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Education Department ramps up FAFSA support for colleges

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CHOICES in EDUCATION

RIGHTING THE SHIP

Education Department ramps up FAFSA support for colleges as lawmakers seek fixes

By Danielle Douglas-Gabriel

The Washington Post

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona has announced more steps the department is taking to help colleges as it continues to try to smooth out kinks in the rollout of its revamped financial aid form.

The changes, including a relaxing of some compliance requirements, come as members of Congress are stepping up calls for the agency to do more to remedy problems with the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). But

the plan does not address the problems some families are still facing in accessing the form.

The FAFSA is filled out by about 17 million students each year and serves as a gateway to billions of dollars in grants and scholarships from the federal government, states, foundations and colleges.

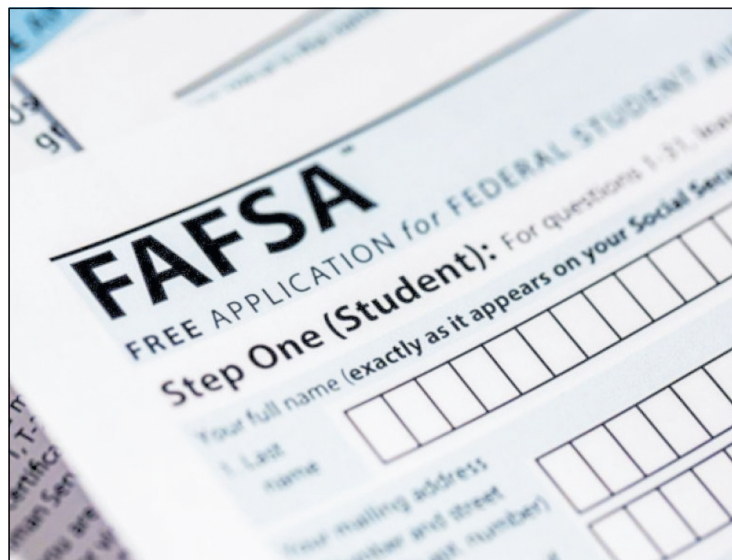
A new version of the form was unveiled in late December, but its launch has been besieged by technical glitches, formula errors and delays that are making it difficult for students to figure out how much they will have to pay for college.

Colleges are in a bind as they wait for the department to send data from FAFSA applications.

After originally promising the information starting in January, the Education Department said it will now take two months longer, in part, as it updates a formula used to help determine whether a student is eligible for aid.

University leaders have complained that their financial aid offices are being asked to quickly churn out aid offers while meeting a host of regulatory requirements from the de-

FAFSA » PAGE 4



Since the federal student aid website that allows students to access FAFSA applications and information went live on Dec. 30, there have been multiple issues that have further delayed the federal student loan process.

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Detroit Catholic Central Announces 149-Acre Purchase and Athletic Complex

The school is also set to open the George and Mary Turek Hall of Science in August, 2024

Detroit Catholic Central High School has announced the purchase of **149 acres of property** and the development of a new **Northern Athletic Complex on the current property**.

The new 149-acre property has increased the school's total acreage from 118 to 267. The new property is located near the crossroads of 12 Mile Road and South Hill Road in Lyon Township, Michigan, 2.5 miles west of the school's main campus.

To date, no plans for the property have been shared with the public but the space will allow the school to continue to develop its **Vision 100 plan**.

