

# **Oakton Survey of Parents of High School Class of 2002 Students at Oakton in Fall 2002**



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## Executive Summary

In the fall of 2002, the Oakton College Office of Research conducted a survey of parents of in-district high school class of 2002 students who attended Oakton in the fall 2002 semester. The project largely replicated a similar study done in fall 2000. The purpose of the study was to ascertain parents' role in their students' college choice process and decision to attend Oakton, to understand outcomes parents wanted their students' to achieve at Oakton, and to gain insights into how the College might more effectively communicate with parents of prospective students.

Of the 759 parents/guardians surveyed (one survey was sent to each household), 12 were undeliverable and 226 usable responses were returned, for a response rate of 30.3 percent. Respondents represented all high schools. Overwhelmingly, mothers completed the survey (73%). Survey respondents were primarily Caucasian (68%) or Asian (19%). Forty percent of respondent families had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree or higher, and only 12 percent indicated neither parent had any college education at all. Two-thirds of the respondents said English was the language spoken at home, and another ten percent said English and another language were spoken at home.

Key findings include:

- Most parents are involved in their students' college choice process, but 17 percent are not.
- Parents rely on Oakton publications, high school counselors, people they know, and their own children for information about Oakton.
- Ninety percent of parents want their students to earn a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Oakton's affordability, proximity to home, and ability to give students time to decide what to do or what major to select are primary reasons students come to the College.
- One-third of students decide to come to Oakton only in the summer after high school graduation.
- Parents pay, on average, 77 percent of their students' direct college expenses at Oakton.
- Transfer preparation is the key outcome parents want for their students at Oakton (credits that will transfer and a grade point average that will permit transfer).
- Parents overestimate their students' academic abilities. Thirty-nine percent of parents rate their students' academic skills as high (ratings of 4 or 5 on a five-point scale) and only 11 percent rate their students as needing help (ratings of 1 or 2 on the same scale). However, 79 percent of students placed into at least one remedial level course.

Findings provide a number of implications for practice:

- Emphasize the transferability of programs and credits when communicating with parents of high school students.
- Emphasize instructional and support systems at Oakton that assist traditionally aged students to gain confidence, maturity, a sense of direction and improved academic skills.
- Sustain strong relationships with high school counselors, individuals on whom parents rely for information and suggestions about colleges for their sons and daughters.
- Continue to market the college to recent high school graduates during the summer immediately after graduation.
- Maintain high quality publications, especially those on which parents rely for learning about Oakton.

## **Introduction**

In the Fall 2000 semester, the Oakton Office of Research conducted a survey of parents of high school class of 2000 graduates who attended Oakton that fall (see Bers and Galowich, 2002a; Bers and Galowich, 2002b). In Fall 2002, the study was repeated at both Oakton and several neighboring community colleges, which joined together to administer the same instrument to parents of high school class of 2002 graduates attending the respective colleges in fall 2002. The purpose of the study was to ascertain parents' role in their students' college choice process and decision to attend Oakton, to understand outcomes parents wanted their students' to achieve at Oakton, and to gain insights into how the College might more effectively communicate with parents of prospective students.

This report provides results for the Oakton study. Subsequent reports will combine data from all participating institutions to present a broader perspective on perceptions of parents of traditionally aged community college students.

## **Why Study Parents?**

Recent literature about college choice reflects agreement that parents play important roles throughout the college choice process, both in terms of setting expectations for their children and taking the more proactive approach of discussing college plans and saving for college expenses (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000a and 2000b; Choy, Horn, Nunez & Chen, 2000; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Flint, 1992; Hossler, 1999). Studies agree that early parent involvement in shaping students' aspirations and preparation is especially important (Jun & Colyar, 2002; Plank & Jordan, 2001; Somers, Cofer & VanderPutten, 2002; Tierney, 2002).

Many studies show that parents' level of education is associated with students' college choice process, including preparation for college (Nunez and Horn, 2000; Bodfish, 2000). Students whose parents were more educated, held higher-level jobs, and earned higher incomes, were more likely to take college preparatory programs in high school and to aspire to bachelor's degrees or beyond. Ikenberry and Hartle (1998) found parents' socio-economic status was associated with the amount and quality of information on college financing; higher income families were more knowledgeable.

