

## Aspiring Adults Adrift

Insidehighered.com

September 2, 2014

By

Jake New

In their 2011 book Academically Adrift, authors Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, argued that colleges are failing to educate students. Many undergraduates, the authors wrote, are "drifting through college without a clear sense of purpose," with more than a third of students not demonstrating any significant improvement in learning over four years in college.

Now Arum and Roksa have revisited a large sampling of those same undergraduates for a new book examining how they've fared after graduation. They're no longer students, the authors write, but they are still adrift.

Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates, published today by the University of Chicago Press, is the story of a generation's difficult transition to adulthood. Based on surveys and interviews with nearly 1,000 recent college graduates from the cohort featured in Academically Adrift, the book reports that a large number of graduates are having difficulty finding jobs, living somewhere other than a parent's house, assuming civic and financial responsibility, and even developing stable romantic relationships.

"In the world of 'emerging adulthood,' the late teens and early 20s are an age of discovery and exploration," the authors write. "A four-year residential college experience is particularly conducive to fully experiencing this stage of life, as it affords students time and opportunity to learn about themselves and others."

But now this experience extends far after graduation, and colleges, the authors argue, share a large part of the blame.

"Colleges are implicated in this," Arum, a professor of sociology and education at New York University, said in an interview. "They've legitimated this. Students are going away to college for a longer and longer time. Colleges are disinvesting in faculty and investing in amenities."

Many four-year universities attend to students' social adjustment rather than developing their characters, he said, allocating resources toward what will attract teenagers to their campuses rather than what will help them learn. Campuses cater to satisfying consumer preferences instead of providing rigorous academics and connecting what students learn to the real world, Arum and Roksa write. Like students and aspiring adults, they argue, colleges and universities are also adrift.

"Both students and the schools they attend exist in larger structural and cultural contexts that have created the conditions under which the observed learning outcomes occur," the authors write. "Widespread cultural commitment to consumer choice and individual rights, self-fulfillment and sociability, and well-being and a broader therapeutic ethic leave little room for students or schools to embrace programs that promote academic rigor."

The result: Colleges are producing graduates with happy memories of their time in college but little sense of purpose or any "clear way forward."

One in four of the students surveyed and interviewed for the book reported that they were living at home two years after graduation, a proportion that is nearly double than in the 1960s. More than half said their lives lacked direction. Seven percent reported being unemployed, 12 percent said they had part-time jobs, and 30 percent were working full-time but earning less than \$30,000 a year. Half of those graduates were earning less than \$20,000.

College selectivity did not significantly affect the graduates' chances of employment, the authors write, and neither did gender, race or parental education.

Field of study had little effect on the probability of whether a graduate was working an unskilled or skilled occupation two years after graduation -- except for students who studied engineering and computer science. While the probability of graduates who studied social sciences, humanities, science, math, and communication working an unskilled job hovered between 14 and 17 percent, the probability for graduates who studied engineering and computer science was just 4 percent.

Field of study did affect the probability of unemployment, with graduates who studied business and STEM-related fields having lower unemployment rates than those who studied social sciences, liberal arts, and the humanities. Business majors had a 2 percent unemployment rate among the graduates surveyed for the book, while social work, education, and health majors were at 8 percent unemployment. Communications majors had an unemployment rate of 9 percent.

Many of those living at home and looking for skilled, full-time work were still financially dependent on their parents, and were "meandering" to and from potential career paths and jobs.

"There's a difference between meandering and exploration," Roksa, an associate professor of sociology and education at the University of Virginia, said in an interview. "There's no grand mission or purpose behind it. And the consequences of meandering can be very different based on the types of families a student comes from. For working class young adults, they don't have the support system and luxury to leave college and have a decade figuring out what they want to do."

Josh Jarrett, co-founder of Koru, a startup that helps graduates develop skills to find employment, said he doesn't fault colleges and universities as much as Arum and Roksa

for aspiring adults' being adrift. There are other societal factors at play, he said, including the recent recession. In their book, the authors briefly note the effects of the recession, as well. The students they studied graduated when the recession was at its worst in 2009.

It may not entirely be colleges' fault that graduates are having so much difficulty transitioning into adulthood, Jarrett said, but it is up to them to find a solution.

"It's not only at the seat of the academy that we can place these issues," he said. "It's what's happening in society as well. But that does not take away the responsibility of higher education to take action. They may not have totally created this problem, but it's their problem they have to address."

Not all of the graduates interviewed by Arum and Roksa found themselves at home with an uncertain future.

A particularly disciplined first-generation college student named Beth devoted nearly 25 hours a week to studying. That's more than double the amount of time her average peers invest in studying, the authors write. She majored in a health-related field, but made sure to complement her curriculum with liberal arts coursework like a history course about Islamic civilization. Two years after Beth's graduation, the authors found that she had married, was financially independent, and was employed in a "desirable position."

But Beth may be an outlier.

"Large numbers of students today do not apply themselves or develop academic skills in college," the authors write. "Thirty-six percent of full-time college students reported studying alone less than five hours per week."

