



THINK OVER YOUR SCHOOL TOOLKIT

So you're thinking over your school? Check out the Think Over Your School Toolkit to take control and improve your education, your school and your future.

STATE OF MINE

Get conscious about education in your state! How does your state compare with the rest of the country? Finding out the following information will help you understand what you're up against when you apply to college.

- Your state's graduation rate
- Your state's college-readiness rate
- Your state's requirements for graduation
- Your state's exit exam requirements, if any
- Your state's college credit programs, if any

Find out how your state compares. Visit the Department of Education's Website to link to your State Education Agency, http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_ID=SEA.

MYTH OR FACT: A FEW THINGS YOU *THINK* YOU KNOW ABOUT EDUCATION

MYTH: I know I'm on track to get my diploma in the spring of my senior year. That means that I'm definitely prepared for college.

FACT: Not necessarily. Only five states require four years of math and only six states specify four years of grade-level English to graduate from high school. Most four-year colleges, on the other hand, want to see more advanced work. It is recommended that students take a minimum of four college-prep English, three full-year courses each of social studies, math, and laboratory science, and two in a foreign language.

MYTH: There are definitely more men than women in the workplace. So obviously, more guys go on to college than girls.

FACT: Wrong, haven't you ever heard of "girl power"? Statistics show that women are nearly 25 percent more likely to go to college than men. In fact, in a recent survey, females said they were more likely than males to get a master's degree or higher.

MYTH: My friends and I all do fine in school. We're all definitely ready for college.

FACT: Don't be so sure. Did you know that just over half of high school graduates are unprepared for four-year colleges?

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR STATE

The Manhattan Institute – College Readiness Rates:

http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_08_t06.htm

State Education Agencies:

http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_ID=SEA

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, US Graduation Rates Map:

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/TransformingHighSchools/>

TAKE ACTION!

Write your state legislator and explain what helps you and your classmates be better prepared for college! To find out who your state legislators are, visit Project Vote Smart at www.vote-smart.org.

GRADE YOUR SCHOOL

Decide whether or not your school should get detention by finding out these five facts about education in your school.

- Your school's graduation rate
- Your school's requirements for graduation
- Your school's internship programs/opportunities
- Your school's partnerships with community colleges, if any
- Your school's college enrollment rates

If you don't know these important facts about your school, your guidance counselor can help you. Make an appointment in the counselor's office and see how your school compares to other schools across the country and the national averages. For example, did you know that nationally, about 7 out of 10 high school students graduate from high school each year?

MYTH OR FACT: A FEW THINGS YOU *THINK* YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

MYTH: My community doesn't have any place I can go to research colleges and other post-graduation opportunities. I guess I'll just wait until after graduation to figure out what I want to do with my life.

FACT: Don't give up so fast. Most high schools have college/career centers right inside your school building. These centers provide resources on different post-secondary opportunities across the country and are usually staffed by a professional who can help answer your questions. If your school doesn't have a career center, talk to your guidance counselor – see if there are other places you can go to find resources and suggest putting a college/career center in your school.

MYTH: Most students in my school would rather cruise through really easy classes than tough, demanding courses with challenging teachers.

FACT: Nope – the word on the street is that students would much rather be challenged by their teachers and classes. In fact, a recent poll showed that 88 percent of students said they would work harder if their schools demanded more of them.

MYTH: If I could, there are a lot of things I'd change about my school, but I can't. Students in my school don't really have any say when it comes to decision making in the community.

FACT: Are you sure? Many states have ruled that students can hold positions on the school board. Talk to an administrator and find out what the rules are in your school.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

The College Board: AP – Click here to find information on AP Courses and Exams.
www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html

Check out what students around the country are doing to make a change in their school. Click here to visit the Center for School Change.
www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/school-change

Find out what educational and career opportunities are out there in your community. Visit Jobs for the Future to find out more.

www.jff.org

TAKE ACTION!

Don't let your school, counselors or teachers expect too little of you! Demand challenging course options and coursework! Write a letter to your school newspaper explaining why students should demand more of their school.

A+ SCHOOLS

So maybe your school doesn't quite make the grade. Don't worry. You can do something about it. In this section, we'll give you the scoop on what can help your school blow the curve, and help you get into college. You can start studying up by learning about five qualities of schools that work.