A new indicator of the importance being placed on parents is publication of a new magazine, *College: The magazine for parents of college-bound students*, first produced in March/April 2003. The publishers state their magazine is "the first consumer periodical about the high school-to-college transition written for parents and families with college-bound kids..." (Trebach and Weimer, p. 2).

The literature about the college choice process of community college students remains relatively sparse, especially when the focus is narrowed to the role of parents in that process. Perhaps the earliest study was conducted at Oakton by Bers and Smith, who surveyed parents of the class of 1988 students attending Oakton in that fall semester

(Bers and Smith, 1989). The studies by Bers and Galowich, cited above, are also part of this literature. In 1989, Hossler, Braxton and Coopersmith noted "...little attention has been paid to college choice process for community college students. Since adult students and students attending community colleges are more likely to be geographically bound, their college stage may look very different. This population also merits study" (pp. 280-81). This statement remains largely true today.

### **Methodology, Data and Respondents**

The primary source of data for this project came from a survey based on the Oakton 1989 and 2000 studies noted above, as modified in collaboration with researchers from the other community colleges participating in the study. The instrument was composed of three sections: one focused on the college choice decision in general, the second on the choice process related to the specific institution, and the third on demographic questions about respondents and their families. Face validity was established through critiques by college professionals conversant with the college choice process and by researchers from the participating colleges.

Data from the college's student information system were combined with parent responses for each student (we coded surveys to enable us to identify each respondent's child). Institutional data included each student's placement test results in reading, writing and mathematics; college-credits earned and grade point average for the first term of attendance (fall 2002); and major.

The initial population surveyed was 759 sets of parents/guardians (one survey was sent to each household). Surveys and postage-paid return envelopes were mailed in late October, 2002, with each survey coded so that a second wave of mailings was sent only to those who did not respond. The second mailing, including a second copy of the survey and another postage-paid return envelope, was sent out three weeks after the initial mailing.

Of the 759 surveys sent to parents/guardians, 12 were undeliverable, reducing the effective number of 747. Of these, 138 were returned from the first mailing and 88 more were returned after the second wave of mailings, for a total of 226 returned surveys and a return rate of 30.3 percent, slightly lower than the 33.5 percent response rate achieved in 2000. This does not include four returned surveys that could not be matched to student SSNs.

We received surveys from parents/guardians representing all high schools throughout the district, although the number from Evanston Township High School was disappointingly small – only three. Overwhelmingly, mothers completed the survey (73%) and survey respondents identified their racial or ethnic identity to be Caucasian (68%), Asian or Pacific Islander (19%), Hispanic (6%), black (1%), other or no response (6%). Parents reported the gender of their students as 56 percent male and 44 percent female. Forty percent of respondents reported at least one parent had a bachelor's degree or higher, and only 12 percent indicated neither parent had any college education at all.

Two-thirds of the respondents said English was the language spoken at home, and another ten percent said English and another language were spoken at home. A variety of languages other than English were listed as the home language, including Polish (7%), Spanish (5%), Tagalog (4%), Malayalam (3%), Russian (3%), Gujarati (3%), and, at less than 3% of respondents, Arabic, Assyrian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Farsi, Filipino, Greek, Hindi, Indian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Serbian, and Sicilian. In some, respondents and their students are relatively diverse in terms of ethnicity and language, and parents are relatively well educated in terms of college degrees earned.

In this report we provide frequency counts and appropriate cross tabulations.

### The College Decision

Seventy-one percent of respondents said their students always planned to attend college or decided to attend by their early high school years (see Table 1). Conversely, 29% said their students did not become serious until late in or even after high school. The picture is very different, however, when we examine timing about the decision to attend Oakton. Only 11 percent of respondents said their students decided on Oakton early in high school or before, whereas 56 percent decided on Oakton later in high school and fully one-third decided on Oakton only after high school graduation. These findings suggest the importance of continuing to communicate with high school seniors *and recent graduates*, and their parents, about attending Oakton.

**Table 1.** Questions 2 and 10: Which of these statements best describes **when** your son or daughter decided to attend college (college in general, not a specific college), and **when** your son or daughter decided to attend Oakton?

