A Healthy Approach to College Admission: What Administrators, Educators, and Trustees Need to Know

Gabrielle McColgan, Castilleja School
Dr. Denise Pope, Stanford University
National Merit Scholarships: List of Bay Area semifinalists for 2020 award
Plus complete list of California semifinalists
Moment 2
Moment 3
Mixed Messages

What we think we’re saying: What our students hear:
What is success?

What are the life outcomes you most value?

How do you define success?
(Perceived) Stakes of College

“Our grades are what make up our future, and if you don’t get good grades you won’t get into a good college, and you won’t get a good job, and (you) will lead a miserable life.”
(Perceived) Stakes of College

“Junior year is what colleges are looking at, and if I mess up, it will ruin my whole life.”
The Student Experience

Survey completed by over 200,000 middle & high schoolers at over 200 schools

High School students tend to say their two biggest sources of stress are:

- Work Load
- College Admissions
The Risks: Overloaded Students

Reported by high schoolers in our sample:

Average nightly homework: **3 hours**
Average extracurricular (M-F): **8.5 hours**
Average sleep per night: **6.7 hours**
The Risks: Academic Tolls

Report having cheated in past month: 79%

Doing School/Disengagement 48%

Lack of creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration
The Risks: Health Tolls

Compromised health
Anxiety and depression
Lack of resilience
Substance use
Other debilitating disorders

Castilleja
Our Mission

Challenge Success partners with schools, families, and communities to embrace a broad definition of success and to implement research-based strategies that promote student well-being and engagement with learning.
"THE U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT GUIDE TO AMERICA'S TOP 500 COLLEGES...CHAPTER ONE..."
What Matters & Doesn’t According to Research

A “Fit” Over Rankings: Why College Engagement Matters More Than Selectivity”
## How do you rank?

What matters most to your child in a college?

- Not important
- Nice to have *(but not essential)*
- Essential

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR CHILD?</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRONG ATHLETIC PROGRAM</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIVERSITY OF STUDENT BODY/FACULTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES MY CHILD ENJOYS</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY SERVICE COURSES &amp; OPPORTUNITIES</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES &amp; SUPPORTS</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES</td>
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<tr>
<td>AVAILABILITY OF PROFESSIONAL INTERNSHIPS -</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAMOUS &amp; REPUTABLE ALUMNI</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCHOOL SPIRIT</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAME RECOGNITION/BRAND</td>
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<tr>
<td>PROJECT-BASED/HANDS-ON CURRICULA</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUPPORT FOR FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE-GOING STUDENTS</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIGHLY COMPETITIVE ADMISSIONS</td>
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<td>GREEK LIFE</td>
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<td>LGBTQ FRIENDLY</td>
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<td>COMMITMENT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY</td>
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<td>SOCIAL JUSTICE CURRICULA</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALUMNI GIVING RATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUALITY OF TEACHING/ACADEMIC PROGRAM</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEOGRAPHY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFORDABILITY/COST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF STUDENTS/SIZE OF SCHOOL OVERALL</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIZE OF ENDOWMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVAILABILITY OF A PARTICULAR MAJOR</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACCESS TO ARTS/CULTURAL EXPERIENCES</td>
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<tr>
<td>RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIGH PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH TOP SAT/ACT SCORES</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAITH COMMUNITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMALL CLASS SIZES</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Finding #1

Rankings are problematic, and arbitrarily precise.

- Some measures are subjective
- Easy data to collect
- Fixed measures ignore a wide range of other things that matter
Defining Selectivity

Selective = Students need to apply. Some people are selected. A school might select 80% of applicants or 5% of applicants.

Non-selective = Everyone is admitted who meets basic criteria (community college)
# Finding #2

Does the level of selectivity matter for long term outcomes?

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<td>Learning</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>Well-Being</td>
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Finding #2

Going to a selective school will not lead to more learning, job-satisfaction, or well-being.
What is well-being?

- **Purpose**: Like what you do, motivated toward goals
- **Social**: Have strong, supportive relationships and love
- **Financial**: Effectively manage money to reduce stress and increase security
- **Community**: Like where you live, feel engaged and a sense of pride
- **Physical**: Have good health and energy
Finding #2

Does the level of selectivity matter for long term outcomes?

Learning  No
Income  It depends
Job Satisfaction  No
Well-Being  No
What does matter?
Finding #3

It is what you do in college, not where you go, that matters.
Engagement

- Having a mentor
- Working on a multi-semester project
- Participating in an internship that helps you apply your learning
- Being active in extracurriculars
- Having professors who care about you personally
- Taking a course with a professor who makes learning exciting
Practices that may send unhealthy messages

- Celebrating Standardized Test Scores
- Defining academic success with college choices
- Board Reports focusing on certain colleges
- Marketing highlighting college choices
- Campus speakers without diverse credentials
- Highlighting alumnae without diverse credentials
- Hiring faculty without diverse credentials
- Leaving College Counselors out of the loop

“The ringing in your ears—I think I can help.”
Practices that support well-being

- Celebrating college fit over name
- Educate students and faculty that all college choices will be celebrated
- Honoring non-traditional choices: gap years, transfers, less-travelled paths
- Marketing materials highlighting strength of program and community
- Inviting campus speakers from diverse educational backgrounds
- Highlighting alumnae who thrived in many types of colleges
- Hiring faculty with diverse credentials
- Introducing students to diverse careers and college choices
- Making time for College Counseling to educate faculty, administration & board
- Refusing to equate college “outcomes” with student success
We know this is hard.

- Enrollment goals
- Community buy-in (parents, board, etc.)
- Hiring
- Tradition
- What else?
Pair/Share with the person next to you

Ask each other (3 min per person):
What practice is working well in your college messaging?
What is one practice that could be improved?
We are not alone.

- Consider partnering with area schools
  - Board Report norms
  - Marketing norms
  - College Counseling norms
  - Collaborate on academic policy
  - Collaborate on external initiatives

- Who has the “power” on your campus to change norms?
  - All constituencies play a role in creating culture
Choose one practice to implement this year:

- Reconsider how you publicize seniors’ college choices (including website, newspaper(s), program, ceremony content, etc.)

  OR

- Eliminate public celebration for standardized testing (including PSAT, SAT, ACT, AP, IB, Presidential Scholars, and National Merit)

  OR

- Complete the White Paper Exercise with your parent community (www.challengesuccess.org) Text CSCOLLEGE to 38470 for free access
Questions and Conversation