

Summary of Survey on use of Private Tutoring and College Entrance Exam Prep Courses

Background

Increased requests for referrals for tutors on the B-CCHS list-serve led the PTSA to initiate a survey to quantify the use of private tutors and private SAT/ACT prep courses.

The survey was conducted online using links from the school website, emails on the list serve as well as using Edline . A paper copy of the survey was sent to every household where the parent was not registered on Edline and included a stamped addressed return envelope.

The survey asked 18 questions including a question on race and current financial situation, as well as questions on use of tutors and SAT prep courses and allowed for comments. At least one follow up reminder email was sent to enhance response.

We received 431 responses from the 1600 registered families at B-CC a response rate of 27%. (The survey asked about the oldest student in the family currently enrolled at B-CC, not every child in the family.)

82 % (330) of the respondents were white and represented 30 % of the white students (1083)at B-CC

7% (27) of the respondents were African American and represented 9% of African American students(292) at B-CC

8% (31) of respondents were Hispanic and represent 13% of Hispanic students at B-CC(248).

While overall the response rate was good for this survey the low response rate by African American and Hispanic parents means there is a potential unreliability of these small sub-sample estimates and comparisons.

Survey Findings

1. **Paid use of tutors** was strikingly high - just over half of White and exactly half of African American parents who responded had used private tutors as opposed to about one-third by Hispanic/Latino parents.

Many comments from parents indicated that they felt despite paying for tutoring it was inequitable and unfair. They felt that only those with sufficient resources could afford to pay for tutoring and that the school system should allow sufficient time in the school day and with homework practice for students to master material without resorting to paid tuition.

2. **The use of Math tutors** shows a particularly high incidence of private tutors (59%) and discussions with our Math department supported the parents' view, that the curriculum is too tight to allow students to, master material, have time for sufficient review and re-teaching in most of the Math subjects. It is particularly challenging for Algebra 2 and Calculus with too many units requiring completion in the semester.

The Math teachers had some creative ideas to try and deal with this problem including removing the statistics units(5) completely from the Algebra 2 course and moving some of the first Calculus units (possibly 3) to the end of the Pre-Calculus course as it is a pre-requisite for Calculus.

90% of Hispanic/Latino respondents indicated that they were paying for tutoring for Geometry. This was an astonishing statistic. Language is probably the reason for the need for tutors but needs further investigation.

3. **Use of SAT and ACT College Prep Courses** was extensive amongst African American (40%)and White(39%) respondents and less so with Hispanic/Latino families (16%)

The comments received covered several issues

3.1 Respondents felt that students achieved increased scores of between 100 -300 points on the SATs after using a College Prep Course and was therefore **essential**.

3.2. **Equity** was again a concern – those who could afford paid and got an advantage in college admissions process.

3.3 **Expensive** – over \$1,000 per course

4. **MCPS's free online college test prep course** is widely recognized (63% of respondents knew about it) though not very positively evaluated. Only 17% used it and many comments noted that you need to have an exceptionally dedicated student to sit on their own in front of a computer and complete it.
5. **Cost concerns lead many parents**—especially parents of African American students (69%)—to reject tutoring and/or college prep courses. This means that a family's financial status can be a barrier to even greater use.

The survey questions and the summary of the responses are attached on the following pages:

1. What grade is your child enrolled in at B-CC?

The responses were fairly even from all grades with slightly higher from 11th grade (29.2%) and the lowest participation from Freshman (21.3%) that could be explained by the fact that freshman are likely to use tutors less than upper grades and unlikely to have used SAT prep courses.

2. Has this student received any paid tutoring to help with high school classes/subjects or general study skills in the last two years? (Do NOT count tutoring for SAT or ACT exam preparation.)

Just over half of White and exactly half of African American parents who responded had used private tutors as opposed to about one-third (32%) by Hispanic/Latino parents. While the sample might be biased in favor of those who had used tutors, this is nevertheless a very large percentage using private tutors.

3. In what courses or subject(s) did your oldest child receive paid tutoring? (MARK ALL THAT APPLY)

Over 59% of all tutors used were for a Math course. 39.5% of all respondents and 57.1% of African American parents used a tutor for Algebra 2/Honors Algebra 2. There could be several reasons for Algebra 2 having the highest number of tutors. As poor math students move up the high school math track taking increasingly more difficult courses that build on units from previous years, they fall further behind and require one-on-one tutoring. Algebra 2 is the math subject most needed to successfully complete SAT testing.