When Decided to Attend	College		Oakton	
	N	%	N	%
Always planned on attending	151	67%	16	7%
Early in HS (Fr/So)	9	4%	9	4%
Late in HS (Jr/Sr)	45	20%	122	56%
Summer after HS graduation	21	9%	72	33%
<b>Total</b>	226	100%	219	100%

The decision to attend Oakton came at a different time than the decision to attend college in general. Of the 151 respondents who said their students always planned on attending college, 29 percent said their students decided on Oakton only during the summer after high school. Eighty-five percent who said their students decided on attending college only after high school also said their students decided on Oakton during the same timeframe. This finding suggests that Oakton should continue to communicate with high school graduates during the summer after graduation, because students' plans to go elsewhere may change and Oakton become a real alternative for them.

Respondents indicated their students did consider alternatives to college, with full-time employment or attending a vocational or proprietary school the top alternatives. Since the line between colleges and universities, on the one hand, and vocational or proprietary schools, on the other, is increasingly blurry (consider DeVry University, for example), it is probably not valuable to differentiate these institutions from more traditional postsecondary alternatives. What is interesting is that one-sixth (17%) of the respondents said their students seriously considered working rather than attending school immediately after high school. There is no relationship between considering employment and when students considered going to college, however. Forty-four percent of respondents who said their students seriously considered working also said their students decided to attend college by the end of the sophomore year in high school.

**Table 2.** Question 3: How seriously did your son or daughter consider each of the following alternatives?

Alternatives to College*	Considered	
	N	%
Full Time Employment	36	17%
Vocational or Proprietary School	34	16%
The Military	19	9%
Travel	16	8%

\*Respondents who chose either “4” or “5” on a scale of 1 (Did Not Consider) to 5 (Seriously Considered). The percentage is based on the number of respondents that answered the question.

Parents have high aspirations for their sons and daughters. As shown in Table 3, 90 percent of respondents want their children to attain a bachelor’s degree or higher.

**Table 3.** Question 4: What level of education would you like your son or daughter to attain?

Level of Education		
	N	%
Some College	2	<1%
AA/S Degree	23	10%
BA/S Degree	130	58%
Graduate Degree	62	28%
Other (comments reflect bachelor’s degree or beyond)	8	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>100%</b>

Not all parents are involved in their students’ college selection process. One-sixth (17%) of respondents said they did not get involved at all, and another 4 percent became involved only after high school graduation. There is little correspondence between parents’ timing and when students decided to attend college. Of the 39 respondents who

said they were not involved at all in their students' selection process, 69 percent also said their students had always planned to attend college.

**Table 4.** Question 5: When did you start getting involved in your son or daughter's college selection process?

<b>When Got Involved in College Selection Process?</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Did not get involved at all	39	17%
Early in student's high school years (Fr/So)	73	33%
Later in student's high school years (Jr/Sr)	102	46%
After student's high school graduation	9	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>100%</b>

There are many ways in which a parent can be involved in his or her students' college choice process. The survey provided a list of activities and asked respondents to indicate in which activities he or she had participated. Table 5 presents results. Clearly, high school counselors and high school-sponsored programs (college nights) and college publications are the most important sources of information formation and involvement for parents. Interestingly, visiting websites is not as important as these more traditional means, but is growing in importance. In the year 2000, 26 percent of respondents said they visited college websites, while in 2002, the percent climbed to 32.

In addition to checking all the activities in which he or she had engaged, respondents also identified the single most helpful one. Here, the importance of personal contacts and direct experiences are evident. The most helpful sources were those involving direct contact with people or campuses: high school counselors, college nights (at which college representatives are present to talk with prospective students and parents), and visiting campuses.

These results suggest the importance of sustaining strong linkages with high school counselors, on whom parents rely for information about colleges. They also suggest the importance of having an Oakton presence at such events, of bringing parents to campus to see first-hand what Oakton has to offer, and of producing high quality printed material directed to prospective students and parents. Conversely, results suggest producing videotapes is a poor use of resources, that use of websites by parents is growing but still not a major source of information, and parents of Oakton students do not rely on commercial college guides or rankings.

**Table 5.** Question 6: There are many activities related to selecting a college in which parents or guardians may engage. Please indicate whether you and/or your spouse/partner participated in these activities as your son or daughter was making decisions about college.

Activities Related to Selection of a College*	Participated		Selected as most helpful	
	N	%	N	%
Talked to high school teacher or counselor	134	59%	34	19%
Read college brochures or catalogs	126	56%	23	13%
Attended college night at high school	108	48%	32	18%
Visited college campus(es)	86	38%	31	17%
Attended open house/info session provided by a college	73	32%	13	7%
Visited colleges' websites	73	32%	17	10%
Talked to admissions staff at college(s)	53	23%	13	7%
Read college guides or rankings	47	21%	4	2%
Talked to college faculty	22	10%	2	1%
Talked to private college counselor	17	8%	1	1%
Watched videotapes supplied by colleges	7	3%	0	0%
Other – total responses, not respondents**	22			

\*Respondents were requested to “check all that apply.”