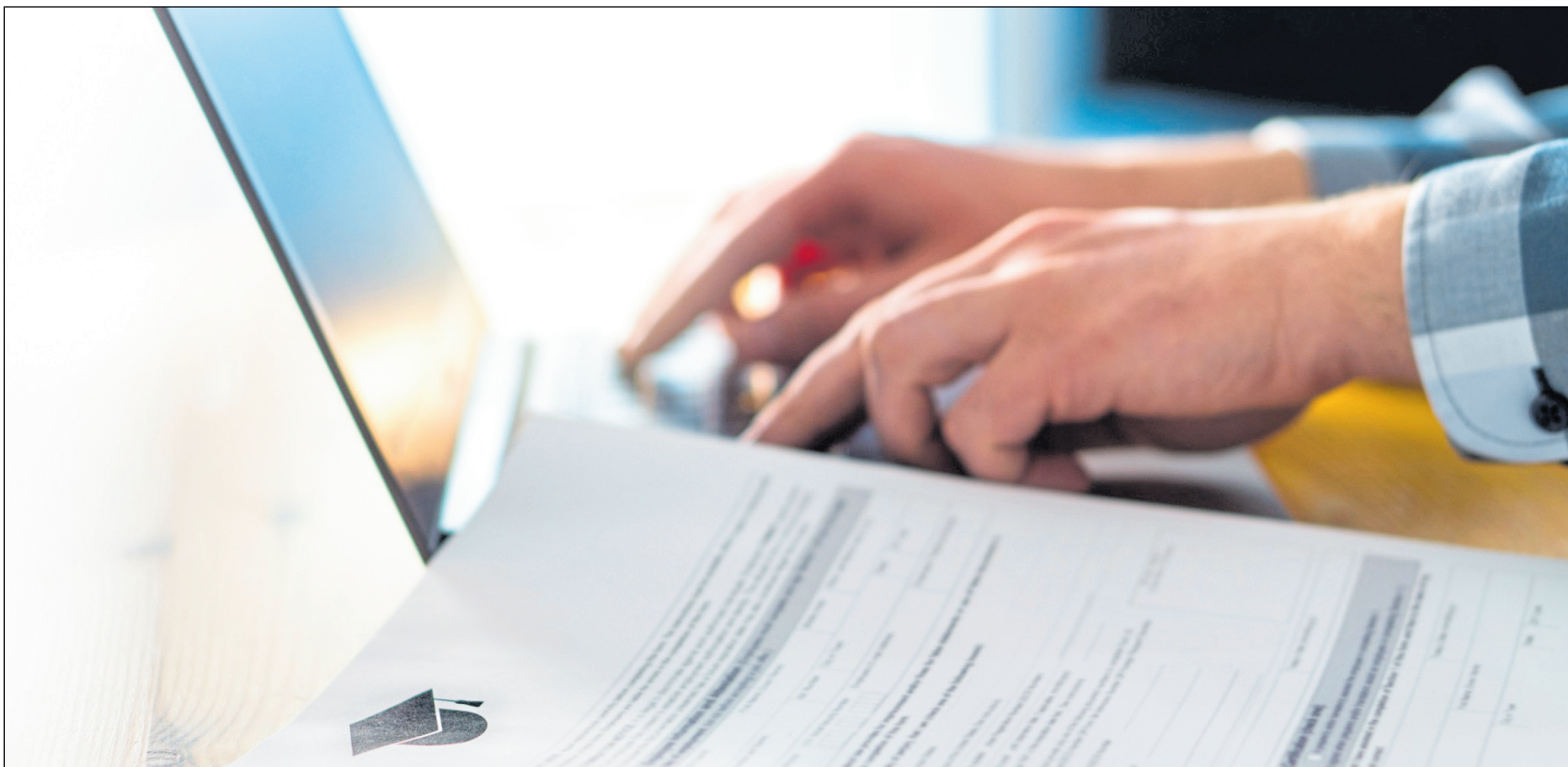
The school also announced the development of a new **Northern Athletic Complex, opening in the Spring of 2026**. The NAC is set to feature two turf fields for sub-varsity use, a nine lane track, a dedicated throwing area, a hospitality building with concessions, team room, bathrooms, and an additional parking lot.

The school is set to celebrate the opening of the **George and Mary Turek Hall of Science** in August 2024. The 57,000 square foot addition will be home to eight science laboratory classrooms, an engineering lab, a 5,300 square foot FIRST Robotics competition field, a fabrication and machinery room, an innovation lab, a greenhouse, a 130-seat immersion hall, a four Meter Observa-Dome with GPS Computerized Celestron Telescope, a RedBird 180° Flight Simulator and flight simulation room, and more!

Families interested in exploring the school for their son are encouraged to visit the school's website, www.catholiccentral.net, and look for the "Admissions" tab.



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GETTY IMAGES

FAFSA processing will start six weeks later than expected.

FAFSA

FROM PAGE 2

partment.

To ease the burden, Cardona said the department will reduce FAFSA verification, an audit widely considered an unnecessary hurdle for low-income students and a time-consuming task for aid offices.

Now that the department is receiving the majority of income data directly from the Internal Revenue Service, the agency anticipates there will be less of a need to verify a student's information.

The department is also suspending through June new reviews to confirm a college is meeting requirements to receive federal student aid, except for those related to suspected fraud or a severe breach of fiduciary

duties.

In addition, the federal agency said it will provide flexibility in the process for some colleges to recertify eligibility to participate in federal student aid programs.

"These steps are a direct response to input we've received from financial aid administrators and college and university presidents about where they're seeing challenges with implementing Better FAFSA and the concrete ways we can help them process this information easier and simpler," Cardona said.

The measures are part of a broader effort Cardona described as the FAFSA College Support Strategy.

He said the department would use \$50 million to create a helpline for colleges and send experts to some campuses to support financial aid offices.

"These steps are a direct response to input we've received from financial aid administrators and college and university presidents about where they're seeing challenges with implementing Better FAFSA and the concrete ways we can help them process this information easier and simpler."

— Education Secretary Miguel Cardona

"We applaud these initial measures from the department," Justin Draeger, president of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, said in a statement. "To make this work, higher education stakeholders require a sustained effort, which includes additional administrative relief and

the department meeting its FAFSA processing timelines going forward."

Pressure is mounting for the Biden administration to quickly clean up the messy FAFSA launch.

A group of more than 100 Democratic lawmakers wrote to Cardona, urging the secretary to address the operational problems.

Lawmakers want clarity on how the department plans to communicate any further delays in processing the FAFSA and minimize the potential impact on students.

"The recent announcements from the department were a welcome first step in addressing the many challenges students, counselors, aid administrators, and relevant stakeholders are facing," lawmakers wrote. "But now, it is imperative that we all work together to ensure no student falls through the cracks or faces unnecessary challenges in accessing the aid they are due."

While the department is taking steps to help colleges, the agency has yet to resolve more than a dozen technical errors preventing some families from completing the FAFSA.

Chief among them is a glitch preventing parents

without a Social Security number from being able to contribute information to the FAFSA and stopping their children who are U.S. citizens from applying for aid. The department said officials are meeting daily to resolve the matter but could not provide a clear timeline. For now, families can submit a paper version of the FAFSA.