90% of Hispanic students using tutors used a Geometry tutor — much higher than African American respondents (43%) and white respondents (33%). Language constraints could be a reason for such high use of tutors amongst the Hispanic/Latino respondents but would need further investigating.

Foreign Languages was the second most used tutoring subject after Math with 36% of respondents

Overall, African American parents used more tutors an average of 2.79 instances per respondent, compared to 2.50 for Hispanics and 2.45 for Whites.

4. Approximately how much did you or your family pay in total for the tutoring your oldest child received during the past 2 years?

Over \$302,500 was spent by the 205 respondents on tutoring services over 2 years—almost \$1,500 per child. 50% of African American respondents spent over \$3,000 as compared to 20% of Hispanics and 18% of Whites.

5. Consider the most recent sequence of tutoring that your child received. How helpful was that tutoring in improving your child's knowledge, ability, or motivation?

79% of African American respondents felt the tutoring very helpful compared to 40% of Hispanic respondents and 59% of White respondents. Overall 92% found tutoring very helpful or moderately helpful and therefore likely to continue seeking such help.

6. If you'd like to tell us about any positive or negative experiences you or your child had with paid tutoring during the past two years, please do so here.

102 Comments fell into several groups

- 6.1 Confidence building – many respondents said tutors helped improve a student’s confidence and investment in the subject. “improved daughter’s attitude and gave confidence” ‘needed tutoring to feel successful in class’ “lessen stress of high level AP courses” ‘helped sustain my child’s investment In the subject’
- 6.2 One-on-One attention – teachers and TAP did not provide enough opportunity to help on individual basis to explain concepts not grasped. “class sizes large and individual attention inadequate” “teachers have too many students unable to provide individual attention and feedback” ‘teachers simply do not have the time to answer all student’s questions’ ‘more focused attention and time to teach to the level of the child’
- 6.3 Organizational skills – tutors helping students get organized and focused, “he doesn’t know how to study, take good notes, review and even how to take tests” ‘no organizational skills or time management classes so I have spent hundreds of \$s on a private tutor – money I really don’t have.”
- 6.4 Writing skills – ‘little feedback on writing assignments’ used tutors to ‘improve basic reading and writing skills’ ‘MCPS fails to teach writing and editing skills – tutoring specifically addressed writing skills for a straight A student’ ‘need to teach grammar and non-fiction writing’
- 6.5 Tutoring however expensive and variable in quality – ‘peer-to-peer not very helpful’ ‘recent B-CC grads familiar with MCPS curriculum useful’ ‘group tutoring not great benefit, one-on-one better’ ‘felt quality of tutor was not as high as it could have been’ ‘Very Expensive: \$100/hour 40 weeks a year’ ‘we realizes we were being ripped off’
- 6.6 Difficult for parents to be go between tutors and teachers. ‘most teachers were unwilling to talk or email a tutor’
- 6.7 Concern about the need to use a tutor. “I have a highly functional child who is struggling and reaching outside to augment her comprehension...how does the ‘average’ student cope?” ‘It is expensive and frankly, it should be unnecessary” ‘we are concerned for the kids in these large classes who do not have the resources we have’ ‘if many students are getting tutoring it means there’s something flawed in the curriculum or instruction’

7. Has your oldest child currently at B-CC ever been enrolled in an SAT/ACT prep course that charged a fee?

40% of African American and 39% of White respondents have paid for SAT/ACT prep, as compared to only 16% of Hispanic/Latino respondents.

8. Approximately how much did you or your family pay for the course? (If your child was enrolled in more than one prep course, how much did you pay in total?)

Respondents spent over \$186,000 on SAT/ACT prep courses, an average of \$1,185 per family

9. How helpful did you find the SAT/ACT prep course to be?

80% of African American respondents found the prep courses very helpful compared to 50% Hispanic and White respondents

10. Regardless of whether your student has been enrolled in an SAT/ACT prep course in the past, do you expect to enroll this student in an SAT/ACT prep course in the future?

