

Education and Career Planning in High School

A National Study of School and Student Characteristics and College-Going Behaviors

Education and career planning has long been seen as a promising intervention for helping students to make informed choices about their lives after high school, and to take the appropriate actions to achieve their goals.¹ In 2008, Arizona became one of many states that mandate education and career plans, or ECPs.

Arizona Department of Education leaders partnered with the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) West to

- understand the prevalence of ECPs as a school requirement and a student experience and
- examine college-going behaviors of students who reported participating in certain education and career planning activities.

A nationally representative sample of high schools and students was used in this analysis.²

Three core education and career planning elements were included in this analysis and are central to Arizona's ECAP policy: early planning, adult support, and yearly review.



Early planning

Students develop an ECP upon first entering high school in grade 9.



Adult support

Students receive help from an adult (such as a counselor, teacher, or parent) to develop an ECP.



Yearly review

Students who have developed an ECP meet with an adult in school to review it at least once a year (fall of grade 9 through spring of grade 11).

1 Solberg, V. S., Phelps, L. A., Haakenson, K. A., Durham, J. F., & Timmons, J. (2012). The nature and use of individualized learning plans as a promising career intervention strategy. *Journal of Career Development, 39*(6), 500–514.

2 Data analyzed for this study is from the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) High School Longitudinal Study of 2009, which follows a nationally representative sample of students who entered grade 9 in fall 2009 and who continue to be followed into postsecondary education and the workforce (Duprey et al., 2018).

STUDY FINDINGS

Schools' education and career planning requirements and characteristics

- A large majority (86 percent) of counselors reported that their school required students to develop some form of an ECP.
- Schools that required ECPs were more likely to be rural and had higher percentages of Black students and economically disadvantaged students than schools that did not require ECPs.

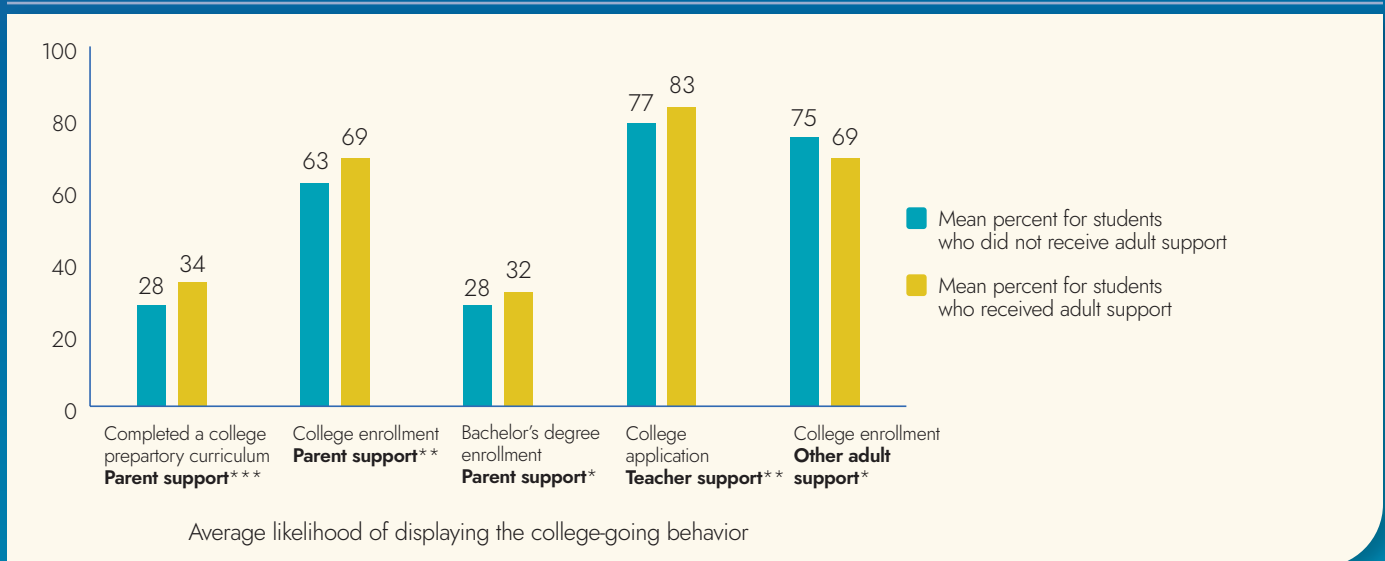
Students' participation in education and career planning

- Most students reported developing an ECP in the fall of grade 9 (62 percent), but fewer received help from an adult to do so (44 percent), and only 22 percent of students reviewed their plan yearly with an adult in school.