Indeed, for every Beth, the authors interviewed several students who "were wading through their early 20s --- much as they had waded through college -- aspiring but adrift." Lucy, a biology major from a less-selective college, found work after graduation but only as a temporary receptionist. Linda, a psychology major from a selective college, was unemployed two years after graduating. Alice, a foreign language and literature graduate from a selective college, worked as a cashier at a cooperative food grocery store. Sonya, a public health major from a selective university, was living at home and working as a full-time baby sitter.

Nathan, who majored in business administration and graduated with a 3.9 grade point average, was a delivery driver for a chain of pharmacies. He found the job on Craigslist and earned less than \$20,000.

"I can definitely do better," Nathan, who also moved back in with his parents, said to the authors. "I feel like I'm not using my degree at all. I put a lot of money on this thing and I feel like I'm not getting much out of it at the moment, but I think I will in the future."

Despite their lack of success after graduation, many of these graduates -- Nathan included -- remained hopeful. The authors note a shared feeling of optimism among the adults in the study, despite some of their circumstances.

Ninety-five percent of the graduates said they expected their lives to be better than their parents'.

"They believed things would work out, even if they did not necessarily have plans for how that would happen," the authors write. "They were also convinced that their lives would be as good as those of their parents, if not better. This optimism in the face of challenges may be characteristic of the Academically Adrift cohort's generation. It may also reflect new ways of understanding adulthood that are tied more closely to subjective sentiments than to objective accomplishments, and that focus on the journey rather than the final destination."

Long Beach's New City Public Schools charter has high hopes for new director  
By Nadra Nittle, Long Beach Press Telegram  
POSTED: 08/29/14



John Vargas, the new head of New City Public Schools. Long Beach, July 24, 2014.  
(Brittany Murray / Staff Photographer)

LONG BEACH >> The new leader of a Long Beach charter school that has battled low test scores is energizing the community with fresh hope, some of which he attributes to controversial Common Core State Standards guidelines that California schools must implement this school year.

Members of the New City Public Schools community say they have high expectations for its executive director, John Vargas, and his background in linguistics and financial acumen as he guides the school.

“It was clear from when we first spoke to John that he understands and embraced (New City’s) mission, that he was interested in and excited about the kind of pedagogical underpinnings of our school, our charter and how we do education,” said Madeline Holler, chairwoman of New City’s board of directors.

Founded in 2000, New City School serves more than 400 students in transitional kindergarten through grade 8. Long Beach Unified authorizes the charter of the school, which offers a dual-immersion Spanish-language curriculum and focuses on such areas as comprehensive student learning, social justice and community-building. New City is one of two charter schools in Long Beach. The other, Intellectual Virtues Academy, opened last year and serves middle-school students.

The school has taken some headline-making hits over the years. Last November, it faced the possible revocation of its charter because students — the majority of whom are low-income English Language Learners — failed to make the grade on the California Standards Test the previous year. It marked the third consecutive year since 2011 that New City did not meet standardized test score targets. In February, however, the school

received a reprieve from state Department of Education officials, who determined that New City took adequate steps to improve.

The phase-out of the California Standards test may work in New City's favor. Public schools are implementing Common Core State Standards, a national set of guidelines for English-language arts and math instruction for kindergarten through 12th grade. From this school year forward, California students will take the Smarter Balanced assessment aligned to Common Core.

Since 2010, 43 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards, which state governors and education commissioners developed with feedback from teachers, parents, school principals and educational experts. Before Common Core, different states had different academic standards for these core subjects.

Opposition has come from cities such as Bellflower, and conservative groups and politicians have characterized Common Core as a federal intrusion on states' rights, arguing that it will result in states losing control over the academic benchmarks they want students to meet. In July, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker called for the Legislature in his state to repeal its adoption of the standards.

Vargas, who comes to New City from the Crown Preparatory Academy charter school in Los Angeles, thinks the Common Core standards strongly suit New City students.

"One thing I believe people will see is that our constructivist model is more closely aligned to (Common Core) than the past standards, so we will see some natural increases in our standardized test results," said Vargas, who served as Crown's business and operations manager.

The constructivist model derives from the idea that people acquire knowledge through the exchange of their perceptions and experiences. The theory was developed by the late Swiss psychologist and philosopher Jean Piaget.

Holler believes that New City is in a "really interesting and strong position" because of Common Core. She said the new standards, which focus on analytical and evidence-based learning, complement New City's focus on comprehensive learning. She's excited that Vargas will lead New City as the Common Core State Standards fully roll out in schools.

Vargas said that throughout the school year, New City will assess students on their understanding of the Common Core State Standards to monitor their progress.

Now pursuing a master's degree in linguistics at Cal State Long Beach, Vargas said that New City's dual-immersion program attracted him to the school.

"The dual-immersion program really gives hope for students to become fully bilingual," he said. "It involves English and Spanish and will obviously give students an appreciation

of two cultures. As our nation continues to become a multicultural melting pot, it's definitely an advantage for our students to have."

Vargas succeeds Sabrina Bow as executive director at New City. Bow has since launched her own business, Evergreen Associates LLC, which provides support to schools and school leaders.

Although Vargas is just 32 years old, he said that he has racked up extensive experience in education. The UCLA graduate co-founded Global Education Academy, a Los Angeles charter school; served as vice president of school finance at ExED, a Los Angeles business that provides financial services to charter schools; and as executive director for Full Circle Learning Academy, another Los Angeles charter school. He was a Hawthorne board member and is an El Camino College District trustee.