The ongoing problems with the FAFSA rollout also continue to draw scrutiny from Republican lawmakers, who have called on the Government Accountability Office to investigate.

"The reason students, parents, and schools are scrambling to deal with financial aid uncertainty is because of gross mismanagement by the Department. End of story," said Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), chairwoman of the House Education Committee.

CAREER PATHWAYS



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

How to pursue a career as an EMS pro

Emergency medical personnel are often first on the scene when someone experiences an accident or a medical emergency.

EMS workers are generally trained and certified as certified first responders, emergency medical technicians and paramedics. However, the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians recognizes five different levels of emergency medical service worker. Though similar, the requirements governing each type of EMS worker vary.

All EMS workers provide life-saving services and help transport individuals to hospitals for additional treatment and care.

Here is a deep look into the different EMS personnel and the training one might expect.

Certified first responder

A certified first responder is an integral member of an EMS team. These individu-

als provide basic medical care at the scene of emergencies, including basic first aid, stabilization of injuries, treating shock, and other tasks. First responders must be certified by the National Registry of Emergency Technicians, according to Learn.org. The American Red Cross offers first responder training courses. Certification requirements vary by state, and each state's EMS office can provide specific details.

Emergency medical technician

According to the UCLA Center for Prehospital Care, EMTs complete a course that is a minimum of 170 hours. One does not need to have previous medical experience to become an EMT, but eligibility requirements may vary from school to school and state to state. Like certified first responders, EMTs must pass the NREMT examination in order to obtain certification. EMTs can be EMT-B

(basic) or one of two EMT-I (intermediate).

Paramedic

Paramedic students complete many more hours of training that may last between six and 12 months. Coursework builds on EMT education and blends additional medical training, including courses in anatomy, cardiology, medication, and physiology. Paramedics will take part in lectures, skills labs and a hospital internship, followed by an EMS field internship before passing the national certification exam. Upon passing, these individuals will receive the highest certification of pre-hospital care in the United States.

EMS workers provide life-saving medical care and are often first on a scene when a medical emergency takes place. Working as part of an EMS team is a demanding, but rewarding career.

— *By Metro Editorial Services*



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HIGHER EDUCATION

Colleges are finally turning the corner on enrollment

By Danielle Douglas-Gabriel

The Washington Post

New data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center confirms that colleges and universities are finally seeing growth in student enrollment. This marks the first increase in enrollment since the coronavirus pandemic upended higher education.

Undergraduate head counts grew 1.2% this fall, amounting to about 176,000 more undergraduate students in college than the prior year. Still, there were more than a million empty seats on campuses compared to five years ago, according to the report.

“Colleges are hoping that

they have finally seen the bottom and are now starting to recover,” Doug Shapiro, the research center’s executive director, said. “But we’re still in a deep hole.”

The report, a closely watched indicator of sector-wide trends, offers a more complete picture of fall head counts than the preliminary findings that the Clearinghouse released in October. The trend lines are largely the same, with older students driving the growth in enrollment on one end and high schoolers on the other. The most significant growth in undergraduate enrollment came from the matriculation of existing students and a return of those who previously dropped out, Shapiro said.

COLLEGES » PAGE 8



New data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center confirms that colleges and universities are finally seeing growth in student enrollment.

JUSTIN SULLIVAN
— GETTY IMAGES



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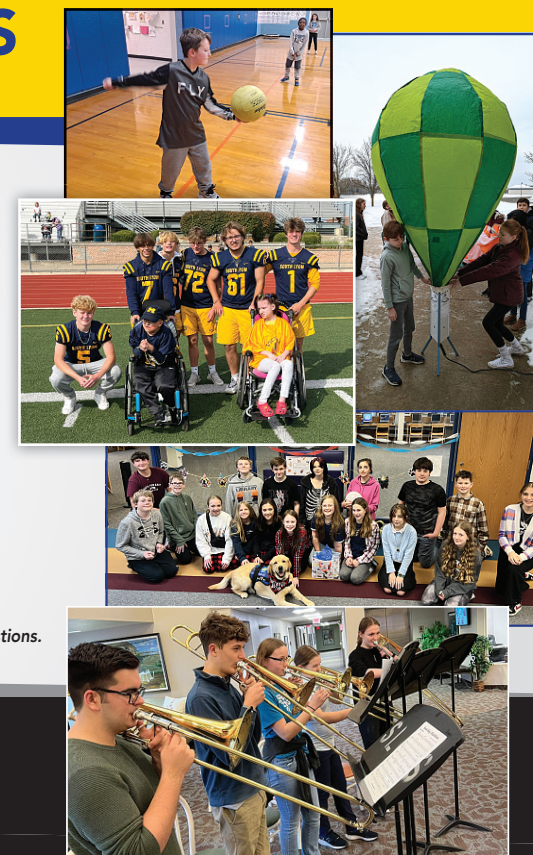
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NIC ANTAYA — GETTY IMAGES

Michigan Wolverines students Xander Caruana, left, Alex Melnyk and James Kolasinski react while watching the 2024 College Football Playoff National Championship Game against the Washington Huskies on Jan. 8 at Good Time Charley's in Ann Arbor.

Colleges

FROM PAGE 6

iro noted.

Yet with more colleges reporting their fall numbers, researchers are noticing trends that could shape higher education for years to come.

