

Results of a Five-College Survey of Parents of Recent High School Graduates

Five suburban community colleges in the Chicago area, including Oakton, recently collaborated on a survey to parents of high school graduates of the class of 2002 who attended the colleges in fall 2002. The study was undertaken to learn more about parents' roles in their students' selection of community colleges, to give insights and information about this important community college constituency, and to assist community colleges to shape more effective ways to foster positive and supportive opinions among parents of potential students. The five institutions sent out 6,431 surveys and received 2,223 usable responses, for an overall response rate of 34.6 percent. What did we learn?

- The dominant outcome parents want from their students' community college experience is credits and grade point averages for transfer.
- Parents have high expectations for their students. Eighty-nine percent say they want their students to achieve a bachelor's degree or higher, while only 11 percent say they expect their students to attain an associate degree or less.
- Parents overestimate their students' academic skills as measured by course placement tests. Twenty-four percent of students whose parents said they had high level academic skills placed into remedial English. Forty percent of students whose parents thought they had high level academic skills placed into remedial mathematics.
- Two-thirds of respondents said their students applied only to the community college, and one quarter said the decision to attend the community college was made only after high school.
- Parents relied primarily on college publications and personal contacts to learn about the community college. Twenty one percent said they used the college's website.
- The study also revealed important differences in how participating institutions record and calculate key measures such as credits earned and grade point averages. For example, one school included remedial courses in GPA calculations.

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