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## College Access for Prospective First-generation High School Students: Parent Perceptions

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# College Access for Prospective First-generation High School Students: Parent Perceptions



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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative interview study examined how parents of potential college-going first-generation students in one high school perceive and experience their access to resources and knowledge that would allow them to support their adolescents' successful entrance into postsecondary institutions. The study found that the parents believe that high schools will help their children with college but that they underutilize the resources available and lack important social capital needed to help their students succeed.

**Keywords:** college access, first generation, parent perspectives, high school, social capital, education

Research continues to show the long-term financial benefit of obtaining a college education, whether it is a 2-year associate degree or a 4-year bachelor's degree (Abel & Deitz, 2014). Data collected between 1970 and 2013 has shown that people obtaining a bachelor's degree earn, on average, 56% more than people obtaining only a high school diploma. Likewise, people earning an associate degree will earn 21% more than people with a high school diploma (Abel & Dietz, 2014).

The social and economic mobility that a college education can offer is a core motivation for first-generation (FG) college students who enroll in and complete college (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). However, FG

students are less likely to obtain a college degree than their peers who have parents or family members that have obtained a college degree (Tym, Mcmillon, Barone, & Webster, 2004). One reason for this disparity may be FG students' limited access to nonacademic knowledge regarding college enrollment. Growing evidence demonstrates that there is more to college readiness than academics, and importantly, a key source of that information for successful students is parents. Researchers have found that families of FG students generally lack needed knowledge to access college institutions, yet parental influence has been identified as a critical factor in whether a student obtains a postsecondary education (Chlup et al., 2018; Holcomb-McCoy, 2018).

Literature on the challenges faced by FG students often characterizes students and their parents from a deficit perspective, which does not lead to adequate approaches for addressing the problem (Holcomb-McCoy, 2018). For example, these students are usually described as unprepared academically and as not understanding the culture and processes of college (Thayer, 2000). Parents of FG students are viewed by educational



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practitioners as disengaged from their children's education (Holcomb-McCoy, 2018; Land & Ziomek-Daigle, 2013) and as not possessing the knowledge or experience about going to college that would enable them to guide their children (Holcomb-McCoy, 2018; Thayer, 2000). Instead of blaming students and their parents, research suggests that to address these obstacles more fully, schools need to understand better their responsibility in the distribution of this knowledge (Chlup et al., 2018; Holcomb-McCoy, 2018).

The problem of lack of college access for FG students can be viewed through a social capital lens. Bourdieu's social capital theory focuses on how people gain access to or are restricted from beneficial economic and institutional resources through their membership to social networks, such as family (Bourdieu, 1986). Using the lens of social capital theory this study examined how parents of potential college-going FG students perceive and experience their access to the valuable resources and knowledge that would allow them to support their adolescent's successful entrance into postsecondary institutions. This understanding can then be used by schools to build upon those supports and opportunities for the benefit of FG families. Prior research on first-generation college students covers a wide range of academic and social factors that have been found to impact FG students, but little research has focused on parent perceptions.

## Background Literature

FG students are less likely to enroll in college and less successful than other students once they get there. Research has found that between 54% and 58% of FG students enroll in college immediately after high school, while 82% of students whose parents obtained a bachelor's degree enroll in college immediately after high school (Land & Ziomek-Daigle, 2013; Mead, 2018). In college, FG students are more likely to take remedial courses and perceive themselves as less academically prepared, especially in areas related to math and science (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014).

Family influence is one of the strongest predictors of a student obtaining a college degree (Chlup et al., 2018; Bui & Rush, 2016; Holcomb-McCoy, 2018), and a critical factor impacting whether an FG student persists in college is the level of social support they receive from family and peers (Gibbons & Woodside, 2014). One study found that parental encouragement of their student to take algebra was a predictor of students taking advanced mathematics in high school and enrolling in a university, and FG students were less likely than those whose parents had a college degree to receive such encouragement (Horn & Nunez, 2000). Other research shows that FG students not only receive less support from family for attending college but also knew less about college when compared to second-generation students (Tym et al., 2004; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991).

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Parental support also impacts whether or not a student applies to college.