- Challenging students by setting high expectations
- Connecting class topics to real world events
- Promoting meaningful relationships between students and adults
- Creating learning environments that are exciting for students
- Encouraging a student's individuality, not making them feel like a number

MYTH OR FACT: A FEW THINGS YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL WORK

MYTH: I go to school in a big city. My school doesn't have a lot of money and it seems like no one really cares about it.

FACT: Maybe that's what you think, but urban schools across the country are being revitalized every year. Take a look at the resources below to see a few examples of how schools, just like yours, can improve.

MYTH: Most of my community isn't really involved with my school. It doesn't matter though because a lot of people in the community don't have kids, so why should they be involved?

FACT: Having a supportive community makes a world of difference in how well a good school functions. Talk to your neighbors and tell them about what great things your school is doing for the community, they might be more likely to get involved.

MYTH: Going to a big high school is ideal. There are more students to hang out with, more groups to get involved in, and more opportunities available to me.

FACT: Bigger isn't always better. Studies have shown that sometimes, smaller schools deliver bigger results, especially for young people who are at a disadvantage. Small schools have fewer course options, so all students take more challenging, college-preparatory courses, in addition to a lot of other great qualities.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOLS THAT WORK

Click here to see a few examples of five new schools across the country that "work!"
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/RethinkingHighSchool.pdf>

Public schools come in all shapes and sizes. Check out this link to see a few examples of successful school models that "work!"
<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/TransformingHighSchools/Schools/ModelSchools/default.htm>

Want to know what makes up a good school? Click here to find out!
http://www.gatesfoundation.org/nr/downloads/ed/Fact_Sheet_High_Quality_Schools.pdf

TAKE ACTION!

Help make your school a school that works! Talk to local businesses about setting up internship programs for you and your friends so you can apply everyday learning to the working world. Visit www.collegeboard.com/mtv/summerjobs to find resources on internships, summer jobs, volunteer opportunities and more. Find “schools that work” in your town and take an after school trip. Bring back new ideas and suggestions for your school and share them with an adult.

GET VOCAL

It's OK to challenge the system. There are students like you all over the country that are getting vocal about what is going down in their school.

MYTH OR FACT: A FEW THINGS YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO TO CHANGE YOUR SCHOOL

MYTH: I'm not an adult – I'm just a teenager. There isn't anything I can do to improve my education or my school.

FACT: Young adults count too. There are a number of things you can do to make a difference – join a school organization, find a mentor in your school, team up with your friends to challenge one another and your school – to name a few.

MYTH: Most young people are too busy dealing with life as a teenager to worry about improving schools. We don't have time to take on such a big issue.

FACT: That may be the case in your school, but in other schools across the country, students are getting their hands dirty and making a difference. So, take a look at your schedule and see if you can do some rearranging to make room for your school.

MYTH: What I have to say about my school isn't important. No one is interested in my opinions or my ideas for making my school a better place.

FACT: Are you sure about that? In a recent survey, about half of all students felt that they have an active voice in making certain decisions in their classroom, such as what they study and how they're graded.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT OTHER STUDENTS ARE SAYING AND DOING ABOUT THEIR EDUCATION

Students just like you are taking action and making changes in their schools and communities across the country. Click here for a look at the Forum for Youth Investment's projects to see how you can make a difference.
www.forumforyouthinvestment.org

Your peers are learning about the skills and tools young adults can use to make change happen and get involved in social justice right at home. Click on this link to the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing to see how you can get involved!
www.fcyo.org

Raise your voice in support of your education. Visit Soundout.org to see what other students are saying to implement change in their schools!
www.soundout.org

TAKE ACTION!

Let your voice be heard! Get together with your friends after-school, at lunchtime or in study hall and discuss a few ideas you have to improve your school. Write it all down and present it to a teacher or school administrator so you can make sure your voice is being heard. To get your brainstorm started, take a look at a few of the links above to see what other students are doing – and saying – in their communities.

GET SERIOUS ABOUT SCHOOL

You may have noticed a few things that your school could do better to help prepare students for college. That's great. But remember, if you're going to get vocal at school you need to get serious about your studies, too. So here are five study habits that will help you get serious about your school performance:

- Identify a quiet, organized study space.
- Time management – be sure you're using your time wisely, prioritizing what you need to study and when.
- Take study breaks – it's okay to take a break after about 30-40 minutes of studying. Just be sure your breaks aren't longer than your study sessions!
- Don't study right before you go to sleep or right after you eat a meal. You're likely to lose your focus.
- Pay attention! If you are actively participating and listening in class, you're studying will be much more productive. (And maybe even interesting!)

