



Obstacles To Opportunity:

Alexandria, Virginia Students Speak Out

Report Prepared By:

Advancement Project

Alexandria United Teens, a project of Tenants and Workers United

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October 2007

LETTER TO THE SUPERINTENDENT AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS OF ALEXANDRIA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dear Superintendent Perry and Members of the School Board:

We are students of the Alexandria City Public Schools system (ACPS) and education advocates who are concerned that many students – particularly those who are Black or Latino, and immigrants of all races – are not receiving a high-quality education within ACPS. Barriers students face include:

- Limited preparation for college;
- Academic tracking of students of color into low-level courses;
- Low expectations of students by school staff that result in students feeling discouraged, unmotivated, and unprepared for college;
- Lack of support for struggling students, and even encouraging some to drop out;
- English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that do not adequately prepare students to graduate high school and attend college;
- Limited access to Advanced Placement (AP) and Honors classes; and
- Unjust discipline policies that push students out of school.

These “opportunity gaps” have created a persistent achievement gap, exemplified by the fact that in 2006, when compared to the rest of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Black, Latino, disabled, low-income, and English language learners in ACPS all scored lower than the state average on the Standards of Learning exams (SOLs). Only White students in ACPS out-performed their peers across Virginia.

In an effort to understand fully the struggles students experience in ACPS and to craft potential solutions, we developed a survey to measure student views about school climate, academic achievement, and college preparation at T.C. Williams High School, the only high school within ACPS. **OBSTACLES TO OPPORTUNITY: ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA STUDENTS SPEAK OUT** presents the results of this survey and other complementary research completed over the last year.

The results of this research led us to a disturbing conclusion: ACPS has effectively created two education tracks: an exclusive, privileged track, in which a small number of students are actively prepared for academic success; and a mainstream, unprivileged track, in which the majority of students are not expected to excel and receive little support or opportunity to pursue their academic goals. Perhaps even more disconcerting is that the tracks are racially identifiable, with White students comprising the majority of the privileged track, and students of color representing the majority of the unprivileged track.

The seriousness of these issues necessitates immediate action from ACPS. We encourage you to examine the research presented, to listen carefully to the voices of students, and to use this report as a catalyst for an education reform campaign at T.C. Williams and throughout ACPS, in collaboration with students, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, and education advocates.

We look forward to a productive dialogue and working with you to create a school district that will offer educational opportunities of the highest quality to all ACPS students.

Advancement Project

Alexandria United Teens, a project of Tenants and Workers United

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	9
College Preparation	11
Reducing Dropouts and Pushouts	23
Conclusion and Recommendations	35
About Us	38
Acknowledgments	39
Endnotes	40
Appendix A	44
Appendix B	50

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) is a racially diverse, well-funded school district located just outside Washington, DC in Alexandria, Virginia. Although the city's population is mostly White, the ACPS student population is predominantly Black and Latino. T.C. Williams High School, the only high school within ACPS, is an example of the school system's racial diversity, which can be traced back to 1971, when the city's two predominantly Black high schools merged with T.C. Williams in an attempt to comply with *Brown v. Board of Education* and other school desegregation cases. Like many formerly segregated school districts during that time, this change was met with resistance. Many believe that the success of the T.C. Williams football team caused relationships to form across racial lines and eventually led to the elimination of racial strife within the school – a touching story that is depicted in the movie *Remember the Titans*.

Today, while the district is rich in diversity and resources, it has not translated these assets into high rates of academic success, particularly for students of color. In an effort to gain a better understanding of the dynamics causing ACPS's low graduation rates – and even lower rate of students who graduate prepared for college – a survey was developed and distributed to T.C. Williams students. This report presents the results of this survey and other research completed over the last year, and finds that ACPS operates a “two-track” school system – one is a college preparatory track that is available to mostly middle-class White students, and the other is a low-level track that is reserved for mostly poor students of color.



COLLEGE PREPARATION

Nationwide, there is a relatively widespread belief among school personnel and the general public that many young people have no aspiration toward higher education. The education offered to students in grades K-12 often reflects those low expectations, as many students find they are “tracked” not for higher education, but rather for post-high school employment, dropping out of school, or worse. For that reason, the survey asked students about their own plans for the future.

Curriculum

The survey results indicate that nearly all T.C. Williams students, of all races and academic levels, plan to attend college. However, evidence suggests that ACPS is failing to provide its students with the preparation needed to meet these goals.

- A crucial component of graduating students who are prepared for college is ensuring that they take high-level courses in high school. Virginia colleges and universities prefer applicants who are recipients of Advanced Studies diplomas, and who have taken Advanced Placement (AP) and Honors courses.
- However, the rate at which T.C. Williams students graduate with Advanced Studies diplomas is much lower than its neighboring districts, Fairfax County Public Schools (Fairfax) and Arlington Public Schools (Arlington). It is also much lower than the Commonwealth of Virginia overall.
- T.C. Williams also has a much lower percentage of students taking AP courses than its neighboring districts.

These figures indicate that ACPS is graduating a much lower percentage of “college-ready” students than its neighboring districts and the Commonwealth overall. Especially troubling is that ACPS’s performance in preparing students for college is divided along racial lines.

- The rate at which ACPS graduated its White students with Advanced Studies diplomas was over six times higher than the rate for Black students and over four times higher than the rate for Latino students.
- While ACPS does just as well or better than its neighboring districts and the Commonwealth with respect to White students, it has much less success than its counterparts in graduating Black and Latino students with Advanced Studies diplomas.
- T.C. Williams also has dramatic racial disparities in its AP and Honors enrollment.

This data indicates that while ACPS has the resources to help its students succeed, students of color benefit from those resources less than in other communities, and ACPS’s relatively low rate of graduating students who are “college-ready” is entirely attributable to its failure

with respect to Black and Latino students.

The low rates of college preparation for Black and Latino students can be traced in part to how ACPS structures its academic program, and the emphasis placed on the Talented and Gifted Program (TAG). The TAG program in ACPS is exclusive and also racially unrepresentative of the overall student population, with Black and Latino students again being dramatically underrepresented. Yet the ACPS curriculum is structured so that the chances of a child receiving a college preparatory education are dictated by whether he or she is selected for the TAG program by the time they reach 6th grade. Thus, in a district in which the students are majority Black and Latino, only a small number of mostly White students are positioned starting in elementary school to benefit from the primary college preparatory track.

While ACPS prepares proportionately fewer students for college-level coursework, the survey results suggest that students want more rigorous academic opportunities.

- Over half of all respondents said they wanted to take more AP and Honors courses than they are currently, including 57% of Black students, 56% of Latino students, 79% of Asian students, and 81% of English as a Second Language (ESL) students.

These results indicate that while nearly all T.C. Williams students intend to go to college, relatively few students – especially students of color – are receiving the academic preparation they need to achieve their goals, even though the students themselves say they want greater academic challenges.

Academic Guidance and Support

Improving the college preparation rate within ACPS will require non-academic measures as well. Successful school districts take it as part of their mission to actively prepare students with the other types of non-academic knowledge and resources they will need. For example, high school students are often ill-informed on what they have to do to prepare for college. Whether schools successfully provide students with the guidance and support they need is dictated by their “college-going culture.”

- In schools with a “strong college-going culture,” almost everyone and everything is geared toward college preparation, and the expectation is that virtually all students will continue directly to college. Advice, information, and resources are provided by the school in a proactive manner.
- Schools with “minimalist college-going culture” can be characterized by their reactive counseling efforts. Counselors and teachers tend to act as information providers, not as aggressive advocates or college motivators.

The survey results indicate that T.C. Williams has a minimalist college-going culture, and is not doing enough to meet student needs.

- Almost half of the respondents said their counselor had not helped them plan the courses they needed to graduate from high school and get into college.
- 58% of respondents said they had not spoken with their guidance counselor about the college admissions process, including 73% of Latino students and 70% of ESL students.
- Most students – and especially Latino students – said they had not been encouraged by their counselor to attend a four-year college.

The survey results indicate that at T.C. Williams, the students often carry the burden of making sure they are prepared for college, and students of color in particular are not receiving enough information and resources on the college preparatory process.

REDUCING DROPOUTS AND PUSHOUTS

Not only is ACPS not preparing enough of its Black and Latino students to attend four-year colleges and universities, the district is struggling to graduate many of its students. Evidence suggests that large numbers of students are both dropping out and being “pushed” out of ACPS.

- For example, ACPS’s graduation rate is substantially lower than the national average and the average for the rest of Virginia. It is also much lower than its neighboring districts, Arlington and Fairfax.
- Once again, ACPS’s shortfall with respect to Arlington, Fairfax, the rest of Virginia, and the rest of the country is due to its relatively poor performance in graduating Black and Latino students. While ACPS’s graduation rate for White students is comparable to its counterparts, its graduation rates for Black and Latino students are much worse.



This data suggests that there are institutional barriers within the district that are preventing Black and Latino students from achieving academic success.

Students Identify Reasons for Dropouts and Pushouts

To examine the forces leading to low graduation rates of students – especially of students of color – students were asked if there were any factors that might prevent them from graduating from T.C. Williams.

- Overall, over half of the students expressed some concern that they might not graduate.
- The survey responses indicate that the most pressing needs within ACPS are for more

targeted academic interventions to ensure that students are kept on track and getting the academic support they need, better advice about the courses students need, and perhaps more flexible academic options and “second-chance” opportunities for students who experience academic struggles.

- The results also suggest a need for assessing the content of the curriculum to determine if it is academically challenging and culturally relevant for the diverse student body of ACPS.
- A substantial number of students – especially students of color – reported feeling unsupported by the staff of T.C. Williams.
- Some students also shared experiences in which school personnel actually encouraged students to drop out, or to get their GED.
- The survey results also indicated that harsh school discipline practices within ACPS – such as the use of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests – are a primary factor in creating an unsupportive school environment that leads to students dropping out or being pushed out.

The survey results indicate that the ESL program at T.C. Williams is in particular need of reform. ESL students apparently experience particular difficulty in acquiring enough academic credits to graduate high school, report not being challenged by their courses, and are the students most neglected in the college preparatory process. However, as mentioned above, ESL students reported overwhelmingly that they planned to attend college, and were the subgroup that was most likely to report a desire to take more AP and Honors courses. Thus, while ESL classes may be helping students to learn English, they are not doing enough to prepare them to meet their goals of graduating and attending college.

* * *

The findings detailed above suggest that ACPS is pushing out a large number of students through a variety of policies and practices. They also indicate a failure to provide an adequate “safety net” for students who, for whatever reason, are struggling.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research leads to the unsettling conclusion that ACPS has created a two-track school system: one for a small number of predominantly White students who are actively prepared from an early age for college and successful careers; and the other for the majority of students of color who are not expected to excel and encounter substantial obstacles to achieving their goals. The survey results demonstrate that students encounter radically different educational experiences depending on which track they are on.

Although the “opportunity gaps” described in this report are substantial, T.C. Williams students’ own desire to take on greater challenges and succeed provide reason for hope.



But the school district must rise up to meet the challenge that students have given them: to structure their academic offerings and create a culture that is more responsive to student needs, in which every student will be prepared to succeed.

What follows is a series of recommendations for creating a world-class school system of which the entire community of Alexandria can be proud.

1. ACPS should adopt the goal of preparing every student in the district to graduate with an Advanced Studies diploma and to attend a four-year college or university. ACPS should have a strong college-going culture, so that all aspects of the education offered in ACPS schools should be geared from kindergarten through 12th grade toward this goal.
2. Students should be encouraged to take on academic challenges, and T.C. Williams High School should take immediate steps to increase the number of Black and Latino students in AP and Honors courses through recruitment and eliminating non-essential barriers to enrollment in these courses.
3. Advice, information, and resources related to the college preparation process should be provided by the school in a proactive manner, minimizing the burden carried by students for gathering and acting upon college knowledge. Students and parents/guardians should receive accurate, high-quality information about the courses that will prepare them for college-level standards, college admissions, and financing college. All information should be provided in a language that parents/guardians and students can understand.
4. ACPS should increase the number of guidance counselors at T.C. Williams, with an emphasis on bilingualism.
5. Because middle school and high school students have many different teachers, they

often do not have a strong relationship with any adult in their school. ACPS should ensure that middle school and high school students are paired with a mentor-advocate (teacher, guidance counselor, or staff member) who will be responsible for guiding and monitoring the student over a long period of time.

6. T.C. Williams should provide students with wider access to the full spectrum of college preparatory opportunities, such as: internships, college visits, SAT/ACT prep classes, and other supplemental academic preparatory classes.

7. ACPS should review its curricula to ensure that it is academically challenging and culturally relevant for the diverse student body of ACPS.

8. ACPS must place greater emphasis on meeting the needs of English language learners. The ESL program needs to be re-designed so that it allows students to be able to successfully graduate high school and attend a four-year college or university. To do so, the content in ESL classes must be made more rigorous, and there must be more emphasis on connecting content instruction with language instruction. ACPS should ensure that English language learners have the same access to high-level curricula as other students, at all grade levels.

9. ACPS administrators and teachers should take responsibility for ensuring that struggling students get the help they need, rather than putting the onus on the student or parents. ACPS should consider the use or expanded use of early morning and late afternoon courses, Saturday school, access to summer school, summer “bridge” programs, and additional tutoring before, during, and after school to meet the needs of struggling students.

10. In addition to the college preparatory curriculum in high school, ACPS must provide broader access to rigorous, college preparatory “pipeline” curricula in middle school. Also beginning in middle school, ACPS should provide students with broader access to tutoring and other intensive academic supports that will prepare them for college preparatory classes in high school.

11. ACPC must ensure that there is an academic “safety net” for struggling students. Rather than neglecting students who are having difficulty successfully navigating high school, ACPS should consider expanded dropout prevention/intervention/recovery programs to ensure that no student is able to slip through the cracks of the school system. ACPS should also consider a variety of “second-chance opportunities” and other flexible academic programs that will meet the unique needs of these students and still prepare them for college.

12. ACPS should limit the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions to behavior that poses a serious threat to school safety. Otherwise, incidents or misbehavior should be handled within the school environment.

13. ACPS should emphasize the inclusion of parents/guardians, students, teachers,

counselors, and administrators in the process of reform planning, decision-making, and implementation. Also, the district should work with community groups to communicate and educate parents/guardians and students on rigor, high expectations, and the focus on college preparation throughout ACPS.



INTRODUCTION

Background

2006-2007 Facts and Figures

	<u>T.C. Williams High School</u>	<u>Alexandria City Public Schools</u>
Total Student Enrollment	2,057	10,334
Student Demographics		
American Indian	0.1%	0.2%
Asian	7.2%	6.4%
Black	42.2%	41.0%
Latino	24.6%	25.2%
White	24.6%	24.6%
Other	1.2%	2.6%
Percentage of Students Who Are Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals	40.5%	48.0%

Percentage of Students Who Are Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals

Source: Virginia Department of Education, "2006-2007 Fall Enrollment"; Alexandria City Public Schools, "Number of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals by Individual School, as of October 31, 2006"

Chart 1

Alexandria, Virginia is a city of approximately 133,000 residents located six miles from Washington, DC.¹ Its residents are quite affluent, with a per capita income that is nearly double the national average, and a poverty rate less than half the national average.² The local school district, Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS), is well-funded, with an operating budget of over \$182 million.³ Indeed, ACPS's 2005 per-student spending (unadjusted for cost of living) ranked in the top 7% of all school districts in the country.⁴

Compared to its neighboring districts, ACPS's per-student spending is 33% higher than Fairfax County Public Schools (Fairfax) and about 5% lower than Arlington Public Schools (Arlington). ACPS spends over 62% more than the average for the Commonwealth of Virginia.⁵ It appears, however, that most students of ACPS are not reaping the benefits of the resources in this wealthy school district.

While the city's population is mostly White, the ACPS student population is predominantly Black and Latino and only one-quarter White.⁶ T.C. Williams High School, the only high school within ACPS, is an example of the school system's racial diversity, with a student population that is 7% Asian, 42% Black, 25% Latino, and 25% White.⁷

The racial diversity of T.C. Williams High School can be traced back to 1971, when the city's two predominantly Black high schools were merged with T.C. Williams in an attempt to comply with *Brown v. Board of Education* and other school desegregation cases.⁸ Like many formerly-segregated school districts during that time, this change was met with resistance.⁹ Many believe that the success of the T.C. Williams football team caused relationships to form across racial lines and eventually led to the elimination of racial strife within the school – a touching story that is depicted in the movie *Remember the Titans*.¹⁰

More recently, though, Alexandria has been recognized for less admirable reasons. For example, ACPS recently received the dishonorable distinction of being named by Forbes Magazine as “the worst school district for the buck” in the entire nation.¹¹ According to the study, ACPS did the poorest job among the districts studied in achieving educational outcomes relative to their funding.¹²

Many ACPS students have expressed similar concerns, noting that while the district has impressive school buildings and ample resources such as laptop computers, the substance of the education they receive is often lacking, and students find they are not adequately prepared for college.

Methodology

Tenants and Workers United and the students of Alexandria United Teens have been working since 2003 to address systemic failures within ACPS that have resulted in a widening gap between students of color and White students. In 2005, they sought the assistance of Advancement Project to develop a survey that would help the community understand the dynamics that were leading to high dropout rates and low levels of college preparation at T.C. Williams High School and throughout ACPS. Additional assistance was provided by Professors Michelle Fine, Kersha Smith, and Maria Torre from the City University of New York Graduate Center, who have conducted similar participatory research projects with students and school districts in New York, New Jersey, California, Delaware, Illinois, and Colorado.

