

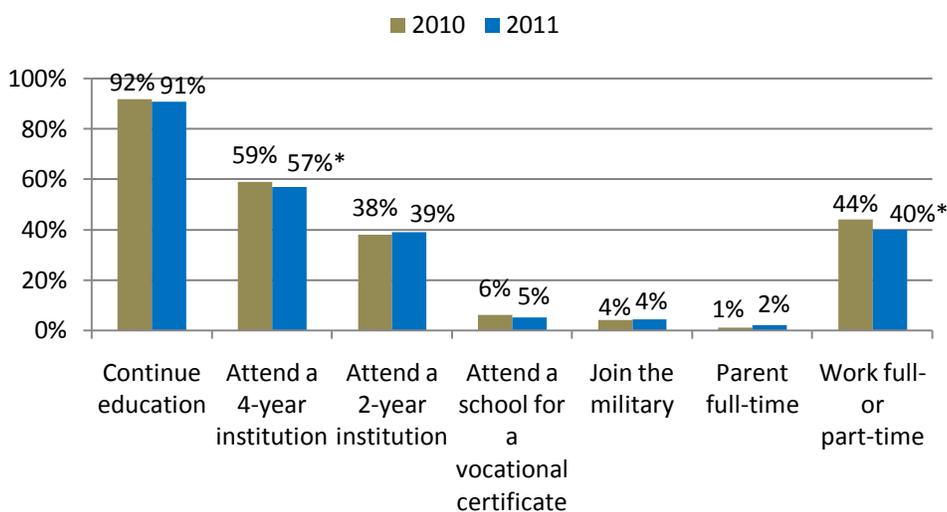
# HIGH SCHOOL EXIT SURVEY: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CLASS OF 2011

## INTRODUCTION

The ninth annual Austin Independent School District (AISD) High School Exit Survey was administered online to seniors in every AISD high school during Spring 2011, and 3,793 seniors responded. Topics covered by the survey included postsecondary intentions and family support; high school experiences and campus climate; instruction and technology; and postsecondary preparation and advising. This research brief covers the highlights of the findings for the district. Part I presents answers to questions regarding postsecondary intentions and preparation; Part II addresses academic preparation and support; and Part III summarizes seniors' feedback about their high school experience and their advice to incoming freshmen.

## PART I. POSTSECONDARY INTENTIONS AND PREPARATION HIGHLIGHTS

**Figure 1. Although the percentage of seniors planning to continue their education after high school remained about the same between 2010 and 2011, the percentage planning to attend a 4-year college was significantly lower in 2011, as was the percentage who planned to work.**



**Two of the top three reasons seniors were not planning to pursue postsecondary education involved financial concerns:**

1. Other (25.4%)
2. Cannot afford to attend school (21.7%)
3. Need income to support myself/others (21.7%)

*Note.* Students were asked to select all that apply.

\* Significant at  $p < .05$

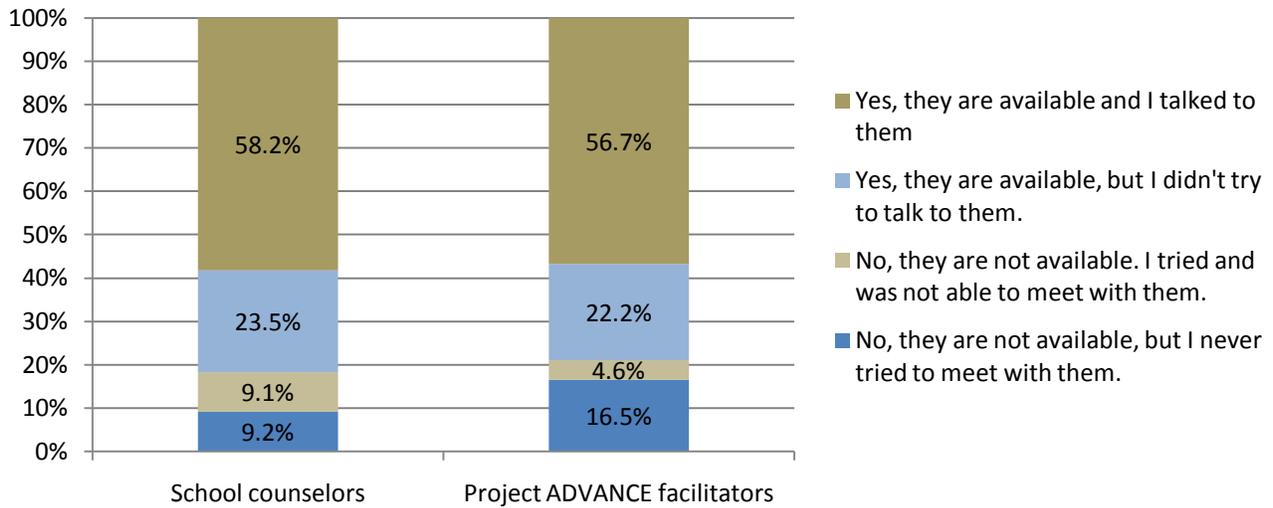
**Table 1. Various campus staff played a part in guiding seniors in their postsecondary plans.**