Vargas said that his business know-how will benefit New City as the school applies for the five-year renewal of its charter this school year. He said that fiscal and financial skills play key roles in the operation of charter schools.

"I believe I have the expertise to help New City move forward," he said.

Holler agreed, pointing out that charter schools are responsible for their own finances.

"There's no one to sort of hand it off to," she said. "We make our budget and funding plan. We're like our own entity."

Giselle Fong, a mother of two New City students, served on the hiring committee that selected Vargas as executive director. She said that Vargas has the skills to keep the school going strong.

Fong said that she's excited about Vargas because he's bilingual and he could be sensitive to the needs of English learners, who make up roughly half the student body at New City.

"He understands how important it is to create community," Fong said. "I get the sense that he would embrace the existing culture of having a really strong community and parent involvement."

Fong said that at New City, "every person counts," be they parents, students, administrators or teachers.

Doris Gorski, who teaches third through fifth grades at New City, participated in a teacher forum at the school when Vargas made a presentation. She said that Vargas understands the dynamics of charter schools and will be an asset to New City.

"I think New City School has been on a great trajectory and it is a good feeling that we can continue on the same path with John Vargas as executive director," Gorski said.

Vargas certainly believes he's poised to take the school to new heights.

"It's a fresh start for everyone, including me and the administration," he said. "It's a great opportunity to take school to the next level."



John Keenan, 1930-2014: Founder of Torrance-based Keenan & Associates dies at 84

By Larry Altman, Daily Breeze  
POSTED: 09/04/14,

John Keenan, who built his Torrance-based insurance business into one of the largest privately held brokerage and consulting firms in the country while stressing “people before profits,” has died. He was 84.

Keenan, chairman of Keenan & Associates on Crenshaw Boulevard, died Wednesday afternoon at Torrance Memorial Medical Center with family members at his side. Doctors discovered Keenan had a brain tumor when he suffered a stroke Saturday, his son, Phil Keenan, said Thursday.

Despite his condition, Keenan spent Sunday and Monday calling company administrators and family members to his hospital room to instruct them on how to run the business without him, his son said.

“He managed his death like he managed his company,” Phil Keenan said. “He did it his way.”

Born May 24, 1930, in Los Angeles, Keenan attended Catholic schools and Loyola University in Westchester. After graduating in 1952 with a bachelor’s degree in business administration, he served in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War.

Once he returned to Los Angeles, Keenan went to work in the insurance business, married his wife, Margaret Ann, in 1955, and purchased a three-bedroom house in the Hollywood Riviera section of Torrance in 1957.

Keenan worked while his wife raised their seven sons — Dan, Phil, Kevin, Tim, Chris, Tom and Vincent, all of whom attended St. Lawrence Martyr School in Redondo Beach and South High School in Torrance. He was president of Hollywood Riviera Little League while his sons played and was a longtime member of the West End Tennis Club in Torrance. He later sold the house to a son and moved to Redondo Beach.

In 1972, Keenan became a pioneer in a niche insurance field when he and three employees opened Keenan & Associates in Torrance, specializing in insurance for schools and hospitals. The business rapidly grew, establishing offices in Riverside, Oakland, San Clemente, San Jose, Rancho Cordova, Redwood City, Pleasanton and Eureka. The company employs nearly 700 people, serving 950 public school districts, cities, counties and special districts, and more than 125 hospitals in California and other states.

“He came up with the idea to be able to insure school districts and teachers,” son Kevin Keenan said. “His deal was to help teachers get better benefits, and he basically invented

the selling of insurance benefits as well as property and casualty insurance, as well as workers' comp to school districts."

The company is now the 17th largest broker in the United States and the largest independent broker in California, taking in more than \$149 million in revenue in 2012-13. The company provides insurance and services to schools, community colleges, hospitals and cities for employee benefits, health benefit management, workers' compensation, risk management and property and liability.

"He was a legend in the insurance industry," said Sean Smith, the company's president and chief executive. "He really was an icon. He was really about niching and having market-specific units before it was fashionable."

Company officials and family members said that throughout Keenan's tenure, he emphasized customer service and placed his employees first, signing cards to them on their work anniversaries and giving bonuses at Christmas even if the company had a difficult year. He believed in "people before profits," Smith said, and that every employee should "have a few extra dollars during the holiday season."

"He wanted an environment where his employees could go coach their kids' soccer teams," Smith said. "It created an incredible culture here where there is an incredible loyalty and commitment to the firm."

Remembering his roots, Keenan supported schools in South Los Angeles, providing donations to campuses such as St. Raphael's School and Verbum Dei High School. His company participated for years in Verbum Dei's Corporate Work Study program that provides internship for students. More than 20 students were interns at Keenan.

"Every Christmas he would go to the busboys around all the restaurants, and the janitors at West End, and give them a tip," Kevin Keenan said.

Keenan required that his sons make names for themselves in other businesses before any could work for him, Phil Keenan said. Four of his sons and two grandchildren work for the company, but Smith was made CEO about 14 years ago. One of his sons is a police officer and another a firefighter.

