

## **GIVE YOUR KIDS SOME CREDIT – by Dr. Sue Skidmore**

Yes, it is December. Yes, I know you probably won't read this due to the bustling in your life this time of year. However, this is important. Your child(ren) will, if they haven't already, matriculate to high school, and I find this evidence stunning! Pay attention, and read.

"New research show students who get a taste of college while still in high school are much more likely to continue their education and complete a degree." Conducted by Jobs for the Future, this non-profit, Boston-based organization followed over 32,000 Texas high school graduates from 2004 through 2010. Fifty percent of them had been in dual-enrollment programs, i.e. taking college credit classes for both high school and college credit. Fifty percent had not taken such classes. Both groups were similar in social and academic backgrounds.

The researchers found that dual-enrollment students were:

1. "2.2 times more likely to enroll in a Texas two- or four-year college;
2. 2.0 times more likely to return for a second year of college; and
3. 1.7 times more likely to complete a college degree."

Regardless of ethnicity or income, these statistics prevailed. Further over half of dual-enrollment students received a college degree; only 37% of the non, dual-enrollment students graduated from college. These startling findings should serve as guidance to high schoolers and their parents/guardians as they plan school course work.

Yes, I know every parent wants to say, "My kid's in AP (Advanced Placement) this or that." AP is great for some students, but for others it is simply overwhelming. Several years ago, I attended the fall parent conferences. The AP, English teachers addressed us, "I don't have time to teach and help each with writing. I'm here to teach the AP curriculum." As a former English teacher, I was aghast. This teacher must be an anomaly because I had experienced many extraordinary AP teachers. However, given my English-teacher perspective, I knew this was the wrong fit for my child.

At the end of the first semester, I withdrew her from the high school class and enrolled her at the community college in English 101. Yes, I had to pay for it. However, she sat in a classroom with 24 other students of a wide variety of age. She listened to their stories about loss of job, dead-end job, divorce, and sacrifice, and she came away with a much greater understanding of the world. Plus, she came away with both high school and transferrable college credit.

Paradise Valley Schools, in recent years, have increased the number of dual-enrollment courses, which can be taken on the local high school campus. Yes, one still has to pay the college for the credit, but transportation is no longer an issue. More importantly, the community college mandates class size. How? "It has the luxury of increasing the price of the ticket to the dance,"—tuition. Public K-12's don't have the same. Given our current economic times, it is conceivable for a high school English teacher to have 40 students in each class. Next door may be an English 101 class with 25 students.

So as you plan your high schooler's schedule, I would urge you to consider: Colleges and universities mandate general, required courses. Depending on the size of the institution, English 101 may have as many as 200 or so students, and its tuition cost may double that of the community college class.

In spite of all you do, your children will stop believing in the tooth fairy. You will drive them to endless soccer games, to orthodontic dentists, and to the mall. They will take your car on their movie dates; they will cry when their first loves break their hearts. However, you will have been vigilant. When you drop them at the college dormitory, you're dropping off children with a pocketful of college credits: AP or dual-enrollment. It doesn't really matter—credit is credit.

Happy Holidays!