REL Appalachia Ask A REL Response

College and Career Readiness, Family and Community Engagement, Postsecondary
June 2018

Question:

From parents' perspectives, what are the key barriers to college application, enrollment, and persistence for their children?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about parents' perspectives on barriers to college. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask A REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for peer-reviewed articles and other research reports on barriers to college application, enrollment, and persistence, based on parent report. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist. References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance.

References

College Board Advocacy & Policy Center. (2010). *Cracking the student aid code: Parent and student perspectives on paying for college*. New York, NY: Author. Abstract retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED520815; full text available at http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/advocacy/homeorg/advocacy-cracking-student-aid-code.pdf

From the executive summary: "Paying for college is a challenge for many Americans and navigating the financial aid process can be very difficult, especially for low-income and first-generation college students. The College Board commissioned research to learn more about students' and parents' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about the importance of a college education and how to pay for it. In addition, students and parents who participated in the research were asked to evaluate whether the recommendations of the College Board's Rethinking Student Aid (RSA) project would improve the effectiveness of the nation's federal student aid system. Focus group participants and survey respondents included students from low- and moderate-income backgrounds, parents with modest financial resources, nontraditional college students and advocates for members of immigrant groups. After analyzing the data, one consistent theme emerged: While participants overwhelmingly understand the importance of college, lack of information and understanding of the college financing process is a barrier that is difficult to overcome for many students and families. This report urges policymakers to pursue the necessary changes to the federal financial aid system to 'crack the student aid code' for first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, and their parents. By presenting the right information at the right time and in ways that families can understand, individuals can begin to break down existing barriers to college entrance and success."

Grodsky, E., & Jones, M. T. (2007). Real and imagined barriers to college entry: Perceptions of cost. *Social Science Research*, *36*(2), 745–766. Retrieved from https://cloudfront.escholarship.org/dist/prd/content/qt7v87v3j0/qt7v87v3j0.pdf

From the abstract: "Patterns of postsecondary attendance in the United States continue to be stratified by socioeconomic background and race/ethnicity. We suggest that inequalities in knowledge of the costs of going to college contribute to persistent patterns of stratification. We hypothesize that disadvantaged parents who believe their child will attend college are less certain of the costs of college attendance than more advantaged parents. As a result, they are less able or willing to provide an estimate of the costs of college attendance, more likely to over-estimate those costs if they do provide an estimate, and more likely to make larger errors in estimation than comparable middle-class or white parents. Using nationally representative data, we find mixed support for these hypotheses. Socioeconomically disadvantaged parents and minority parents are less likely to provide estimates of college tuition and, when they provide estimates, tend to make larger errors. On average, though, parents provide upwardly biased estimates of cost that are uniform across race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. We discuss implications of these findings for sociological theory and for inequality in postsecondary education."

Hallett, R. E., & Griffen, J. (2015). Empowering parents in the college-planning process: An action-inquiry case study. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 20(*1–2), 101–119. Abstract retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1056812

From the abstract: "Involving parents in the college-planning process is essential to increasing access for students from low-income communities of color. Using the action inquiry model, we explore how collaboration between a school district and a university can

empower parents to engage in meaningful conversations and planning related to college access. This qualitative case study draws from 3 years of data gathered from the development and implementation of a college-access program designed for underperforming middle and high school students who would be first-generation college students. Our findings suggest that parents want access to specific information, desire a deeper connection with other parents going through the process, and lack proper knowledge to feel empowered to lead discussions with their children."