The survey (attached as Appendix A) was made available to T.C. Williams students in both English and Spanish in October 2006, through the school’s computer network. Some students were given the option of completing the survey during class, and all students had access to the survey outside of class time.

Advancement Project was responsible for analyzing the data from the survey and writing this report, with the assistance of Tony Roshan Samara of George Mason University, Tenants and Workers United, and Alexandria United Teens.

* * *

In all, 386 students completed the survey. The respondents were 43% male and 56% female (and 1% unidentified).¹³ Forty-two percent (42%) were in 10th grade, 29% were in 11th grade, and 28% were in 12th grade (and 1% unidentified).

For the results included in this report, we focused on particular subgroups, based on the self-reported race and academic placement of the student. The respondents identified their race as being Asian (9% of respondents), African American/Black (33%), Latino/Hispanic (22%), White (39%), or Other (12%) (note that because students could identify more than one race, they could be included in more than one subgroup). They also identified whether most of their classes were Honors/AP (54%), Regular/Academic (34%), Special Education (1%),¹⁴ or English as a Second Language (ESL) (8%) (and 3% unidentified).

To supplement the survey findings, additional research completed over the last year has also been included in this report.

COLLEGE PREPARATION

College Aspirations

Nationwide, there is a relatively widespread belief among school district personnel and the general public that many young people have no aspiration toward higher education. For example, a national survey of high school teachers found that they thought only 32% of their students planned to attend a four-year college.¹⁵ The education offered to students in grades K-12 often reflects those low expectations, as many students find they are “tracked” not for higher education, but rather for post-high school employment, dropping out of school, or worse. For that reason, the Alexandria United Teens’ T.C. Williams Student Survey asked students about their own plans for the future.

Nearly All T.C. Williams Students, of All Races and Academic Levels, Plan to Attend College

The results of the survey demonstrate that nearly every T.C. Williams student plans to pursue higher education, and these results are true for all subgroups. Overall, 97% of the respondents said they would either “definitely” or “probably” attend a two-year or four-year college. Across racial subgroups, at least 96% of the students in every group indicated that they would definitely or probably attend college. Among academic subgroups, the percentages of students who thought they would probably or definitely attend college were 99% for Honors/AP, 96% for Regular/Academic, and 88% for ESL.

Because almost all T.C. Williams students – of all races and academic levels – have college aspirations, every component of education offered within ACPS should be structured accordingly. This includes the expectations of staff members, curricular offerings, class assignment, guidance and support services, and any other academic or extracurricular offerings. Unfortunately, the survey results and other research discussed below suggest that ACPS is not currently structured, or operating, in such a way that enables many students to achieve their goals.

College Preparation - Curriculum

Rigorous High School Coursework is Essential for College Preparation

To be academically prepared for college, it is not enough to have simply graduated from high school. Competitive colleges and universities ask that prospective applicants complete the most demanding college-preparatory program available while in high school.¹⁶

For example, while there are at least eight categories of diplomas and completion certificates offered by the Commonwealth of Virginia,¹⁷ many of the colleges and universities within the Commonwealth state that their preference is for applicants who have received the Advanced Studies diploma (the highest level diploma offered in Virginia).¹⁸ They also ask that students have taken Advanced Placement (AP) and Honors courses when available.¹⁹

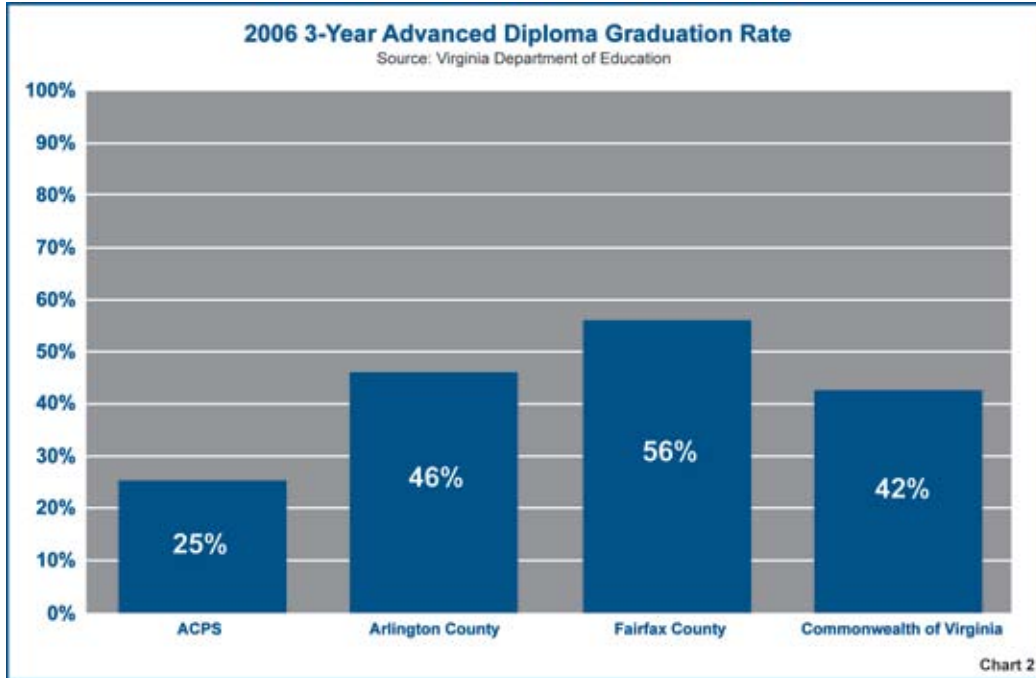
However, ACPS is not successfully preparing enough of its students – particularly students of color – to meet these standards for college-readiness.

College Preparation in ACPS Lags Far Behind Neighboring Districts and the Rest of Virginia

To assess the performance of ACPS in preparing students for college, we look at the rate that students graduate with Advanced Studies diplomas, which is the primary college preparatory track in Virginia. Because T.C. Williams is a three-year high school (10th grade through 12th grade), we calculate a three-year rate so that we can focus solely on the performance of students enrolled at T.C. Williams. The 3-Year Advanced Diploma Graduation Rate (3-Year ADGR)²⁰ calculates a school's success in graduating students with Advanced Studies diplomas, and thus providing students with the preparation that competitive colleges and universities request.

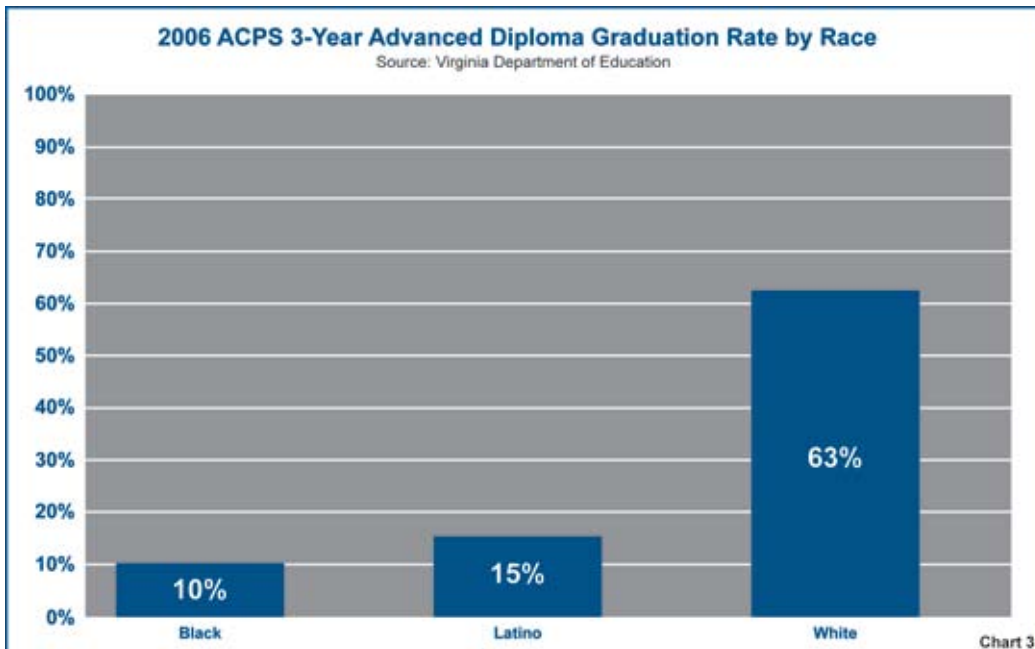
ACPS is graduating very few “college-ready” students. In 2006, the 3-Year ADGR for T.C. Williams was only 25%.²¹ In other words, an incoming T.C. Williams student has only a one-in-four chance of successfully completing curricula that would lead to an Advanced Diploma.

In comparison to its neighboring districts, ACPS does not fare well. The 2006 3-Year ADGR for Fairfax and Arlington were 56% and 46%, respectively, as shown in Chart 2.²² Alexandria also falls far short of Virginia as a whole on this measure, as the 2006 3-Year ADGR for the entire Commonwealth was 42%.²³ These figures indicate that ACPS is graduating a much lower percentage of students who are prepared for college than its neighboring districts and the Commonwealth overall.



Poor ACPS Performance Attributable to Its Failure to Provide College Preparatory Education to Black and Latino Students

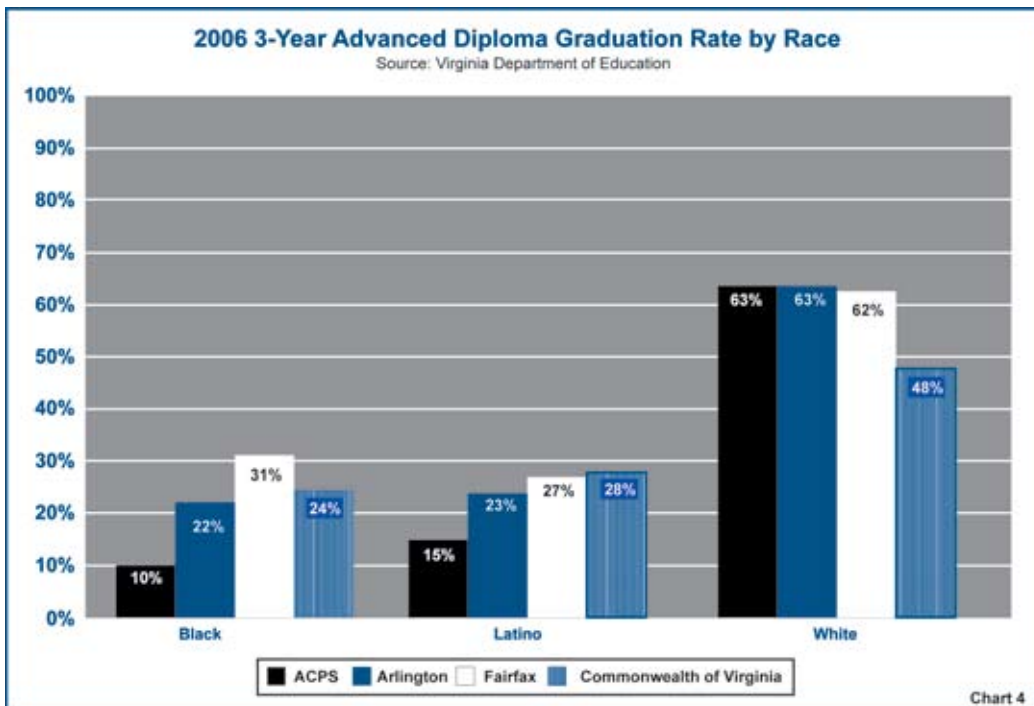
While ACPS's overall 3-Year Advanced Diploma Graduation Rate is extremely low, when it comes to preparing Black and Latino students for college, ACPS fares even worse. For example, in 2006, the 3-Year ADGR for White students was 63%, while for Black students it was 10% and for Latino students it was 15% (data for Asian students was unavailable), as illustrated in Chart 3.²⁴



In fact, the differences in the rates of ACPS, Arlington, Fairfax, and the rest of Virginia are entirely attributable to ACPS's relative failure with regard to Black and Latino students. ACPS's rate of graduating its White students with Advanced Studies diplomas is equal to, or better than, that of its neighboring districts and the rest of Virginia. The 2006 3-Year ADGR for White students in ACPS was 63%, and it was 63% for Arlington, 62% for Fairfax, and 48% for the rest of the Commonwealth, as shown in Chart 4.²⁵

However, ACPS graduates a much lower percentage of Black and Latino students with Advanced Studies diplomas than the others. Compared to ACPS's 3-Year ADGR of 10% for Black students, the rates for Arlington, Fairfax, and the rest of the Commonwealth overall were 22%, 31%, and 24%, respectively, which were all between two and three-and-a-half times higher.²⁶ For Latino students, while the 3-Year ADGR for ACPS was 15%, it was 23% for Arlington, 27% for Fairfax, and 28% for Virginia as a whole.²⁷ Thus, while there are clear racial disparities in all three districts and for the entire Commonwealth, the inequities in ACPS are far worse than the others.

ACPS's relative success with its White students demonstrates that it has the capacity to provide students with a high-quality college preparatory education. However, the data suggests that Black and Latino students benefit from these resources less than in other communities. Therefore, ACPS must emphasize providing a college preparatory education to its Black and Latino students if it is to measure up to its counterparts.



Q: What do you feel would be the best way to prevent students from dropping out of T.C. Williams?

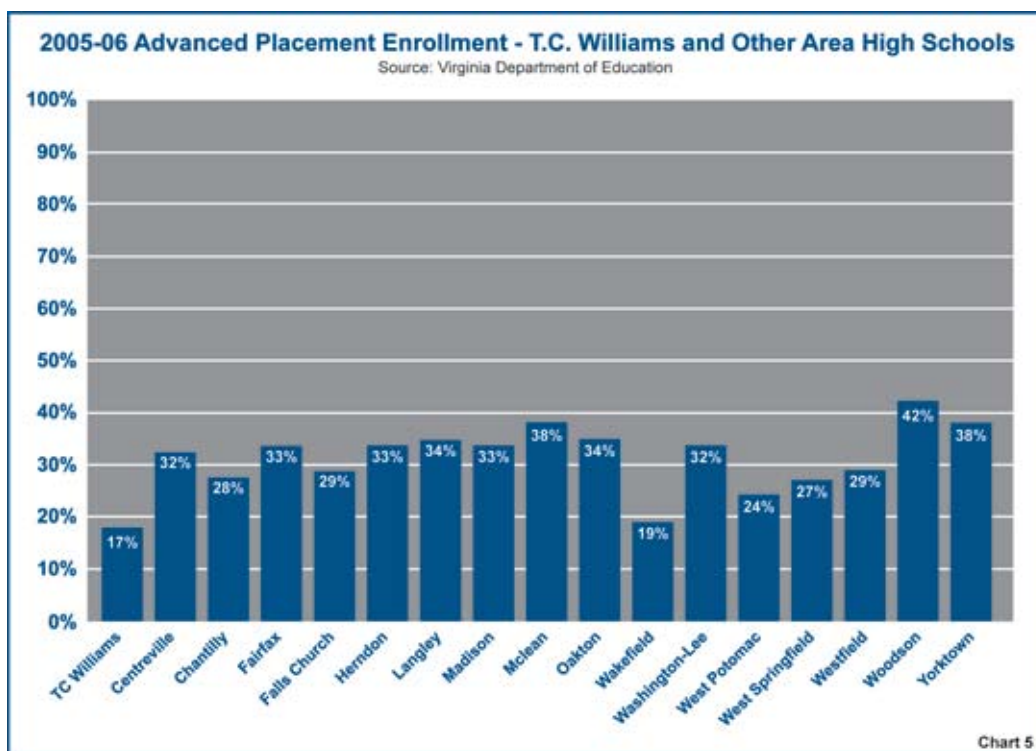
Student Responses:

"Children have the potential to do so much more than you expect of them. Raise the expectations, raise the standards..."

"Better teachers and courses that will help prepare us for college."

