

“It takes a village to raise a child,” the old proverb says. And getting a child to college takes just that—everyone.

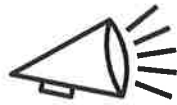
The Village is the families, the educators, the counselors, the youth workers, and the other community members within and beyond our schools—everybody who comprise the potential support system in a student’s life.

The Village is the external force that reflects or rejects what students think about themselves and their prospects for college and life well beyond it.

At its best, the Village reminds students that college is a crucial and collective venture; one that they do not have to navigate alone.

The Village

The Parents, the Counselor & the Principal



“I wish my son could see the opportunity that he has in high school to learn all he can will help him in college, but he doesn’t see that. He just wants to put in his seven hours and be done.”

We facilitated this roundtable with parents and school staff in a small, rural school at the same time we held another one with students in a nearby classroom. We were grateful for the adults' seeming candor, but wondered throughout whether their stories would match up with the ones being shared next door.

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Karen: My son is sixteen. He's a junior. He began the GEAR UP program, I believe it was in seventh grade. He has a younger brother who is in eighth grade. As far as I know, my youngest hasn't had any GEAR UP contact. Most recently, we moved here from out of state. We were looking for a place to set up a homestead and become farmers and live off the land. We happen to have family here, and it seemed like the land prices were just up our alley, so we came here. This was twenty-two years ago.

Victoria: My son is a junior this year, and he's sixteen.

Ben (*married to Victoria*): I was born in Kentucky. I'm going to die in Kentucky. Between the two, I'm going to live. We moved to this county in '76, so I started high school here in this county. I was in sixth grade when we moved down here, so it's about time to be accepted as native. Students here now have a lot more variety. They have a lot more to do. The school has grown a lot—physically and in what they offer. Pretty much when I was here, they'd herd them in and herd them out. They'd talk three hours, and then they'd dismiss them. There seems to be a lot more opportunities now than when I was in school. Of course, I had to take advantage of opportunities that I had at the time, and we're having a bit of trouble trying to get our son to grasp the concept of the op-

he would do better in math, but he didn't, so he has some work to do. The kids were supposed to receive a copy of their scores, of their sheet.

Victoria: Our son brings home nothing. I thought the teachers hadn't sent anything.

Kenna: With the practice, we just communicate through the students. But with the real ACT, we communicate with the parents. A lot of times, of course, on the sheet when they receive it, everything tells where they're weak, where they're lacking, and a lot of times, the kids will go up to their teachers, they actually will, for help. But sometimes, to interpret the scores, parents will come in. I saw a lot of surprises on the ACT. Students that you would think, when I go over their grades, and I sat down one on one with them and I say, "Look, you've got to stay on Wednesday and do my tutoring. You've got to do these things or we're going to have the same conversation at Christmas." And they get a twenty-four on their ACT. And I'm like, "What are you doing all day in class because you just made twenty-four on the ACT!" And then I've got students who just see it as a practice ACT and they just do a lot of bubbling. This particular ACT, I was surprised at how well my students, some of my personal advisees, did compared to their progress reports for the first few weeks of school. I think their ACT would be a better predictor of college success because I think the ACT is a nationally recognized test on a college level, but I can't tell you that in a school setting that if you make all A's in this school that you'll be successful wherever you go.

Sharon: My son doesn't test well. He has a disability, but he does get extended time. And I know there was something he took last year which I was really shocked about because when he looked at the ones he did answer, he did really well. But even with extended time, he over-thinks, and he does everything three times to make sure he gets the correct answer, and he runs out of time.

Kenna: I'm surprised he didn't come home and tell you about this one because he had his extended time, and he took quite a bit of time.

Sharon: He took his time, I know he did.

Karen: My son has taken the ACT three times, I think, and he's off the charts. It's a standardized test, I understand, and there are certain things like the math, which is a cumulative thing that he wouldn't be able to get such a high score on until he's a senior. His grades in school, they've just always been good. It comes easily to him and he enjoys it. So in terms of the standardized test, I think it is a skill to be able to take a standardized test, and if you can master that skill then that is definitely a plus in your book because a lot of the world is going to recognize you in standardized form. It's sad but true.

Felicity: Success is measured in a couple of different things. What I'm talking about is success in the classroom. Being successful in college is more than just being successful in the classroom. You can do really good on the ACT, but if I don't set my alarm on my phone and get to class then I won't retain the information I need to be successful, and that's where your soft skills come in.

Karen: I think college is an awesome opportunity that everyone should take advantage of if possible. My son agrees with me; I know he does. It's just a broadening of your perspective in general, and I don't think it could harm anybody, whether it's through your learning or interaction with other students or faculty. You're just enlarging your perspective on the world, and that's what college is all about to me, and I think my son agrees with me there. The career readiness part of it, I think that's why most people go to college, so they can get a good job and be successful with their lives because they have the financial backing to support their lifestyle and be happy and all that kind of stuff. I think he just has to want to and I think he does.

