



# The High School Years: Transitioning to Adulthood

Year 5

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## Dear Parent:

Welcome to the UCLA High School Project, a continuation of the three-year UCLA Middle School Diversity Project of which you and your child were a part of. As a parent or guardian of a student who completed their second year in one of our high schools in California, you have given us continued permission to include your son or daughter in the extension of this important project. Our newsletter, *The High School Years: Transitioning to Adulthood*, will keep you informed about the study.

As Principal Investigators, allow us to first reintroduce ourselves. Sandra Graham is a Professor in the Department of Education at UCLA. Jaana Juvonen is a Professor in the Department of Psychology at UCLA. Our collaborators in northern California are Frank C. Worrell, a Professor in the Graduate School of Education at UC Berkeley, and Brett Johnson Solomon, an Associate Professor in the Department of Liberal Studies at Santa Clara University. We are devoting our careers to the study of adolescent development in school. We have a particular interest in adolescents' social development – their relationships with peers, their friendship networks, whether they feel accepted or rejected, their desires to be engaged in their communities, their mind-sets regarding the future, and how these feelings affect their adjustment and academic performance in high school. Based on what we have learned about adolescent development, we believe that healthy social relationships and academic success go hand-in-hand. Our long-term goal is to use the information obtained from our research to develop school programs that are sensitive to the needs of all adolescents. In the high school phase of this project, we are especially interested in how both the past middle school experiences and the students' current feelings about their new school, their classmates, and themselves influence their academic performance and healthy development in schools that range in ethnic diversity. With the most ethnically diverse population of any state in the nation, California remains the perfect setting for this study.

As a participant in this study, your son or daughter will be followed over their four years of high school and the first year following graduation. In each of these five years, your teen will complete a written and confidential survey that asks about the social and academic experiences, challenges, and successes of high school. The 10<sup>th</sup> grade Spring assessment will have already been completed by the time you receive this Newsletter. We are pleased to inform you that the great majority of students found the survey to be interesting and the continued use of iPads to complete it to be particularly enjoyable. They were also happy to receive a \$20 honorarium for completing the survey. Published once per year, our Newsletter will provide updates about the progress in the study. Each issue will include informative essays on topics important to adolescent development and performance in high school and descriptions of recent research on timely topics of concern to you as parents of teenagers. These articles will be written by us and our talented team of undergraduate and graduate students. This second issue includes information on easing the transition to high school and, in looking toward the future, academic options in California for students who wish to continue their education beyond high school graduation. Our goal is to share with you our knowledge about development during the teen years based on our own research and the work of other leading scholars.

If you have any questions about the study or other information contained in this Newsletter, please feel free to call (661) 889-0559, Manpreet Dhillon, our Project Manager, will be happy to speak with you. If you prefer, she will arrange for you to speak to one of the Principal Investigators.

We are grateful to you, as parents, and to the staff and teachers at your teen's high school.

***Enjoy the Newsletter!***



# High School Transitions

By Jessica Morales-Chicas and Hannah Schacter

## What helps the transition to high school?

The transition to high school is both an exciting and challenging time for adolescents. Once again, youth go from being the oldest to the youngest students. They must get used to a new school environment, but they also have lots of opportunities to take many different kinds of courses, participate in extracurricular activities, and form new friendships.

In light of all the new social and academic changes associated with the high school transition, it is important to understand what factors can contribute to positive adjustment during this school change and beyond. In this article, we offer some suggestions for helping teens make a smooth transition based on our own research with the UCLA Middle and High School Study.

## Increasing feelings of belonging

One of the unique features of high schools is that they are generally larger in both physical size and number of students than middle schools. A frequent concern of students is how they will find a niche (or “fit in”) within this new school. One goal of our research has been to identify factors that increase students’ feelings of belonging in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In other words, what helps students feel more like they are a part of their new school? Our analyses of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade data show that something as simple as talking to friends, school counselors, or parents is related to a greater sense of belonging in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Specifically, we found that students who talk to their **parents** about their schoolwork (e.g., things they learn in their classes) and plans for the future (e.g., what job or career they want in the future) report greater connection to their school. Similarly, sharing learning strategies with **friends** through both talking (e.g., discussing test-taking strategies or future educational plans) and collaboration (e.g., studying together for tests) show related benefits. Lastly, discussing future coursework plans with **counselors** at school promotes greater belonging in school.