Only 65.6 percent of students who are from the lowest SES and are also academically qualified applied for college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2002). This rate is 22% lower than similar students from higher SES backgrounds (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2002). Choy found among 1992 high school graduates that were considered “college qualified,” FG students reported that they received less support from their parents in the task of applying for college. The level of support increases as parents’ level of education increases (Choy, 2001). However, FG college enrollment rates increase if their parents have received guidance about the processes of completing college entrance and financial applications (Engle, Bermeo, & O’Brien, 2006).

Another barrier for FG students is lack of knowledge about financial assistance for attending college. For example, FG students are less likely to have family members who know that waivers exist to pay for the ACT or SAT and are less likely to complete the Free Application for Federal Students Aid (FAFSA) because of uncertainty about their or other family members’ status as an immigrant, or because their parents are fearful of being audited by the IRS or ashamed of their financial position (Mead, 2018). Additionally, FG and low-income families often have misconceptions about paying for college leading to the tendency of FG students and their families to overestimate the cost of

college and underestimate the amount of financial aid available to them (Velez & Horn, 2018).

In a report discussing debt aversion as a barrier to college access, one study found there is a perception held by low-income students that financial aid loans are not really a form of financial assistance (Burdman, 2005). Choy (2004) explained that the benefits of a college education may not always outweigh the financial cost because accumulated debt can be a huge risk as economic conditions or the inability to find a job can jeopardize timely payment of student loan debt. The fear of the crippling and life-altering debt student loans create is well founded. Friedman (2019) found that college graduates in the year 2017 owe an average of \$28,650 in student loans. Coupled with fears of being academically incapable of completing college, college becomes a risk deemed too large to take (Choy, 2004).

While secondary schools have a significant role in the distribution of college access knowledge, they struggle to effectively disperse this knowledge to FG students. FG students are more likely to go to college if their parents have received help and information regarding college admission processes (Engle et al., 2006). For example, Chlup et al. (2018) examined perceptions of Latino parents with children who would be the first to go to college in their families, focusing on their experiences working with their children’s schools. They found that schools may believe that they are reaching

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parents, but they are not. Second, parents that participated in this study perceived that their language and cultural backgrounds were underutilized and undervalued by the school. Third, parents felt uncomfortable with the school system (Chlup et al., 2018).

Other research on the role of secondary schools in providing information about college enrollment demonstrated how school guidance counselors pose barriers to providing college access knowledge to students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2018). While school counselors largely felt that it is their responsibility to work with low-income and minority families in the area of college processes, their actual efforts in organizing such activities have been found lacking (Holcomb-McCoy, 2018). School guidance counselors may see low-income and minority students as incapable of excelling in college, so these students are steered towards vocational programs, towards less rigorous pathways, and towards 2-year institutions rather than 4-year institutions. Counselors may perceive that 2-year institutions are less expensive, although financial aid may be more accessible at a 4-year institution (Holcomb-McCoy, 2018).

### Methodology

This ethnographic study used qualitative research methods to explore the perceptions and experiences that parents of first-generation students have in regard to accessing resources to help their children

successfully enroll in post-secondary education. This research method uses inquiry to explore the perspectives of these participants and thus create an understanding that may inspire change (Glesne, 2016). This study explored the following research question:

*What are the perceptions and experiences of the parents of potential first-generation college students at one high school in working with their child's school in areas of applying for financial aid and college entrance?*

### Participants

Participants in this study were 11 parents of current high school students selected from a large Southern Illinois suburban high school situated in a mid-sized city. All participants' highest level of education is high school. Participants included 5 fathers (2 Black, 3 White) and six mothers (3 Black, 3 White) as shown in Table 1. The participants were intentionally selected in order to proportionately represent the racial composition of the high school. This high school had a student racial composition of 46.3% White, 40.1% Black, 7.6% Bi-racial, 4.7% Hispanic, and 1.1% Asian. Additionally, the school had 44.5% low-income students, identified by eligibility to receive free or reduced lunch, live in substitute care, or receive public aid (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019).

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Table 1.  
Participant Demographics.