Helped you select courses needed for work or admission to college	School Counselor (49%)
Encouraged you to continue your education after high school	Teacher (57%)
Discussed career information	School Counselor (34%)*
Encouraged you to apply to multiple schools	School Counselor (38%)*
Helped you fill out applications for postsecondary schools	College & Career Advisor (35%)
Helped you plan how to pay for college expenses	College & Career Advisor (31%)

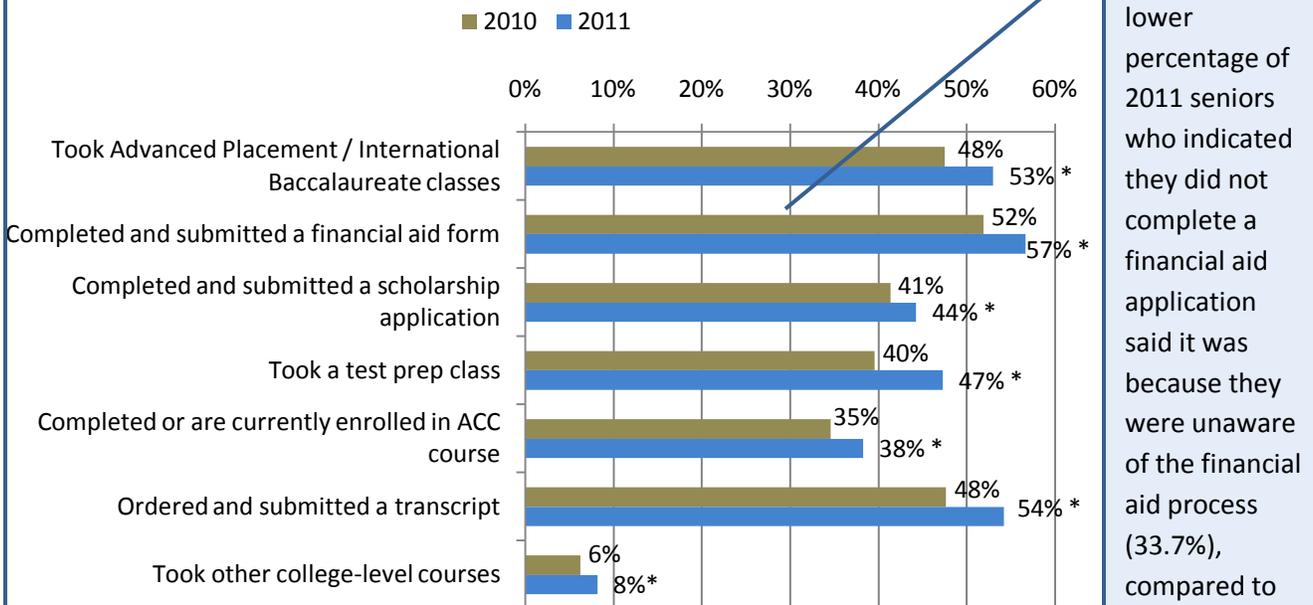
*Note.* Campus staff listed had the highest percentage of responses per item.

\*Teachers had the highest percentage of responses for this item in 2010.

