

Introduction

Purpose. The Austin Independent School District (AISD) administered an online survey to 2010 graduates of the district to better understand how their experience as an AISD student prepared them for their college and career after they graduated from high school. This report focuses on students' perceptions of their postsecondary preparedness and ways it could be improved. This information will enable AISD administrators, faculty, and staff to improve or modify district programs and initiatives to better position students for success after graduation.

Methodology. The data presented in this report were gathered through the administration of two surveys. The Class of 2010 High School Exit Survey (HSES) was administered in the spring of 2010 to eligible seniors at all district high schools. The Alumni Survey was distributed via e-mail and social media from January 19, 2011 to June 30, 2011. There were 411 full or partial respondents. To analyze and interpret the results of the 2010 Alumni Survey, results from both surveys were combined for respondents who were confirmed graduates of the district. Figure 1 graphically displays this process.

A relatively small proportion of 2010 graduates completed the Alumni Survey. Thus, respondent characteristics were closely examined to determine whether respondents were representative of the 2010 graduating class. Findings from this analysis are presented to provide a context for the survey results.

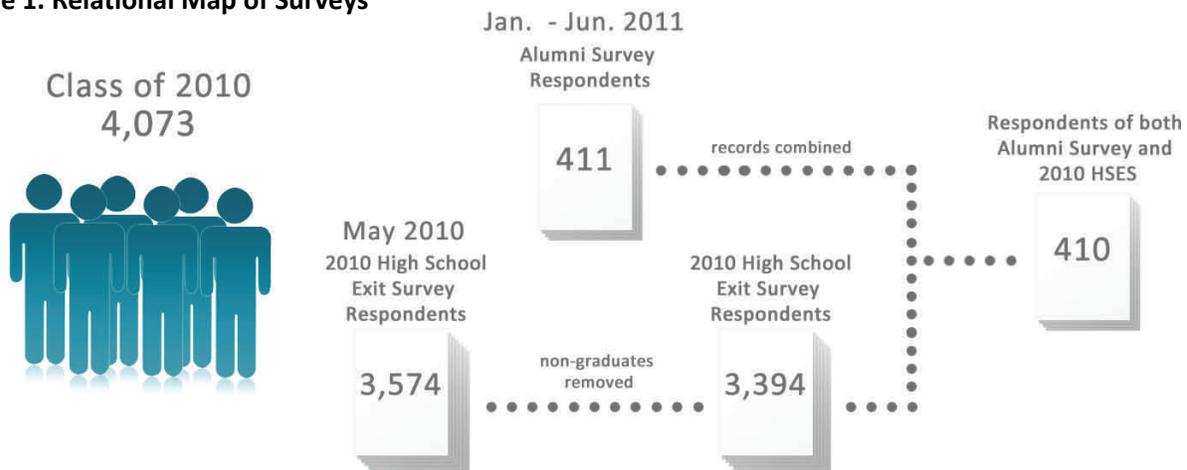
About the report. This report presents findings from the 2010 AISD Alumni Survey. [The Department of Research and Evaluation](#), a department within AISD's Office of Accountability, regularly creates district-wide and campus-specific reports on new innovations occurring within the district. Information in this report supports Goal 3 of the District's Strategic Plan.

About the 2010 Alumni Survey. The 2010 Alumni Survey was created and administered as a part of the district's federally-funded Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) program to learn more about factors that may influence postsecondary success. A complete version of the Alumni Survey can be found in Appendix A.

The survey was originally emailed to 1,547 graduates who provided an email address and consented to participate in a follow-up survey. Of these students, 315 responded. Ninety-six additional respondents were directed to the Alumni Survey through friend referrals. Alumni survey respondents also took the 2010 HSES survey. District and campus results of this survey can be found [online](#).

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Figure 1. Relational Map of Surveys



Introduction (continued)

Limitations. A lower percentage of students who responded to the Alumni Survey than of students in the Class of 2010 and of HSES respondents were identified as being Black, Hispanic, or economically disadvantaged. Conversely, a higher percentage of the Alumni Survey respondents were identified as being White or Asian (Figure 2). A bias toward college enrollees also existed; postsecondary enrollment for the Alumni Survey respondents was 90.4% (Table 1), while the district’s overall postsecondary enrollment rate was 62% for the Class of 2010 (Gossman, 2011). Thus, survey results are not considered representative of the Class of 2010 and should be interpreted with caution. However, the results are presented, along with current research findings, to provide information that might support further inquiry.