Keenan rejected hundreds of millions of dollars over the years offered by other insurance companies trying to acquire his company, Phil Keenan said. He did not want his employees to lose their jobs as part of a large corporation. He made arrangements years ago that his company would not be sold following his death.

"Keenan & Associates is positioned to continue John's vision into the future," Smith said.

In addition to his sons, Keenan is survived by 12 grandchildren. His wife died in 1987.

Services are pending.

## Cal State trustees raise scenario of transfer-only university system

LA Times

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Could California State University one day limit enrollment to transfers, admitting burgeoning numbers of community college students but turning away new freshmen?

The idea sounds far-fetched, but that scenario was raised Tuesday by trustees who cautioned that insufficient state funding could radically reduce the mission of the nation's largest university system.

The warning came during a discussion of the preliminary 2015-16 budget, which predicted growing demand for the 23-campus system. The Cal State system drew a record 761,000 applications for the fall 2014 term.

Much of that demand, officials said, is likely to come from community college transfers for two reasons: increased state funding is expected to boost two-year college enrollment by 60,000 students this year, and increased numbers of community college students will earn associate degrees for transfer, which guarantee admission to a Cal State campus.

After years of budget cuts and enrollment declines, funding for the Cal State system is increasing under Gov. Jerry Brown's multiyear plan that calls for an additional \$119.5 million each for the Cal State and University of California systems in 2015-16.

But that number is \$116.5 million short of what the Cal State system says it needs for operations, including a target enrollment increase of about 12,000 students. About half the students who qualify for Cal State entry but are turned away end up at community colleges, further increasing the transfer numbers, officials said.

The fear is that increased demand from transfer students and stagnant funding to increase overall enrollment will squeeze out new freshmen, creating a potential "train wreck" ahead, Cal State Chancellor Timothy P. White said.

"We do have a growing mismatch, and I think the executive branch and the three systems will have to act together," White said.

Board of Trustees Chairman Lou Monville said the model for the Cal State system could change.

"I have a core concern that this could fundamentally change our mission under the Master Plan (for Higher Education) to take the top one-third of the high school graduating class," Monville said.

In 2013, about 56,565 community college students transferred to Cal State campuses, including 1,400 with the associate degrees for transfer.

The board is expected to finalize a budget plan at the November meeting.

Board members also received an update on the status of so-called student success fees, adopted by many campuses to pay for a variety of services but criticized as a sneaky attempt to get around tuition hikes.

So far, 12 campuses have adopted the fees, which range from \$35 annually per student at Cal State Dominguez Hills (that fee is scheduled to incrementally increase to \$560 a year) to \$780 at the San Luis Obispo campus.

California lawmakers recently imposed a moratorium, ordering that no new fees be approved on campuses before Jan. 1, 2016, and requiring White to set up a committee to review student fee policies and recommend changes.

Proposed legislation would also provide more oversight of the approval process.

Robert DeWitz, a psychology student at Dominguez Hills, urged trustees to give students more say.

"Ideally, when they look at policy revisions regarding the fees, they'll consider the impact on students financially and democratically," DeWitz said.

The chancellor established an [online](#) forum for public comment on the fees.



# THE CHALLENGE INDEX

75 LOS ANGELES COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS—PUBLIC AND PRIVATE—THAT BRING OUT THE BEST IN STUDENTS

BY  
**JAY  
MATHEWS**

PHOTO-  
ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY  
**FREDRIK  
BRODEN**

→ WHEN IT COMES to high schools, you get what you pay for. Or at least that's the belief often held by parents. In this view the schools with the most effective teachers and the strongest track record of preparing students for top colleges must by definition cost a fortune, whether it's a \$30,000-a-year private school or a public school in a million-dollar neighborhood. ¶ But that simply isn't the case. >





You don't always need to earn an executive salary to get your child into the schools that best instill college skills. I've reported on schools for decades, putting together rankings first for *Newsweek* and now for *The Washington Post*, where I'm an education columnist. What I came to see is that traditional measures—SAT, ACT, and state test scores—don't offer a one-to-one correlation with the schools that prepare the most students for college.

A definitive 2001 study of more than 1 million test takers by sociologist Paul Attewell showed that the higher a high school's SAT average, the lower a child's chances of getting into a selective college. Stanford, Yale, and similar institutions pick only a few students from each school. It's hard to stand out in a class full of near-perfect SAT scores. Private schools may seem to do better at placing students in the Ivy League, but look carefully. Often they have more Ivy-graduate parents, whose children are given special consideration by their alma maters.

That's why I created the Challenge Index, basing it on a formula that recog-

nizes schools that try hardest to improve the critical thinking and writing skills needed to thrive in tough college courses and in the job market. Rather than merely tally average test scores—more a gauge of family income than instructional strength—I rank L.A. County high schools by participation in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses and tests. AP and IB, which can earn college credit, are the measures of readiness most valued by college admissions offices because, unlike SAT and ACT, their scores depend on long, written answers graded by outside experts.

The results of the Challenge Index may surprise. For instance, only six schools on the list are private, and the top one, the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies (LACES), is a public magnet in which half of the families are low income. The schools on this list succeed because their teachers demand a great deal of writing and analysis, particularly from average students, who are often allowed to slide at other schools; that way they are better prepared to make the most of college.