\*\*“Other” responses include respondent is attending Oakton, had personal experience, other children are at Oakton.

More than half the respondents (57%) said their students did not apply to any college or university other than Oakton. Schools to which students who did submit multiple applications applied are listed in Table 6, along with information about admission. Schools to which multiple students applied are almost all in Illinois, most in the Chicago area. The number of “yes” responses to whether or not a student was admitted indicate students did have options to go to schools other than Oakton, at least so far as admission was concerned.

**Table 6.** Question 9: What other schools did your son or daughter apply to, other than Oakton? Was he/she admitted?

Schools*	Number of People Applied	Admitted		
		Yes	No	Don't Know or No Response
University of Illinois- Chicago	21	10	10	1
Loyola University	13	8	3	2
Northeastern Illinois University	11	8	1	2
Illinois State University	9	1	5	3
DePaul University	8	6	1	1
Northern Illinois University	7	3	4	0
University of Illinois- Urbana Champaign	6	2	3	1

Schools*	Number of People Applied	Admitted		
		Yes	No	Don't Know or No Response
Western Illinois University	5	5	0	0
Columbia College	5	4	1	0
Carthage College	4	3	1	0
William Rainey Harper	4	4	0	0
DeVry University	3	2	0	1
Southern Illinois University	3	2	1	0
Northwestern University	3	2	0	1
Ferris State College	2	2	0	0
Illinois Institute of Technology	2	0	2	0
Indiana State University	2	1	1	0
Iowa (University of)	2	2	0	0
Lincoln College	2	2	0	0
National Louis University	2	1	0	1
Western Michigan University	2	2	0	0

\*34 schools had one person apply. These schools are: American Academy of Art, Arizona State, Ball State, Bradley, CA College of Arts & Crafts, Chicago State, College of Charleston SC, Eastern Illinois, Greenville, Harrington Institute of Design, International Academy of Design, ITT Tech, Kent, Lewis University, Lynn University, Miami of Ohio, Michigan State, Munter College in NYC, North Park University, Northern Michigan, Ohio State, Otis College, Parkland Community College, Robert Morris College, St Ambros University, Suny Upstate Medical College, U of Kansas, U of Las Vegas, U of Arizona, Vocational College Program in Florida, Washington University, Westwood College of Technology

### About Oakton

In the section above, we noted that the decision to attend Oakton usually occurred much later than the decision to attend college in general. In this section we probe further into factors affecting the choice of Oakton, and parents' expectations of the College.

Both parents and students initiate the idea of attending Oakton (Table 7). Interestingly, high school teachers and counselors, on whom parents rely for information about college, are not perceived by many parents as having initiated the idea of attending Oakton. About half (49%) of respondents said both a parent and the student both initiated the idea of attending Oakton.

A number of factors influence students' decisions to attend Oakton. Table 8 presents the number and percent of respondents who said each factor was considered, and the number that rated each factor as the most important one. According to parents, factors related to money and staying close to home are primary, along with students' needing time to decide what to do or what major to select. Oakton's reputation is important, but not to the extent of other factors. The power of Oakton's being affordable and permitting students to continue to live at home and work while attending college is most evident by the fact that 64 percent of respondents identified at least one of these attributes as the most important factor in the decision to attend Oakton.

**Table 7.** Question 11: Who initiated the idea of your son or daughter attending Oakton?

Who Initiated Idea of Attending OCC*		
	N	%
Parent	134	59%
Student	127	56%
High School Teacher/Counselor	48	21%
Brother/Sister	36	16%
Student's friends	31	14%
Other family members	19	8%
Other	7	3%

\*Respondents were requested to “check all that apply.”

**Table 8.** Question 12: Which of the following factors were considered when your son or daughter decided to attend Oakton?