These findings shed light on the importance of communication during this critical transitional period. Having someone to talk to about both current and future educational plans—whether it be family members, friends, or counselors, can help 9<sup>th</sup> graders make a smoother transition to high school.

Talking to...

PARENTS about what you are learning

PEERS about how to study for your tests

COUNSELORS about what courses to take

Is linked to

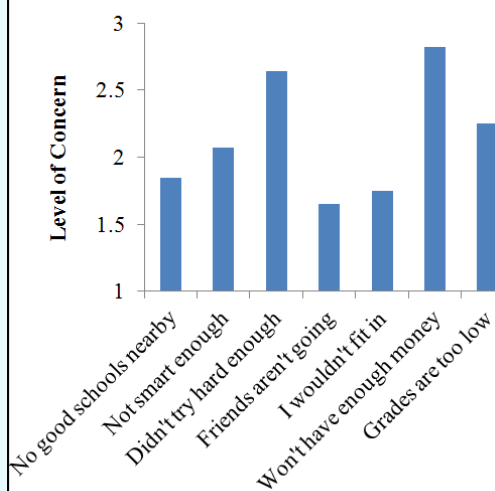
Sense of School Belonging

## Thinking about the future

Not only does talking to parents, friends, and counselors help students feel like they belong in high school, but it can also reduce some of the concerns that students report about plans after high school. Our research shows that even as early as 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students see particular barriers to continuing their education after high school. When students were asked to rate the most likely reason why they would not pursue education after high school, they mostly said that it would be due to not trying hard enough in high school or because they wouldn’t have enough money. The most common barriers are shown in the figure to the left, titled, “Worries Beyond High School.” However, talking to familiar adults and peers is associated with fewer worries about barriers to education beyond high school.

Thus, the more students talked about their current and future educational plans and experiences, the fewer worries they reported about their future beyond high school.

Worries About Attending College



For more information on financial resources to help pay for college, check out these links:

(1) <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/financial-aid-101/financial-aid-can-help-you-afford-college>

(2) <http://www.forbes.com/sites/troyonink/2014/01/31/2014-guide-to-fafsa-css-profile-college-aid-and-expected-family-contribution/>

## Approaching barriers

Parents and students often wait until the tail end of high school to talk about college. However, our new findings suggest that students may benefit from talking to parents about this even early on in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. And if your teen does not want to talk to you about future plans and college, you can encourage them to talk to a school counselor or even their friends. Having conversations about academic progress and ways to succeed in school helps students develop more positive perceptions of both their current feelings about school climate and future potential for success. It is also important to realize that the biggest concerns expressed by students (e.g., not having enough money for college) can be reduced with increased awareness of resources like grants, financial aid, scholarships, etc. (see page 2 for links regarding financial support for college). If students think that trying hard is a barrier, developing strategies for increasing student motivation (e.g., discussing future plans early on) or how to get academic help may increase their effort and beliefs about perceived ability to achieve.

## Types of Financial Aid:

**Grants:** You don't have to pay back! They come from Federal and State governments and colleges. Typically need-based.

**Scholarships:** You don't have to pay back! They come from governments, college, and private organizations. Merit-based (i.e., athletic or academic).

**Loans:** Borrowed money that is paid back with interest. Low interest loans are offered by the Federal Government (both subsidized and unsubsidized).

**Work-Study:** Federally funded program, students work part-time at school to help defray costs.

## Should Students Work While in High School?

*By Daisy Camacho*

It is pretty common for today's teenagers to be engaged in some kind of paid work. According to recent surveys, the most common paid jobs of 8<sup>th</sup> graders are babysitting and doing lawn or yard work. By 12<sup>th</sup> grade, babysitting and yard work are still the most popular teen jobs, but clerical and restaurant jobs also increase by this time. Teenagers may be interested in finding a job for many reasons – for example, to be more independent, buy things they really want, save money for college, or to help their family.