FOR A Q&A WITH  
JAY MATHEWS, GO TO  
LAMAG.COM.



## WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL DYNAMIC

THE BEST HIGH SCHOOLS DON'T MAKE IT EASY FOR STUDENTS. THEY'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO. BUT THEY SHOULD MAKE IT EDUCATIONAL AND, ABOVE ALL, INSPIRING

**R**

ANKING HIGH SCHOOLS is an invitation to arguments. What isn't debatable are the qualities that set the best schools apart: passionate teachers and administrators, characterized by high expectations for all students and a willingness to provide everyone an opportunity to participate in the most demanding courses and activities. Many private schools shy away from allowing students to register for multiple AP courses, in part out of concern that doing so would put too much pressure on them. But AP and IB classes are often the most stimulating, and they receive extra attention from college admissions officials. Pasadena Polytechnic, Harvard-Westlake, Flintridge Prep, Webb, and Westridge have less fear of such potential stress, one reason they are so highly ranked on this list.

Creative teaching is key to success in rigorous courses, motivating kids to go deep. LACES, for instance, uses an approach unheard of in American high schools: Its AP calculus students spend four days at a camp in Angeles National Forest, devoting eight hours a day to preparing for the AP exams.

Marshall Fundamental became a magnet middle and high school dedicated to the basics in 1977 but found it wasn't adequately readying its mostly low-income student body for college. It raised the number of AP tests given from

### Higher Learning

*A word on Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses*

→ AP COURSES are found in about 65 percent of U.S. high schools, and IB courses in about 4 percent. Both are far more demanding and much harder to dumb down than honors courses. AP final exams are usually three





## STAY THE COURSE

College consultants share what they tell clients about building a better transcript AS TOLD TO JULIA HERBST

### Well Tested

→ What I'd say to any student—whether it's early, midway, or late in the process of applying—is, when you're considering highly selective universities, it's clear that what those schools value first is an unquestionably strong academic record. That means taking the most challenging classes available at your school and doing very well in those classes; it doesn't mean just taking difficult classes. You've got to have strong grades over time and really strong standardized test scores. That will open up doors for a variety of colleges. But not everybody fits the mold of being eligible for highly selective schools, and I feel passionate that there's lots of opportunity for almost all students.

**STEVEN MERCER**  
Mercer Educational Consulting, Santa Monica

### Well Rounded

→ Obviously kids need to excel academically to be eligible for the top colleges. Beyond that, the question is, Who are they when they're not in the classroom? A kid's extracurricular profile can tell a story about who they are in terms of their interests. Say a kid loves children and they're working at summer camp, volunteering, and tutoring kids, and they want to study psychology. That makes sense, as opposed to someone saying, "I want to go to Yale. How am I going to make that happen?" In many cases that ends up looking transparent. Parents ask, "Which program is better for the summer?" My response is always, "Which one will be more meaningful?" Forget about what's "better." If it's meaningful, it will be better.

**CANDICE FRANKEL**  
Frankel College Counseling, Santa Monica

## BOOK

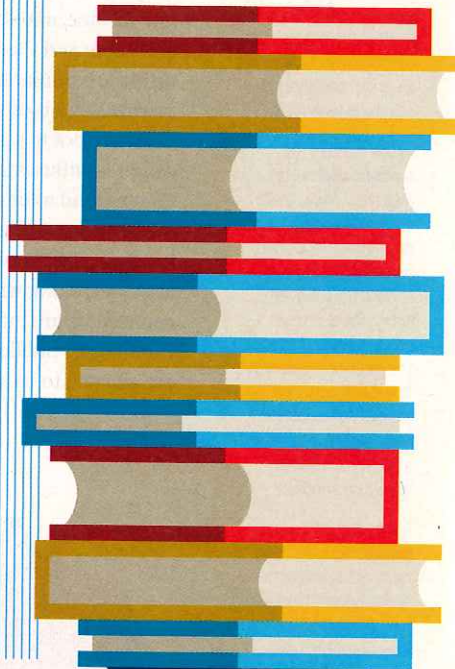
# BOUND

TOO MUCH HOMEWORK? THERE'S NO WAY AROUND IT: COMPETITIVE HIGH SCHOOLS ASSIGN PLENTY OF IT TO READY THEIR STUDENTS FOR THE COLLEGE YEARS TO COME



IN AVERAGE, American seniors headed for college do no more than an hour of homework a night. However,

students at L.A. County's most challenging high schools can expect an average of two to three hours a night. The emphasis in these schools is not enrollment at just any college but at institutions looking for students who



want to do their academic best. The most engaging high schools place great value on writing, the weakest part of the modern American high school curriculum. They require special writing projects and extra practice to prepare for AP and IB exams that emphasize essay questions graded by human beings. Many of the county's best 75 high schools dare to assign long research papers, something rare for public schools in this country. On top of that, extracurricular activities—the more sought-after colleges seek students with serious involvement in one or two—can add significantly to a student's schedule. These high schools also have counselors trained to underscore a student's unique academic accomplishments in their recommendations.