T.C. Williams Has Very Low Student Participation in Advanced Placement Classes

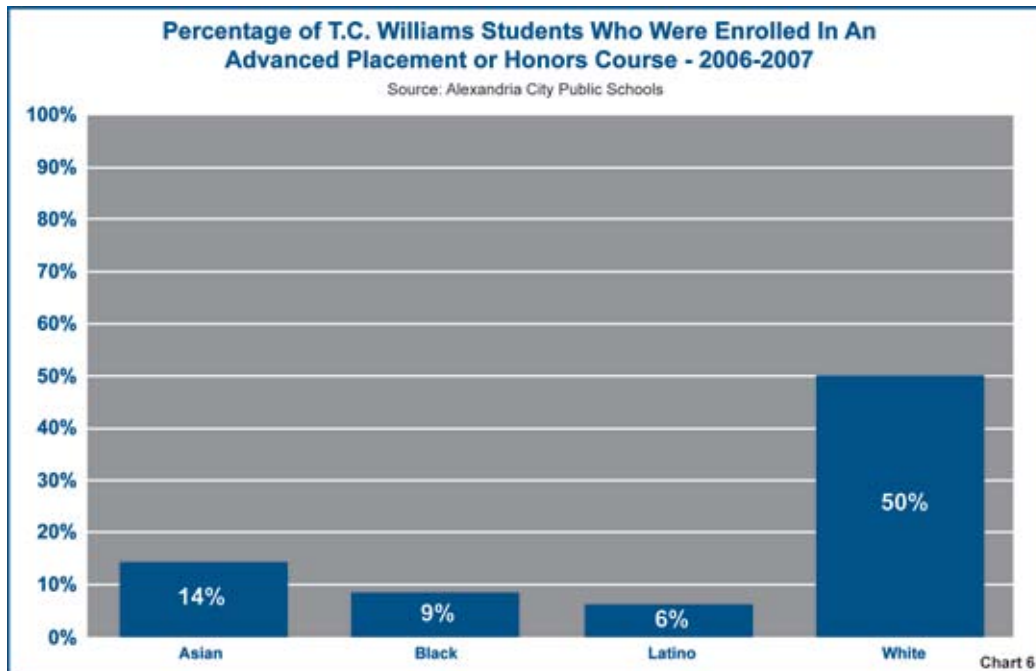
Besides the Advanced Diploma, Virginia colleges and universities also prefer that students take AP and Honors courses, when available.²⁸ However, the overall number of students taking AP classes at T.C. Williams is very low relative to other local public high schools. In fact, compared to the 16 other high schools in Fairfax and Arlington,²⁹ T.C. Williams had the lowest percentage of students taking AP courses in 2005-2006, only 17%, as illustrated in Chart 5.³⁰ Most of the schools had about twice as many students enrolled in AP classes as T.C. Williams.³¹ Having so few students in these classes limits the number of ACPS students who will graduate ready to do college-level work.



Few Students of Color Are in AP and Honors Courses at T.C. Williams

Not only are far fewer T.C. Williams students participating in advanced courses overall, there are dramatic racial disparities in AP and Honors enrollment. In 2006-2007, 50% of White students at T.C. Williams were enrolled in at least one AP or Honors course, as shown in Chart 6.³² In comparison, only 14% of Asian students, 9% of Black students,

and 6% of Latino students were enrolled in an AP or Honors course.³³ Shockingly, of the 1,374 Black and Latino students in the school, only 108 were in an AP or Honors course.³⁴



Accordingly, the vast majority of AP and Honors students at T.C. Williams are White. Because of how important AP and Honors classes are for college preparation, admission, and success, these discrepancies play a key role in the corresponding lack of college-ready students of color leaving ACPS. This should be alarming to all stakeholders within the ACPS community, and immediate steps should be taken to increase the enrollment of students of color in these classes.

Talented and Gifted Program Limits Number of Students Who Are Prepared for College

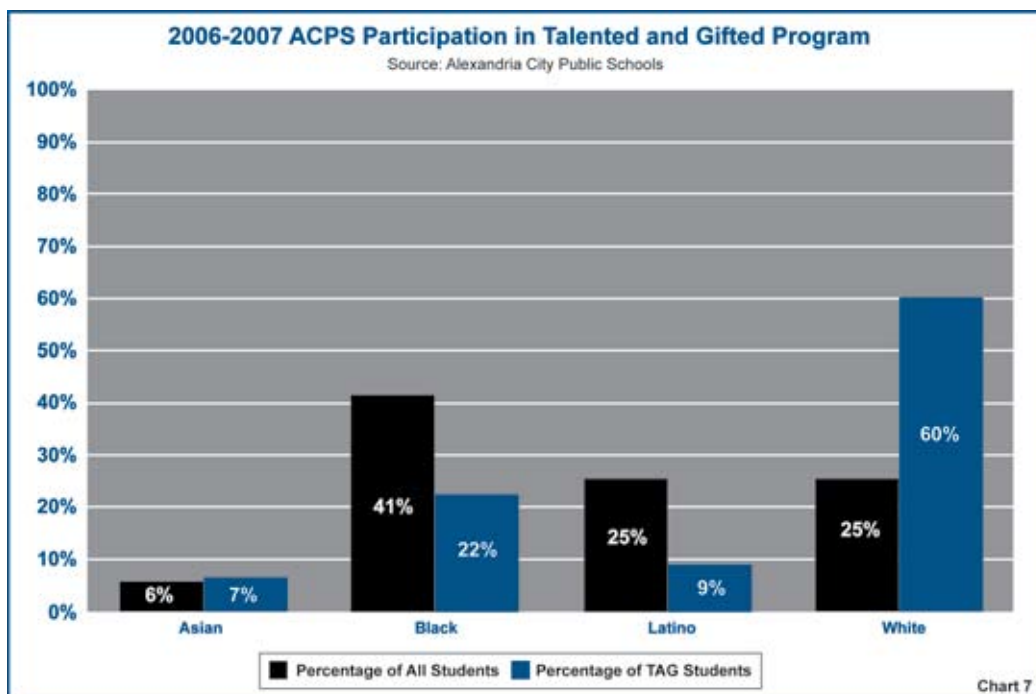
The low rates of college preparation for Black and Latino students can be traced in part to how ACPS structures its academic program, and the emphasis placed on the Talented and Gifted Program (TAG). In effect, ACPS has artificially limited the number of students who will be prepared to be high-achievers in high school and beyond, and has pre-determined that few of those high-achievers will be Black or Latino. In fact, the ACPS curriculum is structured so that the chances of a child receiving a college preparatory education are dictated by whether he or she is selected for the TAG program by the time they reach 6th grade.

Beginning in elementary school, ACPS places a small number of students on a college preparatory track, while most students are on a lower academic track and receive a relatively inferior education that diminishes their chances of attending college. The main driver of this tracking process is the TAG program. In ACPS, the TAG program is the primary college preparatory pathway at the elementary and middle school level. It is designed to prepare elementary and middle school students for advanced academic

challenges, such as AP and Honors classes in high school.³⁵ In fact, the ACPS Program of Studies for 2007-2008 – which is distributed to parents and students to assist in academic planning – suggests that only those students who are in TAG mathematics by the time they reach 6th grade would be expected to continue on to receive an Advanced Studies diploma.³⁶

On the other hand, children who are not enrolled in the TAG program by 6th grade would not be in line to graduate with an Advanced Studies Diploma or to take AP and Honors courses in high school. The ACPS Program of Studies indicates that those students would be expected to graduate with, at best, a Standard Diploma.³⁷

The ramifications of this structure are magnified because the TAG program in ACPS is exclusive – only 12% of all students participate.³⁸ It is also racially unrepresentative of the overall student population. In 2006-2007, White students were 25% of the school population but 60% of TAG participants, while Black and Latino students were 66% of the school population and only 31% of TAG participants, as illustrated in Chart 7.³⁹ Thus, in a district in which the students are majority Black and Latino, only a small number of mostly White students are positioned starting in elementary school to benefit from the primary college preparatory track.



While there is nothing wrong with having advanced-level curricula such as TAG available for talented children, the problem arises when that program is designed as the only (or at least the dominant) way to achieve academic success, it is only available to a small group of students, and it is set up so that the possibilities of academic success are severely limited as early as 6th grade. In that instance, the school system is placing unnecessary constraints on its students, and limiting their life chances at far too early an age.

By structuring the academic program so that TAG is the dominant feeder system for students who will complete rigorous curricula in high school, ACPS has placed most of its students on a non-college track. As a result, the low rates of students graduating with Advanced Studies diplomas and participating in AP and Honors courses – and the racial disparities in both – are unlikely to change significantly unless ACPS restructures itself to provide college preparatory curricula to more students, whether as part of the TAG program or otherwise.

New Open Enrollment Honors Classes Promising, But Insufficient

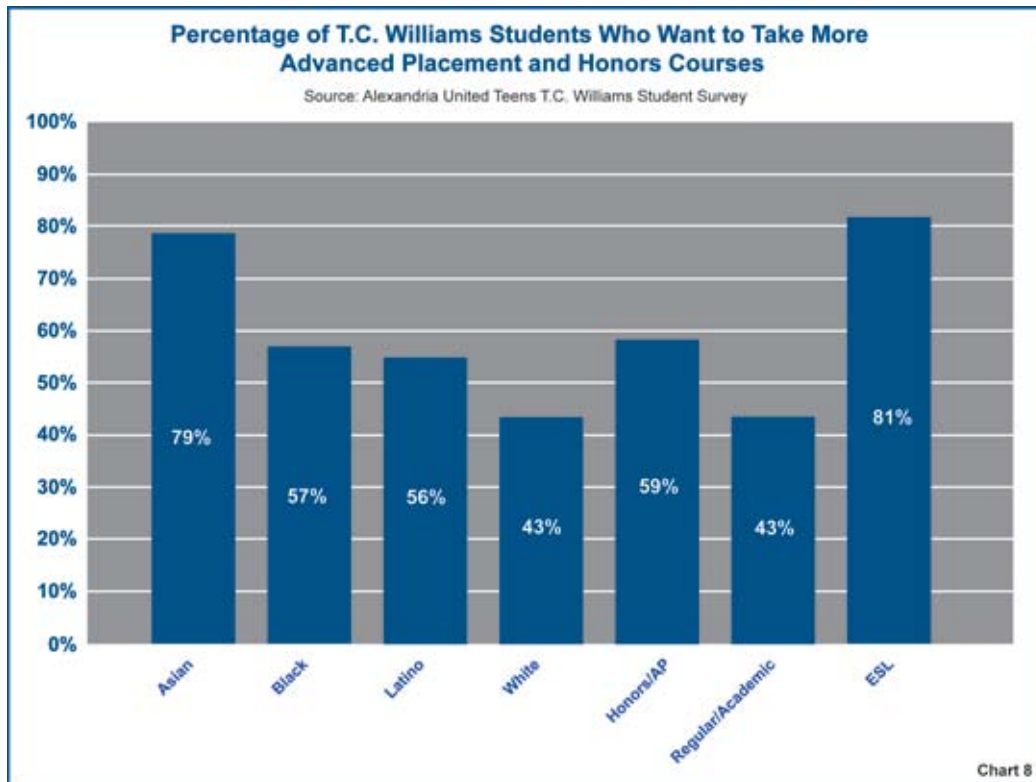
ACPS appears to have recognized some of these problems, because the School Board has recently voted to offer open enrollment Honors classes at middle schools in language arts and social science, in addition to the science courses that it already offered.⁴⁰ However, while expanding access to rigorous curricula is important, it is not enough to passively allow admission to those students who have the wherewithal to enroll in these traditionally-exclusionary courses. ACPS must actively provide students with the college preparation they need by restructuring the curriculum and changing their expectations. Therefore, while we applaud ACPS for the attention it has placed on these issues, we urge the district to continue to look critically at how these programs stand in the way of student and district success.

T.C. Williams Students Want to Take More Challenging Courses

While ACPS prepares proportionately fewer students for college-level coursework, the survey results suggest that students have higher aspirations for themselves than their schools have for them. Indeed, 55% of all respondents said they wanted to take more AP and Honors courses than they are currently, including 57% of Black students, 56% of Latino students, and 79% of Asian students, as shown in Chart 8. Among all subgroups, the strongest response was from ESL students, of whom 81% said they wanted to take more AP and Honors courses, indicating that these students are particularly desirous of academic challenges.



Overall, the strong response from students on this question suggests that their efforts to take high-level classes are being stifled. ACPS should explore the barriers to achievement that students are facing, and take immediate steps to eliminate them.



* * *

The survey results indicate that T.C. Williams students have high expectations for their own futures and intend to go to college. Yet few students – especially students of color – are receiving the academic preparation they need to achieve their goals, even though the students themselves say they want greater academic challenges. It is evident that immediate steps should be taken to redesign the curriculum so that all students have the opportunity to pursue college preparatory courses and achieve their goals.⁴¹

It is important to note, however, that increasing the rigor of the ACPS curriculum alone will not result in greater rates of college preparation. School districts with high rates of college attendance among their students provide students with an array of academic supports and interventions to ensure that students stay on track.⁴² Thus, for ACPS to succeed in preparing all of its students for higher education, it must make sure that students are supported academically along the way.

College Preparation - Guidance

Beyond rigor and academic supports and interventions, improving the college preparation rate within ACPS will require non-academic measures as well. Successful school districts take it as part of their mission to actively prepare students with other types of non-academic knowledge and resources they will need.

For example, high school students are often ill-informed on what they have to do to

prepare for college. They tend to have significant misconceptions about what types of courses are needed to both get into and succeed in college, the cost of college, the availability of financial aid, and placement tests.⁴³ This knowledge is often particularly lacking among students from low-income families and students who are not taking Honors-level courses.⁴⁴

The results of the Alexandria United Teens T.C. Williams Student survey indicate that ACPS is not currently doing enough to provide students with the information and resources they need to prepare for college.

College-Going Culture

Whether schools successfully provide students with the guidance and support they need is dictated by their “college-going culture.” A school’s college-going culture includes the qualities and values of a school that can serve to either motivate and advocate for students to attend college, or discourage and even prevent them from going to college.⁴⁵

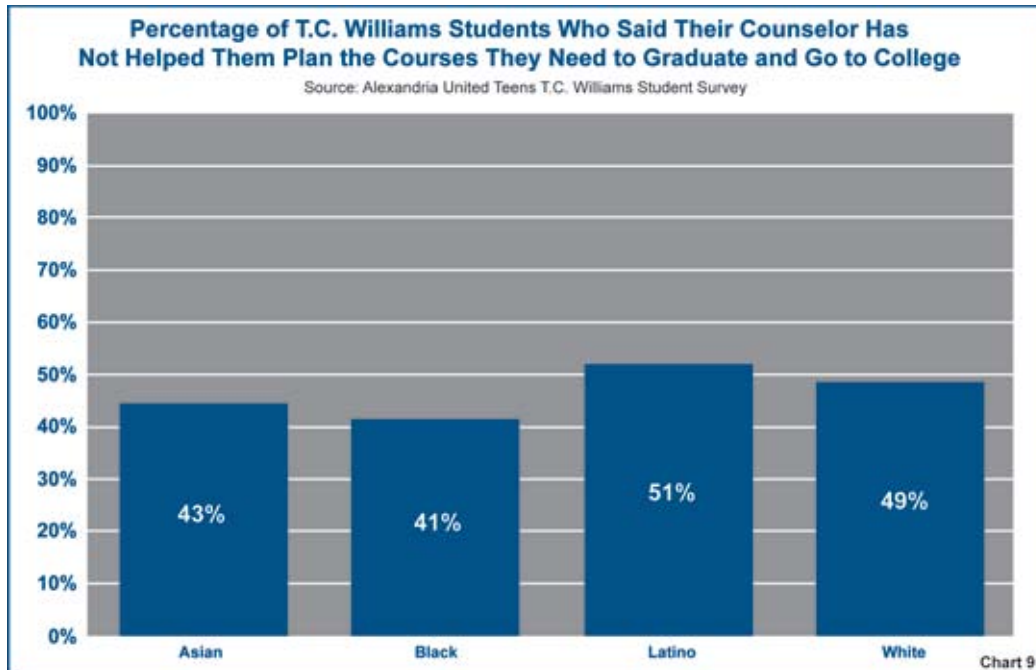
In schools with a “strong college-going culture,” almost everyone and everything is geared toward college preparation, and the expectation is that virtually all students will continue directly to college.⁴⁶ Advice, information, and resources are provided by the school in a proactive manner, minimizing the burden carried by students for gathering and acting upon college knowledge.⁴⁷ Teachers and counselors are intimately involved in the process of preparing for, and learning about, college.⁴⁸

However, schools with “minimalist college-going culture” can be characterized by their reactive counseling efforts.⁴⁹ Counselors and teachers tend to act as information providers, not as aggressive advocates or college motivators.⁵⁰ Counselors at these schools devote more time to class scheduling and helping students meet the high school graduation requirements than to college and career counseling.⁵¹

T.C. Williams Exhibits a Minimalist College-Going Culture

The survey results indicate that T.C. Williams has a minimalist college-going culture, and is not doing enough to meet student needs. For example, 45% of the respondents said their counselor had not helped them plan the courses they needed to graduate from high school and get into college. Among all subgroups, that sentiment was strongest among Latino students, 51% of whom said they had not received such assistance, as shown in Chart 9.

