require—an ability to speak and write clearly—and many occupations that may not require a bachelor's degree nevertheless demand high-level math and science skills.

For example, plumbers and construction workers nowadays need four or five years of apprenticeship or training. They need to be able to understand complex technical manuals and solve problems that often involve applying skills in mathematics, physics, or statistics.

College graduates have access to many more jobs and are less likely to be unemployed than those with a high school diploma. Young people with college degrees are more likely to get a job with such benefits as health insurance, a retirement fund, paid vacations, and disability insurance. And according to the latest Census Bureau data, college grads on average earn far more annually as well:

- College diploma: \$56,788
- High school diploma: \$31,071
- No high school diploma: \$20,873

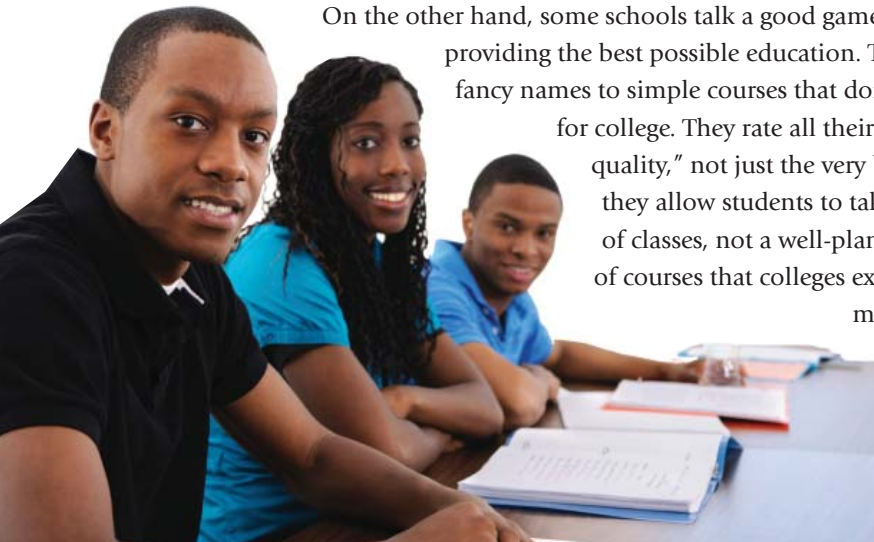
Over a lifetime, the difference in salary between a high school graduate and a college graduate amounts to nearly \$1 million. So it just makes good sense to help your child prepare now for college and a career.

## IS YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL FOCUSED ON SUCCESS BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL?

Today, many schools have exactly the right goal: educating all students for college and a career. These schools have high expectations. They hire the best teachers they can find. They've developed rigorous curricula and offer demanding courses. And teachers give students challenging assignments. No one makes excuses for low achievement; instead, principals and teachers work hard to give each student what he or she needs to succeed.

On the other hand, some schools talk a good game but are not really providing the best possible education. These schools give fancy names to simple courses that don't prepare kids for college. They rate all their teachers "high quality," not just the very best ones. And they allow students to take a hodgepodge of classes, not a well-planned sequence of courses that colleges expect students to master.

No matter where you live,



you need to know the courses that can help your child get into college—and meet academic expectations once they enroll. Some states require all students to take college-prep courses to graduate, but many have mismatching requirements for high school graduation and college admission.

Remember, research clearly shows that the best predictor of college success is a rigorous high school program of study. So as you help your child explore options for college, you might find the college’s catalogue or Web site lists courses like this:

<b>Content Area</b>	<b>Common courses for college admission and success</b>
English (4)	Four years of English
Math (4)	Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, and high-level math in 12th grade
Science (3)	At least three years with labs (typical courses include Biology, Chemistry, Physics)
Social Studies (3)	Typical courses include World History, American History, Civics, Economics
World Language (2)	At least two years of a second language in sequence (i.e., Spanish 1, Spanish 2)

Speak with your child’s principal and teachers to find out whether the school really offers a college and career-ready curriculum. And make sure your child enrolls in the required classes and makes steady progress in earning the right credits needed to get into college—and succeed once there.

## **AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS FACE SOME TOUGH CHALLENGES**

Given lingering racism in this country, you won’t be surprised to learn this: African-American students are much less likely than white students to have the most qualified teachers—the ones with the most experience and greatest expertise in the subject matter.

And many African-American students go to schools that do not even offer some of the high-level courses necessary for admission to the best colleges. This is a terrible injustice. The tragic consequence is that African-American graduates are nearly half as likely to finish high school with a rigorous academic diploma as white students.

The best schools encourage all students to aspire to the most challenging courses. Then they provide plenty of academic support for those struggling with assignments, and they don’t lower standards. This support includes concentrated help on specific skill sets during the school day and extended-day options.

## **HOW YOU CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD**

Until every school gives all students an education that prepares them for college and a career, African-American parents will have to fight for their children’s future, class by class, teacher by teacher, and school by school. Your child deserves nothing less.

A strong high school education is a legacy that lasts, a gift that can propel your child on a journey of independence. When equipped with the learning today’s world demands, our young people can begin to truly live their dreams.



# HOW YOU CAN HELP IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

## Set clear expectations

- Let your child know you expect him or her to go to college—nothing less.

## Be an advocate at school

- **Meet with your child's teachers and counselor.** Together, map a course of study that prepares your child for college. Ask to see your child's schedule and transcript to be sure your child is taking college-prep courses, including honors, Advanced Placement, and dual enrollment if available. It is never too early to plan for college—as early as middle school—and it is important to let the school know you expect your child to attend college.
- **Get a copy of the state academic standards for each subject,** and make sure you know what your child should be learning. Look at your child's homework and ask for a syllabus or outline of the work your child will receive during the year. If you're alarmed after comparing the state standards with the syllabus or outline or the homework, discuss your concerns with the teacher and principal. For more information, see our homework guide at [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org).
- If your child struggles in a specific subject, **ask the teacher or principal about a plan to help your child learn.** (Beware if they lack a plan or tell you not to worry.) Insist your child receive appropriate extra help through tutoring, after-school support, and lunch-time support—whatever it takes.
- **Check with the principal to find out whether your child's teachers are certified** to teach a specific subject and their number of years of experience. If you're dissatisfied, ask for a different teacher.
- **Ask the principal for data** to find out how the school's African-American students score on tests, how many graduate, and how many go on to college. If your child's school is doing poorly, reach out to other parents and express your concerns collectively.

## Be an advocate at home

- **Find out the high school course requirements** for competitive four-year colleges that interest you and your teenager. Check the admissions page on the college's Web site for this information as well as [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org). And find out whether your state requires any extra courses for graduation (such as health, physical education, and art).
- **Learn all you can about college financial aid.** Students and parents often overestimate the costs and underestimate the amount of available financial aid. Use the FAFSA4caster to receive an early estimate of how much federal student aid your child is eligible for: <https://fafsa4caster.ed.gov>.
- **Find out which colleges offer your child the best chances of success.** Visit College Results Online, [www.collegeresults.org](http://www.collegeresults.org), to compare different colleges' graduation rates and to find those with a strong track record of graduating African-American students.
- **Find outside help to navigate the college admissions process.** Many libraries, community centers, and colleges themselves offer help to students and parents, including help filling out college application and financial aid forms.



**BECOME AN INVOLVED PARENT.  
YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR YOUR CHILD.**

**ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST**

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside educators, parents, policymakers, and community and business leaders across the country to help transform schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas. Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people—especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families—to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.

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