Pseudonym	Relationship	Race	Education Level
Charles	Father	White	High School
Charmaine	Mother	Black	High School
Erica	Mother	White	High School
Jimmy	Father	White	High School
Kim	Mother	White	High School
Max	Father	White	High School
Ralph	Father	Black	High School
Regina	Mother	White	High School
Shelia	Mother	Black	High School
Steve	Father	Black	High School
Tonya	Mother	Black	High School

### Data Source

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study. All participants were interviewed by the researcher. Each of the 11 participants was individually interviewed one time using the same set of open-ended questions (Appendix A). Interview questions aimed to find out parents' perceptions and experiences of accessing process information about enrolling in college; more specifically, questions explored how these parents perceive and experience institutions that hold such information. Interviews took place in August through November of 2019, in the researcher's administrative office at the school. The length of each interview was approximately 45-60 minutes, and audio of the interview was recorded for transcription.

### Procedures

#### Pilot interview procedures.

After approval from the Institutional Review Board, two pilot semi-structured interviews were conducted using a created set of questions. The interviews were with two parents who did not go to college. These pilot interviews allowed the researcher to practice interview skills and make necessary

changes to the questions. This helped increase clarity and to make sure the questions serve the purpose of the study. Further, after each interview, interviewees were asked for feedback regarding the format of the questions. The researcher was interested to know how the questions made the interviewees feel, as it is essential to this study that questions are not belittling, interrogative, or condescending in nature. Interviewees for this piloting were parents who have children who attend the selected high school and who are already known not to have ever gone to college. Pilot interviews took place in the first two weeks of July; and were approximately 45 minutes long and audio recorded.

#### Study interview procedures.

After necessary revisions to this study's piloted interview questions, the researcher identified potential participants by providing a letter to parents at the beginning of the year Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) AVID parent night. This letter

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requested parents who qualify for this study to complete contact and demographic information and return the letter to a box. This letter also contained information regarding the incentive for participation, which was a \$25 gift card usable at a local gas station. Participants (11) were then selected and contacted to set up interview times during the month of August. This method of soliciting participation yielded only two participants. As a result, the remaining nine participants were contacted through referrals from other participants. All interviews were held confidentially in the school's administrative offices, were audio-recorded, and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Prior to the start of the interview, interviewees were provided another copy of the recruitment form. At this time, interviewees were provided time to ask any questions they had about the interview procedures. Then participants were verbally told that they had an opportunity to review the transcription of the interview when complete.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data for this study (Glesne, 2016). Each interview transcription was read once to increase the researcher's familiarity with each interview. Then, each transcription was read line by line a second time, stopping to annotate using the lens of social capital theory (Glesne, 2016). Once all transcriptions were annotated with the researcher's thoughts, a third reading of the

transcripts was conducted. During the third reading, six transcriptions were open-coded. The open codes were narrowed down to a set of 26 focused codes. After a set of focused codes was created, the transcriptions were re-read, focus coded, and annotated. When all transcriptions were focus-coded, the focused codes were narrowed to derive a final set of critical themes.

In order to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the data analysis, the researcher conducted a data analysis triangulation by having participants conduct a review (Patton, 2015). This method allowed the researcher to evaluate the accuracy and fairness of the data analysis. To achieve this, 3 participants were randomly selected to review a description of the findings from their individual interviews. Participants were asked if the description aligned with what the participant believed they said in the interview (Patton, 2015). The results of these reviews by participants are reported in the limitations section of this study. Also, throughout the entire process, the researcher used a running list of notes regarding the design of this study; any identified flaws in this study's design are included in the limitations section of this report (Patton, 2015).

### Findings

The parents of potential FG college students in the study fear costs and saw grants and scholarships as a primary way to finance college.

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Financing college was a common topic for all parents. When talking directly about paying for college, three parents discussed either an effort or a hope for their child to receive some type of scholarship for college. For example, Regina stated, "That's why I wanted her to get in band and get good at it and participate, get some scholarships, help mom out a little bit. Anything she can do to get scholarships, every little bit helps." Other parents discussed how they saw their income level as a way to access grants. Erica talked about her hopes for her son to get financial aid in the form of grants by saying, "I'm hoping that there ... I mean, just based on our income, I'm hoping that there's aid. I know there are grants." Ralph, when asked if he saw financial aid as something that his son will need, replied, "I believe that it will to a certain extent, but I know what we need to mainly focus on is grants." Several financial alternatives to grants and scholarships were mentioned by fathers such as using their G.I. bill or considering army enrollment for their child.