Here's a look at a few key takeaways from the report:

Older students are driving freshman enrollment

Colleges and universities counted more freshmen this fall than in years past, but recent high school graduates weren't the

ones signing up for the most classes.

People aged 21 and up drove the growth in freshman enrollment, especially at community colleges.

Researchers also found an influx of community college students over age 30, a rare increase in enrollment for that population, according to the report.

Enrollment of first-time undergraduate students under the age of 20 flatlined this fall and remains 5.3% below 2019 levels.

Shorter programs are all the rage

Enrollment in associate programs saw the highest growth among undergraduates, up 2.2% over the prior year, but still 14.2% below fall 2019 levels.

Bachelor's programs grew at a lower rate of less than 1% and remain 3.3% below pre-

pandemic levels, according to the report.

Undergraduate certificate programs gained 18,000 students for a third consecutive year of fall term growth, although growth has tapered from its high in fall 2021. Still, enrollment in certificate programs is 15.6% above 2019 levels.

"After that initial shock when community colleges lost huge numbers of students in 2020 and 2021, students have been increasingly opting for shorter-term credentials," Shapiro said.

Skilled trades training is booming

Community colleges focusing on vocational education registered a 16% increase in fall enrollment, bringing head counts above fall 2019 levels.

Shapiro said enrollment in mechanic

and repair technologies at community colleges grew by 11.5% compared to the prior year.

Dual enrollment continues to dominate

High schoolers eager to get a jump on college courses continue to file into community colleges, which reported a 5.2% increase in dual enrollment students over the prior year.

Dual-enrollment programs, which let high school students take college classes, have been a bright spot for community colleges. Enrollment in those programs helped pull many schools out of steep declines in head counts during the height of the pandemic.

LEARNING STARTS AT HOME

Parental involvement is a key factor in students' performance, success

Success in school can carry over to successful experiences later in life. That underscores the benefits of developing skills in the classroom. Students learn in their own way, and at times they may need to overcome various obstacles.

The job of education does not fully fall on educators and administrators.

Education begins at home. Research has found that kids benefit significantly when parents and other caregivers are strongly involved in a child's education. A 2020 study published in the Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community

found that parental involvement in a child's education is associated with improved academic performance.

Specifically, children whose parents are more involved in their educations have higher levels of academic performance than children whose parents were not as involved.

A 2005 study from researchers at the Johns Hopkins University Center of School, Family and Community Partnerships showed that school practices that encourage families to support their students' math learning at home led to higher percentages of stu-

PARENTS » PAGE 10



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

A mother helps her daughter with her homework.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

A father watches his son doing his homework.

Parents

FROM PAGE 9

dents scoring at or above proficiency on standardized math tests.

Additional research indicates the benefits also extend to other subjects and areas of learning, includ-

ing language comprehension and expressive language skills.

With so much to gain from parental involvement in students' educations, parents can embrace these strategies to get more involved:

- Develop a partnership with the teacher. Open communication with a

teacher can help parents stay up-to-date on what is going on in the classroom and learn early on where a student may need extra support. Then parents can offer extra guidance if it is feasible, or look into an experienced tutor.

- Be firm but supportive. Too much academic pressure may cause a child

to pull back or even test boundaries, and that can lead to students falling behind in school. Parents must find the right level of involvement and guide their kids without sounding like good grades are "make or break" the relationship.

- Attend school functions. Parents can go to

open houses, back-to-school nights, conferences, and other events held at school to show support and interest in their children's education. Involved parents also build school-based networks this way, which can be called upon if their student needs additional support in the future.

- Establish a schedule at

home. Students can benefit from a schedule, with regular bedtime, homework time and opportunities to relax. Knowing what to expect and when to expect it can take some of the stress out of learning and studying, according to Nemours Children's Health.