### Is working harmful to teenagers?

Working long hours can be bad for teens, as it may come at a cost to their sleep, homework, exercise, and even meals. Long hours, considered to be 20 or more hours per week of work, may not leave enough time for schoolwork and organized after-school activities. When teenagers work 20 hours or more, studies find that they have poor school performance, greater absenteeism, low educational aspirations and higher levels of delinquency and substance use (e.g., smoking and drinking).

However, some studies find that jobs don't cause kids to do poorly in school—but that teens who struggle with school may choose to work more hours. So if your teen seems to want to work more than 20 hours a week, find out if it is because school is difficult for him or her. As much as possible, the teen's work schedule should be arranged so that it does not interfere with school opportunities to get additional academic help as needed.

### Is working helpful for teenagers?

Employment, at moderate levels—less than 20 hours a week—could still leave teens with enough time for participation in organized after-school activities, homework and even some leisure

reading. In some cases, working less than 20 hours a week is linked with *higher* GPAs, —especially if the teenager is saving money for college. Jobs that are related to the adolescent's future career may provide skills useful for their future. Other jobs that foster a strong connection between work and school can teach teenagers valuable skills, such as responsibility and independence, in addition to cutting down on their leisure time, like watching TV and surfing the Net. Working a moderate number of hours can reduce the likelihood of deviant behavior and arrests as well as the use of drugs and alcohol—and working in a family business or at school can potentially connect teens positively with their families or their school.

A good job can also promote positive relationships with peers and adults as well as provide the opportunity for adolescents to gain mentors. A structured job can provide a safe place for teens to gain self-confidence as they solve new challenges and develop new coping skills. Teens who are able to balance a paid job, homework and extracurricular activities gain experience with time management and are not only more likely to attend college, but also more likely to graduate from college. Having work experience may also make it easier to find a job after high school—and they might even get paid more than their peers!

**So, what does the research on adolescent work tell you as parents? Decisions about whether and how much a teen will work need to be done within families, and every family's circumstances are unique to them. But, it seems pretty clear that if a teen is going to work, 20-hours a week should be the upper limit.**

# College for All: The California Dream Act

By Yolie Vasquez-Salgado

Although the Federal Dream Act has not passed, California created its own version, the California Dream, comprised of three different bills (Assembly Bill (AB) 540, AB 130 and AB 131). Together, these bills make college affordable for undocumented students in California. More specifically:

AB 540 makes it possible for undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at public colleges and universities in California (e.g., California State University, University of California and Community Colleges).

AB 130 enables undocumented students to apply for and receive private scholarships.

AB 131 allows students to apply for and receive state-level financial aid (i.e., state grants at California State University and University of California; tuition fee waivers at Community Colleges)

It is important to keep in mind that while the California Dream Act assists with funding your college education, it does not provide any legal help.

## What are the requirements to qualify?

1. Must have attended a California high school for 3 or more years
2. Must have graduated from a California high school or obtained a General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D), also called General Educational Development test.
3. Must be enrolled in an accredited public college or university in California

\*For assistance with this process and to find more students like you, please contact the California Dream Network: <http://www.cadreamnetwork.org/>

## What are the steps involved?

**AB 540:** To begin the process, visit the undergraduate admissions office at the California public college or university you wish to attend and ask for an “AB 540 Affidavit Form” or visit: [http://www.calgrants.org/documents/2008\\_ab\\_540\\_affidavit.pdf](http://www.calgrants.org/documents/2008_ab_540_affidavit.pdf)

**AB 130 & AB 131:** To begin the process, read the FAQ handout by visiting: [http://www.csac.ca.gov/pubs/forms/grnt\\_frm/cal\\_grant\\_dream\\_act\\_faqs.pdf](http://www.csac.ca.gov/pubs/forms/grnt_frm/cal_grant_dream_act_faqs.pdf) After carefully reading the handout, fill out the online application by visiting <https://dream.csac.ca.gov/> and follow the instructions.

## Did You Know:

Undocumented students who qualify under AB 540 criteria (for more information, see: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/paying-for-uc/tuition-and-cost/ab540/index.html>) can now apply for certain types of financial aid by submitting the California Dream Act Application.

## What should you be doing right now to get ready for college?

Stay in school and work hard to get good grades  
Go to a California high school and graduate or earn your G.E.D

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