Three parents discussed how scholarships or grants will affect their child's college choice. Kim best summarized this idea when she talked about her son's selection for college. She described how her son really wanted to attend St. Louis University until she saw how much it costs. She then stated, "he only got a half ride there, which was really not much." Kim's son ultimately chose another college that provided a "full ride." Similarly, Ralph shared this same sentiment "I think that attributes to a lot of the problems that are

going on now, and then you hear about how millennials aren't buying homes, having kids, and this and that and it's like, well, of course, they're not. They've been saddled with essentially a mortgage since they got out of college."

Debt was a concern, and four parents alluded to trade schools as a way to avoid college debt. Regina discussed how she is "investing in her [daughter] now to try to get scholarships to help out." Regina then described her fears of "...\$200,000 of debt staring her in the face," when she graduates. She described the influence this would have on her ultimate choice when she related a conversation she had with her daughter, "So that's why I said, is it a university, or is it a technical school?" Max stated, "I don't think trade schools are pushed enough... You can make an honest, decent living doing that, without \$100,000 in student debt probably." The parents of potential FG college students perceive the school's role and responsibility to be limited to academic preparation, high school course selection, and guidance upon request.

Parents felt that their child's school was generally doing what it needed to do to help their child prepare for and enroll in college. Of the 11 parents, five of them talked about how they felt either the school was doing an excellent job of helping their child prepare for college and/or enroll in college or assumed that the school was available for help if they needed it. For example, when Kim was asked about what she thought the school could help



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her with, she replied, “I really don’t know, I believe if a child wants to talk about it that there’s always somebody there to talk to them. I don’t know what else you guys can do to push it.” Erica replied similarly with, “I don’t think so.” She then went on to explain, “The high school’s job, to me, is getting him to graduation and then give us a little pointer on what I can do to take him to the next level, but I don’t feel that they are responsible for it too.” Steve stated, “Just keep her focused on going to school. As long as she’s got good teachers that’s helping her and keeping her focused and disciplining her when it’s necessary, that a big help in going to college.” Parents of FG students felt it was important for the school to make sure that their high school course selection was correct. Max stated it this way, “Just making sure that he’s on the right path, that he’s picking what he wants to do and taking the right classes and keeping up”. Sheila made the suggestion that the high school can help parents by helping students put together a “game plan” by “making sure that they’re taking the right courses.” Jimmy shared this same idea by suggesting that the high school discuss his son’s plans by asking him specific questions, much like he experienced when he was in high school. Jimmy felt that the school should also help the student assess strengths to determine a postsecondary plan then “...This is the path that will get you to that next step if you’re looking to do this.”

The parents of potential FG college students perceive a lack of communication from the school about accessing college. Participants were asked to discuss information received from the school about applying for financial aid and for college. The vast majority of participants (9 of 11) indicated they had not received any information. Some participants explained that while they have not received any information regarding college enrollment, they believed that the school would either eventually provide that information or that they can contact the school to get the information. For example, Tonya stated, “Yeah, they’re going to give me that information, I believe. I think they’ll talk to me about that if I come and talk to them.” Finally, fathers had the perception that the school was sending information regarding college enrollment, but it was only being sent to their child’s mother. For example, Ralph explained that he is dependent on his wife to share with him information that comes from the school. Steve stated that he has not heard of any information from the school about college enrollment but believes the school has communicated with his daughter’s mom. Jimmy also discussed how he believes that his son’s mother might be receiving the information, but he is not.

The parents of potential FG college students get information from family and the internet and lack awareness of other resources. Six interviewees talked about getting information about college access through a family member or relative. Max would consult “His godmother, who’s a teacher. My

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sister is a college graduate.” Jimmy and Steve both explicitly stated their sisters would be a resource for this information. Steve said, “Like I said, my sister, she had with [experience] my niece. She knows going through the processes and stuff with her.”

The internet, in some form, was mentioned as a resource by six of the participants. For example, Jimmy stated that his sister and the “high school website” were resources he could use to find information about college enrollment procedures. Other participants mentioned Google as a resource to find needed information.

Participants also acknowledged that they either do not have any resources or are unsure of what resources exist that would help them gain needed knowledge to help their child access college. For example, when asked about where he might get answers to his questions, Max shared “I really don’t know, sir...I don’t have anybody to turn to outside of the school to ask questions. I just don’t.” Steve had a similar answer when discussing what his daughter would need help doing to enroll in college. Steve stated, “...I don’t know who to talk to, who to see as far as looking into colleges and stuff like that. So, that’s kind of one of our issues. Who do we talk to?”