MYTH OR FACT: A FEW THINGS YOU *THINK* YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR ACADEMICS

MYTH: I'm really far behind in my Algebra I class. Without it, I probably won't get into college, so what's the point? I'm just going to give up.

FACT: Don't give up. Staying in math in high school is crucial. Studies show the more math you take in high school, the more likely you are to graduate from college. It may seem unachievable now, but even though you're having trouble with math, college is still within your reach.

MYTH: All high school students in this country can read. Illiteracy only applies to uneducated people.

FACT: Read between the lines. On average, most high school students in nine other countries can read better than those in the US.

MYTH: I'm not very good at science and probably need some help. None of my friends have tutors though and I'm too embarrassed to get one. What if my friends found out?

FACT: There's nothing embarrassing about working with a tutor to improve education. Take a look at the resources below for information on working with a tutor and talk to your guidance counselor to see what tutoring programs exist in your school.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT FINDING ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Being a teenager is tough! Having a mentor to talk to can sometime make life's challenges seem a little bit more achievable. If you don't have someone you can talk to, visit Mentor Place to find out about mentoring programs in your community.

www.mentorplace.org

Need a little extra help with one of your classes? Click here to link to FREE, Federal Resource for Educational Excellence – a government Web site with learning resources on all subjects.

www.ed.gov/free

Need to find a tutor, or want to train to become one? Check out the National Tutoring Association's Web site for more information.

www.ntatutor.org

TAKE ACTION!

Take responsibility for your own education! If you are having a tough time in a course, talk to an adult or a trusted friend about getting a tutor. Or, if you're performing well in a course, see if you can help support a struggling peer by becoming a tutor. Look at the resources above to see what you need to do to get help or help a friend.

HANG IN THERE

School is supposed to be challenging. And giving your brain a good workout is the best way to get ready for college. So here are a few reminders about why you should stay in school:

- High school dropouts are four times as likely to be unemployed as those who complete four or more years of college.
- Graduating from high school will most likely determine how well you live for the rest of your life.
- On average, High school graduates earn \$175 more per week than high school dropouts. College graduates earn \$368 more per week than high school graduates.
- Two-thirds of prisoners in America are high school dropouts.

MYTH OR FACT: A FEW THINGS YOU *THINK* YOU KNOW ABOUT THE LIFE OF A DROPOUT

MYTH: Some of my friends don't really like school, but they would never dropout.

FACT: Student dropout rates are higher than you think. Did you know that about three out of every 10 students drop out of high school?

You can help prevent your friends from dropping out by paying attention and being supportive. Some things to look for – poor attendance, lack of interest in school, and lack of participation in after-school activities.

MYTH: Only young adults who are troublemakers drop out of school. My friends don't get into a lot of trouble. They would never drop out.

FACT: Students drop out of school for a number of reasons – they can't work and go to school at the same time, they don't like school, they don't have a supportive family, and so on. Don't be so quick to judge – someone you know may be thinking about dropping out. See what you can do to help.

MYTH: If I drop out of high school, I can still go right to work and make enough money to support myself and a family.

FACT: It is a big deal. And if you're focused on the money, than you should know that, on average, adults with bachelor's degrees earn 62 percent more than high school graduates and \$1 million more than high school dropouts over their working lifetime.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON STAYING IN SCHOOL

There are national organizations across the country working hard to make sure you stay in school. Click here to visit the National Dropout Prevention Centers and see why so many people care about your future and what they're doing to help.

www.dropoutprevention.org

If you're thinking about dropping out of school, make sure you have someone in your life you can talk to about it. For example, getting involved in Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America programs is a great way to make a new friend who you can count on.

www.bbbsa.org

Organizations like Communities in School (CIS) have staff across the country working with the community to make sure students stay in school. Find a CIS in your neighborhood and see what they're doing to help students like you.

www.cisnet.org

TAKE ACTION!

Feeling stressed out about school? Make a list of three adults who care about you and your future. It could be a parent, teacher, older sibling, or coach, just to name a few. Talk to one of them about how you're feeling and what you need from them to make you a more successful student. And remember, if you need someone to talk to, take a look at the resources in this section, as well as "Get Serious About School" for information on mentoring programs.