78% of African American respondents expect to enroll their student in an SAT/ACT prep course in the future as compared to 58% of Hispanic and 46% of White respondents.

11. Were you aware of Montgomery County Public Schools' free on-line college entrance test preparation instructional module?

Over half of all respondents (63%) were aware of the MCPS online test prep course.

12. Has your oldest child at B-CC ever used this free online instructional module?

47 % of African American respondents had used the online course as compared to 13% Hispanic and 15% White. Overall only 45 (17%) respondents had used the course.

13. How helpful was the free online instructional module?

Only 18% of respondents found it very useful and 36% moderately helpful

14. If you'd like to tell us about any positive or negative experience you or your child have had with SAT/ACT prep courses.

126 Comments were made and fell into several categories:

- **14.1 Online courses** – need self motivating student to be able to take advantage of course.
 - ‘Difficult for unenthusiastic student who struggled with self-monitoring and inertia’
 - ‘my son does not have the self motivation to take these on’(online course)
 - ‘an on-line course might work for a motivated student but the face to face interaction (of Prep Course) helps students understand/remember the content.’
 - ‘she wasn’t the kind of student who had the discipline to review materials found on-line’
 - ‘the problem is finding time ...when he has homework and music lessons/practice and sports’
- **14.2 SAT/ACT Prep courses** – increase scores.
 - ‘both my children raised their scores by at least 200 points’
 - ‘my daughter had 200 point increase’
 - ‘helped my two children raise their PSAT scores by 100 points or more in each of the individual areas on the SATs’
 - ‘brought up her scores dramatically’
 - ‘SAT review course raised my child’s SAT score by 300 points’
 - ‘her scores came up significantly after taking the prep test, perhaps 300 points’
 - ‘my child went from scoring 18 to 29 after paid one on one ACT prep course’
- **14.3 Prep course vs. individual tutoring**
 - ‘SAT prep far more expensive than I thought I would consider for him.’
 - ‘found small group instruction most beneficial’
 - ‘paid extra for one on one tutoring’
 - ‘used private tutor for SAT prep – cheaper and less time consuming’
 - ‘When you need to focus on math subjects individual tutoring was better than the whole SAT prep course’
 - ‘we have 3 kids ..believe only in the one on one tutoring to increase scores.’
- **14.4 Fairness of access**
 - ‘ whole system grossly unfair. Some students with affluent parents had the advantage of private SAT prep classes others do not.’
 - ‘I am disappointed colleges place so much emphasis on these tests. Students who do not test well are discriminated against in college selection process.’
 - ‘without a prep course a child is at a disadvantage’
 - ‘if you have \$\$ you do well on the SAT, if you don’t have \$\$, you can’t fairly compete.’
 - ‘feel like I have to consider a prep class to keep him competitive’
 - ‘Not a level playing field’

15. During the past 2 years, was there a time when you wanted your child to have tutoring or college entrance exam help but decided against it because of the cost?

Two thirds of African American respondents (69%) said they decided against tutoring or college prep because of cost as compared to 36% of Hispanic and 28% of white respondents. Almost one third of all respondents decided against tutoring or prep courses because of cost.

16. Is your oldest child currently enrolled at B-CC male or female?

54% of all respondents had a male oldest child enrolled at B-CC.

17. What is this child's primary race or ethnicity?

82 % (330) of the respondents were white and represented 30 % of the white students (1083)at B-CC
7% (27) of the respondents were African American and represented 9% of African American students (292) at B-CC
8% (31) of respondents were Hispanic and represent 13% of Hispanic students at B-CC(248)

18. Which one of these statements best describes your family's current financial situation?

48% of White respondents indicated they had resources for all expenses and for most other things they want to buy compared to 25% African American and 29% Hispanic.
Only 3% of all respondents indicated they were having trouble making ends meet. This means the survey underrepresented responses from our FARMS families officially registered at 10% .Also our population actually includes almost 20 % students who at one time have been registered as eligible FARMS. We know many HS students are reluctant to be registered as FARMS and therefore we assume the 31% of respondents who indicated that cost prevented them paying for tutoring and SAT prep courses could be considerably higher.

I would like to thank all the parents who participated in the survey as well as Sid and BethGroeneman for their invaluable professional help in conducting this survey.

Mary Cobbett, President
B-CC HS PTSA
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