### Discussion

#### Parent access to resources.

Parents viewed grants and scholarships as a resource needed to help their child access college. Here, social capital theory sheds light

on how the family structure seems to reproduce perceptions of resources, particularly knowledge of financial and informational resources related to college entrance. The resources these parents perceive they have access to include grants and scholarships, for financing college, and access to the internet and family to obtain information. But, the literature reveals that low-income families often lack the needed capital to navigate the bureaucratic process of financial aid (Goldrick-Rab, Kelchen, Douglas, & James, 2016), meaning that those who need the aid the most are often least likely to receive it.

The limited knowledge of available resources on the part of the participants demonstrated how the lack of social networks that disseminate college knowledge can negatively impact FG families. Support for this negative impact is found in a prior study that found that families of FG backgrounds knew less about college when compared to families of second-generation backgrounds (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). This illustrates that the lack of awareness of valuable resources creates a clear disadvantage for FG students. The use of the internet as an informational resource is interesting in this regard as the amount of information that exists could prove to be helpful to a parent, but only if parents know what information to look for or have the experience to see beyond the face value of college marketing schemes and misleading information.

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### Role of the school.

The participants believe the secondary school's role and responsibility is limited to academic preparation, high school course selection, and guidance. This theme highlights a contradiction between parent perceptions and what research indicates about what schools should be doing to teach the contextual skills and knowledge associated with college entrance. FG students are more likely to enroll in college if their parents have received information and guidance regarding college enrollment processes (Engle et al., 2006); however, Chlup et al. (2018) found that Hispanic parents perceived that schools were not making a connection with them as parents, undervalued their cultural backgrounds, and that these parents felt uncomfortable with the school system. These are clear barriers to building a relationship of shared social capital.

This discrepancy between schools and parents of FG backgrounds gives rise to two issues. First, the trust FG parents place in the school to prepare students for college entrance seems to be positive but creates a "one-way street" type of relationship. The second issue that arises is the perception of parent disengagement this conflict may create or enhance, possibly due to meritocratic

ideologies. Literature reports that often FG parents are viewed by educational practitioners as disengaged from their children's education (Holcomb-McCoy, 2018; Land & Ziomek-Daigle, 2013). This may suggest one reason why the flow of college knowledge capital fails to be shared between schools and families of FG backgrounds. However, a comparison of college planning services between more affluent districts and ones with higher low-income populations

shows noticeable disparities in the amount of college counseling expertise, focus, and resources students and families are provided. This comparison was easily done by the researcher using a website review of a High School known to be situated in an affluent area. The disparity of college planning resources is clear when comparing the two schools. The comparison school, Prairie High School

(pseudonym), has a college and career counseling department staffed with 3 counselors while the research site school does not have a dedicated department (Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2021). Prairie High School has 4 counselors, in addition to the college and career counseling department, serving 1,346 students, while the research site has 6 counselors for 2,392 students (Illinois State Board of Education, 2019; Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary



**“The trust FG [first generation] parents place in the school to prepare students for college entrance seems to be positive but creates a ‘one-way street’ type of relationship.”**

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Education, 2021). This demonstrates how the emphasis on sharing this capital within this more affluent social network, and the lack of emphasis in other social networks, creates social and economic disparities.

Parents' experiences working with their child's high school in areas of applying for financial aid and college entrance are limited. Parents of potential FG college students in the study perceive a lack of communication from the school about accessing college. When looking at this communication breakdown through a social capital theory lens, it is clear that this school is failing to distribute its knowledge regarding college enrollment procedures. This is in alignment with research indicating that schools may believe they are reaching parents, but in actuality, they are not (Chlup et al., 2018). Engaging FG fathers in this relationship is important as prior research by Gibbons and Woodside (2014) found that college expectations of fathers of FG children have a substantial impact on their children's decision to enroll in college. This evidence further magnifies the breakdown in the sharing of college knowledge capital, suggesting that schools are not effective distributors of such capital to families of FG backgrounds.