Figure 2. Lower percentages of Alumni Survey respondents were of traditionally underserved ethnic groups or were economically disadvantaged compared with all 2010 AISD graduates.

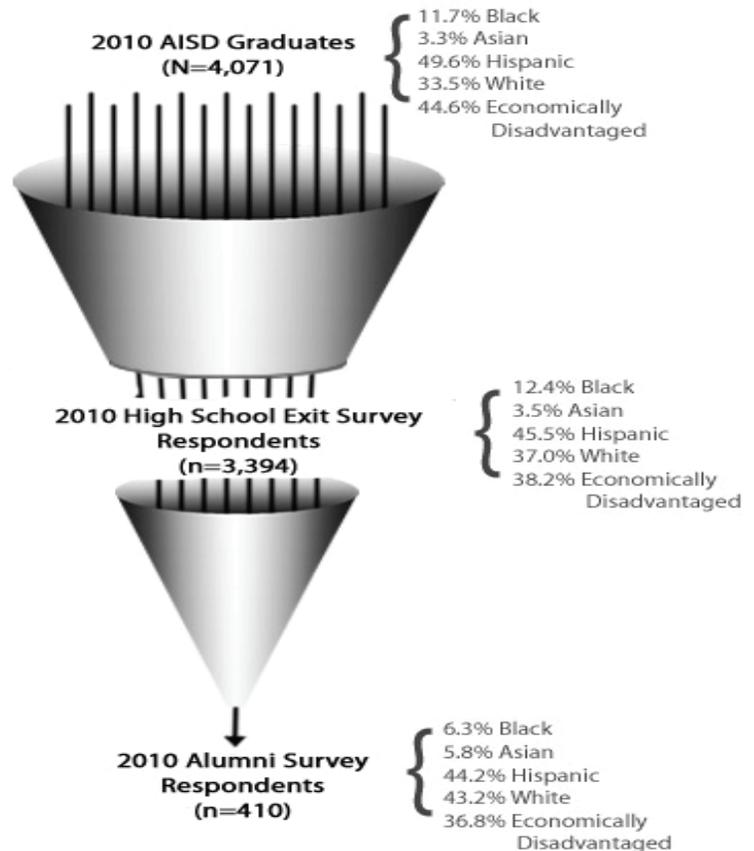


Table 1. A majority of Alumni Survey respondents indicated that they were only attending college (n=396)

Postsecondary Status	Overall Percentage of Respondents	Refined Postsecondary Status	Overall Percentage of Respondents
Attending college	57.1%	College attendees (Includes all “attending college” options)	90.4%
Looking for work	1.8%	Employed alumni (Includes all “military” and “working” options)	28.0%
Looking for work and attending college	11.9%	Unemployed alumni (Includes all “looking for work” options)	13.6%
Military (full-time or reserves)	1.5%		
Military and attending college	-		
Working (full-time or part-time)	5.1%		
Working and attending college	20.7%		
None of the above	1.3%		

Note: Data was suppressed when cell total <5.

General Preparedness

General Life Skills Preparation. The Alumni Survey asked students how their high school classes contributed to their general preparedness on skills important to college and career success. A majority of students felt their high school classes left them well prepared or prepared for all five skills (Figure 3). However, the two skills with the highest proportion of poorly prepared or not prepared alumni were personal finance and stress management abilities.

Research has shown that personal financial management has an important impact on student’s postsecondary success (Shim, Xiao, Barber, & Lyons, 2009). Although evaluation results for financial literacy programs in high schools have been mixed, researchers have begun to establish best practices for more effective personal finance instruction. These include a consistent reliance on real-life examples that are relevant to young

adults (Varcoe, Martin, Devitto, & Go, 2005), as well as an instructional delivery method that is interactive rather than lecture based (Mandell, 2006).