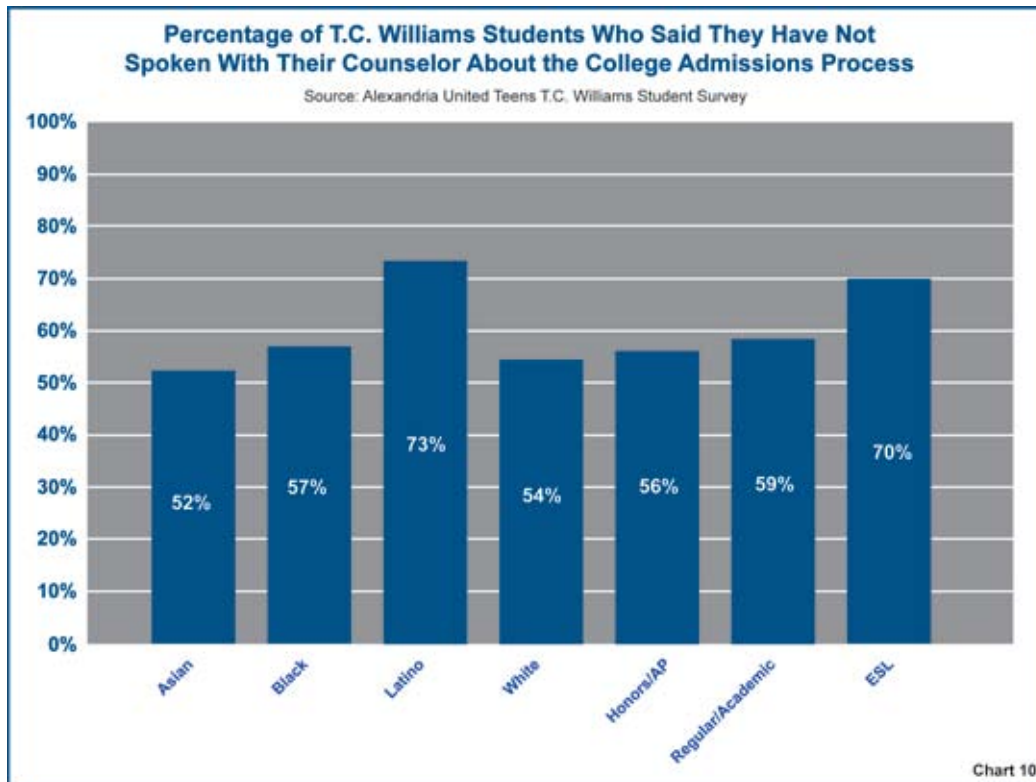




The survey also demonstrated that the district should address student misperceptions regarding the attainability of a college education. For example, the most commonly cited factor that students said might keep them from attending college was the cost. Overall, 37% of students identified this as a barrier, including 67% and 41% of Latino and Black students, respectively. This is an area in which there is a clear need for additional information to be provided to students, because while the cost of higher education is certainly a legitimate concern, and can be a hardship on families, the availability of financial aid and scholarships makes the pursuit of higher education more accessible than what is widely perceived.

Most T.C. Williams Students Report Never Having Spoken With Their Counselor about the College Admissions Process

In strong college-going cultures, school personnel proactively advise students about college opportunities. That does not appear to be happening at T.C. Williams. In fact, 58% of respondents said they had not spoken with their guidance counselor about the college admissions process, as illustrated in Chart 10. This problem is evidently most severe for Latino and ESL students, of whom 73% and 70%, respectively, said they had not had such a discussion. These results suggest that counseling at T.C. Williams is either: less focused on college preparation than on other areas, and perhaps needs to be altered; under-resourced, such that more guidance counselors are necessary to address these gaps in knowledge; or perhaps both.




Students Report Weak and Unequal Encouragement to Attend College

While schools with strong college-going cultures encourage and expect all students to graduate and attend four-year colleges or universities, at T.C. Williams it appears most students do not receive such support. Overall, only 48% of respondents said their counselors had encouraged them to attend a four-year college.

The survey results also suggest that along with not being proactive enough, the advising process at T.C. Williams may not treat students equally. For example, 53% of White students said their counselor had encouraged them to attend a four-year college, along with 55% of Black students. However, this was true for a mere 29% of Latino students. Thus, it appears that students are not only receiving inadequate information and support regarding college, there are major differences in the type of information that students receive.

* * *

The survey results indicate that T.C. Williams has a minimalist college-going culture, in which students often carry the burden of making sure they are prepared for college. The results also suggest that students of color in particular are not receiving enough information and resources on the college preparatory process. Immediate steps should be taken to ensure that ACPS is proactively working to enable all students to meet their college goals.



Leslie, T.C. Williams Graduate, Class of 2007

"[For] other kids my age who were Black or Hispanic – counselors would recommend, 'Take the easy classes,' or if they wanted to take the advanced classes, [the counselors] would say, 'Oh no, that's too hard for you.'"

"[My guidance counselor] tries to help you a little bit but she's just overwhelmed with work. There are too many kids. They only see you when you pick classes."

On Parental Involvement

"I remember in 6th grade my mom went to the parent-teacher conference and they made her wait for an hour and a half. The whole time the teachers were talking to parents who obviously knew English. So she just gave up and she doesn't go to parent-teacher conferences any more."

REDUCING DROPOUTS AND PUSHOUTS

Not only is ACPS not preparing enough of its Black and Latino students to attend four-year colleges and universities, the district is struggling to graduate many of its students. Evidence suggests that large numbers of students are both dropping out and being “pushed” out of ACPS.

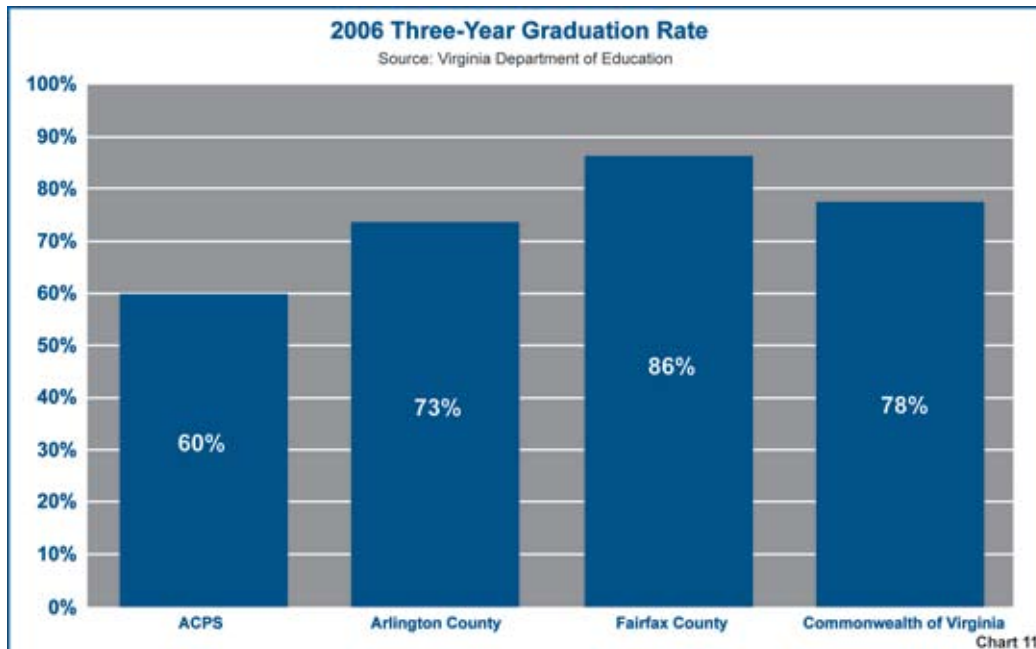
“Pushout” happens when youth are removed (or remove themselves) from school as a result of policies and practices that discourage them from remaining in classrooms and on track to receiving a Standard or Advanced Studies diploma.⁵² These policies and practices include: unwelcoming school environments and a lack of relevant and engaging curricula, both of which alienate students and discourage them from attending school; not providing enough access to academic counseling and supportive relationships with teachers to help keep students in school; encouragement of low-performing or under-credited students to drop out or transfer to a GED program; and “zero tolerance” and other exclusionary discipline policies that remove students from school.⁵³ The combined effect of these dynamics is a school environment that fails to meet the needs of its students, particularly students who are struggling with academic, personal, or family problems. Ultimately, far too many students are exiting the educational process, either dropping out by choice or being pushed out by some combination of these institutional forces.

Dropouts and Pushouts in ACPS

ACPS's 3-Year Graduation Rate is Substantially Lower than Neighboring Districts, the Rest of Virginia, and the National Average

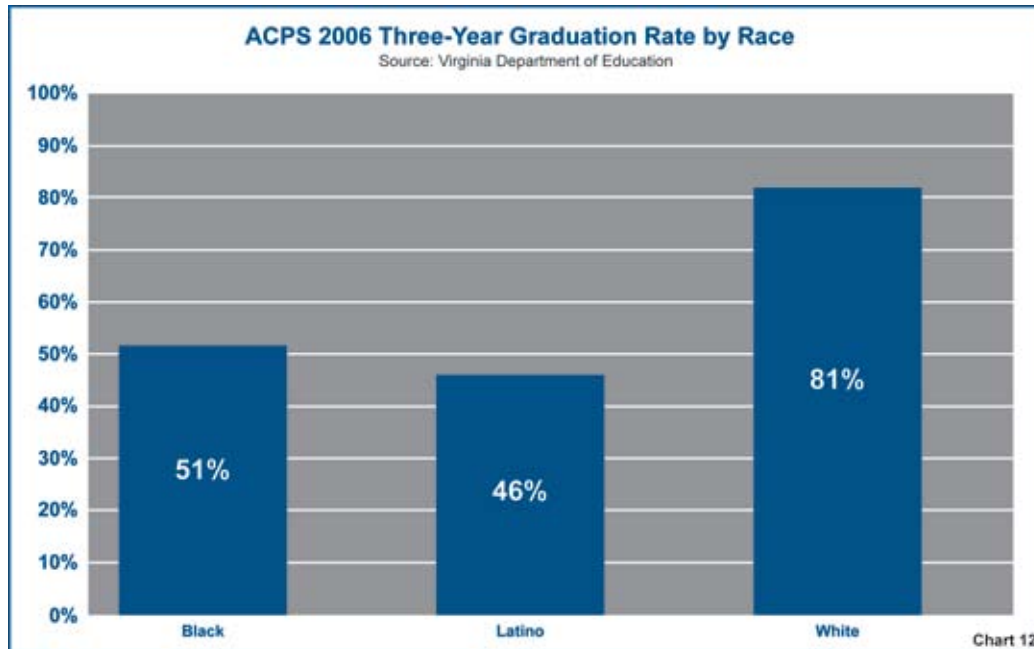
ACPS's graduation rate is unusually low for such a well-resourced district. In 2006, the 3-Year Graduation Rate for ACPS was 60%.⁵⁴ In other words, over the course of three years, only six out of ten ACPS 10th graders make it to graduation with even a Standard diploma. To put this in perspective, the national 3-Year Graduation Rate for 2005 (the most recent data available) was 78%.⁵⁵

More locally, ACPS's rate is substantially lower than its neighboring districts, and the Commonwealth as a whole. As shown in Chart 11, the 2006 3-Year Graduation Rate for Arlington was 73%, and for Fairfax it was 86%.⁵⁶ For the rest of the Commonwealth of Virginia, it was 78%.⁵⁷



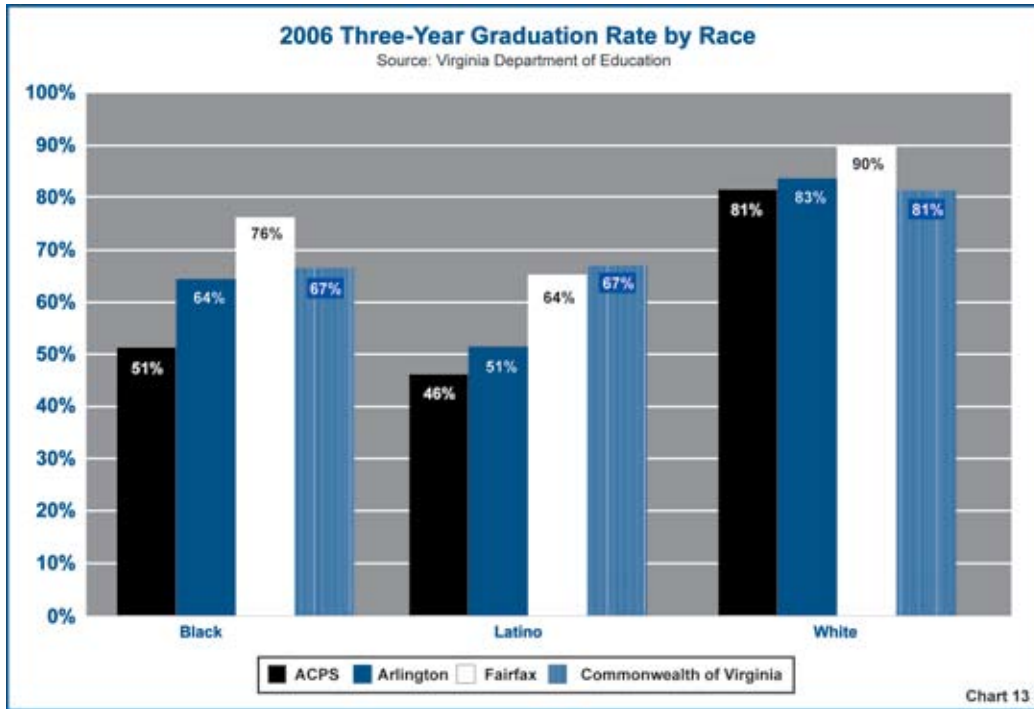
Extreme Racial Disparities in ACPS Graduation Rates

Students of color, who are less likely to be prepared for college in ACPS, also are significantly less likely to graduate as compared to their White peers. In ACPS, the 3-Year Graduation Rate for White students was 81%, while for Black students it was 51% and for Latino students it was only 46% (data for Asian students was unavailable), as shown in Chart 12.⁵⁸ Thus, there was only about a 50% chance that a 10th grade Black or Latino student in ACPS would graduate with a Standard or Advanced Studies diploma, while more than four out of five White students did so.

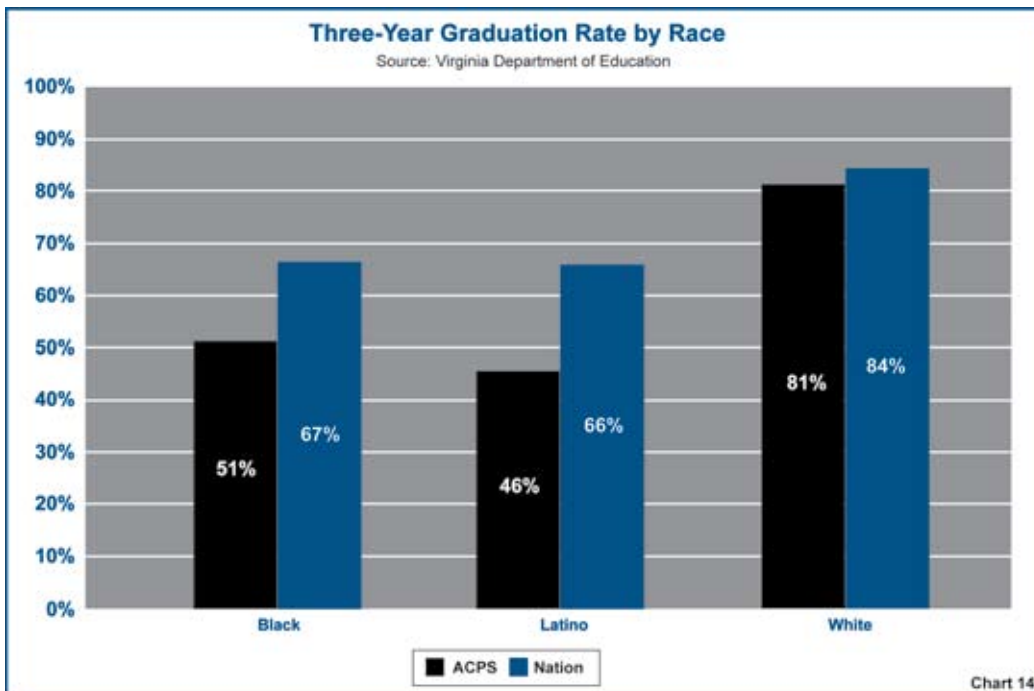


Once again, ACPS's shortfall with respect to Arlington, Fairfax, and the rest of Virginia is attributable to its relatively poor performance in graduating Black and Latino students. While ACPS's graduation rate for White students is comparable to its counterparts, its graduation rates for Black and Latino students are much worse.