Kirk, C. M., Lewis-Moss, R. K., Nilsen, C., & Colvin, D. Q. (2011). The role of parent expectations on adolescent educational aspirations. *Educational Studies*, *37*(1), 89–99. Abstract retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ911134; full text available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rhonda_Lewis2/publication/233046501_The_role_of_parent_expectations_on_adolescent_educational_aspirations/links/559ce29908aeb959c47491de.pdf

From the abstract: "Parental expectations have long been studied as a factor in increasing adolescent educational aspirations, often linking these expectations to parental level of education and involvement in academic endeavours. This study further explores this relationship in a statewide Midwestern sample of parents and their adolescent children. Regression analysis and independent samples t-tests were used to predict adolescent aspirations and compare groups. Results suggest that adolescent educational aspirations can to some degree be predicted by parental expectations. Parents reported high expectations for their children despite low levels of personal educational attainment. However, these high expectations were buffered by a reported unfamiliarity with college requirements and an expressed concern about college affordability and limited awareness of financial aid opportunities. Limitations and suggestions for future research and intervention are discussed."

Palbusa, J. A., & Gauvin, M. (2017). Parent-student communication about college and freshman grades in first-generation and non-first-generation students. *Journal of College Student Development, 58*(1), 107–112. Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1127388

From the abstract: "Prior research has found that students whose parents attended college begin college with more understanding of higher education than do first-generation students (Engle, 2007). Parents pass on knowledge along with advice and emotional support that help their children when they encounter new challenges, such as the transition to college. This study investigates parent-student communication about college during the transition to college. First-year college students at a large public university participated in an online survey about these communication experiences. Participants were asked about the frequency of their communication with parents about college and their perceptions of the helpfulness and quality of emotional and instrumental support in these interactions. Emotional support is concern about the child's feelings about college. Instrumental support is parents' availability as a resource about college. The relationship with students' first-year academic success was also studied. Responses of students who are the first in their family to attend college and students whose parents attended college were compared using *t* tests

for mean levels of responses. Researchers found that parents' support can affect students' college success regardless of whether parents attended college. Youth who want to attend college and their parents should know about the value of parent-student communication in this endeavor."

Smith, M. J. (2009). Right directions, wrong maps: Understanding the involvement of low-SES African American parents to enlist them as partners in college choice. *Education and Urban Society*, *41*(2), 171–196. Abstract retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ822812; non-copy-edited full text available at https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/edu_fac/71/

From the abstract: "Research extols the benefits of parent involvement in college choice, but low-SES African American parents are unable to match efforts of wealthier parents. This qualitative study found that in their communities the high school diploma was the normative credential for upward mobility. To this end, parents used narratives of struggle to motivate their children while utilizing maps that charted the course to high school completion. Findings suggest that in these families a high level of involvement towards high school completion exists, but that to shift expectations from high school to college completion requires unified and coordinated efforts from the Academy to pull parents into the college pipeline as early as middle school. The Academy must assume parents support their child's education and work with them to aggressively deliver critical college knowledge in the form of co-constructed maps that chart the course to college completion."

Additional Organizations to Consult

Achieve: Future Ready Project: https://www.achieve.org/future-ready

From the website: "Achieve provides state and local college- and career-ready stakeholders with the information, strategies, messages, and tools needed to effectively make the case for college- and career-ready agenda in their states."

- "What parents are saying about college and career readiness" https://www.achieve.org/publications/what-parents-are-saying-about-college-and-career-readiness

College and Career Readiness and Success Center: https://ccrscenter.org/

From the website: "The College and Career Readiness and Success Center (CCRS Center) is dedicated to ensuring all students graduate high school ready for college and career success. The mission of the CCRS Center is to serve Regional Comprehensive Centers in building the capacity of states to effectively implement initiatives for college and career readiness and success. Through technical assistance delivery and supporting resources, the CCRS Center provides customized support that facilitates the continuous design, implementation, and improvement of college and career readiness priorities."

National PTA: https://www.pta.org/

From the website: "PTA's mission is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children."

- College and Career Readiness resources: https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources/College-and-Career-Readiness

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- ("Parent perspective" OR "parent survey" OR "parent perceptions" OR parent) AND (college OR postsecondary OR higher education) AND barriers AND (application OR enrollment OR persistence OR access)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- Date of the publication: Searches cover the most current information (i.e., within the last ten years), except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- Search priorities of reference sources: Search priorities include IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.
- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on June 4, 2018. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.