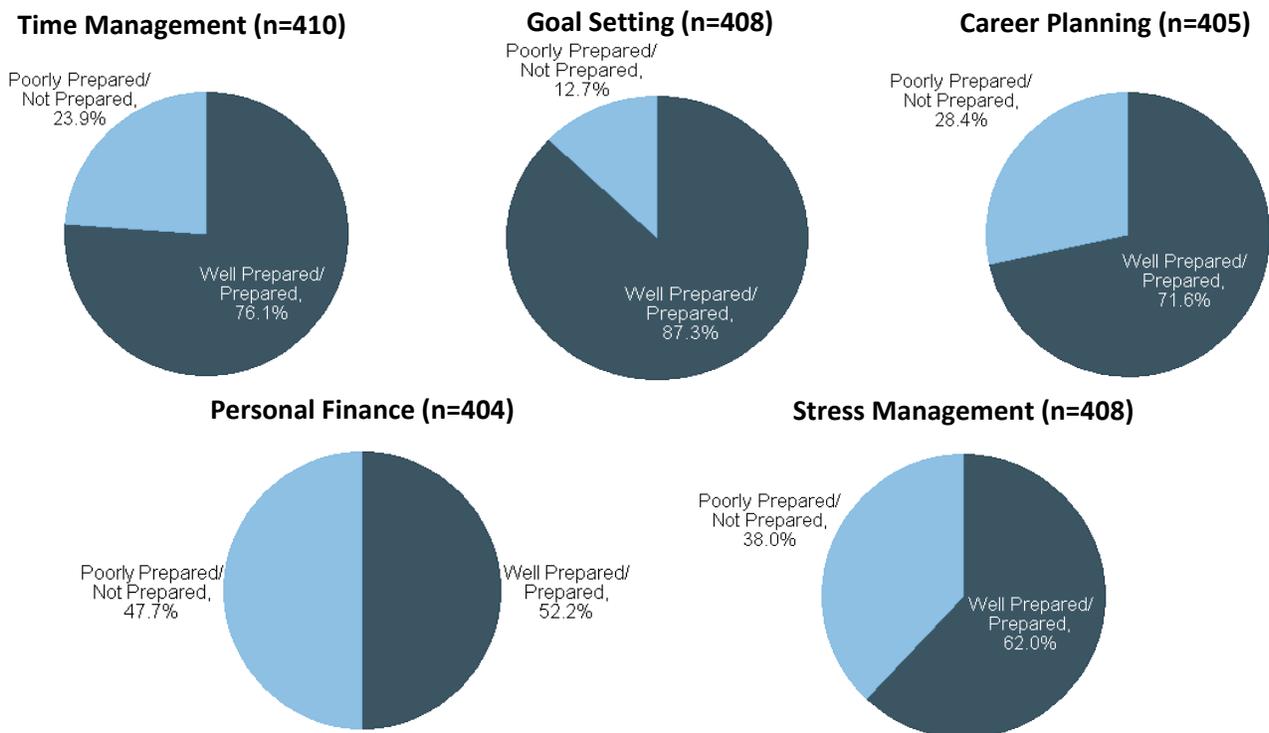
Stress management also has been demonstrated to have an impact on postsecondary success, particularly for those attending college. In fact, Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, and Majeski (2003) found that students’ ability to

manage stress was a better predictor of college grade point average (GPA) than was high school GPA. Interestingly, financial difficulties are a commonly cited postsecondary

stressor (Joo, Durband, & Grable, 2003). As a result, improving the quality of financial management instruction could give alumni more tools in dealing with potentially stressful events in their lives after graduation.

“...[I]mproving the quality of financial management instruction could give alumni more tools in dealing with potentially stressful events in their lives after graduation.”

Figure 3. Overall, Alumni Survey respondents felt their high school classes left them least prepared in “Personal Finance” and “Stress Management”.



General Preparedness (continued)

Skill Area Preparation. Respondents were asked to evaluate how well their high school experience prepared them in several different skill areas. At least 65% of all respondents reported that their high school preparation was good or excellent in every skill area, with some areas (e.g., listening, reading, and writing) exceeding 80% (Table 1). Math skills and organizational skills received the lowest levels of good or excellent evaluations at 69.2% and 74.6%, respectively. This low evaluation of math preparedness was consistent across multiple survey items.