Students' college-going behaviors

- Receiving support from an adult to develop an ECP in grade 9 was associated with completing a college preparatory curriculum, applying to college, and enrolling in college, depending on the source of adult support.

The relationship between receiving adult support and college-going behaviors

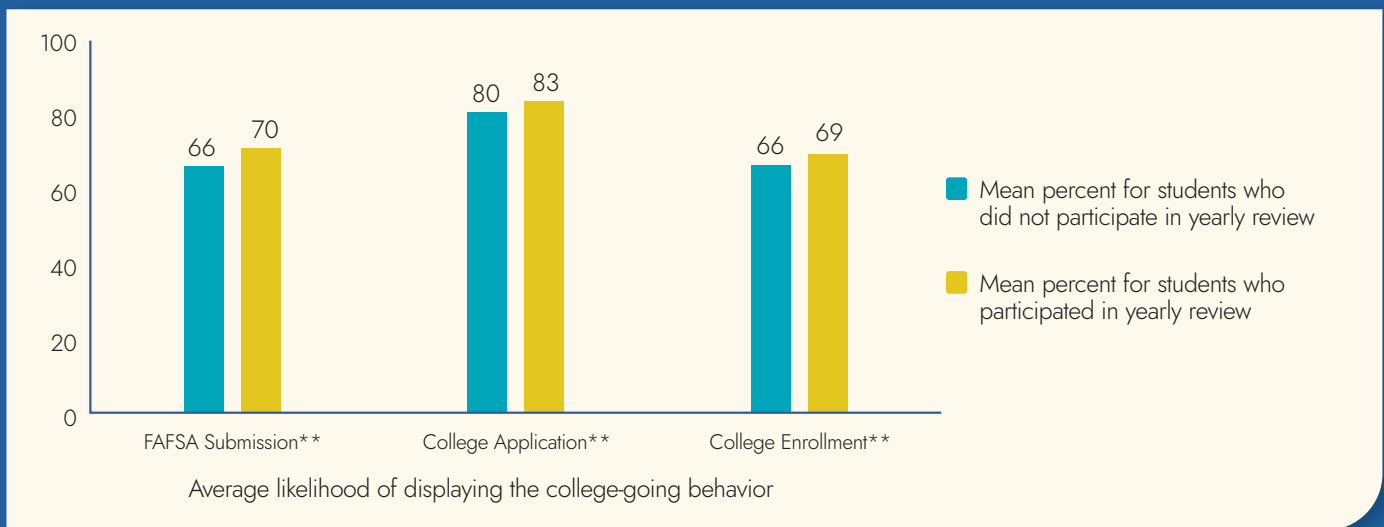


Source: Authors' analysis of data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009.

* Significant at $p < .05$; ** significant at $p < .01$; *** significant at $p < .001$

- Participating in a yearly ECP review with an adult in school was associated with Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) submission, applying to college, and college enrollment.

The relationship between participating in a yearly ECP review and college-going behaviors



Source: Authors' analysis of data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009.

** Significant at $p < .01$

Implications

- States may wish to pay close attention to how ECP policies are designed, especially with regard to the supports that students receive in the planning process.
- States can examine the extent to which their policies go beyond mandating the use of plans to encourage specific forms of adult support in the planning process.
- States, districts, and schools that design or implement ECP requirements could also explore the mechanisms through which teachers and parents may influence students' planning and college-going behaviors.
- Education leaders may also want to examine the role that school counselors play in the education and career planning process given that a low share of students (11 percent) received support from a counselor to develop their ECP in grade 9.

“As researchers gather more evidence on the potential effectiveness of ECP interventions in specific contexts, policymakers can develop an understanding of the common features of education and career planning that have the greatest potential for impacting student outcomes.”

— Torre Gibney & Rauner (2021)



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