With regard to White students, ACPS's 3-Year Graduation Rate for 2006 was 81%, compared to 83% for Arlington, 90% for Fairfax, and 81% for the rest of the Commonwealth, as shown in Graph 13.⁵⁹ However, ACPS's rate of 51% for Black students is substantially lower than the rates of 64% for Arlington, 76% for Fairfax, and 67% for the rest of Virginia.⁶⁰ Similarly, ACPS's 3-Year Graduation Rate of 46% for Latino students is lower than Arlington's rate of 51%, and much worse than Fairfax's rate of 64% and the Commonwealth's rate of 67%.⁶¹



Even if we look outside the Commonwealth, ACPS does not fare well. The national 3-Year Graduation Rates for Black and Latino students in 2005 (the most recent data available) both were substantially higher than ACPS's: 67% and 66%, respectively, as illustrated in Chart 14.⁶² Meanwhile, the rates for White students were comparable; 81% for ACPS and 84% for the nation.⁶³



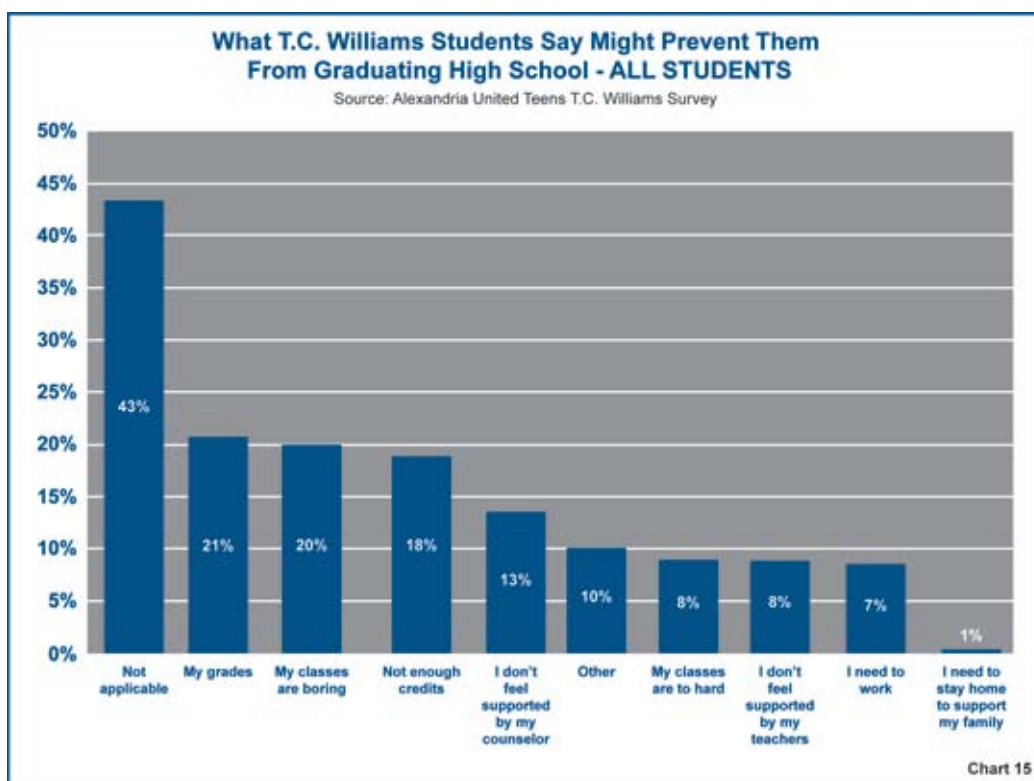
Whether we look at the rates of college preparation or simply the rates of graduating its students from high school, the racial inequities within ACPS far exceed those of its counterparts. This suggests the existence of institutional barriers within the district that are preventing Black and Latino students from achieving academic success. This is an extremely serious problem for the Alexandria City Public Schools that has dramatic ramifications for the Alexandria and Northern Virginia community as a whole. Increasing the retention of Black and Latino students must be a major priority for ACPS.

Students Identify Reasons for Dropouts and Pushouts

To examine the forces leading to the low graduation rates of students – especially of students of color – students were asked if there were any factors that might prevent them from graduating from T.C. Williams. They were presented with a list of reasons commonly cited by students who drop out of high school. Overall, 57% expressed some concern that they might not graduate. Their responses began to shed light on a number of factors that might be causing high dropout rates and low levels of student achievement at T.C. Williams and throughout ACPS.

Students Identify Lack of Academic Supports and Interventions and the Lack of an Engaging Curriculum as Common Reasons for Dropouts/Pushouts

The survey responses indicated the most pressing needs within ACPS are additional academic supports and interventions, and perhaps adjusting the academic curriculum to meet the needs of students. In fact, the three most commonly cited reasons why students drop out or are pushed out of school were all related to academics: low grades (21%), “boring” classes (20%), and shortage of academic credits (18%), as shown in Chart 15.



Low grades were cited most frequently by Latino students (35%) and ESL students (41%) (for data disaggregated by race, see Appendix B). Boring classes were the most common response for Asian students (25%) and Black students (22%), and were of concern for Latino students (27%) as well. Lack of credits was a major concern for Black students (20%) and Latino students (27%), and was cited by an overwhelming 59% of ESL students.

The number of students mentioning grades and credits demonstrates that a substantial percentage of students are concerned that they will not be academically prepared to graduate high school. These academic troubles undoubtedly have many causes, but overly-challenging classes do not appear to be one of the main problems. Relatively few students (8%) said the reason they might not graduate was that their classes were too difficult. Indeed, the responses regarding “boring” classes suggest that, if anything, students felt they were not being challenged enough.

The academic concerns expressed by students, combined with the evidence of low graduation rates in ACPS, suggest that there is a need for more targeted academic interventions to ensure that students are kept on track and getting the academic support they need. The concerns about credits also suggest there is a need for better advice about the courses students need, and perhaps more flexible academic options and “second-chance” opportunities for students who experience academic struggles.

Regarding classes that are perceived as “boring,” it is instructive that this problem was frequently cited by students of color, but not by White students. In fact, while 24% of Asian, Black, and Latino students cited this as a problem, only 12% of White students indicated this as a concern. This suggests that White students and students of color are experiencing the curriculum in different ways. This could convey a need for assessing the content of the curriculum to determine if it is academically challenging and culturally relevant to the diverse student body of ACPS.

Additionally, while only 15% of AP/Honors students cited boring classes as a problem, 34% of Regular/Academic students viewed this as a potential reason for dropping out. This suggests that students in Regular/Academic classes find them to be much less engaging than AP/Honors students find their classes. This could either be additional evidence of the need for a more challenging curriculum for a broader array of students, or that the most engaging teachers are in Honors and AP classes, or both. In either case, because over one-third of the students in Regular/Academic classes were concerned that they might not graduate because they are not engaged by their classes, serious consideration must be given to modifying their academic experiences.

Taken as a whole, these responses indicate not only a need for greater academic supports and interventions; they also provide an important window into a generalized condition of alienation potentially affecting many students. Particularly with respect to boredom, these results suggest a disengagement from the learning environment that very likely contributes to other common causes of dropping out (such as behavioral problems), while resulting from others (such as feeling unsupported), both of which are discussed below.

Ultimately, the data indicates that students have serious unmet needs in relation to their academic experiences within ACPS.

Students Identify Lack of Strong Relationships with Adults in the School

The survey results also indicate that a substantial number of students feel unsupported by the staff of T.C. Williams. Outside of the three curriculum-focused factors previously mentioned, the most commonly cited reason for potentially dropping out of school was not feeling supported by one's counselor (13%). Eight percent (8%) of students also cited lack of support from their teachers as a potential cause of dropping out. While apparently less significant for students than the factors discussed above, this still represents a sizable percentage of students who think they might not graduate because of unmet needs with regard to guidance and academic support.

These factors were particularly significant for students of color. Twenty-five percent (25%) of Latino students and 22% of Asian students cited not being supported by their counselors as a potential cause of dropping out. This also was mentioned by 21% of ESL students. Additionally, 17% of Latino students and 13% of Asian students listed lack of teacher support as a reason they might drop out. These results suggest that steps must be taken to strengthen the relationships that ACPS students have with adults in their schools.

Q: What do you feel would be the best way to prevent students from dropping out of T.C. Williams?

Student Responses:

"Have the counselors and teachers get more in touch with their students and give more support."

"Have the teachers really support and help the student. If the student's grades are too low, make them go to tutoring or talk to someone to see if they just have no interest or if their classes/teachers are too hard. Just have someone for them to talk to."

"Listen for once, and see what they are dealing with, know their problems before judging them, and yelling at them."

"The teachers should be more concerned about the students and show that they want [them] to do well."

"[T]he guidance office can be so frustrating and unhelpful, and that can cause a lot of problems for students."

"Having guidance counselors that . . . put [students] in appropriate classes and actually listen to the students' needs and concerns."

"Teachers and counselors need to listen to the students more than they reprimand them!"

Students Report Being Advised to Drop Out or Get Their GED

Some students also shared experiences in which school personnel actively pushed students out of the school system. For example, one student reported that a guidance counselor "actually encouraged my brother to drop out." Another said that the people she knew who had dropped out did so because "they asked them to leave school and never come back."

In interviews with members of Alexandria United Teens, one student said her friend missed a lot of school in 9th and 10th grade, and he was advised to “get a GED and stop coming to school.”⁶⁴ Another student, who has a B average, asked her guidance counselor about taking extra classes to graduate early from high school. The student said her advisor told her “that if I wanted to graduate early, I should just get my GED – that a GED is the same as a high school diploma, which I knew was not true.”⁶⁵

Clearly, for ACPS to improve its academic performance and reduce the number of students who drop out, school personnel must not encourage or advise students to leave school.

Students Report That Harsh School Discipline Practices Contribute to Dropouts

The surveyed students also cited harsh school discipline practices – such as the use of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests – as a primary factor in creating an unsupportive school environment that leads to students dropping out or being pushed out. When asked why other students they know had dropped out, the third most commonly cited reason was expulsion (36%) (although ACPS reports no expulsions in their annual discipline data⁶⁶). In their comments, students were often critical of current approaches to discipline. Some suggested there is too much of an emphasis on punishment, and that schools should instead focus on providing students with behavioral supports.

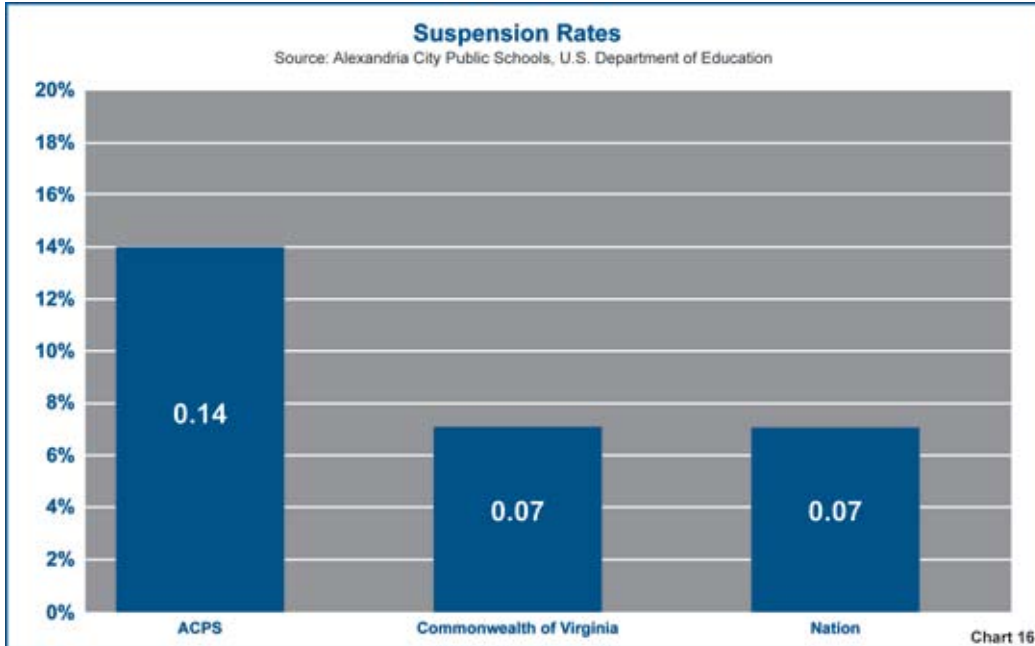
Q: What do you feel would be the best way to prevent students from dropping out of T.C. Williams?

Student Responses:

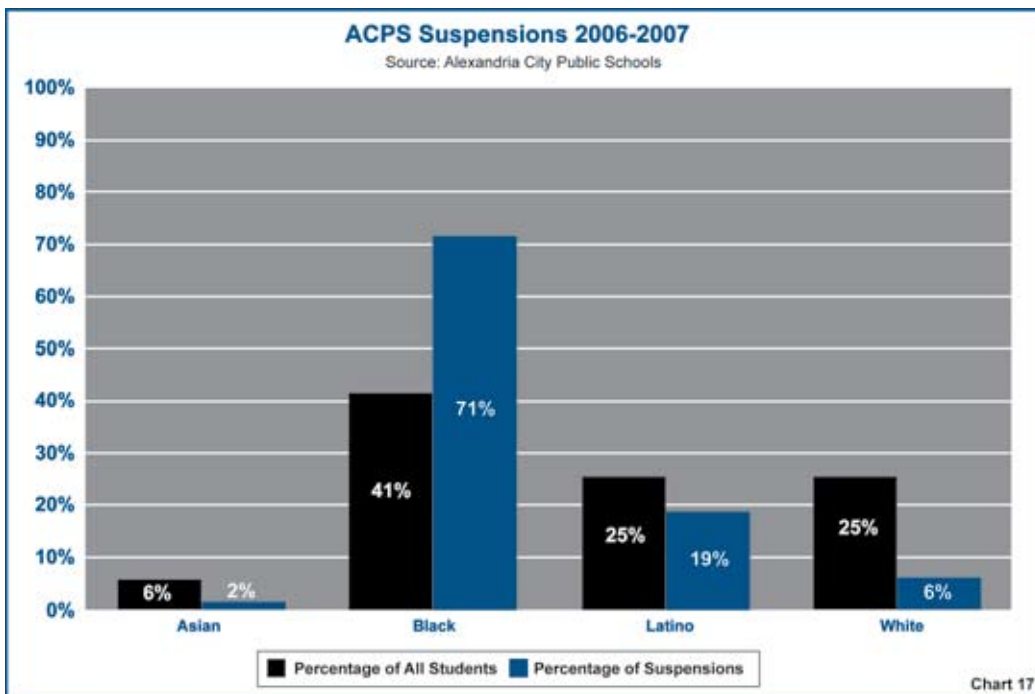
“Teachers should give more attention to students instead of disciplining them and trying to fail them.”

“Stop expelling and suspending students for little things. Stop taking people to court for no reason.”

Indeed, suspension rates within ACPS are twice as high as those of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the entire country, indicating that harsh disciplinary practices are being used system wide. In 2006-2007, there were 1,439 suspensions reported in ACPS, or 0.14 reported suspensions per student.⁶⁷ In comparison, the most recent data available for the rest of the Commonwealth and for the entire country is from 2004, when there were 0.07 suspensions per student for both, as shown in Chart 16.⁶⁸



Along with having a high number of suspensions overall, there are dramatic racial disparities evident in the suspensions issued. In 2006-2007, Black students received 71% percent of suspensions issued by ACPS, even though they were only 41% of the student body.⁶⁹ Together, Black and Latino students received 91% of the suspensions issued by ACPS, compared to 6% for White students, as illustrated in Chart 17.⁷⁰ Similar inequities exist in the suspensions given just at T.C. Williams.⁷¹



These harsh discipline practices undoubtedly contribute to the low graduation and achievement rates within ACPS. Research has shown that regardless of their own background, most high school students appear to share the perception that school discipline, especially school suspension, unfairly targets poor students and students of color, thus leading to the view that such methods are ineffective and unfair.⁷² This can lead to students feeling unsupported by their schools, which can in turn result in a variety of academic and behavioral problems.⁷³

Indeed, research has shown that students perform worse academically in schools with high suspension or expulsion rates, and that zero tolerance policies can increase bad behavior and lead to higher dropout rates.⁷⁴ Thus it is imperative that the school discipline policies and practices of ACPS be revised so that they promote, rather than detract from, academic performance.

Students Report That Job and Family-Related Factors Are Not Significant Causes of Dropping Out

In much of the discussion that surrounds the issue of high school dropouts, job and family-related factors are frequently cited as primary reasons that students drop out. The survey results at T.C. Williams do not support those theories. In fact, of all the options students had for identifying potential reasons to drop out, the least commonly cited were “needing to work” (7%) and “needing to stay home to support my family” (1%). Students were far less concerned with these factors than they were about institutional factors, i.e., those that relate to their relationship with T.C. Williams. Therefore, solutions to these problems must establish as their primary focus those factors that are under the school’s control, and stakeholders must resist the temptation to place blame on any perceived deficiencies in students’ family life, the effects of poverty, or other factors outside of the school’s control.

That being said, we must also acknowledge the inherently fluid boundaries between these different factors when attempting to craft solutions. Poor grades, for example, can certainly be linked to pressures at home, just as behavioral problems leading to suspension and expulsion may be related to students feeling disengaged by their classes or unsupported by teachers and counselors. In many cases students will in fact be dealing with multiple pressures from multiple sources. Nevertheless, the odds of success in solving these problems are increased significantly if attention is focused on how the school community can be changed to better meet students’ needs, rather than placing the blame on generalized societal ills – even if they are relevant to the issue – that require much more comprehensive and long-term solutions.

Student Views on ESL Program

The survey results indicate that the ESL program at T.C. Williams is in particular need of reform. First, ESL students apparently experience particular difficulty in acquiring enough academic credits to graduate high school. As mentioned above, 59% of ESL students mention lack of credits as being a potential cause of their dropping out, underscoring what is most likely a structural problem in the ESL program. Close attention needs to be paid to the possibility that it is very difficult for ESL students to earn enough credits to graduate even if they perform well in their classes and do exactly what is expected of them.