— Metro Editorial Services

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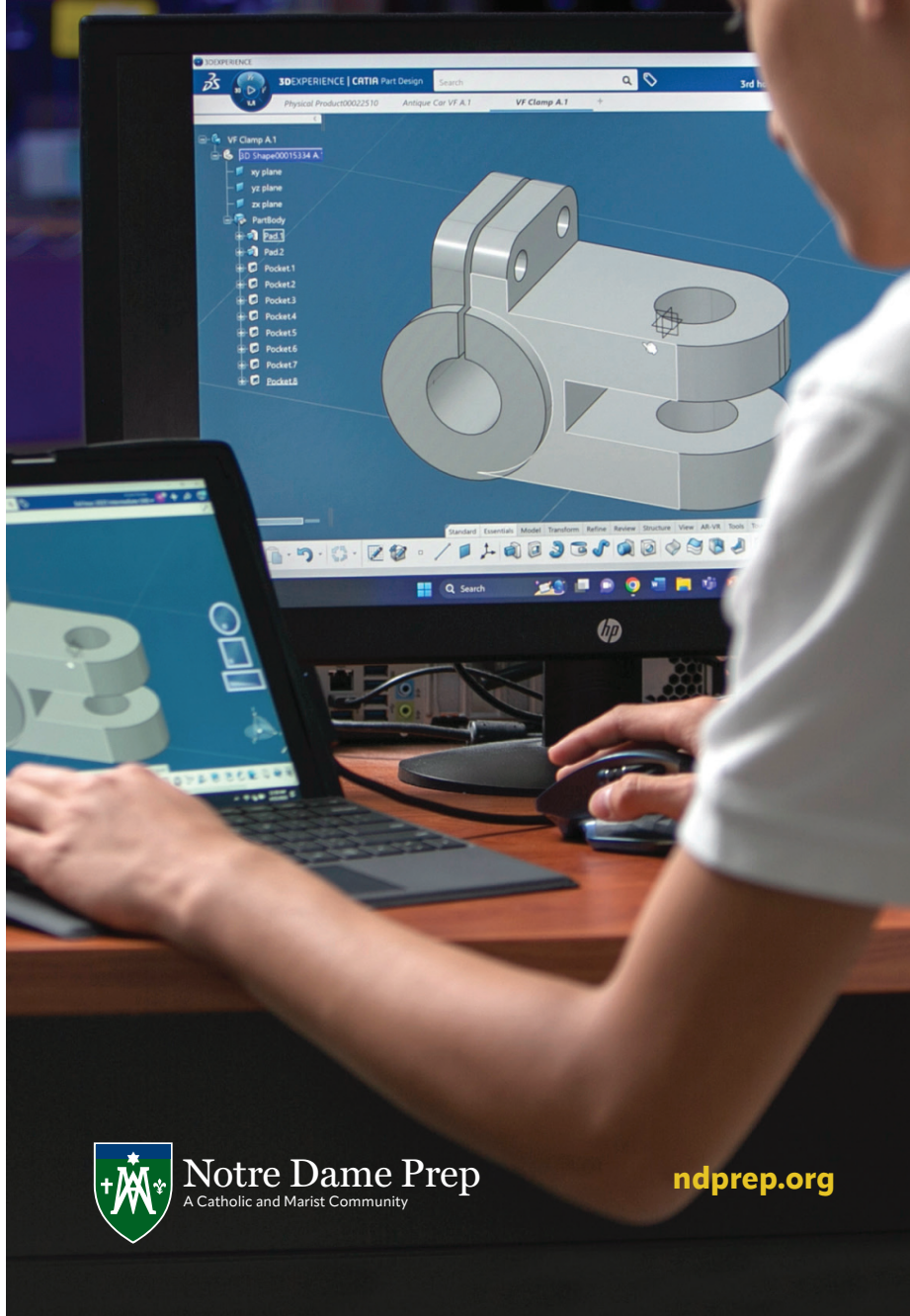


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CAREER PATHWAYS



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

10 facts about trade school

Vocational programs attract students who may not want to attend a traditional college or university.

Prospective trade school students can keep this information in mind as they consider if a career in the trades is right for them.

1. Students can often learn a trade and enter a related profession within 10 to 24 months of enrolling in trade school.

2. Schools focused on specific trades have strong job placement rates that often exceed those of schools where students pursue four-year degrees, according to the Philadelphia Technician Training School.

3. Qualified instructors and trade industry experts tend to be on staff at vocational schools. The instructors bring years of on-the-job experience to the classroom.

4. Many trade school programs offer accelerated formats that lean heavily on specialized training for specific career goals.

5. Trade schools tend to

merge instruction in a traditional classroom setting with hands-on training in real-world situations. That means those studying electrical trades may work in laboratories that mimic both home and business settings.

6. Forbes reports that students in trade school often take part in a paid apprenticeship where they earn money while learning on the job. Statistics from the United States government state 92% of apprentices who complete their programs retain employment and go on to earn a salary.

7. Many trades are quite lucrative and in demand. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, carpenters earn a median wage of \$54,000, while an elevator and escalator installer and repair person earns an average of \$86,000 per year.

8. Many trade schools offer industry support and career services, just like traditional colleges. These

departments can assist students in funding tuition through federal aid and scholarships and help them find jobs.

9. Students enrolled in accredited vocational schools could be eligible for federal student aid. That's particularly true for students enrolled in programs that last longer than 15 weeks, according to The Balance, a financial resource. Individuals living in the U.S. can file the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) to see if they're eligible for assistance.

10. Apart from elevator installers and repair people, dental hygienists and radiation therapists tend to earn the highest salaries in the trades.

Students interested in trade education can speak with school guidance counselors or reach out to accredited trade schools to learn more about opportunities near them.

— Metro Editorial Services

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NOTEWORTHY



Senior Hazel Ostrowski attends her first period AP statistics class. Ostrowski was among a group of high school students in Seattle who wore activity monitors to discover whether a later start to the school day would help them get more sleep. It did, adding 34 minutes of slumber a night, and they reported less daytime sleepiness and grades improved.

ELAINE THOMPSON — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Study tips for high school students

High school is an important period in students' academic careers. High school curriculum tends to be more demanding than pre-secondary education. In addition, at this point in their academic careers, high school students may begin to ponder their future endeavors, including higher education.

High school curriculum aims to prepare students for their future, which is why coursework tends to be more specialized, challenging and complex.

It's not uncommon for students to experience some difficulty as they adjust to the demands of high school curriculum.

With that in mind, high school students can consider these study tips as they confront the rigors of academia:

- Schedule study time. An analysis from the U.S. Census Bureau found that children are engaging in more extracurricular activities than they did decades ago. Though research has found that participation in extracurricular activities among adolescents is associated with a range of

positive outcomes, including higher academic performance, it's important that students make time for academics in their daily schedules. Much like sports practices or drama club rehearsals are scheduled, study time can be included in students' daily schedules. Students can block off a set amount of time on their schedules each day for studying and commit to it just like they would for extracurricular practices or rehearsals.

