

High school students can earn college credit

Written by Fred Easter

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Nobody asked me, but since young folk everywhere are heading back to school, my thoughts turn to that pesky "achievement gap."

I had the opportunity, earlier this year, to do some work for the Center for School Change and, indirectly, the Minnesota State Department of Education. In so doing, I learned a lot about Dual Credit Programs that are available to high school students beginning as early as 9th grade.

There is an alphabet soup of dual credit programs under an umbrella called PSEO (Post Secondary Education Options). CIS (College In the Schools) is one. AP (Advanced Placement) is another. IB (International Baccalaureate) is yet another.

Dual credit means students can earn both high school *and* college credit while in high school. As you might imagine, students who arrive at college, whether the two or four year variety, with credits in hand, spend significantly less time and *money*

there. Work done while in high school is free to the students – no tuition, no cost for books. Generally, at least one of these options is available at most high schools, Charter schools and some alternative schools as well. The work I referred to was aimed at opening up these credit-earning pathways to students who achieved at a level below the school's academic stars. As my father used to tell me, school is 95 percent perspiration and 5 percent inspiration.

No point in my trying to lay out in some organized fashion how each of these programs work. Counselors are much better suited for that. *But* – and this is important – don't let them tell you that your child isn't capable and don't you believe either, that the knucklehead you see around the house isn't college material.

When I was a senior in high school, I met with my "college counselor" for about 20 seconds. Long enough for her to shuffle through some papers and say, "Easter, you are not college material. Get a job." My parents had one high school diploma between them. I can make this a longer story, but, the punch line is, this past May, I traveled to Cambridge, Mass. to celebrate our 50th reunion with my classmates at Harvard University. I'll be the first to admit that I didn't dominate Harvard while I was there, but I earned "the paper" fair and square. Won the college's public speaking prize, too.

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In my experience, which includes a stint as associate director of admissions at Carleton College, the finest human beings on the planet are high school counselors, but, so are the worst. Back in New York City, teachers got deployed as "college counselors" when they could no longer manage a classroom.

Many parents, far too many, think, "We don't have the money to send this kid to college."

It's a mistake to give up before they start. There are scholarships, loans and work available to students. All colleges and universities have scholarship funds in accounts that they cannot use to pay their own bills until they attach a student's name to it. In short, they give you money so you can give it back to them to put in their "other pocket."

These days, President Obama is talking a lot about the crushing loans college graduates leave with. I hope something gets done. But, whether or not it does, consider that research shows that college grads will earn over \$1 million more in their lifetimes than folk who don't graduate from high school. Who wouldn't beg or borrow \$30,000 for a million dollar payout? Over a 42-year working career, that's an additional \$23,000 per year.

Look into dual credit courses. I'll be bugging you about this in subsequent columns. Give a kid a chance – particularly, if it's yours.