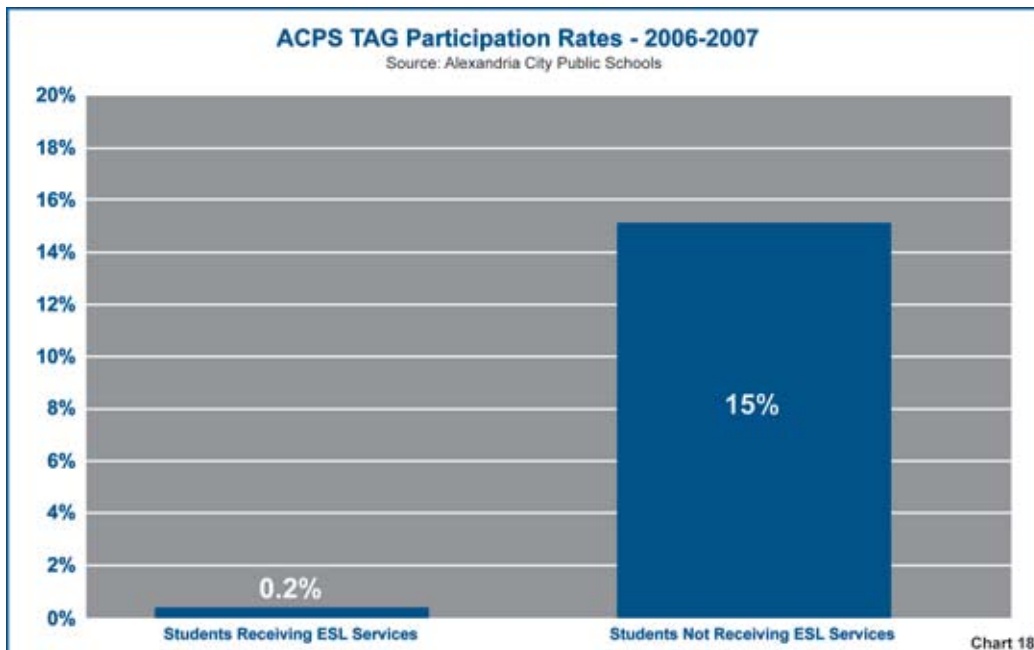
Q: What might prevent you from graduating from T.C.Williams?

Student Response:

"As an ESL student I might not have enough time for all [the classes] I need for the Advanced Diploma I want to get."

Second, ESL students report not being challenged by their courses. Forty-six percent (46%) of ESL students said their classes were "too easy," which was by far the highest percentage of any subgroup (and a remarkable admission for a high school student). It was also noted above that ESL students were the subgroup that was most likely to report a desire to take more AP and Honors courses. These results suggest that ACPS must take immediate action to expand access to high-level classes for ESL students.

Third, data suggests that of all ACPS students, ESL students are the most neglected in the college preparatory process. In fact, ESL students face almost unbelievable obstacles in participating in the TAG program, which as previously discussed is the primary college preparatory track in ACPS. While there were 1,650 students receiving ESL services in 2006-2007, amazingly there were only three that were enrolled in the TAG program (and all were from the same school).⁷⁵ While federal law requires that students not be screened out of consideration for gifted programs because of their limited English proficiency,⁷⁶ in ACPS these students were 81 times less likely to be enrolled in TAG than non-ESL students in 2006-2007, as shown in Chart 18. This suggests that ACPS has structured its ESL program to almost categorically exclude these students from the college preparatory process.



However, as mentioned above, the vast majority of ESL students reported that they planned to attend college. Thus, while ESL classes may be helping students to learn English, they are not doing enough to prepare them to meet their goals of graduating and attending college. Immediate steps must be taken to align the ESL program with the academic aspirations of students who participate in the program.



Giselle, T.C. Williams Student, Class of 2008

On the ESL Program

“When I first got to Alexandria they tried to put me in ESL because they said the education I got in Arlington wasn’t good. I was really quiet so they thought I couldn’t speak English. They had me sit in a little chair in a little room and read a baby book.”

On Getting an Advanced Diploma

“It was kind of too late. My counselor told me taking AP history would be a little bit hard for me because the grades I had in the past were a B or a C, so I didn’t do that. I wanted to take AP government next year, but she said I wouldn’t get in so I didn’t do it.”

On Parental Involvement

“It’s harder for the parents to get involved. They don’t have translators. Now they’re translating some papers they send home but not all. I know parents who try to get involved but how can they if they don’t know the language?”

“When I went to conferences I would be the translator, but now my parents have given up on going to parent-teacher conferences.”

* * *

The findings detailed above suggest that ACPS is pushing out a large number of students through a variety of policies and practices. They also indicate a failure to provide an adequate “safety net” for students who, for whatever reason, are struggling. At the same time, the survey provides important insight into how we can begin to reduce the unacceptably high rates of students – particularly Black and Latino students – who do not graduate from high school.

Remedying these problems is essential to creating a more just school system for ACPS students and families. But it also represents sound policy for the entire Alexandria and Northern Virginia community. Research has demonstrated that the public realizes extensive benefits from improving high school graduation rates.⁷⁷ Indeed, the public economic benefits that result from producing more high school graduates – in the form of increased tax revenues and reduced public expenditures on health, crime, and welfare – far outweigh the cost of providing that education.⁷⁸ Therefore, addressing the problems described above is not merely a question of fairness for ACPS students: it has dramatic ramifications for the health and prosperity of the entire community.

Q: What do you feel would be the best way to prevent students from dropping out of T.C. Williams?

Student Responses:

"Be really involved in the lives of students who seem to be struggling."

"Have an after-school tutoring program everyday for every academic course."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research included in this report leads to the unsettling conclusion that ACPS has created a two-track school system: while a small number of students are actively prepared from an early age for college and successful careers, the majority of students are not expected to excel and encounter substantial obstacles to achieving their goals. The structure of these tracks has dramatic racial implications, as White students dominate the high-level track, while students of color comprise the majority of the low-level track. And as the survey results demonstrate, students encounter radically different educational experiences depending on which track they are on.

Yet some might examine this report and find its recommendations for solving these problems to be inconsistent with its findings, asking why expanding preparation for college is appropriate when so many ACPS students are already struggling to graduate high school. There are numerous reasons why this is the appropriate response to ACPS's problems.

First, the relative success of Arlington, Fairfax, and the rest of Virginia indicate that improved college preparation is a very realistic goal and ACPS has ample room to improve. Second, providing a challenging, engaging, college preparatory curriculum, along with establishing a supportive college-going culture, would respond to the most common causes of student dropouts, as identified by T.C. Williams students and discussed above.

Third, even if a student does not ultimately attend college, the job market increasingly demands that applicants have completed rigorous high school courses.⁷⁹ Fourth, the only potential downside to providing students with a more challenging academic experience is that some students struggle with the added rigor. However, the district already has very low graduation rates, especially for students of color, so it is difficult to imagine losing even more students if the reforms are implemented with the appropriate supports and interventions for students.

Most important, though, is that T.C. Williams students have said that they are capable of handling higher-level courses, and evidently have higher aspirations for themselves than their schools have for them. Therefore, while the "opportunity gaps" described in this report are substantial, T.C. Williams students' own desire to take on greater challenges and succeed provide reason for hope. But the school district must rise up to meet the challenge that students have given them: to structure their academic offerings and create a

culture that is more responsive to student needs, in which every student will be prepared to succeed.

What follows is a series of recommendations for creating a world-class school system of which the entire community of Alexandria can be proud.

Recommendations

- 1.** ACPS should adopt the goal of preparing every student in the district to graduate with an Advanced Studies diploma and to attend a four-year college or university. ACPS should have a strong college-going culture, so that all aspects of the education offered in ACPS schools should be geared from kindergarten through 12th grade toward this goal.
- 2.** Students should be encouraged to take on academic challenges, and T.C. Williams High School should take immediate steps to increase the number of Black and Latino students in AP and Honors courses through recruitment and eliminating non-essential barriers to enrollment in these courses.
- 3.** Advice, information, and resources related to the college preparation process should be provided by the school in a proactive manner, minimizing the burden carried by students for gathering and acting upon college knowledge. Students and parents/guardians should receive accurate, high-quality information about the courses that will prepare them for college-level standards, college admissions, and financing college. All information should be provided in a language that parents/guardians and students can understand.
- 4.** ACPS should increase the number of guidance counselors at T.C. Williams, with an emphasis on bilingualism.
- 5.** Because middle school and high school students have many different teachers, they often do not have a strong relationship with any adult in their school. ACPS should ensure that middle school and high school students are paired with a mentor-advocate (teacher, guidance counselor, or staff member) who will be responsible for guiding and monitoring the student over a long period of time.
- 6.** T.C. Williams should provide students with wider access to the full spectrum of college preparatory opportunities, such as: internships, college visits, SAT/ACT prep classes, and other supplemental academic preparatory classes.
- 7.** ACPS should review its curricula to ensure that it is academically challenging and culturally relevant for the diverse student body of ACPS.
- 8.** ACPS must place greater emphasis on meeting the needs of English language learners. The ESL program needs to be re-designed so that it allows students to be able to successfully graduate high school and attend a four-year college or university. To do so, the content in ESL classes must be made more rigorous, and there must be more emphasis on connecting content instruction with language instruction. ACPS should ensure that

English language learners have the same access to high-level curricula as other students, at all grade levels.

9. ACPS administrators and teachers should take responsibility for ensuring that struggling students get the help they need, rather than putting the onus on the student or parents. ACPS should consider the use or expanded use of early morning and late afternoon courses, Saturday school, access to summer school, summer “bridge” programs, and additional tutoring before, during, and after school to meet the needs of struggling students.

10. In addition to the college preparatory curriculum in high school, ACPS must provide broader access to rigorous, college preparatory “pipeline” curricula in middle school. Also beginning in middle school, ACPS should provide students with broader access to tutoring and other intensive academic supports that will prepare them for college preparatory classes in high school.

11. ACPS must ensure that there is an academic “safety net” for struggling students. Rather than neglecting students who are having difficulty successfully navigating high school, ACPS should consider expanded dropout prevention/intervention/recovery programs to ensure that no student is able to slip through the cracks of the school system. ACPS should also consider a variety of “second-chance opportunities” and other flexible academic programs that will meet the unique needs of these students and still prepare them for college.

12. ACPS should limit the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions to behavior that poses a serious threat to school safety. Otherwise, incidents or misbehavior should be handled within the school environment.

13. ACPS should emphasize the inclusion of parents/guardians, students, teachers, counselors, and administrators in the process of reform planning, decision-making, and implementation. Also, the district should work with community groups to communicate and educate parents/guardians and students on rigor, high expectations, and the focus on college preparation throughout ACPS.

ABOUT US



Advancement Project, a communications and legal action organization committed to racial justice, was founded by a team of veteran civil rights lawyers in 1998. Advancement Project was created to develop and inspire community-based solutions based on the same high-quality legal analysis and public education campaigns that produced the landmark civil rights victories of earlier eras. From Advancement Project's inception, we have worked "on-the-ground," partnering with organized communities of color by bringing them the tools of legal advocacy and strategic communications, to dismantle and reform the unjust and inequitable policies that undermine the promise of democracy. Simultaneously, we have aggressively sought and seized opportunities to promote this approach to racial and social justice among our colleagues and allies in the organizing, legal, policy, and philanthropic communities. Lastly, on the national level we have persistently inserted race and issues impacted by race into the public discourse, reframing them in an effort to sway public opinion.

Our mission is:

"To develop, encourage, and widely disseminate innovative ideas and pioneer models that inspire and mobilize a broad, national racial justice movement to achieve universal opportunity and a Just Democracy!"

Advancement Project's founding team of veteran civil rights lawyers believed that structural racism could begin to be dismantled by multiracial grassroots organizing focused on changing public policies and supported by lawyers and communications strategies. Solid relationships with organized communities of color are at the core of our work. They define and shape our ability to intervene with successful reform efforts and develop strong coalitions of allies that share Advancement Project's vision of a Just Democracy. We link communities and local groups working on allied issues and causes, lawyers, journalists, and policy analysts with data, relevant research, and technical and communications support. By supporting local communities' struggles for racial and social justice, we advance equity, access, and universal opportunity for those left behind—and pushed aside—in America.



Tenants and Workers United is a democratically-controlled, grassroots organization committed to winning social and economic justice and power for the people of Northern Virginia – Latinos/as, African Americans, tenants, immigrants, workers, women, youth, and low-income people.

Alexandria United Teens (AUT) is the youth-led chapter of Tenants and Workers United. AUT was created to develop young leaders—with a special focus on young women of color—with the skills and vision to be agents of change in our community and region. Most of the active members of AUT are students at Minnie Howard School or at T.C. Williams High School who desire to graduate and attend a reputable four-year college or university.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank everyone who assisted us in the development, distribution, and analysis of the T.C. Williams Student Survey and other research conducted.

Jeffrey Craven, Joshua Greene, Scott Thompson, Jean McCue, Patton Boggs LLP
Monte Dawson, Executive Director, Monitoring and Evaluation Services, Alexandria City Public Schools
Professors Michelle Fine, Kersha Smith, and Maria Torre, City University of New York Graduate Center
Sterling Lloyd, Research Associate, Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (Education Week)
Jane Manners, Harvard Law School
Scott Newsham, School Board Member, Alexandria City Public Schools
Rebecca Perry, Superintendent, Alexandria City Public Schools
Mel Riddile, Principal, T.C. Williams High School
Eileen Rivera, School Board Member, Alexandria City Public Schools
Dana Weekes, University of Virginia Law School

We would also like to thank the following for their generous financial support.

Community Foundation for the National Capital Region
Ford Foundation
Fulfilling the Dream Fund
Hill-Snowdon Foundation
Open Society Institute
Public Welfare Foundation
The Rockefeller Foundation

ENDNOTES

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. 2005 American Community Survey.

² *Id.*

³ Alexandria City Public Schools. Fast facts. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/fast-fact.php>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. Per pupil amounts for current spending of public elementary-secondary school systems by state 2004-2005. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from http://ftp2.census.gov/govs/school/elsec05_sttables.xls#8!A1; U.S. Census Bureau. 2005 public elementary-secondary education finance data. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.census.gov/govs/www/school05.html>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Supra* note 3.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Smith, Leef. (Feb. 3, 2004). New School, Old Debate in Alexandria. *Washington Post*. Metro, B01.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Settimi, Christina. (July 2007). Best and worst school districts for the buck. *Forbes*. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from http://www.forbes.com/businessinthebeltway/2007/07/05/schools-taxes-education-biz-beltway_cz_cs_0705schools.html.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ All percentages have been rounded for this report.

¹⁴ Because there were so few responses from students identified as being in special education classes, this subgroup has been omitted from the analysis included in this report.

¹⁵ Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 2000. Are we preparing students for the 21st century?, at 8. New York: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.metlife.com/WPSAssets/19369043831018400720V1F2000ats.pdf>.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Harvard College. Frequently asked questions: Admissions. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from http://www.admissions.college.harvard.edu/utilities/faq/admissions/high_school/index.html ("Although schools provide different opportunities, students should pursue the most demanding college-preparatory program available."); Princeton University. Admission information, at 52. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from http://www.princeton.edu/pr/admissions/u/ai/PU_admininfo_0708.pdf ("We also encourage students to take the most rigorous courses possible in their secondary schools, including honors and Advanced Placement courses where available."); Duke University. Applying to Duke: Who we're looking for: Our process. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from https://www.admissions.duke.edu/jump/applying/who_process.asp; University of North Carolina. Undergraduate admissions: Freshman. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.admissions.unc.edu/applying/freshman.htm#lookfor>.

¹⁷ Virginia Department of Education. Report of high school graduates and completers: 2005-2006 graduates and completers by diploma type. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Publications/grads/gradd0506.pdf>.

¹⁸ See, e.g., University of Virginia. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.virginia.edu/undergradadmission/senior.html> ("[W]e recommend that candidates take the most rigorous academic program available in their school, including at least five academic courses each year and AP, IB, and honors courses whenever possible."); Radford University. Applying to RU. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.radford.edu/admissions/ruinfo/applyru.html> ("Virginia residents are encouraged to complete the Advanced Studies Diploma."); Virginia Military Institute. Admissions requirements. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.vmi.edu/Show.asp?durki=527> ("A college preparatory course comparable to the Commonwealth of Virginia's Advanced Studies Program is preferred."); Virginia Commonwealth University. Admissions 101. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.ugrad.vcu.edu/admissions101/freshman/index.html>; James Madison University. Admission process. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.jmu.edu/admissions/process/>; George Mason University. Freshman admission requirements. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://admissions.gmu.edu/freshmen/FreshmenAdmissionRequirements.asp>. For more information on the requirement for the Advanced Studies diploma, see Virginia Department of Education, Virginia graduation requirements, at <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/2plus4in2004/dip-advanced.shtml>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ The method used to calculate graduation rates in this report is a modified version of the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI), developed by Christopher Swanson, formerly of the Urban Institute and now the Director of the Education Week Research Center. Education Week. Diplomas count: An essential guide to

graduation policy and rates. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2006/06/22/41s_map.h25.html. Normally, the CPI estimates the percent of public high school students who graduate on time with a diploma. *Id.* The CPI rate captures four key steps a student must take in order to graduate: three grade-to-grade promotions (9 to 10, 10 to 11, and 11 to 12) and ultimately earning a diploma (grade 12 to graduation). *Id.* By multiplying grade-specific promotion ratios together, the CPI estimates the percentage of 9th graders who will complete high school on time with a regular diploma, given the schooling conditions prevailing during a particular school year. *Id.* The modifications made for the 3-Year Advanced Diploma Graduation Rate used here were: eliminating the first grade promotion ratio (9 to 10), because T.C. Williams is a three-year high school; and only counting Advanced Studies diploma recipients, rather than also including Standard diploma recipients. For more information on the Cumulative Promotion Index, see Swanson, Christopher B., *Who graduates? Who doesn't: A statistical portrait of public high school graduation, Class of 2001*, The Urban Institute Education Policy Center, available at http://www.urban.org/UploadPDF/410934_WhoGraduates.pdf.

²¹ 2006 graduation statistics provided by Virginia Department of Education in response to a records request (on file with the authors); Enrollment figures are available Virginia Department of Education, at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Publications/rep_page.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.* Note that rates for the rest of the Commonwealth of Virginia exclude ACPS.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Supra* note 18.