- Designate a study space. During the COVID-19 pandemic, administrators at the University of Michigan created a web-based space reservation system to help students secure spaces to study in the face of social distancing limitations. Those efforts underscore the value of designated study spaces, and high school students and their families can create such areas in their homes. A quiet, distraction-free space can facilitate learning and help students excel in the classroom.

- Take notes and summarize while studying. High school courses are more

complex and it's easy to get lost in that depth when studying subjects like English or history that feature a lot of reading. Students adjusting to this may find it hard to remember important details when they're reading more in a typical study session than they're accustomed to. Taking lots of notes and summarizing text while reading, such as at the end of each chapter, can help students recall the key points of reading assignments.

- Organize study groups. A weekly study group can help students gain a greater understanding of coursework and their own perspectives. Different perspectives can help students see materials through a new lens. One student may hit a snag on a particular point, and another may illuminate the issue and make it easier to understand, and vice versa. Sharing perspectives with other students also can help students sharpen their own ideas as they seek to explain themselves during conversations with classmates.

— Metro Editorial Services



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CHOOSE YOUR PATH

How to plan a fulfilling gap year

Many high school students tend to enjoy a few months of summer vacation after they graduate, and then embark on new adventures at college or trade school.

Graduating college seniors follow a similar path of joining the workforce or beginning post-graduate work after earning their degrees. But such paths are not the only ones available to students.

Some students may want to consider a gap year.

A gap year is a break from academia to pursue other interests or even experiential learning, according to Forbes.

It's more than just a time to relax and can prove especially helpful to self-development and discovery. If time and budget allow, taking a gap year can be a worthwhile and productive endeavor.

Taking a gap year may not be the traditional route for students, but the benefits of time away from formal learning can be profound.

Here are a few ideas and benefits relating to gap years:

- **Hone skills:** Some see a gap year as a chance to goof off or lounge around. Instead, this break provides an opportunity to sample the workforce and gain experience. Individuals can seek opportunities that will be relevant to the careers they intend to pursue in the future. A future certified public accountant, for example, may want to spend tax season



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

A young woman on a gap year helps to volunteer.

working with an accounting firm to learn the ropes.

- **Learn a language:** Students may think a gap year is the perfect opportunity to become more proficient in a foreign language or two. Bilingualism can be a key advantage in one's job search and future career. Traveling to a country where a studied language is spoken and learning it while immersed in the culture can be a particularly effective means of acquiring language skills.

- **Engage in a passion project:** Many projects may be put on hold because of a lack of time or resources while in school. A gap year can be the ideal time to write more or explore an innovative new business idea.

- **Perform service work:** A gap year can be an opportunity to engage in social change or to help a cause. Certain people may want to travel to underprivileged areas on humanitarian missions or

teach English to students overseas. These are experiences that will promote personal growth and help boost a résumé when it comes time to find a job.

- **Improve academic performance:** A study by Colorado College's Gap Year Research Consortium reported that those who participate in gap years exceeded their predicted GPAs by roughly 0.15 points. A gap year may help a person become a better student.

- **Land an internship:** Some companies may want to extend internship offerings beyond the standard semester. Many professionals land their jobs through networking, so taking time away from school to participate in a lengthy internship can make for a smoother entry into that company should one want to work with them in the future.

— Metro Editorial Services



PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO EDITORIAL SERVICES

An overwhelming majority of students who have taken a gap year reported positive experiences.

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ACHIEVEMENTS: Two provisional patents

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HELPING HANDS

Tips for finding a tutor to help master the coursework

A successful academic career requires a lot of hard work.

Although some students grasp their coursework without much difficulty, there are plenty who may need some additional help throughout their academic careers.

Before falling far behind classmates, those who could benefit from some additional assistance can turn to tutors for help.

Students have plenty of places to look for tutors. Schools may provide on-campus access to tutoring from fellow students or educators.

Students who perhaps didn't meet certain benchmarks during standardized or placement testing may be assigned tutors for resource engagement during or after school. Private tutoring is another option worthy of consideration.

Some tutors work independently or as part of a larger tutoring or test preparatory program.

Tutors can help students succeed when extra instruction is needed, and families typically have numerous tutoring options at their disposal.

Families who have decided it is time to call in a tutor can follow these guidelines for finding one who is the right fit:

- Identify the goals of tutoring. It is important to identify where a student needs help. Make an appointment with a teacher or have a college student speak to the professor to determine where they need help. This information can then be conveyed to prospective tutors.

- Ask for recommendations. The school might offer suggestions on tutors, or if a student clicks with a particular teacher, past or



KAREN DUCEY — THE SEATTLE TIMES VIA AP

Ayub Mohamed, left, 7 years, gets help from Esmeralda Jimenez, 13, left back, volunteer tutor; while Olivia Elaydo, 7, right back, and Eden Pollard, 6, right, work on math problems during a summer tutoring program.

present, you can inquire if he or she does private tutoring. Friends or family members also may have information about tutors they recommend.

- Know the learning style. Some students learn best in one-on-one settings. Others may benefit from small group instruction. The learning style will help guide the path chosen for tutoring, as some tutors work individually with stu-

dents, and others take on small groups.