Because selective colleges pay careful attention to the number of AP or IB courses and tests on a student's transcript, it is important to enroll in at least three. But students at truly challenging schools will often sign up for more—not only to strengthen their transcripts but because those are the most stimulating courses and the ones their friends are taking.

**JAY MATHEWS**, an education columnist for The Washington Post, is the author of *Work Hard. Be Nice. How Two Inspired Teachers Created the Most Promising Schools in America and other education books*. He can be contacted at [mathewsj@washpost.com](mailto:mathewsj@washpost.com).

CALCULATOR ICON: SHUTTERSTOCK

## TESTING, TESTING

### GRAND ENTRANCE

→ For the first time more students took the ACT than the SAT in 2012. But more students are also taking both, including roughly a third of applicants to UCLA.



### A, B, OR SAT?

→ A National Association for College Admission Counseling study released this year concluded that high school grades better predict success in college than SAT or ACT scores.





## GETTING IN THE DOOR

*Not interested in the neighborhood high? The basics of branching out*

→ EVEN AT ITS most prestigious magnets, the L.A. Unified School District must choose students based on a point system, not grades or test scores. What counts most for magnet high schools is having been enrolled in a magnet for lower grades. Admission points for opportunities in elementary school are awarded for living where schools are overcrowded or students are predominantly minorities. Having been on a magnet waiting list before also earns points. Guidelines can be found at [eChoices.lausd.net](http://eChoices.lausd.net).

→ APPLYING TO a public charter is relatively easy. There are no boundary restrictions. If a charter has room, it has to take you. If oversubscribed, it must usually hold a lottery to decide who gets in. The California Charter School Association ([calcharters.org](http://calcharters.org)) has information about rules and schools.

→ POPULAR private schools have far more applicants than spaces. The best bet: Apply for the lowest grade; upper grades are full of previously enrolled students and their siblings. But there are exceptions. This year, for example, Flintridge Prep had 50 ninth-grade openings.

## PUBLIC OR PRIVATE?

FOR SOME, THERE'S SIMPLY NO DOUBT AS TO WHICH IS BETTER. THIS IS FOR EVERYONE ELSE

IT'S A QUESTION that comes up among parents in L.A., especially those with the means. As the rankings on pages 130-131 indicate, private is not necessarily better than public. Studies show that public high schools with mostly affluent students tend to produce the same results as private schools serving the same population, since both groups of students generally receive strong support at home. Take Palos Verdes Peninsula: Only 3 percent of students are low-income, and its average SAT score and Challenge Index rating are similar to those of private schools on this list.

That's not to say private education is without advantages: Classes tend to be smaller, misbehaving students are easier to expel, and extracurricular activities, along with college counseling, are more accessible. But magnet public schools that are allowed to be as selective as

the best private schools can do as well or better on the Challenge Index list even if their demographics are different. Top-ranked LACES, near 18th Street and Fairfax Avenue, and number eight Marshall Fundamental, in Pasadena, are two public magnets that have performed just as well as affluent private schools even though 50 percent of LACES students and 70 percent of Marshall students are low-income. At both LACES and Marshall, students aren't chosen on the basis of STAR, PSAT, or any other test scores but on their willingness to work hard. Whitney, a nationally famous magnet in Cerritos that is 19 percent low-income, does admit students based on academic criteria that include scores from state tests if they're from a public school or one of the various nationally normed tests geared to private schools.

While this block of text can't answer the question of whether a private school is best for your child, it can tell you this: There are many public schools where he or she can excel.



154 in 1998 to 1,068 this year. It's even teaching sixth graders how to handle the document-based questions—analyses of news accounts and other texts—they won't see until AP history in high school.

Challenging high schools provide a strong focus on extracurricular activities that enable students to develop and pursue their talents to a logical extreme, which is precisely what selective colleges look for. Loyola students do at least four major service projects. For seniors this means a minimum of 85 hours working in inner-city schools, hospitals, homeless shelters, or other socially conscious endeavors in January. Palos Verdes Peninsula High has enjoyed much success competing in dance, drama, debate, and mock trials and since 2008 has been particularly active in robotics and solar boat contests. Diamond Bar High was one of 12 institutions nationwide this past year to be named a Grammy Signature School in chorus and placed second at the National Orchestra Cup in New York in 2013. At high schools like these, students have a chance to soar, no matter their parents' income bracket.

hours long, and IB final exams as many as five hours. Half of a typical AP exam and almost all of a typical IB exam consists of free-response questions, written and graded by independent college instructors and high school teachers.







## IT ADDS UP

→ WE SPOKE with a University of California admissions officer, students, and consultants about expenses a high achiever can ring up before the first college tuition check is signed. Now add in at least a couple thousand to visit college campuses.

### 6 AP EXAMS

\$534



### 6 IB EXAMS

\$820



### 1 SAT PREP COURSE

\$699



### 2 SAT EXAMS

\$105



### 2 ACT EXAMS

\$109



### 6 COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

\$540



### 1 COLLEGE CONSULTANT

\$150/HR

### BRACE YOURSELF

"Parents and kids have to expect that it is going to be a tough process and know that they may need to cut each other slack when decision time comes. Don't take things too personally."