Students' math preparation is important in their postsecondary success. Research has shown that having exposure to higher-level math content significantly affects both college and labor market outcomes. Koedel and Tyhurst (2011) found employers looking to fill sales positions were more likely to respond to resumes that indicated strong math skills. Rose and Betts (2001) found annual wages for students who had completed high level math courses in high school were about 65% higher than the annual wages for those who only completed basic courses, even after for controlling for other variables.

According to a national survey of recent high school graduates, students who had at least completed Algebra II reported higher levels of college- and career-preparedness than did their peers who had not taken Algebra II (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 2005). This perception seems to have been confirmed by empirical research. After controlling for student's demographics, family and school characteristics, GPA in math class, and test scores, Rose and Betts (2001) found that simply taking an Algebra II course instead of a basic Algebra/Geometry class more than doubled students' overall probability of graduating from college.

Table 1. More than two-thirds of Alumni Survey respondents felt their high school did an "Excellent" or "Good" job in preparing them in all skill areas.

Skill Area	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Math skills (n=396)	34.3%	34.9%	22.2%	8.6%
Writing skills (n=395)	45.1%	36.7%	13.7%	4.6%
Reading (n=396)	48.5%	36.9%	12.9%	1.8%
Listening (n=395)	48.4%	38.5%	10.6%	2.5%
Problem solving and reasoning skills (n=396)	40.2%	41.2%	15.7%	3.0%
Organizational skills (n=394)	33.5%	41.1%	19.5%	5.8%
Speaking before a group (n=395)	32.2%	36.7%	21.3%	9.9%
Technology / computer skills (n=395)	37.0%	39.8%	19.8%	3.5%
Observing (n=395)	44.8%	35.7%	15.4%	4.1%
Locating and using information (n=395)	48.9%	33.7%	11.9%	5.6%

Note: Row totals may not add up to 100% as percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth.

Greatest Challenge. Alumni Survey respondents identified their greatest challenge in their transition out of high school. Overall, alumni cited time management and being self-motivated as their greatest postsecondary challenges (Table 2). Both time management and self-motivation affect a broad range of academic, behavioral, and health outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). Yeager and Walton (2011) also found students who felt their intelligence was fixed or somehow inherent demonstrated much lower levels of academic resiliency and motivation than did students who viewed their intelligence as malleable and at least somewhat within their control. They suggested counseling students about these underlying issues to enhance students' abilities to motivate themselves and effectively manage their time and recommended engaging students in activities that target their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about school and their educational ability.

General Preparedness (continued)

Table 2. AS respondents cited “Time management” and “Being self-motivated” as their greatest postsecondary challenge (n=330).

Response	Percent
Time management	27.3%
Being self-motivated	20.6%
Work load / work expectations	18.5%
Being away from home	12.4%
Managing my own finances	12.1%
Other (please specify)	9.1%

Preparation Regrets. Survey respondents also were asked what they wished they had done differently in high school. As Table 3 shows, “studied harder or more” was the most frequent selection. Preventing many of these regrets (e.g., “studied harder or more” and “taken school more seriously”) could be achieved through some of the social-psychological interventions mentioned previously because they may stem from a lack of motivation. Also, with nearly 40% of alumni indicating they wished they had participated more in extracurricular activities, it is important that all students feel encouraged to participate in these opportunities.

General Postsecondary Education Preparedness. Most college enrollees indicated that high school instruction left them prepared or well prepared for postsecondary education. (Figure 4). However, 18.6% selected either poorly prepared or not prepared, and 60% of these students had taken an AP class during their senior year. As

Table 3. The most frequent regret cited by Alumni Survey respondents was that they wish they had “studied harder or more” as well as “participated (more) in extra-curricular activities (n=390).