Victoria: To me, college means a better, more productive life. To my son it means, *How much money am I going to make?* I wish he could see the opportunity that he has in high school to learn all he can will help him in college, but he doesn't see that. He just wants to put in his seven hours and be done.

Ben: There are kids coming out of high school that are well rounded, good, and ready to take on life. There's going to be some that won't be able to cook an egg and everything in between. And this goes for lifestyle from the beginning. You may have some

overprotective parents that guard their kid. You may have parents that are overly religious and they raise up a different kid. You may have parents that just don't care, the kid has to fend for themselves. A kid can come from the lousiest conditions and be a success, and a kid can come from the greatest conditions and be a failure. There's so many variables. Correlation is not causation.

But me personally, I didn't go to college. I went out into the workforce, got a job, got another job, got another job. Then I went back to school and got a technical degree which allowed me to get a better job and a better job and a better job. So I do have the technical degree. It's not much. It's pretty basic but it has opened doors that wouldn't have been open to me before, so college, postsecondary education, technical school is important, but not everyone is going to be an academic.

Not everyone is going to be a white collar worker; not everyone is going to wear a suit. You have to have people who work on cars, and you have to have people who work in factories. A blue collar life is not something to look down upon. It's not something to be shunned or sneered at. I've made a pretty decent life for my family by working in maintenance.

We've lost a lot of our manufacturing base, and we are more product and service-driven, so college is going to be important or some sort of postsecondary training. But when it comes down to it, things are going to break, and there's gonna be people that need to fix 'em. If nobody knows how to fix 'em, then our consumer culture is going to fail because there's no products there. You've gotta have people to put air conditioners in. You gotta have people to build homes.

Victoria: Or a plumber! How hard is it to find a plumber! I told my son, "You don't have to go to college, that's fine! But you're going to have some kind of postsecondary education where you can provide for yourself and your family. I don't care if that means you are a plumber because you make a house call and twenty-five bucks to just go and make a house call!" It's probably more than that now.

Ben: It's more than that now.

Victoria: You know, I told him, “That’s your choice. You’re going to do something, and you will have to have some education once you get out.”

Ben: There’s a man I know, he’s the same age as I am. We would have graduated the same year. I never met him as a child because he dropped out in seventh grade. Dropped out, went to work on the farm. A local farm boy. I went to school, graduated, job, married, another job, went back to school, technical degree, better job, better job, better job. This seventh grade dropout from the sweat of his brow, being an astute business man, owns about six farms, hundreds of heads of cattle, grows lots of tobacco, lots of hay, lots of corn. Tractors, trucks, and I don’t know if he ever went back and got his GED or not, but the point is, a seventh grade dropout, everything is stacked against you, but the man made himself a success. Provided a good living for his family, just by the sweat of his brow and common sense, whereas there are college graduates who don’t have common sense. There are people who can’t survive outside of academia!

It’s like my momma, she dropped out of school in sixth grade. Of course, it was a different time. And she went to work in a restaurant. She went back and she would have got her GED back in the early ’80s I think. Education was important to mom and dad. They said, “All our kids are going to finish high school.” Postsecondary? Well, dad was a truck driver. He’s been a mechanic. He’d done a lot of other things. He was a blue-collar worker, so I think going to college wasn’t as prevalent. People who are white-collar, their kids, they expect them to go to college because it was part of their lives and their upbringing and how they made a success of themselves. Whereas, for a blue-collar worker, it’s a little different. You want to go to college, great, maybe you can learn something that will help you out. But I don’t think it’s as pressing in rural areas as maybe it would be in a high-end urban setting. If our boy says he wants to go to school, it will happen. I said, “How are you going to pay for college?” He said, “Aren’t you going to pay for it?” I said, “The United States Military.”

The Principal: My experience as a student and my experience as an educator is I have seen students go to college and fall flat on their faces because they didn’t have to apply themselves in high school. They knew how to work the system. They had the grades,

but they did not have the foundation, and you've got to have the foundation, or the building is gonna crumble. We call this term "persistence." It's one thing to get kids into postsecondary education out of high school, but what are we doing to keep them there? A lot of them, we're losing. In all honesty, what we see in this school and others, 'cause the students come to us all the time, we see that all they need is to hear it from somebody else. And when they hear it from somebody else, it kinda seals the cracks in that foundation. It teaches them how to seal the cracks in the foundation because they're scared. They don't know how to manage it. They look at it as obstacles. And then with a little bit of guidance and reinforcement, they create the solution. There was the problem, and they create the solution.

COLLEGE TRIPWIRES

READY OR NOT

Stories from the Students Behind the Statistics



STUDENT VOICE TEAM

PRICHARD COMMITTEE FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

With a Foreword from

Dr. Vicki Phillips

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