**JESSICA RICE**  
Colgate University  
Class of 2016  
English and Political Science

WHAT DO (FAIRLY) RECENT HIGH SCHOOLERS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT MAKING IT INTO COLLEGE? WE SOUGHT THE HARD-EARNED WISDOM OF OUR INTERNS FOR TIPS FOR KIDS AND PARENTS ALIKE

### TAKE TWO

"Many of my classmates who took both the ACT and the SAT did significantly better on the ACT or vice versa. It's important to know which test presents you in the best light."

**JENNIFER TEHRANI**  
USC  
Class of 2015  
Public Relations

# ADMISSION ACCOMPLISHED

### START TOURING

"Begin visiting colleges your freshman year. It will give you inspiration and help narrow down the kind of school you are interested in early on."

**SHELBY WAX**  
Scripps College  
Class of 2016  
English major with a Media Studies minor

### INVEST EARLY

"My friend hired a college consultant in the eighth grade to help attain her goal of going to George Washington University as a political science major. Her consultant helped her structure her whole high school experience to attain that goal."

—J.T.

### FIND A MENTOR

"Seek out teachers, coaches, family friends, counselors, et cetera, who can give advice and help keep things in perspective when you're stressed about your future."

**JULIA HERBST**  
Oberlin College/Oberlin Conservatory  
Class of 2015  
Biology and Jazz Bass Performance

### KNOW THY LIMITS

"Don't just follow your classmates. If two AP courses is your max, honor that. Supplement that lack of a class with an extracurricular."

**LEILA ELIHU**  
Boston University  
Class of 2015  
Cultural Anthropology

### CAUSE...

→ A recent study of ten competitive California high schools in *The Journal of Experimental Education* found that students averaged 3.1 hours of homework a night.

### AND EFFECT

→ Students who go to sleep after 11:30 p.m. on weeknights tend to have lower GPAs than those who go to bed earlier, according to UC Berkeley researchers.

### CHECK, PLEASE

→ The average tuition for a nonsectarian private high school in the U.S. is \$29,700. At Pasadena Polytechnic (number two on our list), high school tuition is \$32,300.





# HOW THEY RANK

**T**O CREATE THE Challenge Index, I took the total number of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate tests given at a school in 2013 and divided that figure by the number of seniors

who graduated in May or June of that year. Dividing by the number of seniors means a big school like Diamond Bar, which administered 2,657 AP tests and graduated 767 seniors in 2013, had no advantage over a small

	HIGH SCHOOL	LOCATION	% LOW-INCOME STUDENTS	% SENIORS WHO PASSED AP/IB	SAT	AP/IB TESTS	NUMBER OF 2013 GRADUATES	AP/IB PARTICIPATION
1.	L.A. Center for Enriched Studies*	Mid City	50	78	1753	1525	204	7.495
2.	Pasadena Polytechnic (P)	Pasadena	N/A	100	2150	566	88	6.432
3.	Harvard-Westlake (P)	Studio City	N/A	100	2098	1845	290	6.362
4.	Whitney High	Cerritos	19	100	1967	1008	164	6.146
5.	Flintridge Preparatory (P)	La Cañada Flintridge	N/A	97	2083	611	105	5.819
6.	The Webb Schools (P)	Claremont	N/A	90	2010	495	108	4.583
7.	Westridge (P)	Pasadena	N/A	93	1989	306	67	4.567
8.	Marshall Fundamental High	Pasadena	70	47	1380	949	210	4.519
9.	Loyola High (P)	Pico-Union	N/A	80	1846	1306	289	4.519
10.	Palos Verdes Peninsula High	Rolling Hills Estates	3	67	1781	2319	575	4.033
11.	James A. Foshay Learning Center*	South L.A.	84	46	1321	680	174	3.908
12.	Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy*	Wilmington	72	66	1551	323	86	3.756
13.	Diamond Bar High	Diamond Bar	7	60	1743	2657	767	3.623
14.	North Hollywood High*	North Hollywood	72	30	1530	1928	536	3.597
15.	Eagle Rock High*	Eagle Rock	65	37	1376	1283	358	3.584
16.	King/Drew Medical Magnet*	South L.A.	81	32	1328	839	256	3.277
17.	San Marino High	San Marino	2	51	1829	941	296	3.179
18.	Cerritos High	Cerritos	28	59	1673	1652	520	3.177
19.	Walnut High	Walnut	13	53	1717	2431	768	3.165
20.	Mira Costa High	Manhattan Beach	3	50	1757	1746	555	3.146
21.	South Pasadena High	South Pasadena	12	54	1762	1072	341	3.144
22.	Van Nuys Senior High*	Van Nuys	72	40	1551	1466	469	3.126
23.	La Cañada High	La Cañada Flintridge	1	70	1805	1117	369	3.027
24.	32nd St./USC Magnet*	Los Angeles	80	17	1249	222	74	3.000
25.	Downtown Magnets High*	Downtown L.A.	87	45	1411	590	198	2.980
26.	Academic Leadership Community*	Westlake	64	48	1132	136	46	2.957
27.	Palos Verdes High	Palos Verdes Estates	3	58	1750	1389	470	2.955
28.	Valley Academy of Arts & Science*	Granada Hills	58	12	1278	432	147	2.939
29.	UCLA Community*	Koreatown	43	6	1225	126	43	2.930
30.	Sherman Oaks Center for Enriched Studies*	Reseda	46	40	1578	666	230	2.896
31.	Elizabeth Learning Center*	Cudahy	89	56	1276	421	149	2.826
32.	Torres Renaissance*	East L.A.	78	28	1202	107	38	2.816
33.	Malibu High School	Malibu	8	60	1626	488	175	2.789
34.	John Marshall High*	Los Feliz	61	31	1454	1518	547	2.775
35.	Granada Hills Charter High*	Granada Hills	50	50	1637	2360	870	2.713
36.	Magnolia Science Academy 2*	Lake Balboa	74	50	1250	50	19	2.632
37.	John A. Rowland High	Rowland Heights	50	38	1650	1085	498	2.602
38.	Beverly Hills High	Beverly Hills	5	65	1733	1251	481	2.601