**Figure 2. Although the majority of seniors perceived school counselors and Project ADVANCE staff to be available, 42% of seniors had not met with a counselor and 43% had not met with Project ADVANCE staff.**



**Figure 3. A significantly higher percentage of seniors in 2011 took the following steps to prepare for continuing their education after high school compared with seniors in 2010.**



A significantly lower percentage of 2011 seniors who indicated they did not complete a financial aid application said it was because they were unaware of the financial aid process (33.7%), compared to such seniors in 2010 (39.2%).

\*Differences were significant at  $p < .05$ .

The exception was attending college fairs: a significantly lower percentage of seniors in 2011 (47.1%) than seniors in 2010 (51.1%) attended college fairs. Two additional preparatory steps were included in 2011:

- 52% of seniors met with a school counselor or Project Advance facilitator to discuss college plans and processes
- 45% of seniors met with a college representative/recruiter at their high school.

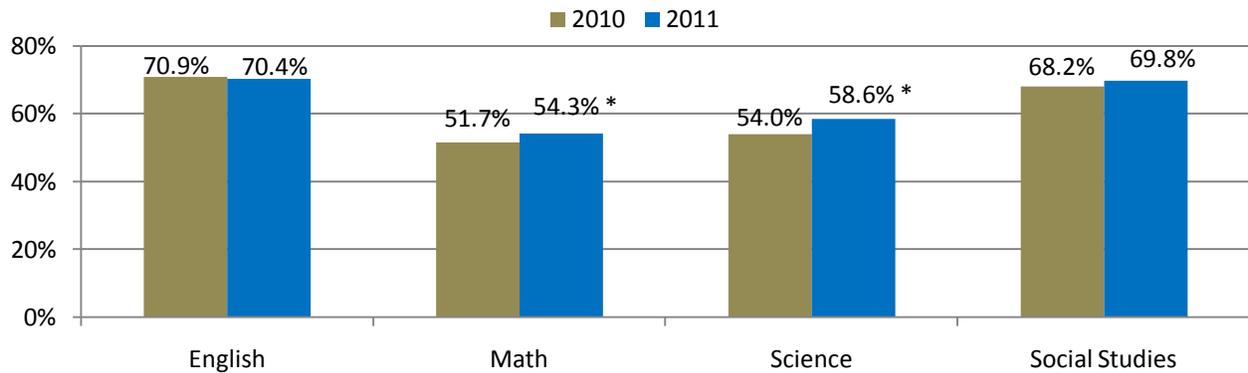
**Table 2. Almost half of seniors indicated they had no idea what the cost of tuition and fees were at the community, state, and private college examples given.**

<i>Do the estimates of full-time (12 hours) tuition and fees at these institutions sound right to you?</i>	Answered correctly	Had "no idea"
<b>Austin Community College:</b> about \$700 a semester	37.4%	48.5%
<b>University of Texas at Austin:</b> about \$4,700 a semester	26.5%	43.6%
<b>Harvard University:</b> about \$17,000 a semester	20.0%	50.9%

*Note.* All estimates given are correct. Response options were *No, they cost a lot less*; *Yes, that's about right*; *No, they cost a lot more*; and *I have no idea*.

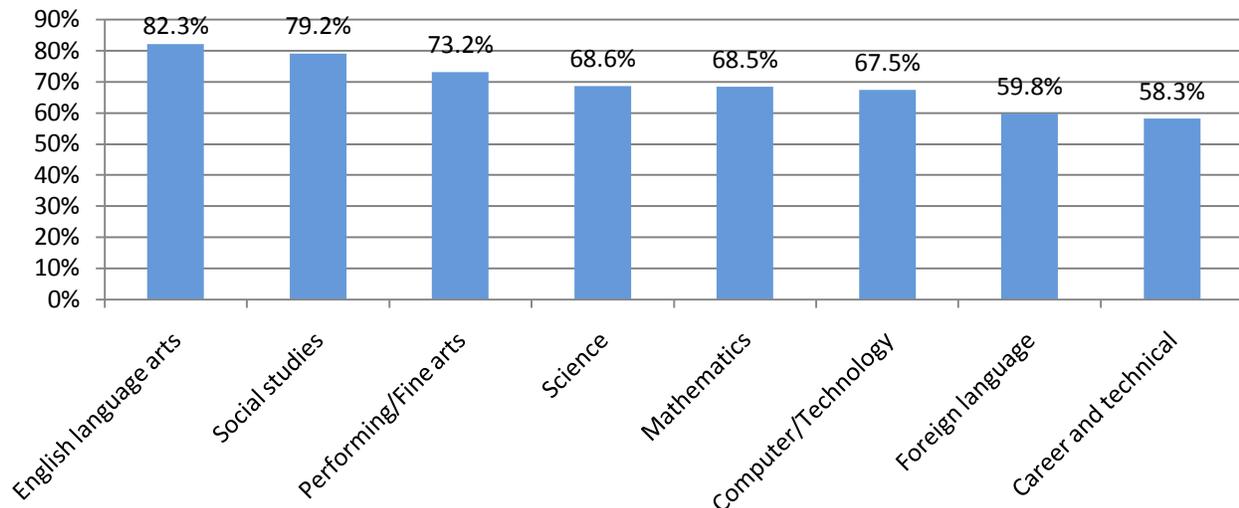
## PART II. ACADEMIC PREPARATION AND SUPPORT

