

Digging Deeper: Obstacles Facing Those Attending College

Higher education attainment in Louisville is decidedly lower than what we aspire it to be. So why, then, are residents of the community not attending at higher rates? On one hand, the majority of students and adults alike believe college is important; furthermore, most do not believe it to be highly difficult to attend. Clearly, there are underlying factors that “get in the way” in one’s pursuit of a higher education.

Both students and adults were presented with a series of scenarios that may prove to be obstacles in a student’s attempt at college. Paying for college is a deep concern within the community, followed by one’s ability to balance life with the demands of college. Some 68% of adults believe that paying for college will be an obstacle for high school students, while 41% of students believe so. Additionally, 48% of adults cited balancing college and life to be an obstacle, compared to 29% of students.

Adults are more concerned than students in a high school student’s ability to attend college. On average, there is a 13% disparity between student and adult concern of potential obstacles, where adults are more concerned.

What’s more, there is more concern surrounding obstacles facing *working adults returning to college* than those pertaining to high school students. Nevertheless, there is real concern within the community on how they will fund their education.

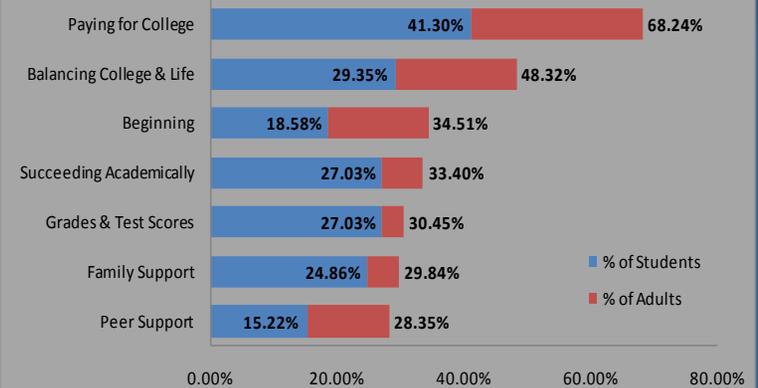
Does Everyone Have an Equal Chance at College?

The Greater Louisville Community believes the answer to this question is a resounding “no.”

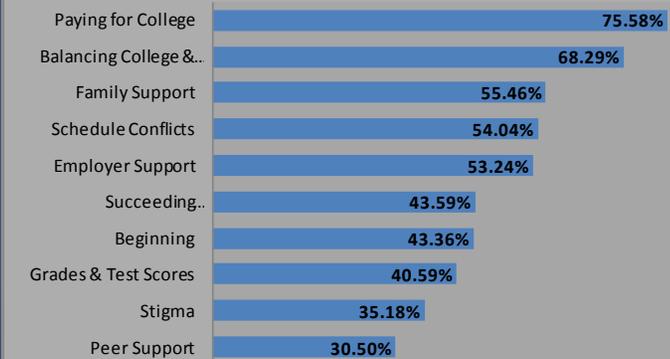
- 92% of students believe that access to college is easier for some than others.
- 74% of adults believe this.

Respondents, students and adults alike, cited reasons for this inequality such as socioeconomic status, means of social and familial support, and minority status. Those with more education are more aware of the disparities that exist in access.

Perceived Obstacles Facing High School Students, Student and Adult Response



Perceived Obstacles Facing Working Adults, Adult Response



Making Sense of it All

A *plurality of thought* seems to be at play in the community. Overall, community residents believe that college is important and that, abstractly, it is not difficult to attend. However, once presented with the challenge of attending, and given time to think about potential obstacles, these preconceived beliefs begin to clash with the real task of collegiate pursuit.

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BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL: COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Business Leaders for Education and the Mayor's Education Roundtable commissioned IQS Research to study community perceptions surrounding attaining a college degree in an effort to better explain the higher education attainment gap present in our community. The study was conducted within the Greater Louisville area, where 1,000 adults and 300 students were surveyed.

The community, consisting of adults and students within the Greater Louisville community, largely believes that attaining a college degree, specifically a bachelor's degree, is indeed highly important. Precisely, 96.30% of students believe that it is important for high school students to attend college, and 80.59% of adults believe this. What is more, 98% of students surveyed do intend to go to college sometime after the completion of their high school education. There is also indication that the earlier a student's exposure to college begins, the more likely they will be to consider college as important.

If importance is not an issue, as a clear majority of both students and adults believe that college is an endeavor worth pursuing, then the problem would seem to exist in the perceived difficulty of attaining such an endeavor. However, this is not the case. Only 11% of students believe that attending college is highly difficult; 23% of adults think so. Rather than the community firmly believing that attending college is too difficult, there is a level of uncertainty surrounding their perceptions. This begs the question: if college is thought to be important and not difficult to attend, why then does Greater Louisville not attend college at higher rates?

Important Findings

- 1 96% of students and 81% of adults believe that a bachelor's degree is highly important.
- 2 Only 11% of students and 23% of adults believe that it is highly difficult to attend college. More so, the community has either (1) a level of uncertainty surrounding how difficult it is, or (2) a belief that attending is not difficult.
- 3 Regardless of the perceptions of difficulty, the earlier a student hears of college, the more important they think it is.
- 4 While the community does believe that it is important for *high school students* to attain a college education, there is less confidence in such importance for *working adults returning to school*. Only 56% of students and 64% of adults indicated that it is highly important for working adults to attain higher education.
- 5 The community believes that it is more difficult for working adults to attend college than it is for high school students.
- 6 4 in 10 adults in Greater Louisville believe that *not everyone needs a college degree*. Only 1 in 10 students think this. Interestingly, the more an adult is educated, the less likely they are to believe that everyone needs a degree.
- 7 The data indicate that there is a *plurality of thought* at play. On one hand, the community has well founded beliefs regarding the importance of and access to college. However, once presented with the real world task of attending college, the awareness of obstacles becomes more prevalent.