

How Colleges Are Ripping Off a Generation of Ill-Prepared Students

Earlier this month, the 2017 National Assessment of Educational Progress, aka the nation's "report card," was released. It's not a pretty story.

Only 37 percent of 12th-graders tested proficient or better in reading, and only 25 percent did so in math. Among black students, only 17 percent tested proficient or better in reading, and just 7 percent reached at least a proficient level in math.

The atrocious National Assessment of Educational Progress performance is only a fraction of the bad news. Nationally, our high school graduation rate is over 80 percent. That means high school diplomas, which attest that these students can read and compute at a 12th-grade level, are conferred when 63 percent are not proficient in reading and 75 percent are not proficient in math.

For blacks, the news is worse. Roughly 75 percent of black students received high school diplomas attesting that they could read and compute at the 12th-grade level. However, 83 percent could not read at that level, and 93 percent could not do math at that level.

It's grossly dishonest for the education establishment and politicians to boast about unprecedented graduation rates when the high school diplomas, for the most part, do not represent academic achievement. At best, they certify attendance.

Fraudulent high school diplomas aren't the worst part of the fraud. Some of the greatest fraud occurs at the higher education levels—colleges and universities. According to the

Bureau of Labor Statistics, 70 percent of white high school graduates in 2016 enrolled in college, and 58 percent of black high school graduates enrolled in college.

Here are my questions to you: If only 37 percent of white high school graduates test as college-ready, how come colleges are admitting 70 percent of them? And if roughly 17 percent of black high school graduates test as college-ready, how come colleges are admitting 58 percent of them?

It's inconceivable that college administrators are unaware that they are admitting students who are ill-prepared and cannot perform at the college level. Colleges cope with ill-prepared students in several ways. They provide remedial courses. One study suggests that more than two-thirds of community college students take at least one remedial course, as do 40 percent of four-year college students. College professors dumb down their courses so that ill-prepared students can get passing grades.

Colleges also set up majors with little analytical demands so as to accommodate students with analytical deficits. Such majors often include the term "studies," such as ethnic studies, cultural studies, gender studies, and American studies. The major for the most ill-prepared students, sadly enough, is education. When students' SAT scores [are ranked](#) by intended major, education majors place 26th on a list of 38.

The bottom line is that colleges are admitting youngsters who have not mastered what used to be considered a ninth-grade level of proficiency in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Very often, when they graduate from college, they still can't master even a 12th-grade level of academic proficiency.

During a recent University of North Carolina scandal, a learning specialist hired to help athletes found that during the period from 2004 to 2012, 60 percent of the 183 members of the football and basketball teams read between fourth- and

eighth-grade levels. About 10 percent read below a third-grade level. Keep in mind that all of these athletes both graduated from high school and were admitted to college.

How necessary is college anyway? One estimate is that 1 in 3 college graduates have a job historically performed by those with a high school diploma. According to Richard Vedder, distinguished emeritus professor of economics at Ohio University and the director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, in 2012 there were 115,000 janitors, 16,000 parking lot attendants, 83,000 bartenders, and about 35,000 taxi drivers with a bachelor's degree.

I'm not sure about what can be done about education. But the first step toward any solution is for the American people to be aware of academic fraud at every level of education.

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