Factors Considered in Decision to Attend OCC*	Considered		Selected as Most Important	
	N	%	N	%
Student can combine work/school	143	63%	26	13%
Student wants to live at home	134	59%	25	12%
Student wants to save money	116	51%	15	7%
Student needs time to decide what to do	115	51%	26	13%
Oakton was most affordable choice	115	51%	37	18%
Student is unsure about a major	93	41%	19	9%
Oakton has excellent reputation	87	39%	8	4%
Oakton has program wanted	61	27%	17	8%
Student has friends who go to Oakton	55	24%	1	<1%
Student needs academic assistance that Oakton provides	49	22%	17	8%
Other family members have gone to Oakton	49	22%	1	<1%
Student couldn't afford to go elsewhere	47	21%	8	4%
Other**	9	4%	7	3%

\*Respondents were requested to “check all that apply.”

\*\*“Other responses include some that nearly duplicate specific items in the survey, along with responses such as “wanted to be a transfer student” and “girlfriend is at UIC.”

The actual decision to attend Oakton was most often a seen to be a joint one, shared by both students and parents (Table 9). In only a handful of cases to respondents describe the decision as being primarily the parents’.

**Table 9.** Question 14: How would you describe your son’s or daughter’s decision to attend Oakton? (Choose only **one** response)

Description of Decision to Attend Oakton		
	N	%
Entirely student’s own decision	56	25%
Mostly student’s own decision	44	20%
Joint decision	115	52%
Mostly Parent or spouse/partner’s decision	7	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100%</b>

One of Oakton’s ongoing concerns is how best to communicate with parents of potential students about the College. Respondents were provided with a list of resources and asked to indicate which ones they used to learn about Oakton, and which was the most important. Table 10 presents results. Here the importance of high school counselors is evident, with 22 percent of respondents indicating these individuals as their most important source of information or opinions about Oakton. Other important sources include students, friends and relatives, and Oakton publications, especially the class schedule and catalog. Mass media such as newspapers, radio and TV are not relied on as sources of information or opinions about the College, but they may provide background information to foster familiarity with the institution, if not specific information.

**Table 10.** Question 15: Parent/Guardians learn about colleges from many sources. Please indicate whether you’ve gotten information or opinions **about Oakton** from any of the sources listed below.

Sources of Information or Opinions*	Used Source		Most Important	
	N	%	N	%
Oakton class schedule mailed to home	104	46%	29	14%
Oakton catalog	93	41%	26	13%
High School counselor/teacher	93	41%	44	22%
Your friends or relatives	93	41%	28	14%
Your class of 2000 student	77	34%	23	11%
Oakton brochures	69	31%	14	7%
Your other children	68	30%	22	11%
Oakton website	40	18%	5	2%
Friends of your class of 2000 student	29	13%	4	2%
Your spouse/partner	27	12%	2	1%
Your employer or co-workers	20	9%	0	0%
Other**	14	6%	5	2%
Oakton faculty or staff	8	4%	3	1%
Local newspapers	7	3%	1	<1%
Local cable or other TV ads	4	2%	0	0%
Admission staff from other colleges	1	<1%	1	<1%
Radio	1	<1%	0	0%

\*Respondents were requested to “check all that apply.”

\*\*“Other” responses include respondent attended Oakton (mentioned 9 times), lives in neighborhood, and reputation.

Parents want the college experience to provide a number of results for their students. To ascertain what parents of recent high school graduates want their sons and daughters to achieve at Oakton, respondents were given a list of potential outcomes and asked to rate the importance of each on a 5-point scale, with 5 = very important and 1 = not important. Table 11 provides the number and percent of respondents rating each item 4 or 5, and the number and percent who rated each outcome as the most important. Preparation for transfer, exemplified by the desired outcomes of both transferable credits and GPA, head the list, with improved direction, confidence and academic skills coming next. The two sets of desired outcomes are complementary and send a clear message about what parents are likely to value about their students' Oakton experience.

The importance of transfer is further illustrated by looking at what students themselves said their intent was at Oakton. On their application forms, 69 percent said their intent was to prepare for transfer. Sixty-one percent said their Oakton program was in a transfer area and another 13 percent said they were undecided.

**Table 11.** Question 17: The following is a list of gains or outcomes that students may obtain from attending Oakton. Please indicate which you think are important for your son or daughter to achieve at Oakton.