Response	Percent
Studied harder or more	45.5%
Participated (more) in extra-curricular activities	37.9%
Taken school more seriously	30.4%
No, I am satisfied with my preparation	27.4%
Taken different courses	25.1%
Done more homework	22.5%
Attended my classes more often	12.8%
Other	8.4%

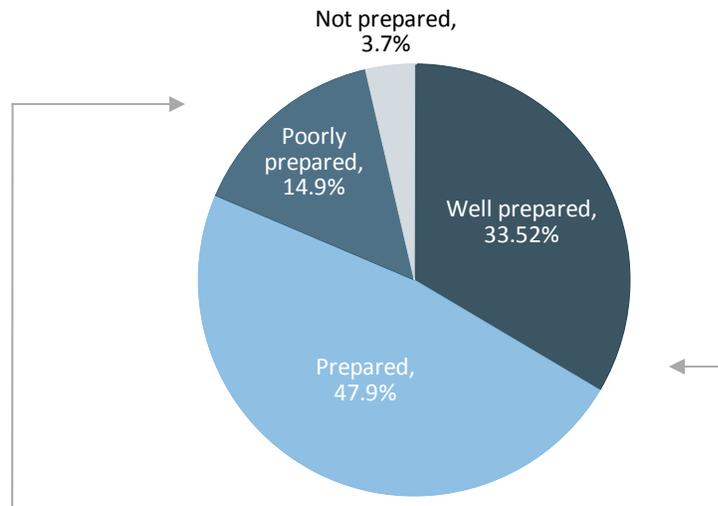
Note: Since respondents could select more than one option, percentages will not add up to 100%.

one might expect, students’ efforts in high school appeared to affect their perceptions of postsecondary preparedness. A higher percentage of well prepared and prepared students, than of students reporting lower levels of preparedness enrolled in advance placement (AP) classes, completed homework and studied in their senior year. This

might indicate a variation in the students’ engagement or quality of AP instruction across AISD campuses or classrooms, although additional analysis would be necessary to determine the influence.

Postsecondary Status—College Attendees

Figure 4. Most Alumni Survey respondents who were enrolled in college reported their high school instruction left them “Prepared” or “Well prepared” for postsecondary education (n=355).



Of the students who indicated that they were either **“Not prepared”** or **“Poorly prepared”** on the Alumni Survey:

- **65.2%** were attending 4-year colleges and **30.3%** are attending 2-year colleges;
- **32.3%** were considered economically disadvantaged during their senior year.
- **58.5%** said they were enrolled in AP classes on HSES;
- **63.1%** reported spending only 1-5 hrs. per week studying or doing homework on HSES;
- **7.7%** reported spending more than 11 hrs. per week studying or doing homework on HSES;
- **18.5%** reported on HSES that they were “not well” prepared to meet their college and career goals.

Of the students who indicated that they were either **“Prepared”** or **“Well prepared”** on the Alumni Survey:

- **71.3%** were attending 4-year colleges and **24.2%** are attending 2-year colleges;
- **36.3%** were considered economically disadvantaged during their senior year.
- **70.9%** said they were enrolled in AP classes on HSES;
- **40.0%** reported spending only 1-5 hrs. per week studying or doing homework on HSES;
- **25.4%** reported spending more than 11 hrs. per week studying or doing homework on HSES;
- **6.6%** reported on HSES that they were “not well” prepared to meet their college and career goals.

Content Area Preparedness. Alumni Survey respondents pursuing postsecondary education were asked to assess their level of preparedness by specific content areas (Table 4). Overall, they reported feeling the least prepared in math, with 20% describing themselves as being poorly or not prepared for college-level math

courses. Students also reported low levels of preparedness in science, with 17% reporting they were poorly or not prepared. Nearly one in five respondents reported not taking a science course during their first year of college. These results were consistent with reports of instructional quality and student preparedness on the 2010 HSES.