- Consider your budget. Private tutoring costs money. If money is tight, you may want to consider a free tutoring option if it is offered through the school. For example, some colleges provide tutoring services on campus at no cost, as do some public libraries for various grade levels.

- Be sure to check credentials. Anyone can put up a

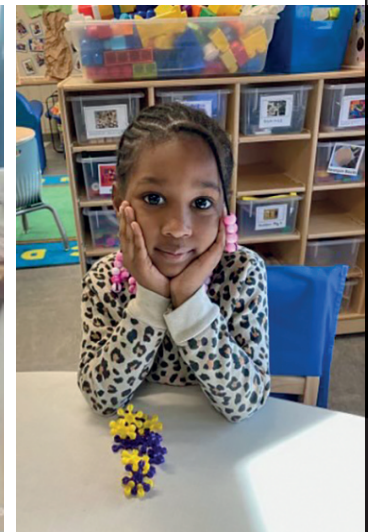
tutoring advertisement, but not every person is qualified to tutor. If you will be hiring a professional, ask for credentials. Very often tutors are current or former educators, so it's reasonable to ask about schooling and certification. Also, if a student is struggling with a particular subject, it is best to hire a tutor who specializes in that area of study.

— Metro Editorial Services

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MONEY MATTERS

Tips to educate young adults to be smart about credit

Credit is a necessary component of doing business in the modern world. The credit reporting agency Experian defines credit as the ability to borrow money or access goods or services with the understanding that a person will pay later. Various creditors grant credit based on their confidence that a borrower will repay what is owed.

Many adults learn about credit through trial and error. Financial literacy is not taught in many schools, although lots of people feel it merits space alongside literature, math, science and other subjects.

A recent NextGen study found only one in six high school students are required to take a personal finance class in the United States. In addition, a survey conducted in 2018 by Chase Bank found only one-third of Americans were taught what a credit score is by their parents.

It is essential that guardians share information about credit with young adults to help them be financially solvent and successful later in life.

Here are some ways to help young adults learn about credit:

Start with credit basics

Speak generally about credit and how it is used. Then explain credit scores, credit bureaus and credit reports.

A credit history and credit score are important information for young adults to have early on and check frequently, as having good credit improves the chances they will qualify for loans and earn acceptable terms in the future.

Help them build credit

Having one or more credit accounts can help a person establish and build credit by making payments on time. Credit card companies often advertise student and secured credit card accounts that come with small or managed credit limits.

Making purchases on the cards and paying them in full every month is the best way to improve



PHOTO BY FREDERIC J. BROWN — AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

An illustration photo shows a display of credit cards.

a credit score or maintain a good one, says the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Another way teens can build credit is through their student loans. Making small payments on the principal while in school can help establish a strong credit history.

Check their credit reports

The Federal Trade Commission recommends checking a child's credit score around the age of 16 or 17.

This will help families figure out if any anomalies may indicate identity theft or inaccurate credit issues.

Know the formula for good credit

Forbes says there are five cate-

gories that add up to good credit:

1. Payment history (35%): Always pay bills on time.
2. Amounts owed (30%): Borrow a low amount compared to the total lines of credit. This also is known as credit utilization.
3. Length of credit history (15%): Keeping accounts open for a long time is a win.
4. New credit (10%): Do not apply for too much new credit too often.
5. Credit mix (10%): Having a balance of different types of credit, such as car loans, credit cards and other types of debt, is advantageous.

Share your own experiences

Sometimes the best way to

Credit card companies often advertise student and secured credit card accounts that come with small or managed credit limits. Making purchases on the cards and paying them in full every month is the best way to improve a credit score or maintain a good one, says the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

teach about credit is to be honest about what a parent or another adult did wrong with his or her finances, and use that as a "what not to do" scenario.

It is important for young adults to learn about credit so they can make smart choices

that will positively affect their future.

Although talking finances may be uncomfortable, it is vital for families to have these discussions.

— Metro Editorial Services



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COLUMN

Low grades on tough tests aren't a waste of time but a powerful incentive

By Jay Mathews
The Washington Post

One of Nadya Martinez's math students at the IDEA San Juan College Prep public charter school near Texas's Mexican border got only a 2, the equivalent of a C-minus, on her grueling three-hour Advanced Placement Calculus BC exam in 2018. She had worked hard, but she needed to score a 3 to get college credit.

She thought her chances were ruined for the bachelor's degree in biochemistry she wanted at the University of Texas at Austin on her way to becoming a doctor. Then she learned something that few people understand.

While she didn't get course credit, her hard work in the AP course resulted in a score on the UT-Austin placement test high enough to exempt her from university math courses through the second year of calculus. She was still on her way to her dream.

The girl's mother was sobbing when she called Martinez with the good news. At schools like IDEA San Juan, where 96% of the students are low-income, the unusual demands of Advanced Placement, and other college-level courses, have given an unexpected boost to achievement in life.

Recent analyses of AP by the New York Times and The Washington Post shed much light on the workings of those college-level courses and exams.

Now, 80% of public high school students attend a school offering five or more AP courses. But the analyses wrongly suggested that students who got less than a 3 on AP exams didn't get much from those courses.