²⁹ This excludes magnet schools and those schools that offer the International Baccalaureate program instead of AP.

³⁰ See Virginia Department of Education, School, School Division, and State Report Cards, available at <https://p1pe.doe.virginia.gov/reportcard>.

³¹ *Id.*

³² AP and Honors enrollment statistics provided by ACPS in response to a public records request (on file with authors); Virginia Department of Education, *supra* note 21.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ For more information on the ACPS Talented and Gifted Program, see Alexandria City Public Schools, Talented and gifted program (TAG), available at <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/tag/index.php>.

³⁶ Alexandria City Public Schools. Program of studies: Grades 6-8, a planning guide for students and parents 2007-2008, at 6. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/guidehs/guidems.pdf>.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ TAG data provided by ACPS in response to a public records request (on file with authors).

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Alexandria City Public Schools. Board votes for open enrollment honors at middle schools. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/news2007/nr20070417a.php>.

⁴¹ For more information on providing college preparatory curricula, see, e.g., American Diploma Project Network, available at <http://www.achieve.org/node/604>; Education Trust, available at <http://www2.edtrust.org/>; National Commission on the High School Senior Year (Oct. 2001). *Raising Our sights: No high school senior left behind*. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.uschamber.com/NR/rdonlyres/ek7tts3xp6-kvrtzoqwy2qgzfzocxleroyedr35wr5ourco4fs5lwstnxhgjar64lvdy4o77ecralpvzaqbwfoqba/raisingoursights.pdf>; Oakes, Jeannie, et al (Nov. 2006). *Removing the roadblocks: Fair college opportunities for all California students*; National Governors Association (2005). *Getting it done: Ten steps to a state action agenda*, at 5. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/05warnerguide02.pdf>.

⁴² Extensive information about, and examples of, such districts are included in the publications mentioned *id.*

⁴³ Venezia, Andrea & Kirst, Michael W. & Antonio, Anthony L. (2003). *Betraying the college dream: How disconnected K-12 and postsecondary education systems undermine student aspirations*, at 31. Stanford Bridge Project.

⁴⁴ *Id.*, at 33-34.

⁴⁵ Antonio, Anthony L. & Venezia, Andrea & Kirst, Michael W. (Jan. 2004). Addressing the development of college knowledge: Concepts to improve student transitions from high school to college, at 9-10. Stanford Bridge Project.

⁴⁶ Id. at 11.

⁴⁷ Id.

⁴⁸ Id.

⁴⁹ Id. at 17.

⁵⁰ Id.

⁵¹ Id.

⁵² Statement of Dignity in Schools Campaign, A Project of the Education Subcommittee of the Children's Rights Litigation Committee of the American Bar Association, in Collaboration with Stakeholders from Across the Country (on file with the authors).

⁵³ Id.

⁵⁴ Graduation figures provided by Virginia Department of Education (on file with the authors); Enrollment figures are available at http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/Publications/rep_page.

⁵⁵ Common Core of Data (2004-2005). State nonfiscal survey of public elementary/secondary education. Note that this calculation excludes New York and Wisconsin, as data for these states was not included in the Common Core of Data.

⁵⁶ Supra note 54.

⁵⁷ Id. Note that rates for the rest of the Commonwealth of Virginia exclude ACPS.

⁵⁸ Supra note 21.

⁵⁹ Id.

⁶⁰ Id.

⁶¹ Id.

⁶² Supra note 55. Note that this calculation excludes Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, South Carolina, and Wisconsin, as data for these states was not included in the Common Core of Data.

⁶³ Id.

⁶⁴ Interview with Leslie Aucedá, 6/22/07 (notes on file with the authors).

⁶⁵ Interview with student who wished to remain anonymous, 6/22/07 (notes on file with the authors).

⁶⁶ Discipline data provided by ACPS in response to a public records request (on file with authors).

⁶⁷ Id.

⁶⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights. Civil rights data collection 2004. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://vistademo.beyond2020.com/ocr2004rv30/>.

⁶⁹ Supra note 66.

⁷⁰ Id.

⁷¹ In 2006-2007, 68% of the suspensions given at T.C. Williams were of Black students, and 21% were of Latino students. In contrast, only 7% were of White students. Id.

⁷² Skiba, Russell (Summer 2004). Zero tolerance: The assumptions and the facts. Education Policy Briefs, Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Vol. 2, No. 1, at 3.

⁷³ Id.

⁷⁴ American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (Feb. 2006). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations.

⁷⁵ ESL statistics provided by ACPS in response to a public records request (on file with authors).

⁷⁶ Michael Williams, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education (Sept. 27, 1991). Policy Update on Schools' Obligations Toward National Origin Minority Students With Limited English Proficiency.

⁷⁷ Levin, Henry & Belfield, Clive & Muennig, Peter & Rouse, Cecilia (Jan. 2007). The costs and benefits of an excellent education for all of America's children. Center for Benefit-Cost Studies of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.cbcse.org/pages/cost-benefit-studies.php>.

⁷⁸ Id.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Achieve, Inc. Raise high school graduation requirements. Retrieved July 29, 2007, from <http://www.achieve.org/node/332>.

APPENDIX - A

T.C. Williams High School Student Survey

This Survey is being collected by Alexandria United Teens who are interested in
YOUR EXPERIENCES at T.C. Williams. Thanks for filling it out!

1. Please mark how many years of each subject you have taken from 9th grade through the current semester (for example, 2, 3.5, etc.).

a. English _____ b. Math _____ c. Science _____ d. Foreign Language _____ e. Social Studies _____

2. Please mark with a check if you have taken, or are currently taking, the following classes.

Algebra I _____	Geometry _____	Algebra II _____	
Earth Science _____	Biology _____	Chemistry _____	Physics _____
World Civ I _____	World Civ II _____	VA/US History _____	VA/US Government _____
Cosmetology _____	Auto Tech _____	Culinary Arts _____	Woodworking _____

3. How many times have you met with your guidance counselor while at T.C. Williams? _____

4. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	I Don't Know
-------------------	-------	----------------------	----------	--------------

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. I feel like my education at T.C. Williams is preparing me well for college. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. I feel like most of my classes at T.C. Williams are too easy. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. ESL classes do a good job of teaching English. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. My counselor has helped me plan the courses I need to graduate from high school and get into college. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. I feel supported by T.C. Williams: there are people here to help me if I need it. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. I know students who are in ESL classes but speak English well enough to be in non-ESL classes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Students of all races and ethnicities are treated equally at T.C. Williams. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. My counselor has encouraged me to go to a 2-year college. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. I would like to take more honors and AP courses than I am right now. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j. I feel challenged by my courses. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| k. My counselor and I have talked about the college admissions process. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| l. I understand the courses I need to graduate with an Advanced Diploma. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| m. There are courses I would like to take, but I can't get into. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| n. ESL classes are too easy. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| o. My counselor has encouraged me to attend a 4-year college. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| p. I know students who started in ESL classes and then moved into non-ESL classes. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| q. My counselor believes that I am a good student. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| r. Graduating with an Advanced Diploma helps you get into college. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. I will likely graduate with (please check one): a. Advanced Diploma _____ b. Standard Diploma _____
c. Other Diploma _____ d. Probably will not graduate _____

6. Check all those that might prevent you from graduating from T.C. Williams:

- a. My grades _____ b. Not enough credits _____ c. My classes are too hard _____
d. I don't feel supported by my teachers _____ e. I don't feel supported by my counselor _____ f. My classes are boring _____
g. I need to work _____ h. I need to stay home to support my family _____
i. Not applicable _____ j. Other (please specify) _____

7. Do you know anyone who has dropped out of T.C. Williams? Yes No

8. If yes, why did this person (people) drop out? (Please check all that apply.)

- a. Grades were not good _____ b. Not enough credits _____ c. Classes were too hard _____
d. Didn't feel supported by teachers _____ e. Didn't feel supported by counselor _____ f. Was bored by school _____
g. Was expelled _____ h. Needed to stay home to support family _____ i. Needed to work _____
j. Other (please specify) _____

9. What do you feel would be the best way to prevent students from dropping out of T.C. Williams?

10. Have you been involved in any of the following at T.C. Williams? (Please check all that apply.)

- a. In-school suspension _____ f. Athletics _____ k. Out-of-school suspension _____
b. Internships _____ g. Vocational Education _____ l. English as a 2nd Language (ESL) _____
c. Tutoring other students _____ h. Honors Classes _____ m. Special Education _____
d. AP Classes _____ i. Community Service _____ n. Student Government _____
e. PSAT/SAT/ACT prep _____ j. Free/Reduced Lunch _____

11. How likely is it that you will pursue the following after high school?

	Definitely Will	Probably Will	Probably Won't	Definitely Won't
a. An Associates degree (Community College or 2-yr degree)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. A Bachelors degree (a 4-year college degree)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Vocational training (such as mechanics or construction) or Certificate programs (such as computer training or beauty school)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Enroll in the military	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Get a full-time job right after graduation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Check all those that might prevent you from going to college:

- a. I'm not going to graduate high school _____ b. I can't afford college _____
c. I don't have enough AP/honors courses _____ d. My grades aren't good enough _____
e. I don't have enough information about college _____ f. I don't want to go to college _____
g. Not applicable _____ h. Other _____

13. Are you: Male Female

14. How old are you? _____ 15. What grade are you in? _____

16. Were you born in the United States? Yes No If no, where? _____

17. Are you: African American/Black Latino/Hispanic Asian White Other _____

18. What language(s) are spoken in your home? _____

19. Most of my classes are (select one): Honors/AP Regular/Academic Special Education ESL

20. How many years have you attended public schools in Alexandria, VA? _____

Encuesta para estudiantes de T.C. Williams High School

Esta encuesta es dirigida por el grupo Alexandria United Teens quienes tienen interés en
TUS EXPERIENCIAS en T.C. Williams.

¡Gracias por llenarla!

1. Por favor indica cuantos años de cada clase has tomado desde el grado nueve hasta hoy (por ejemplo, 2, 3.5, etc.)

a. Inglés _____ b. Matemáticas _____ c. Ciencias _____ d. Idiomas Extranjeras _____ e. Estudios Sociales _____

2. Por favor indica, con una "X" si has tomado, o si estás tomando, los siguientes cursos.

Algebra I _____ Geometry _____ Algebra II _____
 Earth Science _____ Biology _____ Chemistry _____ Physics _____
 World Civ I _____ World Civ II _____ VA/US History _____ VA/US Government _____
 Cosmetology _____ Auto Tech _____ Culinary Arts _____ Woodworking _____

3. Durante tu tiempo en T.C. Williams, ¿cuántas veces te has reunido con tu consejero/a académico/a? _____

4. ¿Cuánto estás de acuerdo o no de acuerdo con lo siguiente?

	Firmemente de Acuerdo	De Acuerdo	Firmemente no de Acuerdo	No de Acuerdo	No Sé
a. Siento que mi educación en T.C. Williams me está preparando bien para la universidad.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Siento que la mayoría de mis clases son demasiadas fáciles.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Los cursos de ESL son buen método para enseñar el Inglés.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Mi consejero/a me ha ayudado a escoger las clases que necesito para graduarme de las secundaria y matricularme en la universidad.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Siento que T.C. Williams me apoya: hay personas aquí quienes me ayudarán si lo necesito.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Yo conozco estudiantes en clases de ESL quienes hablan el Inglés bastante bien que pudieran estar en clases regulares.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Alumnos de todas razas y étnias se tratan con igualdad en T.C. Williams.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Mi consejero/a me ha sugerido ir a una universidad de 2 años.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Me gustaría tomar más clases avanzadas que las que tengo ahora.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Siento que mis clases exigen mucho esfuerzo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
k. Mi consejero/a y yo hemos hablado sobre el proceso para matricularme en la universidad.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
l. Entiendo las clases que necesito para graduarme con un Diploma Avanzado.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
m. Hay clases que quisiera tomar pero no las puedo acceder.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
n. Las clases de ESL son demasiadas fáciles.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
o. Mi consejero/a me ha sugerido ir a una universidad de 4 años.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
p. Conozco a alumnos quienes comenzaron en clases de ESL y después se cambiaron a clases regulares.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
q. Mi consejero/a cree que yo soy buen estudiante.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
r. Un Diploma Avanzado le ayuda a matricularse en la universidad.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Probablemente me graduaré con (*favor de escoger una*): a. Diploma Avanzado____ b. Diploma Básico____
c. Otro diploma____ d. Probablemente no me voy a graduar____

6. Marca todos los que puedan impedir tu graduación de T.C. Williams:

- a. Mis notas____ b. Falta de créditos____ c. Mis cursos son muy difíciles____
d. No siento que mis maestros me apoyan____ e. No siento que mi consejero/a me apoya____
f. Mis cursos son aburridos____ g. Necesito trabajar____
h. Tengo que quedarme en casa para apoyar a mi familia____
i. No aplica____ j. Otra razón (favor de especificar)_____

7. ¿Conoces a alguien que ha abandonado sus estudios en T.C. Williams? Si No

8. Si conoces a alguien, ¿porqué abandonó sus estudios? (*Favor de marcar todos los que aplican.*)

- a. Malas notas____ b. Falta de créditos____ c. Cursos muy difíciles____
d. No sintió que los maestros lo apoyaban____ e. No sintió que su consejero/a lo apoyaba____
f. Estudiar lo aburría____ g. Fue expulsado____
h. Necesitaba quedarse en casa para apoyar a su familia____
i. Necesitaba trabajar____ j. Otra razón (favor de especificar)_____

9. ¿Que sientes que fuera la mejor manera de asegurar que los alumnos no abandonen sus estudios en T.C. Williams?

10. ¿Tienes experiencia con algunos de los siguientes programas en T.C. Williams? (*Favor de marcar todos los que aplican.*)

- a. Suspensión en la escuela____ f. Atléticos____ k. Suspensión fuera de escuela____
b. Internship____ g. Educación Profesional____ l. Inglés como segundo idioma (ESL)____
c. Ayudando otros alumnos con sus estudios____ h. Cursos Avanzados (Honors)____ m. Educación Especial____
d. Cursos de AP____ i. Servicio Comunitario____ o. Gobierno Estudiantil____
e. Preparación para los exámenes PSAT/SAT/ACT____ j. Almuerzo Gratis o Reducido____

11. ¿Qué probabilidad tienes de hacer algunas de estas actividades después de la secundaria?

Definitivamente Probablemente Probablemente Definitivamente

Si Si No No

- | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Licenciatura de Colegio Comunitario o Licenciatura de 2 años | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Licenciatura de Universidad (de 4 años) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Entrenamiento profesional (como para mecánico o construcción) o Programa de Certificado (como computadoras o escuela de belleza) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Matricularte en el servicio militar. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Trabajar tiempo completo inmediatamente después de graduarte. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. Marca todas las posibilidades que pudieran impedirte ir a la universidad:

- a. No me voy a graduar de la secundaria____ b. Falta de recursos económicos____
c. No tengo bastantes cursos avanzados (AP/honors)____ d. Mis notas no son bastantes buenos____
e. No tengo bastante información sobre la universidad____ f. No quiero ir a la universidad____
g. No aplica____ h. Otra razón _____

13. Eres tú: Hombre Mujer

14. ¿Cuántos años tienes? _____

15. ¿En cuál grado estás? _____

16. ¿Naciste en los Estados Unidos? Yes No Si no, ¿dónde naciste? _____

17. Eres tú: Afro-Americano/Negro Latino/Hispano Asiático Blanco Otro _____

18. ¿Cuáles idiomas se hablan en tu casa? _____

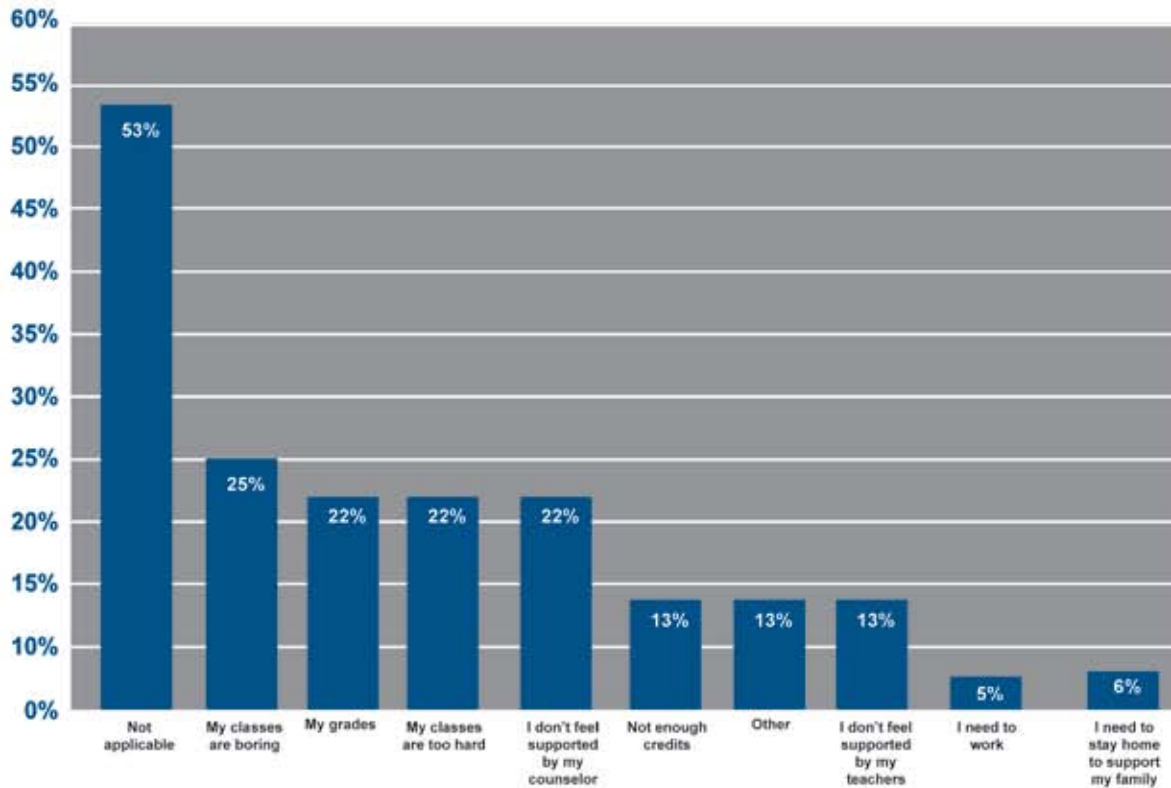
19. La mayoría de mis clases son (*escoge*): Avanzadas/AP Regular Educación Especial ESL