Postsecondary Status—College Attendees (continued)

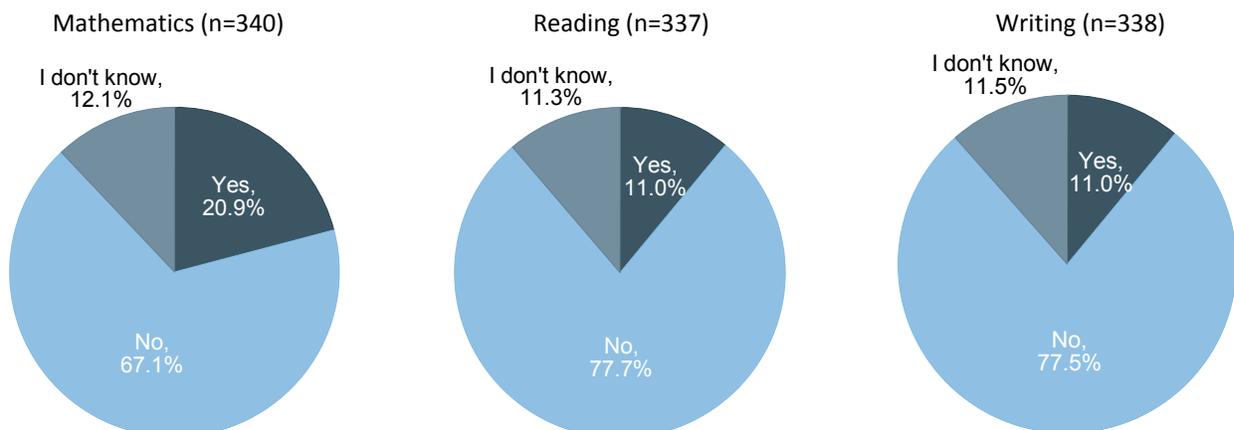
Table 4. College enrollees reported that they were the least prepared in mathematics and science.

Subject Area	Well Prepared	Pre-prepared	Poorly Prepared	Not Prepared	I have not taken a college course in this area.
English/Language Arts (n=308)	44.8%	35.4%	6.8%	1.6%	11.4%
Mathematics (n=308)	31.5%	37.7%	15.0%	5.5%	10.4%
Writing (n=308)	39.6%	40.3%	11.4%	2.0%	6.8%
Science (n=308)	24.0%	39.3%	14.6%	2.6%	19.5%
Social Studies (n=307)	37.1%	39.7%	4.9%	2.0%	16.3%

Note: Row totals may not add up to 100% as percentages were rounded to the nearest tenth.

Developmental Education Enrollment. Alumni who identified as college attendees were asked about their enrollment in developmental education classes. As shown in Figure 5, the highest percentage of respondents taking developmental courses was in math, nearly double the percentages in reading and writing. Additional analysis showed an overlap (87%) between alumni taking reading and writing developmental education classes. Furthermore, 45.1% of the alumni enrolled in reading developmental education, and 42.2% of the alumni enrolled in writing developmental education also were enrolled in math developmental education. Of respondents enrolled in any developmental education classes, 35.9% were enrolled in developmental courses in all three subjects.

Figure 5. Did you take a developmental class in one of the following subjects?



Additional Information about alumni survey respondents enrolled in a postsecondary institution.

Class Load:

- **88.5%** are attending full-time and **11.5%** are attending part-time

Type of Institution:

- **70.3%** are attending a 4-year college or university
- **25.2%** are attending a junior, community, or 2-year college
- **4.5%** are attending a trade, technical or vocational school

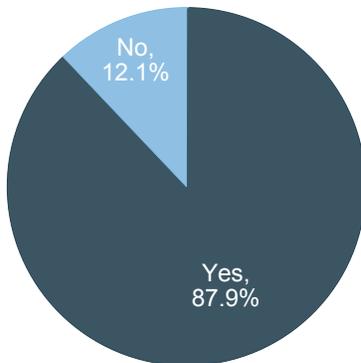
Payment Methods:

- **69.6%** have received scholarships or grants
- **67.3%** are relying on parents or relatives to help with the cost of college
- **49.4%** have taken out a student loan with the federal or state government
- **36.3%** are using some of their own money
- **24.6%** are using wages from a part-time job to pay some of their college costs
- **13.2%** have taken out a bank loan

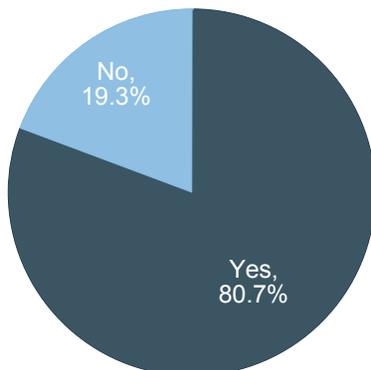
Postsecondary Status—College Attendees (continued)

Figure 6. Most Alumni Survey college attendees found Advance Placement or alternative college prep curriculum useful to their postsecondary preparation.