Gains or Outcomes *	Desired Outcome		Most Important	
	N	%	N	%
Credits that will transfer	195	91%	44	21%
GPA will transfer	182	88%	60	29%
Sense of direction	176	86%	22	11%
Confidence in his or her abilities	169	83%	19	9%
Improved academic skills (e.g., reading, writing, math)	165	82%	20	10%
An Associate's degree	141	70%	26	13%
Social maturity	137	69%	4	2%
Training for a job	108	55%	11	5%

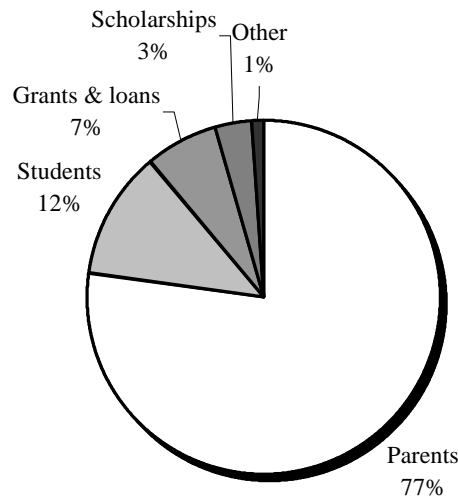
\*Respondents who chose either "4" or "5" on a scale of 1 (Not Important) to 5 (Very Important); percent is based on number who responded.

Parents' satisfaction with Oakton can be gleaned from their responses to a question asking them to rate their confidence that attending Oakton was the right decision for their student. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 = extremely confident and 1 = not at all confident, 93 percent rated their confidence as 4 or 5. Parents also perceive that Oakton provides them with adequate information about the College. Eighty-seven percent of respondents agreed this was the case.

Parents' interest may be inferred, as well, from the extent to which they finance their students' educations. Respondents were asked to indicate the percentage of their

students' college costs (tuition, fees, books, supplies and incidentals) paid by each of five sources. Figure 1 presents results. On average, parents pay for just over three-quarters of their students' college costs, with students themselves supplying just over 10 percent. These data do not tell the whole cost picture, however. What is missing are estimates of who is paying for the cost of students living at home (e.g., food) and for their lifestyle expenses, including cars, entertainment, etc.

**Figure 1**  
Percent of College Costs Paid by Various Sources



### Academic Performance

Parents were asked several questions related to their students' academic skills and achievements. One question sought information on students' high school ranks, presented in Table 12.

**Table 12.** Question 21: What was the approximate high school rank of your student?

High School Class Rank	N	%
Top Quarter	23	12%
Second Quarter	52	26%
Third Quarter	84	42%
Fourth Quarter	39	20%
<b>Total</b>	198	100%

Two other questions asked parents to rate their students' academic skills and level of maturity, each on a 5-point scale with 5 = the highest level of skill or maturity. Table 13 presents these results. Parents tend to see their children as academically capable and mature, if not outstanding.

**Table 13.** Question 22: How would you characterize your child's academic skill?  
Question 23: How would you characterize your child's level of maturity?

<b>Academic Skills and Maturity Level</b>		
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Academic Skills</b>		
Honors—Outstanding – 5	21	9%
4	67	30%
3	110	50%
2	16	7%
Remedial—Needs Help – 1	8	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Maturity Level</b>		
Very Mature – 5	50	22%
4	87	39%
3	68	30%
2	12	5%
Very Immature – 1	7	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>100%</b>

Data drawn from Oakton's student information system (Oakstar) depict a different picture of the academic levels of these recent high school graduates, however. Of the 220 students who took Oakton reading and writing placement tests, 27 percent placed into remedial reading and 30 percent placed into remedial writing. Of the 213 students who took the mathematics placement test, 74 percent placed into remedial mathematics and another 13 percent placed into intermediate algebra, a course below the level of general education. Put another way, only 13 percent placed into college-level mathematics.

To gain more insight into the relationship between parents' evaluations of their students' academic skills and maturity, and students' actual skills, we compared parents' assessments and their students' placement results. We looked first at the number of remedial courses into which a student placed, and then at their placements in reading, writing and mathematics. To do this, we collapsed parent assessments such that scores of 1 and 2 indicated low skills or maturity, a score of 3 indicated moderate skills or maturity, and scores of 4 or 5 indicated higher skills or maturity. We also excluded

Intermediate Algebra from the Remedial Mathematics category. Tables 14 and 15 presents results.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 14.** Comparison of Parent Assessments and Number of Remedial Course Placements\*

Parent Assessment of Academic Skills and Maturity Level		Percent of Students and Number of Remedial Course Placements			
	Number	0 21%	1 40%	2 24%	3 15%
Academic Skills					
High	86	38%	34%	20%	8%
Moderate	101	15%	46%	26%	14%
Low	24	0%	33%	33%	33%
Maturity Level					
High	132	23%	41%	25%	11%
Moderate	64	23%	39%	23%	14%
Low	17	18%	29%	24%	29%

\*Includes only students who took all three placement tests; intermediate algebra is not counted as a remedial course.