Overall, parent perceptions of access are not in alignment with research on college access for FG students. The parents in this study generally felt that they had access to all the resources they would need to help their child access college and perceived that the school is

a resource for information if they need it, but also acknowledge that they have not received information from the school. While these parents had positive perceptions of the school, this study made it clear that the school is not reaching these parents. Participants indicated a strong desire for their children to go to college, and they felt they could go to the school for guidance in this endeavor. Schools need to recognize this desire and capitalize on these positive perceptions by working to ensure that they are effectively providing FG parents with all the guidance they need. If schools understand these parents' perceptions, coupled with the barriers they face, a new perspective emerges. This perspective challenges stereotypes of FG families being uninterested in their children's education. Instead, it demonstrates that schools are disengaged with FG families. With this new perspective, schools can begin the work of engaging FG families break college entrance barriers.

### Implications

Improving the college enrollment and completion rates of students with FG backgrounds is a critical social justice issue. A good starting point in addressing these social and economic disparities is to examine how social capital that schools possess has failed to be effectively distributed to students and families from FG backgrounds.

One implication is that further research about FG parents' perceptions of financing college needs to be conducted. This study found that

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FG parents aspire for their children to gain scholarships and grants, yet they fail to mention student loans as a viable means to finance college. While avoiding student loan debt can be smart financially, the lack of knowledge parents have in this area needs more attention from researchers. How much do FG parents really know about acquiring either a scholarship or a grant for their child? Do FG families avoid loans because they are aware of how smart it is to avoid loan debt, or are there other underlying reasons, as Mead (2018), Velez and Horn (2018) suggest? Reasons such as not knowing or understanding the true cost of going to college or are FG families afraid of exposing their financial information through the FAFSA process. Do FG parents know that completing the FAFSA typically results in access to grants, work-study programs, and different types of student loans, subsidized or unsubsidized?

A second implication for future research pertains to the engagement of FG parents in activities that increase college awareness. Future research should examine how schools can engage FG parents in college awareness activities more effectively, possibly exploring more effective methods of communication and implementing resources. Additionally, future research could examine how to engage FG fathers in college awareness activities, since college attendance can be increased by engaging fathers. Further research also needs to be conducted on school personnel's perceptions and practices of preparing FG

students for successful college enrollment. This research could shed light on why there seems to be a breakdown in the distribution of social capital from schools to FG families. This study also has implications for policy and practice. It is evident that FG families have limited capital that would grant them an equal opportunity to access a college education. Policymakers continue to force schools to focus on academic preparation for college, but as stated before, the non-academic skills and knowledge associated with college preparation needs to become a predominant part of schools' mandated curriculum and support services. This should include funds to employ specialized counselors and implement programs like AVID, where a priority of the program is to engage students and families, especially FG families, in college awareness activities. Additionally, policymakers need to rework the financial aid process and increase the amount of the aid available. Studies demonstrate that on average a Pell grant only pays for 33% of college costs. Goldrick-Rab et al. (2016) stated that low-income families would need to spend as much as 75% of their annual income to pay for their child's college costs. Further, legislatures need to revisit the initial intent of the Pell grant, which was to increase college opportunities for low-income families to improve employment rates as a way to promote social mobility (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016). However, with Pell grants covering less and less of the cost of college, FG students are still facing more out-of-pocket costs, which does not alleviate the struggles associated with being poor and

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pursuing a college degree.

Further, this study has major implications for K-12 educational practitioners. This study extends prior evidence that schools are not effectively distributing college knowledge capital. The most alarming result of this study is that FG parents reported not receiving any college enrollment information from the school, yet they also report that the school is doing a great job preparing their children for college. Practitioners need to understand how their own perceptions of how they distribute this capital to parents negatively impact students. Understanding the magnitude of this impact should force educational practitioners to evaluate the methods they are using to reach FG parents with this critical information. In this effort, education practitioners should be mindful of their position and experience as holders of college degrees and reflect how this position may lead to the failure to effectively distribute this capital to FG parents.

### Limitations

The researcher's position as an administrator at the school and is a college graduate limits this study. The researcher's position was known and could have brought apprehension to participants. This topic appeared to be sensitive to the interviewees, as there seemed to be an element of embarrassment and caution in their demeanor and responses. These feelings may have kept participants from being more open and truthful during the


interview, possibly due to feelings of embarrassment or to avoid the perception of being a disengaged parent. Evidence of this could exist in their responses to how well the school was doing to prepare their child for college or by responses that ended with the parent questioning what they said. A suggestion for future practice would be to conduct the interviews away from the school's campus.