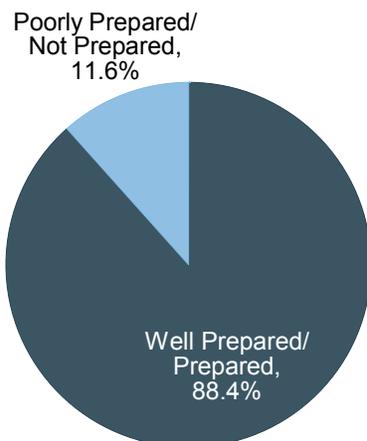
Did AP/IB help prepare you for college or school?
(n=273)



Did dual enrollment or tech prep help prepare you for college or school?(n=192)



How well did CTE help you prepare for college or school?(n=69)



Utility of Advanced Placement or Dual Credit Courses.

Alumni Survey respondents were asked to evaluate whether AP, International Baccalaureate, dual credit, tech prep, and/or Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses were helpful in preparing them for their postsecondary education. As Figure 6 shows, a large majority of alumni who had previously taken these courses in high school responded that their past experience was useful preparation for college or school.

Alumni Survey respondents also were asked whether their postsecondary institution accepted college credits earned during high school. A total of 72.5% of dual enrollment/tech prep-enrolled survey respondents said their credits were accepted. Fifty-eight percent of AP enrollees said their credits were accepted by their postsecondary institution.

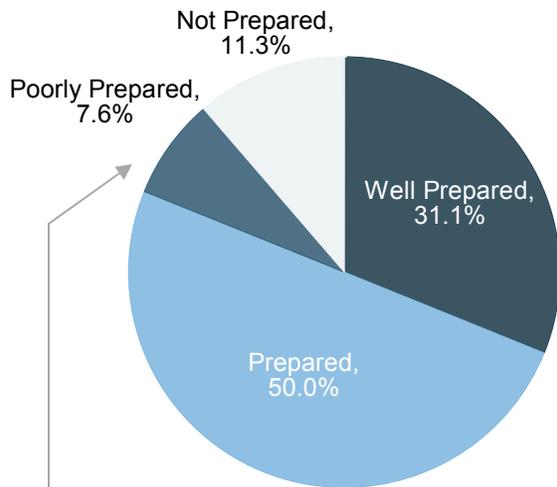
AP credit acceptance policies for freshman-level courses vary across postsecondary institutions. Because data were not collected regarding institutions' AP score requirements, it was impossible to determine how many alumni were not awarded credit for this reason. As a result, further study is required to determine the accuracy of the reported acceptance rates for all types of credit, as well as the obstacles to credit acceptance.

General Workforce Preparedness. Most survey respondents indicated that high school instruction left them prepared or well prepared for the workforce. Participation in advanced CTE courses also appeared to influence students' perceptions of workforce preparedness.

Twenty-one percent of the Class of 2010 took an upper level course in a CTE sequence of two or more courses for three or more credits, or followed a course sequence that included a tech prep course (e.g., with articulated credit at the postsecondary level) during their senior year. Five percent of the 2010 graduates earned industry certifications or licenses during the 2009–2010 school year (Pazera, 2011). Thus, encouraging student participation in CTE and job-related training programs might better prepare graduates for both college and the workforce.

Postsecondary Status—Employed Alumni

Figure 7. Most alumni who were employed felt high school instruction left them “Prepared” or “Well prepared” for their current job. (n=111)



Additional Information

Of those who were either “not prepared” or “poorly prepared” for their current job:

- **45.0%** were considered economically disadvantaged during their senior year.
- **50.0%** said they were enrolled in AP classes on HSES;
- **15.8%** completed two or more CTE courses; and
- **0.0%** completed a postsecondary-level tech prep course.