MISSION ADMISSION

If you want to get into college, you need to start preparing for it today. So here are five things you can do to get ready for college:

- Know that you're on track academically. Make sure your teachers and guidance counselor know from day one that you are college bound so they can be sure you're in the right college-preparatory classes.
- Take part in school activities both during school and after school. College admissions offices look at extracurricular involvement.
- Make sure you are up-to-date on your college entrance exams, usually taken in a student's junior year. Have you taken the PSAT? SAT? ACT? If you haven't, talk to your guidance counselor about what you can do to get ready for and take these tests.
- Before you start applying to colleges, attend a college fair and/or take a college visit with friends or family to see what type of school best fits your profile. Your guidance counselor or college/career center can help you with this task.
- In your senior year, fill out your college application forms and turn them in on time. Many colleges have rolling admissions, so the sooner your application is complete, the better your chances will be of getting in.

MYTH OR FACT: A FEW THINGS YOU *THINK* YOU KNOW ABOUT BEING PREPARED FOR COLLEGE

MYTH: I've taken all of my high school requirements. I'm definitely ready for college.

FACT: Maybe, maybe not. Only about one out of every two high school graduates leave high school prepared to attend a four-year college without needing remedial classes.

MYTH: I'm not a very good test taker. It would probably hurt my application if I took the SAT or ACT test.

FACT: Don't overlook these important tests. About 80 percent of four-year colleges and 20 percent of two-year colleges require the SAT or ACT. And some schools may require additional tests. Be sure you read your application forms carefully, and know what the schools you're applying to require.

MYTH: Filling out these college applications and writing the essays are really time consuming and not fun at all. I think I might just rethink college and go get a job instead. Then I can start making money instead of spending it.

FACT: Think it over. While getting a job right after high school will pay off in the beginning, you may not be making as much as you could be down the road if you skip college. 21 of the 30 fastest growing job occupations require postsecondary education.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON GETTING INTO COLLEGE

For an insider's view on campus life around the country, visit Campus Dirt.
www.campusdirt.com

Headed to Community College? That's great! Click here to learn what you need to know about the colleges in your community.

www.communitycollege.org

Need some help finding the right college for you? Narrow your choices down using the Counselor-O-Matic.

<http://www.princetonreview.com/college/research/advsearch/match.asp>

TAKE ACTION!

Help your classmates envision themselves in college. Work with a teacher to organize a class field trip to a local college campus.

COLLEGE PAYS

College can be expensive, but it's worth every penny. You can get help paying for it by applying for financial aid. So here are five things to know about financial aid:

- In the 2003-04 school year, the average tuition and fees for full-time students was \$7,700. Tuition ranged from as much as \$14,200 at four-year private colleges to \$1,000 for two-year public colleges.
- The need for financial aid does not affect a student's chance of being admitted into college, one way or the other.
- There are three main types of financial aid: Grants and Scholarships, Loans, and Work-Study.
- To apply for Federal Aid, you must fill out a *Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)* on the Web. FAFSA applications for the 2006-2007 school year must be submitted by midnight Central Daylight time, June 30, 2006.
- You may also be eligible for state and/or school aid. Check with your guidance counselor and/or school's financial aid office to find out about eligibility and deadlines.

MYTH OR FACT: A FEW THINGS YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT FINANCIAL AID

MYTH: My parents make a lot of money, so I probably don't qualify for financial aid.

FACT: Don't be so sure. There are a lot of things, besides your parents' income, that determine your eligibility for financial aid. About six out of every 10 college undergraduates receive financial aid. Fill out a *Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)*, and find out what you qualify for.

MYTH: I don't get straight A's, so no one is going to give me financial aid or a scholarship.

FACT: While some scholarships are based on merit, there are many other aid programs that are based on need. Don't throw that application away – you just might be eligible!

MYTH: There isn't as much available for me as there was for my older brother 10 years ago. I'm going to be paying off student loans forever anyway, so why should I apply for aid?

FACT: True, funds might be a little tighter these days. However, the money you spend on a college degree is still a good investment. Over a working lifetime, the typical college graduate earns about 75 percent more than a high school grad does, about \$1 million more. That should be enough to pay off your loans, don't you think?

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION ON STAYING IN SCHOOL

Interested in applying for a scholarship? Visit College-Scholarships to learn more about regional and national opportunities available to you.
www.collegescholarships.com

Need more information on Financial Aid? Click here to learn about FAFSA and other tools that can help you apply for financial aid for college.
www.financialaidsupersite.com

Sign up for information and resources on scholarships, college tuition and more at Find Tuition.com

www.findtuition.com

TAKE ACTION!

College tuition is becoming more and more expensive. Join in the fight to build support for greater financial aid. Visit www.studentaidaction.org.