**Figure 4. A higher percentage of 2011 seniors indicated they were prepared for college-level work in math and science compared with 2010 seniors.**

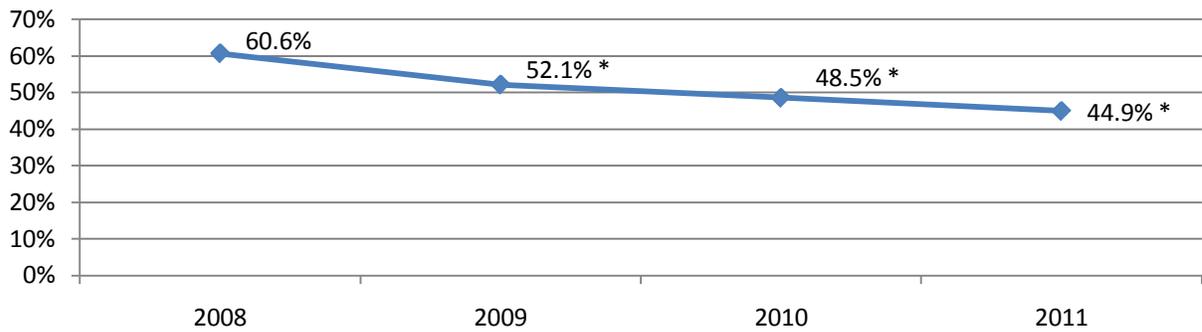


\* Significant at  $p < .05$

**Figure 5. Seniors rated the instructional quality of their English language arts and social studies courses most highly.**



**Figure 6. 2011 marked the third year of a significant decline in parent communication with teachers.**



*Note.* Percentages are of responding seniors who indicated their parents communicated with a teacher at least occasionally. Response options were *Often, Occasionally, Rarely, and Never.*

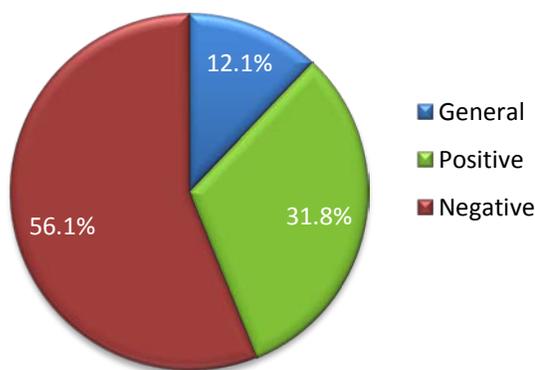
\* Significant at  $p < .01$

### PART III. SENIOR FEEDBACK ON HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE AND ADVICE TO FRESHMEN

Students were asked to contribute their ideas on any issues they wanted the adults in AISD to know about, and they were also asked what advice they would give incoming freshmen. Approximately 35% of responding seniors provided comments for the first question, and 69% provided advice for freshmen.

Contributions to the first question were categorized as general, positive or negative. Comments categorized as general included those that provided suggestions about the survey itself, shared personal stories and hopes for or stress about the future, or asked questions about college, for instance.