A piece by The Post's editorial board said a grade below 3 "hardly benefits the high-schoolers in question, who leave the courses with neither a college credit nor, presumably, a firm un-

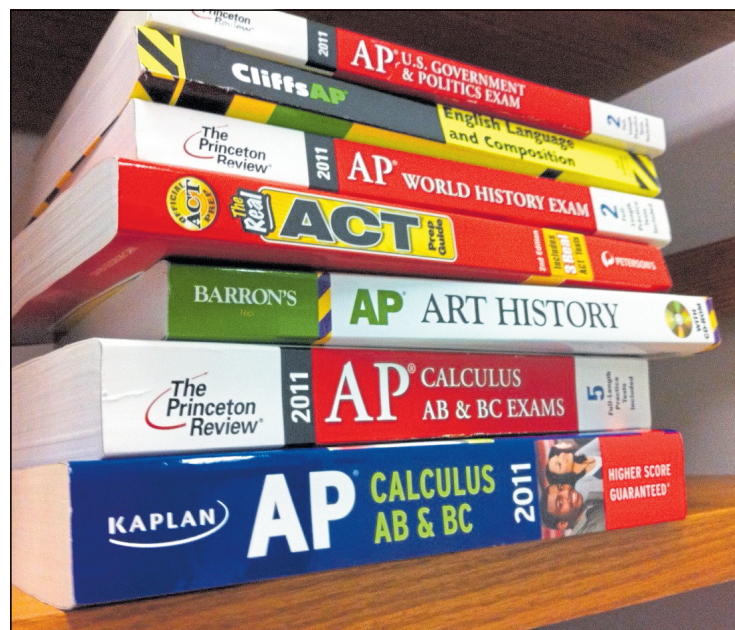


PHOTO COURTESY WEIL COLLEGE ADVISING

Students throughout the state are taking more Advanced Placement courses in order to earn college credits before ever setting foot on campus.

derstanding of college-level material." The article in the Times called the fact that 60% of AP exams taken by low-income students in 2023 resulted in 1s or 2s "one of the most sobering statistics in education."

It doesn't seem that way to me. Twenty-five years ago, when I began to rank the nation's strongest high schools based on level of participation in final AP exams, the top schools on my list were nearly all suburban campuses where affluent families were used to 4s and 5s and had an instinctual but ill-informed distaste for 2s.

Those nice schools in New York's Scarsdale, Ohio's Shaker Heights and California's Palo Alto have since been replaced at the top of my list by many public charter schools that require AP classes for nearly everyone and have student bodies with families of more modest means.

Their mostly Hispanic and Black students often start taking AP courses in ninth grade.

Those schools have a total number of AP exams administered each year that is a dozen times their number of graduating seniors. They are exciting places to be, quite different from the take-it-easy atmosphere in most high schools.

Most AP exams taken by low-income students are scored below 3, according to the College Board, but those students have gained much from the experience. AP and programs like it have also greatly increased the number of students exposed to such pushy lessons.

The number of AP exams each year in the United States grew from 1.6 million in 2002 to 5.2 million in 2023, according to the College Board.

The number of exams receiv-

ing grades of 2 similarly tripled in size, from 360,000 in 2002 to 1.1 million in 2023.

A College Board study of 1.5 million students and a subsample of 410,000 students for whom college grades were available showed that AP students with average scores of 1 or 2 on their AP exams were 16 and 19 percentage points, respectively, more likely to enroll in a four-year college than academically similar peers who did not take AP.

Students who received AP scores of 2 had higher grades in college introductory courses than similar college students who did not take an AP course in that subject, according to the College Board. Students whose first score on an AP exam was a 1 or a 2 were also much more likely to take an AP exam in subsequent years than students who had not taken AP.

People who have been motivated by flunking bar exams, employment entrance tests or other difficult challenges know how much such galvanizing experiences can help.

My 40 years of interviewing students and teachers in AP, and the similar International Baccalaureate program, indicate the same determination to do better arises when initial exam scores are low.

Frazier O'Leary, who taught AP English to low-income students in D.C. for many decades, said "a score of 2 on the AP exam in literature or language lets colleges know that a student is ready for freshman English classes because of the comprehension and writing skills needed to achieve this score. An AP class pushes students to find out things about themselves that they never knew existed."

What makes AP powerful is not only the college-level courses, but also the exams.

Their length (at least three

hours long) and their method of grading — by independent examiners and NOT by teachers who might give a break to kids they know and love — make them much more challenging than other exams in high school. Many AP graders are themselves AP teachers, but they don't know the students they are assessing and are not told their names.

AP exams, along with IB and Cambridge exams, are a deeper and more accurate reflection of a student's level of achievement than other large examination systems used in public schools.

Not only are the exams immune to teacher favoritism, but they also include essay questions that big state exams can't handle.

"For years, we've heard from AP teachers that just completing an AP course — studying hard, preparing for the exam, following through — can change the way students see themselves and raise their ambitions for college," said Trevor Packer, executive director of the AP program.

Mike Feinberg, co-founder of KIPP, the largest charter school network in the country, recalled what he and other middle school teachers learned trying to teach first-year algebra in seventh and eighth grade to their mostly low-income students.

They adopted a strategy similar to what their students used to master video games. "They tried higher levels, faced failure, kept trying and learning from their failures, and eventually mastered the more advanced levels," he said.

Kind teachers have long tried to encourage struggling students by giving them grades better than they deserved. That approach avoids bad feelings. But many of us who have had to deal with a disappointing grade know the result is often that we try harder, and thus learn more.



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