As a part of this study's effort to increase the quality and credibility of the data analyses, three participants were randomly selected to review the findings from their individual interview transcripts. These three participants were Erica, Charmaine, and Jimmy. Erica felt that the findings from her interview were consistent with answers to the interview questions. Erica did add that she felt it was more of her son's responsibility, rather than the school's, to get into college because it is a part of growing up and maturing. This statement provided an extension to the finding by providing reasoning for Erica's perception but does not alter the analyses. Charmaine felt that the findings were accurate in representing her perceptions. She added that she felt that participating in the interview made her think more about what she can do to assist her daughter in preparing for college. Jimmy also felt that the analysis of his interview was consistent with his perceptions and experiences regarding helping his son access college. Jimmy added that he felt the interview made him more aware of how much he would need to rely on other resources such as the school, friends, and

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family to help him make sure his son is prepared to enter college successfully. In all, these three participants thought that the findings from their individual interviews were consistent with their thoughts and experiences, providing evidence that the described findings are creditable.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study extend the literature surrounding the college enrollment disparity between FG students and non-FG students and conclude that educational policymakers and practitioners need to reexamine not only their efforts in remedying this disparity but also how they perceive parents of FG students. The literature and findings bring to light the critical role schools play in sharing this college access knowledge with FG families and the social responsibility they have in equalizing the college entrance playing field. If schools focus on understanding the perceptions of FG parents and use this new knowledge to find ways to engage effectively with FG families, schools can increase the rate in which FG students successfully access college. 

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### APPENDIX

Tell me about a favorite memory or story of your kid.

Tell me more about your kid.

Prompts, if needed: Tell me about their strengths? What are their main interests in and outside of school? How has their high school experience been?

What are X's post grad plans at the moment?

How do you feel about these? What do you think are factors that led to these plans?

What are your wishes for X after high school?

What kinds of factors have led you to these wishes/hopes/plans for X?

To what extent are you and your child in agreement about post high school plans? Tell me about this.

If warranted/appropriate: What do you think X is likely to do after she/he graduates? To what extent, if at all, have you and X talked about college? Tell me about these conversations?

#### **A. Questions if college seems to be the plan or a potential plan.**

Where is your child in terms of the college process?

What actions have you and/or your child taken related to college?

What do you think still needs to be done?

What do you see as your role in the college process for your child?

If appropriate: what challenges have you encountered with this?

What challenges do you foresee as the process moves along?

What kinds of questions do you have about the college issue at this point?

What have you done in terms of getting answers to questions thus far?

What challenges has X encountered in the college process this far.

What challenges do you foresee for X in the future?

## Parent Perceptions

How ready is your child to go to college? Academically? Socially? Emotionally?

What do you think your child will need help doing in order to enroll in college?

What, if anything, has your child's school done to help your child learn college enrollment procedures?

What would you expect the school to help with?

What do you want from the school that you have not yet gotten?

Tell me about the extent of communication the school has had with you about college enrollment information.

Describe the type of information you have received about paying for college.

To what extent has this information been helpful to you and your child?

Describe the type of information you have received about applying for colleges?

To what extent has this information been helpful to you and your child?

What suggestions would you make to help your child's school be more helpful?

What other resources, other than your child's school, have been available to you?

What information, if any, do you need more information about?

How would you prefer to get this information?

### **B. Questions if parent answer does not state college as a hope or aspiration.**

To what extent have you thought about the possibility of your child going to college?

Imagine if your child told you one day that they want to go to college; how would you respond?

How would you feel?

What would your opinion be?

What questions or fears would you have?

What would be your next actions once you receive this news?

## Parent Perceptions

To what extent do you believe that your child would be ready to go to college?

Academically; socially; emotionally?

What do you think your child would need help doing in order to enroll in college?

What would you expect the school to help with?

What would your role be? What might be challenges in this role for you?

What would you want the school to do?

How has your child's school helped your child learn college enrollment procedures?

Tell me about the extent of communication the school has had with you about college enrollment information.

Describe the type of information you have received about paying for college.

To what extent has this information been helpful to you and your child?

Describe the type of information you have received about applying for colleges?

To what extent has this information been helpful to you and your child?

What other resources regarding college enrollment, other than your child's school, have been available to you?

What topics, if any, do you need more information about?

How would you prefer to get this information?