**Table 15.** Comparison of Parent Assessments and Students' Placement Test Results

Parent Assessment of Academic Skills and Maturity Level		Percent of Students Placing into Remedial Level		
	Number	Reading	Writing	Math
Academic Skills				
High	85	24%	21%	54%
Moderate	110	24%	33%	78%
Low	24	50%	50%	100%
Maturity Level				
High	134	28%	29%	70%
Moderate	68	21%	29%	72%
Low	19	37%	42%	74%

Data in Table 14 indicate that of the 211 students who took all three placement tests, only 21 percent placed into college-level courses in all three subjects (reading, writing and mathematics), and 15 percent placed into remedial courses in all subjects. Data in both tables indicate that while parents' assessments of their students' academic skills are generally in the expected direction (high ratings are associated with fewer remedial placements), they are far from perfect. For example, of respondents who said

<sup>1</sup> The number of parents who rated their students' Academic Skills and Maturity levels differs between the two tables because in Table 14 only respondents whose students took all three placement tests are included, and in Table 15 respondents whose students did not take a placement test are included.

their students' academic skills were high, 62 percent had students placing into at least one remedial course. Parents' ratings of their students' maturity levels are not associated with the number of remedial course placements.

Of the 226 students whose parents responded to the survey, 212 had at least one college-level credit on the transcript. The mean GPA was 2.06 – barely a C average – with a standard deviation of 1.15.<sup>2</sup> The median GPA was 2.23 (half the students earned GPAs above and half earned GPAs below 2.23).

Two-thirds of the students were classified as full-time on the official census date of the Fall semester. Full-time is defined as 12 credits or more of Oakton coursework, including remedial classes. However, the mean number of college credits earned was just 9.3, with a standard deviation of 4.0. Only 15 percent of the students earned 15 or more credits. This is important information because to earn an associate degree or its equivalent in four semesters, a student must earn credits (and an average of C or higher) in at least 15 credits each semester. Eighty-six percent of the students returned to Oakton for the spring semester, a strong rate of term-to-term retention.

### **Summary and Discussion**

In summary, parents who responded to this survey had graduates at all public high schools in Oakton's district, were relatively diverse with respect to ethnicity and home language, and were generally well educated. Most were involved in their students' college choice process and decisions, though said that coming to Oakton was usually the students' decisions. Parents relied primarily on local sources of information, including the Oakton course schedule mailed to homes, Oakton catalog, high school counselors and teachers, friends, and their own sons and daughters. Parents are paying for about three-quarters of their students' academic expenses, though we do not know who is financing lifestyle expenses such as cars, clothes and entertainment. Oakton's affordability is clearly an attraction.

Parents have high educational aspirations for their students. They want them to earn at least a bachelor's degree and see the value of Oakton as a place where students can earn transferable credits, gain a sense of direction and confidence, and sharpen academic skills. Parents are unrealistic in estimating their students' academic skills, however. Only 11 percent rated their students' academic skills as low, yet 79 percent of the students placed into one or more remedial courses at Oakton.

While most respondents said their students decided to attend college by the end of their sophomore year in high school, fully a third said the decision to attend Oakton came only after high school graduation.

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<sup>2</sup> The standard deviation gives the average amount the GPA deviates from the mean. Two-thirds of students are between one standard deviation below and above the mean. In this case, two-thirds of the 212 students earned GPAs between .91 and 3.21.

These findings suggest that Oakton might

- Emphasize the transferability of programs and credits when communicating with parents of high school students;
- Emphasize instructional and support systems at Oakton that assist traditionally aged students to gain confidence, maturity, a sense of direction and improved academic skills;
- Sustain strong relationships with high school counselors, individuals on whom parents rely for information and suggestions about colleges for their sons and daughters;
- Continue to market the college to recent high school graduates during the summer immediately after graduation;
- Maintain high quality publications, especially those on which parents rely for learning about Oakton.

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