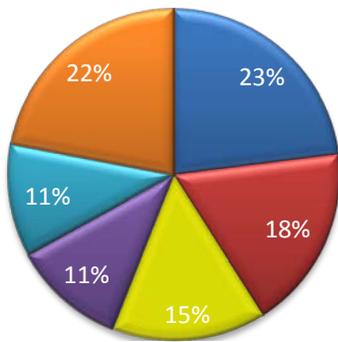
**Figure 7. Most of the comments students provided were categorized as negative.**



“Teachers are vastly underpaid, and should be evaluated not in terms of test scores, but in terms of the effect they have on their students. I am aware that there are both good and bad teachers, but sacking a large quantity of teachers to cut budgets is not the best road to take. The cost of sending one soldier to war could pay for three students to attend a four year university, yet here we are cutting spending on education as our defense budget and deficit skyrocket.”

*Source.* Class of 2011 High School Exit Survey

## Top 6 negative comment categories:



“The school system is totally flawed. The district has no money so you have been cutting teachers’ jobs, yet expect kids to take more classes and harder classes. There aren’t even enough desks in some classes, and we have traveling teachers because they don’t have a room. So increasing class size isn’t really going to do much justice to a school that’s already being outperformed in pretty much everything to begin with.”

Source. Class of 2011 High School Exit Survey

“I would like to point out that although most of the people here at this school do have computer and internet access at home, some do not. This was the case with me up until the last semester of my senior year, I would struggle to turn in assignments on time. I dreaded having to do these assignments because I would have to miss lunch in order to have computer time, this was even worse with me because I was in AP classes...”

Source. Class of 2011 High School Exit Survey

■ **School climate** - Although some of the negative comments on school climate included topics such as the quality of food in the cafeteria, most comments described poor treatment of students by campus staff members, or the quality of campus or district staff.

■ **Postsecondary preparation** - Students expressed a desire for more help with the college enrollment process from applications, scholarships, and financial aid to choosing a major. They expressed the need to have college information shared with them either early their senior year, or their freshman year so they would be familiar with what would be expected of them and their families.

■ **Policy issues** - Seniors addressed a wide variety of policy issues including technology, curriculum requirements, grading and homework, the grade point average (GPA) system, attendance, and discipline. Unlike previous years, several seniors provided comments about budget cuts. They expressed concern about teachers being laid off, classes being cut, potentially larger class sizes, and programs being underfunded.

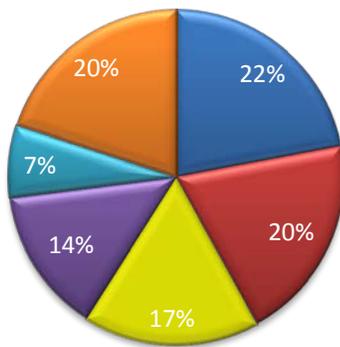
■ **Academic rigor and support** - Most of the comments on academic rigor and support were complaints about the lack of rigor in both regular and advanced placement (AP) courses, and the breadth of difference between these two types of classes. Some students expressed a desire for more academic support or frustration over not having received it.

■ **Advisory \*** - Most of the comments about advisory indicated that it was a waste of time, not taken seriously by students or teachers, and that many students simply did not attend.

■ **Other**

\* Advisory classes were instituted in all high school during the 2008-2009 school year as an element of high school redesign. Advisory had four goals: 1) Build relationships and community; 2) Support academic achievement and skill building; 3) Promote postsecondary planning, access, and completion; 4) Support healthy development toward adulthood (Garland & Looby, 2010)

## Top 6 positive comment categories:



“I was surprised to have a handful of teachers this year that have shown a lot of personal interest in me and I have a lot of respect and appreciation for them. Many of my teachers treat me as the adult I believe I am, and they recognize that I take my future seriously and praise my work ethic. “

Source. Class of 2011 High School Exit Survey

“I want to thank everyone in the College and Career Center... for always being there to help everyone on what they needed. Y'all are a great resource for high school students who want to continue their education after high school.”

Source. Class of 2011 High School Exit Survey

■ **Teacher care** - Students were appreciative to have teachers who cared about them and who showed an interest in their success. Seniors thanked teachers for helping them pass classes, get into college, and struggle through difficult times. Students stated that some teachers made a real difference in their lives.