Of those who were either “prepared” or “well prepared” for their current job:

- **41.2%** were considered economically disadvantaged during their senior year.
- **53.5%** said they were enrolled in AP classes on HSES;
- **36.5%** completed two or more CTE courses; and
- **16.5%** completed a postsecondary-level tech prep course.

Content Area Preparedness.

Alumni were asked to assess their level of preparedness by specific content areas (e.g., reading, math, writing, science, and social studies). Overall, they reported feeling the least prepared in math and science (Table 5). When alumni’s responses were compared with their reports of instructional quality on the HSES, their reports of preparedness were consistent with their own prior responses. This consistency of results suggests that AISD high school students have an understanding of the skills and knowledge that will be required of them after graduation. Finally, many alumni reported not using writing, science, and social studies in their jobs.

Of all employed alumni:

- **78.3%** were working part-time (less than 40 hours a week)
- **21.7%** were working full-time (40 hours or more a week)
- **5.1%** were working only and not attending college

Top two industries employing AISD alumni:

- **29.1%** were in retail sales
- **28.2%** were in hospitality (e.g., hotels or restaurants)

Recommendations

Improve math and science instruction. As noted throughout this report, alumni gave lower evaluations to their math and science instruction than to their instruction in other core subject areas. This deficiency also was evident in how easily students transitioned to postsecondary-level instruction. The percentage of AISD college-attending alumni reporting enrollment in math developmental education was nearly double the percentage enrolled in reading or writing. Research regarding college persistence (i.e., a student's ability to successfully complete a degree program) shows that students who are required to take developmental courses during their first year are much less likely to obtain a degree. Recent studies show that between 60% and 70% of students placed in remedial math never graduate (Bryk & Treisman, 2010).

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform's Leading Indicators Spotlight report details specific ways educators can increase students' success in higher-level math classes on their campuses (Musen, 2010). Research has found that incorporating strategies such as cooperative learning (i.e., organizing students of various skill levels into small groups) can be particularly effective for math instruction (Slavin, Lake, & Groff, 2009).

Work to provide more social-psychological supports for AISD students. Many alumni cited struggles with stress management and personal finance after high school. Research suggests that these skills are just as important to postsecondary success as content knowledge. Non-cognitive skills such as self-motivation and self-efficacy have been found to be strong of predictors of college GPA and retention (Robbins et al., 2004). Teaching students relaxation techniques (Foret et al., 2012) and providing counseling aimed at improving coping capacities (Hampel, Meier, & Kümmel, 2008) have been shown to help students develop these skills.

Explore contributing factors behind AISD's low AP credit acceptance rate and the high percentages of unprepared alumni who previously completed an AP course. The AP course credit acceptance rate was 58% for 2010 Alumni Survey respondents. Though research has shown that simply complet-

ing an AP course increases the likelihood of 4-year college completion, having successfully earned college credit has been shown to further increase that likelihood (Smith, Garton, Killingsworth, Maxwell, & Ball, 2010). By not earning credit for their AP course, alumni are not realizing the full benefit of this program.

Another concern is the high percentage of alumni who reported completing an AP class in high school, but who felt they were unprepared for college. Because the AP curriculum is designed to meet or exceed college-level standards, AP completers should be well prepared for all postsecondary instruction. AISD dedicates considerable resources to enrolling students in AP courses and administering AP tests. Given these two indicators, AISD should study ways to increase the return on that investment.

Encourage more students to participate in extracurricular activities. Nearly 40% of survey respondents indicated they would have liked to participate in more extracurricular activities while they were attending AISD schools. Considering the many benefits these activities can have on students' academic, psychological, and behavioral outcomes (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006), AISD administrators should explore strategies for making the district's extracurricular offerings more accessible to its students.

Continue using the High School Exit Survey as a tool for program evaluation. A small part of this analysis included comparing Alumni Survey results with the 2010 HSES results. A clear relationship was found between students' evaluations of their high school experience during their senior year and 1 year after graduation. This trend was consistent across subject areas and across general evaluations of the instruction they received in high school. Also, this result was consistent with other national studies of students' evaluations of their college and career preparedness. This suggests that seniors have a fairly accurate understanding of what will be required of them after graduation. As a result, AISD should continue to rely on HSES reports when making decisions regarding its postsecondary readiness plan.

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