20. ¿Por cuántos años has asistido las escuelas públicas en/de Alexandria, VA? _____

APPENDIX - B

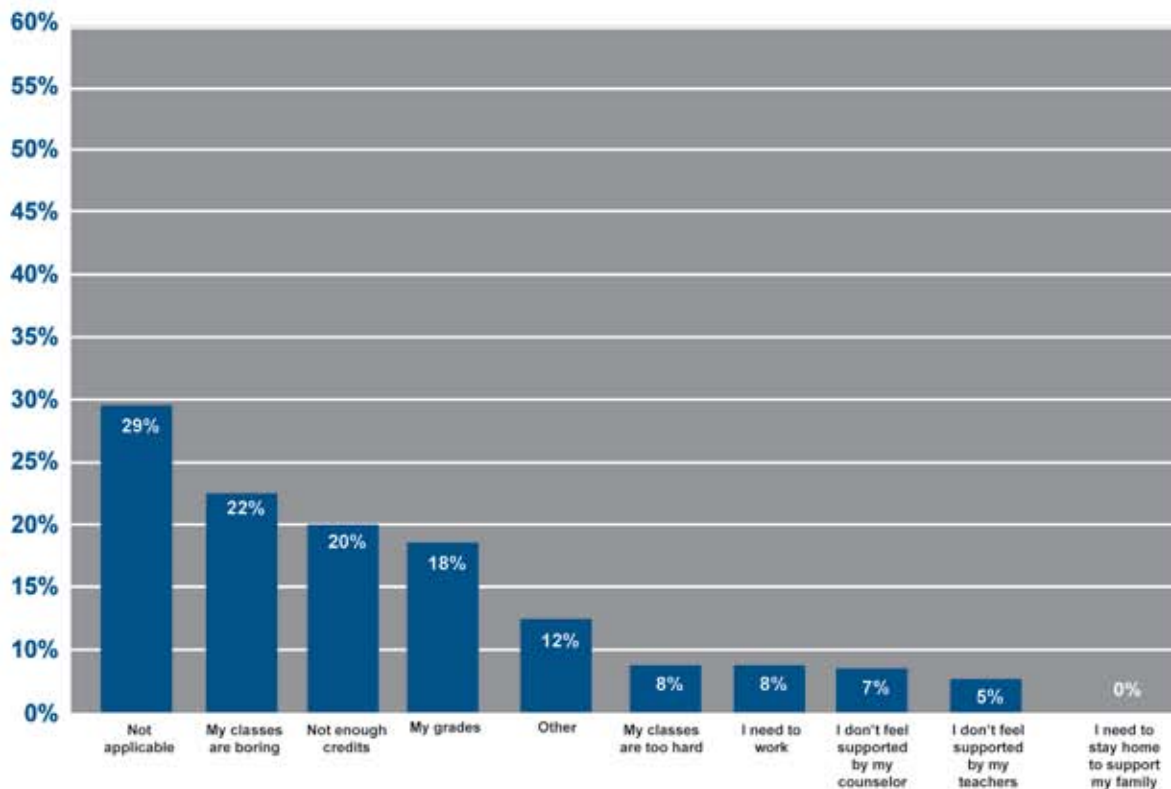
What T.C. Williams Students Say Might Prevent Them From Graduating High School - ASIAN STUDENTS

Source: Alexandria United Teens T.C. Williams Survey



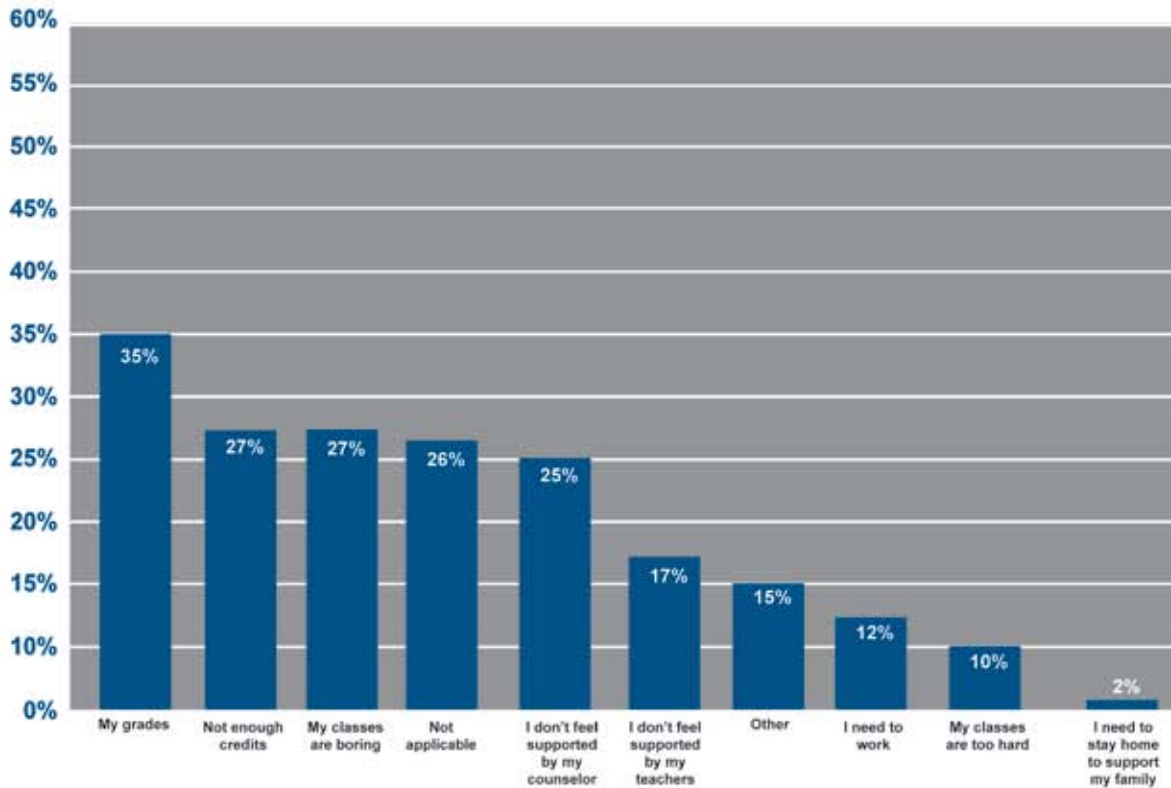
What T.C. Williams Students Say Might Prevent Them From Graduating High School - BLACK STUDENTS

Source: Alexandria United Teens T.C. Williams Survey



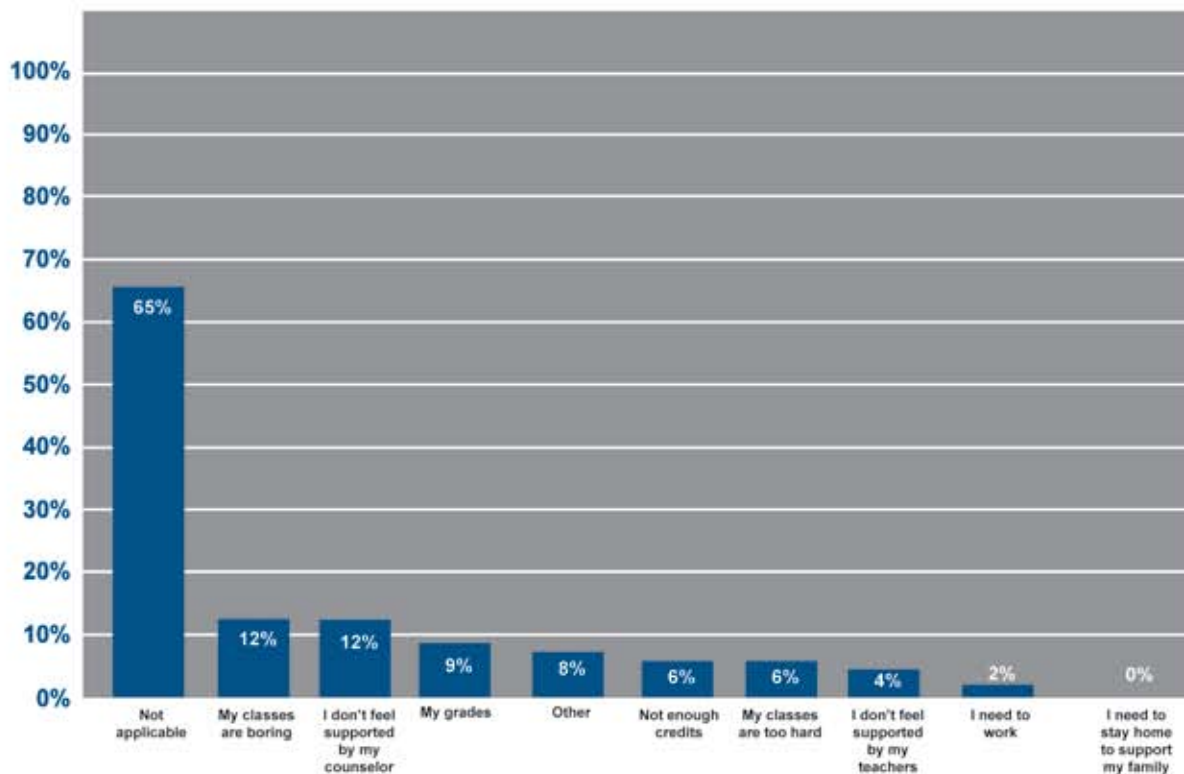
What T.C. Williams Students Say Might Prevent Them From Graduating High School - LATINO STUDENTS

Source: Alexandria United Teens T.C. Williams Survey



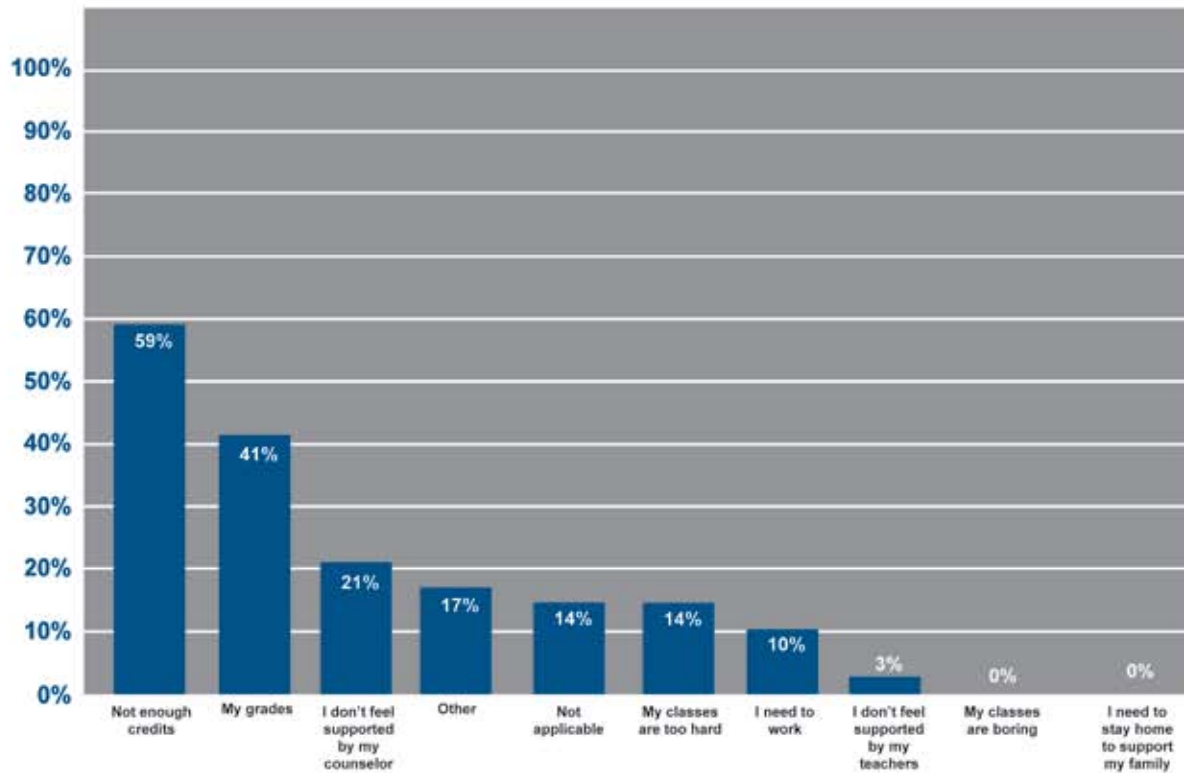
What T.C. Williams Students Say Might Prevent Them From Graduating High School - WHITE STUDENTS

Source: Alexandria United Teens T.C. Williams Survey



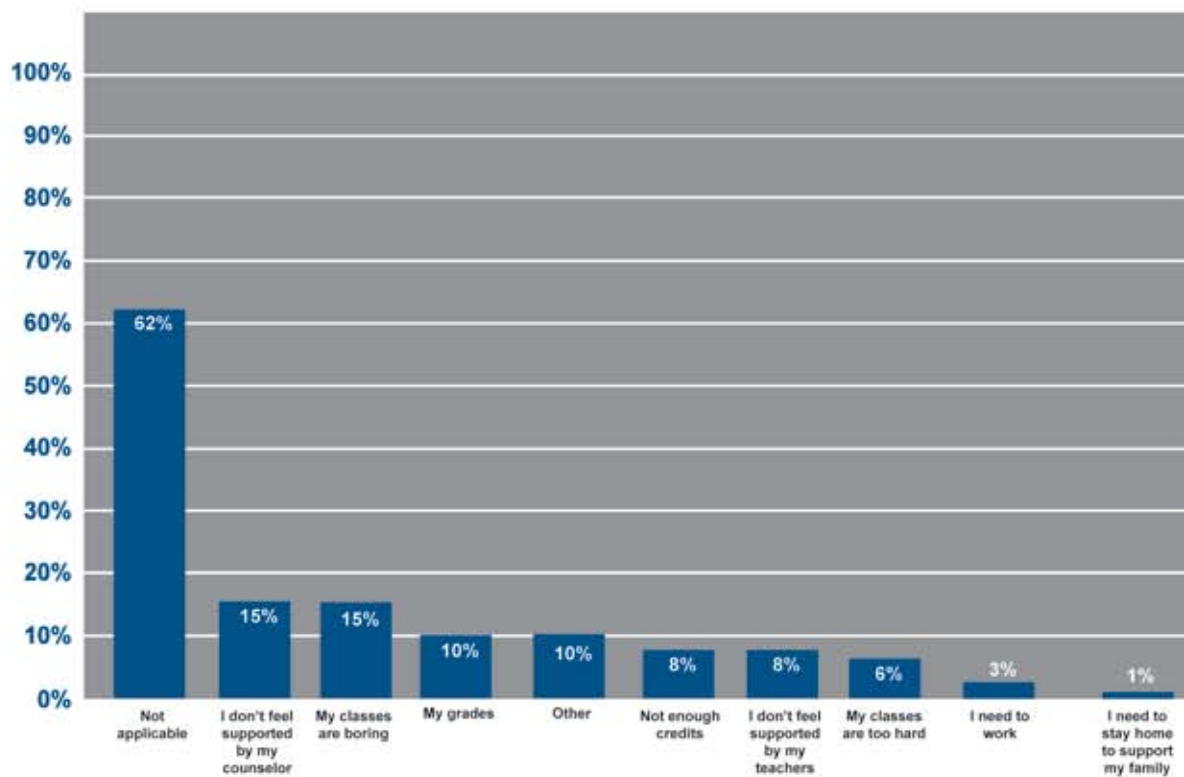
What T.C. Williams Students Say Might Prevent Them From Graduating High School - ESL STUDENTS

Source: Alexandria United Teens T.C. Williams Survey



What T.C. Williams Students Say Might Prevent Them From Graduating High School - HONOR/AP STUDENTS

Source: Alexandria United Teens T.C. Williams Survey



What T.C. Williams Students Say Might Prevent Them From Graduating High School - REGULAR/ACADEMIC STUDENTS

Source: Alexandria United Teens T.C. Williams Survey