■ **Postsecondary preparation** - Many of the comments on postsecondary preparation referred to the assistance provided by Project ADVANCE facilitators, school counselors, and the staff of the Immigrant College Access program. Seniors thanked these staff members for helping them understand and follow the steps necessary for enrolling in college. Others seniors expressed confidence in their preparation for college.

■ **School pride** - Seniors said that they loved their school, and they expressed their gratitude for and enjoyment of their high school experience.

■ **Student climate** - Student climate comments spoke of fun classes, great classmates and teachers, making good friends, and generally having a good time in high school.

■ **Teacher quality** - Students praised the quality of their teachers.

■ **Other**

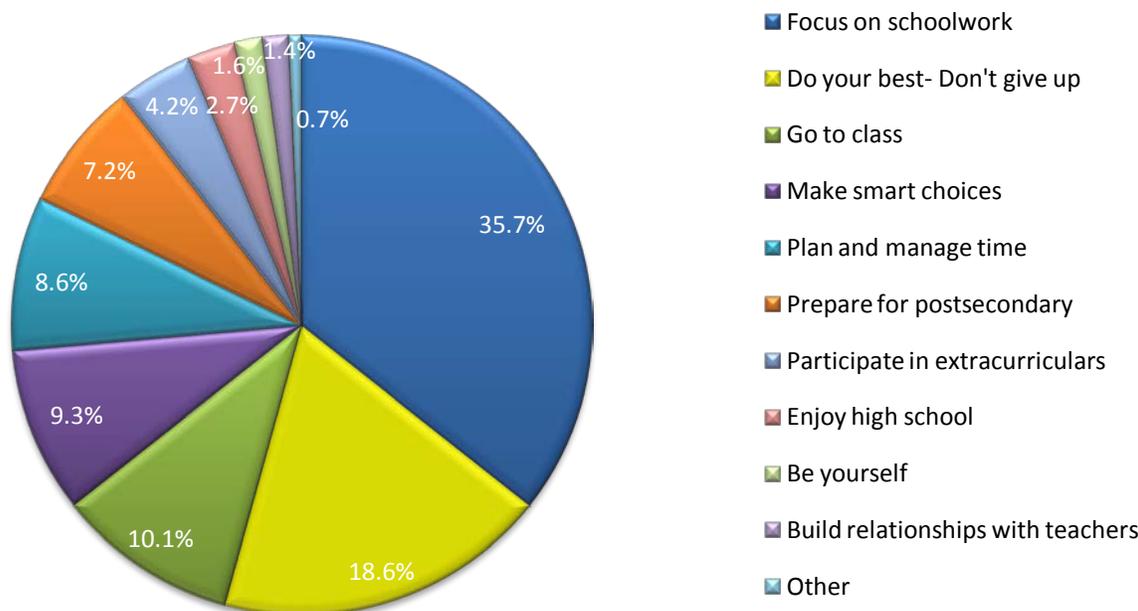
“I'd like to take this time to commend the majority of the teachers I've had at [my high school], especially those I've had during my senior year. The vast majority of them work really hard and ultimately have the students' best interest at heart. I've appreciated everything I've learned from them and their devotion toward doing a great job in the field of education, which is arguably the most crucial field in the United States at this time.”

Source. Class of 2011 High School Exit Survey

“My education is probably the most valuable thing I possess and I thank AISD for being a part of my high school education.”

Source. Class of 2011 High School Exit Survey

**Figure 8. In their advice to incoming freshmen, seniors emphasized the importance of taking academic work seriously, putting forth their best effort, and doing what it takes to not fall behind in their classes.**



**References**

Garland, M., & Looby, K. (2010). High school redesign student advisory evaluation, year 2 implementation, 2008-2009 (Publication Number 08.79). Retrieved from: [http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/docs/ope\\_08-79\\_Advisory\\_Evaluation.pdf](http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/docs/ope_08-79_Advisory_Evaluation.pdf)

**For more information** Access answers to all the questions on the High School Exit Survey at [http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/docs/ope\\_2011\\_HS\\_Exit\\_Survey\\_District\\_Report.pdf](http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/docs/ope_2011_HS_Exit_Survey_District_Report.pdf)

High School Exit Survey answers by campus can be found here: [http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/accountability/evaluation/survey\\_reports.phtml](http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/accountability/evaluation/survey_reports.phtml)

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