school like Harbor Teacher Preparation Academy, with only 323 AP tests and 86 graduates. Though students could take AP or IB tests without enrolling in the course, fewer than 1 percent of the tests are taken by the non-AP students.

Public schools aren't always happy to be ranked, but freedom of information laws require that they provide the data used in the list. Private schools aren't beholden to the same rules, and some refuse to share their data, saying they don't want

to be measured by numbers. Still, few L.A. County private schools with strong AP or IB programs declined to participate for these rankings. Schools were excluded if the portion of tests with passing scores was less than 10 percent. ■

	HIGH SCHOOL	LOCATION	% LOW-INCOME STUDENTS	% SENIORS WHO PASSED AP/IB	SAT	AP/IB TESTS	NUMBER OF 2013 GRADUATES	AP/IB PARTICIPATION
39.	Venice High*	Mar Vista	54	35	1488	790	309	2.557
40.	Daniel Pearl Magnet High	Lake Balboa	50	31	1449	143	57	2.509
41.	Magnolia Science Academy 1*	Reseda	89	47	1334	125	51	2.451
42.	Animo Venice Charter*	Venice	86	62	1299	196	80	2.450
43.	R.F.K. Ambassador School of Global Leadership*	Koreatown	82	38	1206	164	67	2.448
44.	Palisades Charter High	Pacific Palisades	34	43	1648	1554	646	2.406
45.	Gabrielino High	San Gabriel	58	39	1586	1032	430	2.400
45.	Glen A. Wilson High	Hacienda Heights	55	65	1617	960	400	2.400
47.	Arcadia High	Arcadia	11	49	1848	2123	895	2.372
48.	L.A. County High School for the Arts	El Sereno	5	35	1690	344	147	2.340
49.	Francisco Bravo Medical Magnet*	Boyle Heights	61	55	1451	1050	450	2.333
50.	Hawthorne Math & Science Academy	Hawthorne	85	90	1429	303	130	2.331
51.	Leadership in Entertainment & Media Arts*	Lincoln Heights	100	14	1043	123	53	2.321
52.	Alexander Hamilton Senior High*	Palms	54	32	1446	1185	512	2.314
53.	L.A. High School of the Arts*	Koreatown	89	33	1309	115	50	2.300
54.	William S. Hart High	Newhall	29	37	1606	1116	496	2.250
55.	Rancho Dominguez Preparatory*	Long Beach	65	16	1323	278	124	2.242
56.	West Ranch High	Stevenson Ranch	11	50	1613	1380	620	2.226
57.	Miguel Contreras Learning Complex*	Westlake	71	44	1155	313	141	2.220
58.	University High*	West L.A.	72	23	1397	885	403	2.196
59.	Reseda Senior High*	Reseda	59	26	1411	795	364	2.184
60.	Torres Engineering & Technology Academy*	East L.A.	67	9	1115	109	50	2.180
61.	Glendora High	Glendora	17	37	1594	1186	553	2.145
62.	Bonita High	La Verne	26	28	1535	909	424	2.144
63.	Woodrow Wilson High	Long Beach	57	35	1503	1827	861	2.122
64.	Ramón C. Cortines School of Visual & Performing Arts*	Downtown L.A.	67	36	1358	750	354	2.119
65.	Robert A. Millikan High	Long Beach	55	30	1453	1762	870	2.025
66.	California Academy of Math & Science	Carson	52	72	1755	305	151	2.020
67.	Blair High	Pasadena	67	44	1322	308	123	2.008
68.	William Howard Taft Charter High*	Woodland Hills	57	29	1505	943	477	1.977
69.	Green Design Community*	South L.A.	72	12	965	79	40	1.975
70.	Mark Keppel High	Alhambra	55	42	1610	1081	550	1.965
71.	Grover Cleveland Charter High*	Reseda	63	35	1521	1222	623	1.961
72.	Franklin High*	Highland Park	62	29	1337	584	298	1.96
73.	School for the Visual Arts and Humanities*	Koreatown	87	39	1212	119	61	1.951
74.	Orthopaedic Hospital Medical Magnet High*	South L.A.	100	41	1343	308	158	1.949
75.	Diamond Ranch High	Pomona	46	29	1482	837	435	1.924

\*LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT; (P) PRIVATE