



A Future for All Students, College-Bound or Not Why “Educational Management” Should Replace “College Preparation”

by *Doug Manning, President of Bridges.com*

When I was a high school counselor, it was common to have a student ask for assistance in completing their course selection for the next year. As most counselors do, I'd begin the interview by asking, "What kind of things do you want to do after you graduate?"

About half of the students would answer, "I don't really have a clue what I'm doing after graduation!" In every case, as most counselors do, I'd follow up with a classic piece of guidance advice, "No problem. Let's just keep all your doors open."

"Let's just keep all your doors open" is counselor code for, "Let's put you in a fully academic program."

Why is it that in high schools we continue to place our primary emphasis on university prep? Only 33 percent¹ of high school graduates ever earn a four-year degree. By centering high school on academic studies, we assure that many students, including the 29 percent² who fail to graduate, find no relevance in the courses they are taking. Unlike in the 20th century, when students could quit school and learn a living in community settings, 21st-century individuals without a real high school diploma are destined to be "unsuccessful."

The answer is not complicated -- it begins with one change. We must shift the focus of high school from 'university prep' to 'educational management' -- developing more students with a meaningful plan for work and learning in the future. This focus applies to every student -- whether they are bound for employment, apprenticeship, military, volunteerism, two-year college, or university.

As a result of this simple shift in emphasis, expecting all students to manage a self-developed educational plan, schools can become more meaningful to a wider variety of students. This has a positive impact on graduation rates, aggregate achievement, student interest, attendance, enrollment in challenging courses, and post-secondary enrollments.³ With more students staying in school, more funds are provided to districts, enabling an enriched suite of educational services for learners.

More than individuals are disadvantaged by our society's preference for university prep. The reputation, productivity,

and financial status of every school are negatively impacted as well (see table on next page). Schools are caught between 20th-century expectations and 21st-century realities requiring preparation of every child for the future.

We ask our schools to create great scholars yet require them to improve aggregate test scores while graduating more students on time. We struggle to find funds but lose thousands of dollars every time a student walks out the door. This is very frustrating for educators, who are fully occupied seeking answers and funding to meet multiple requests.

Bridges can help schools to make this adjustment. Our 'Explore Plan Apply' methodology for career and educational management is designed to help every student, not just those focused on a known career or university path. We provide an integrated suite of products, curriculum and training that makes program implementation easier. We have real people available for support. We provide consultative services, resources that include parents, and connections to best-of-breed partners who can help educators to develop more students in their school with a meaningful plan. All this help makes a difference to kids needing direction, to counselors needing support, and to schools needing more students to stay in school.

I once read a quote that said, "Any society that values its poor philosophers over its excellent plumbers will have a society where neither its pipes nor its beliefs will hold water." This is also true for schools. We can no longer dedicate our available school resources primarily to those who are academically successful.

Let's make one change -- developing our school systems and services around the interests of all kids. If we did this, and I were a counselor today, no planning disabled student would get out of my office until they had committed to a process for developing some kind of interest beyond Friday night. This is the most effective beginning for truly leaving no child behind.

¹ http://www.collegeways.com/retention_journal.htm

² http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm

³ <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/~iee/PAPERS/Stw.pdf>

College Prep for Some vs. Educational Management for Every Student

School Objective	Traditional University Prep Focus	Focus on All Student Interests	Explanation
1. Increased Graduation Rate		+	Schools cannot increase graduation rates by putting more emphasis on those who are already successful. We must develop programs that enable all students to see meaning in school, not just those preparing for college.
2. More Funds to Schools or District		+	Schools benefit financially when more students stay in school. The academically successful are already staying in school. We need to focus on motivating <u>all</u> students to see the benefits of staying in school. Raising retention rates can increase FTEs.
3. Improved Aggregate Test Scores		+	Schools cannot increase aggregate school test scores by focusing on those who are already successful in high-stakes tests. The biggest gains come from motivating and focusing on those performing poorly today.
4. More Motivated Students With Goals		+	Students that are motivated are students who want to learn. Motivating students to make plans for the future sparks learning and helps students with their learning retention skills, leading to better test scores. Improved student interest in school and school studies keeps students in school.
5. Improved Attendance Rate		+	Students with more interest in school are more planful students. They are motivated to stay in school. Schools need to work with <u>all</u> students to improve attendance rates and improve allocated funding amounts.
6. Increased Number of Students Attending Post-Sec Education		+	Students with plans go on to post-secondary education. Motivated students see the importance of education in a successful future and enroll in more post-secondary programs.
7. Increased Number of Students Who Complete Post-Sec Ed.		+	Better planning at the high school level would lower the 50 percent dropout rate in post-secondary programs. Students are more successful in post-secondary life when they build a pathway for the future while they are in high school.
8. Increased Scholarships and Financial Aid to Students	+	+	A broader perspective on scholarships and financial aid will enable a broader range of students to benefit from financial assistance for all career and educational pathways. There is satisfaction today with academically successful kids.
9. Parent Satisfaction with School	+	+	Similarly, parents of academically successful students are likely to be satisfied with the system today. A focus on <u>all</u> student interests will bring support from a wider range of parents.
10. Employer Satisfaction with School		+	Employers want motivated and skilled employees. They will be more satisfied with the education system as more students develop a sense of purpose related to school and their future careers.
11. Improved School Status	+		Schools with more college- or university-bound students (and more academic scholars) have higher status in our society than those with high graduation rates and good aggregate test scores. Schools need to focus on helping <u>all</u> students create a pathway for their future.