

SUMMARY REPORT from the 2022 Student Survey of the Wabash County Early Award Scholarship Program: Program Awareness and College Planning



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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Methods	4
Sample	4
Measures	4
Descriptive Variables	4
Subgroups of Interest	4
EASP Awareness and Engagement	4
EASP Account Status	4
College Planning	4
Procedure	5
Results	5
Descriptives – Full Sample	5
Program Awareness Sources	11
Conclusion	14
CHAPTER TWO: COLLEGE PLANNING	16
Methods	16
Results	16
Descriptives	16
Conclusion	19
References	21

Introduction

This report summarizes a selection of data from the second administration of the Wabash Early Award Scholarship Program (EASP) student survey. The survey for the second round included two new blocks of questions designed to assess: (a) student awareness of the Early Award Scholarship Program and (b) student college planning activities. A summary of findings from these two new blocks is presented here.

The aim of this report is to aid in understanding current EASP program operations and student behaviors, and to identify opportunities for future development. Here we present basic frequency data (counts and percentages) for EASP leadership to review, but do not speculate on causal mechanisms, test hypotheses, or seek to generalize beyond this sample. Select data from matched parent surveys are utilized to provide background demographic information and to further illuminate student responses by subgroups of interest.

After describing the survey methodology, findings are presented in two chapters, each with its own set of key takeaways and conclusions. Chapter 1, program awareness, utilizes data from all surveyed grades. Findings are presented for the sample overall and broken down by parent educational expectations and parent communication. Chapter 2, college planning, is limited to responses from only 10th and 11th grade students. Demographic and college planning findings are presented for the group overall and broken down by household income.

Methods

Sample

The population for this study is 7th – 11th graders attending public school in Wabash County whose parents provided consent for participation. Out of a total of 1,905 parents surveyed, 567 parents completed the survey (567/1905=30% response rate). Of those that responded, 554 gave permission for their student to participate (student response rate 493/554=89%). After merging parent and student surveys, there were 468 matched pairs for a final analytic sample N = 468.

Measures

Descriptive Variables

Family descriptive variables were drawn from the matched parent survey and include parent's highest level of education (less than college, some college or associate degree, bachelor's degree or higher); household income (\$75,001 or more, \$75,000 or less); marital status (married, other); student gender (male, female), and student grade (7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th).

Subgroups of Interest

Findings are broken down by household income (\$75,001 or more, \$75,000 or less), parent educational expectations (less than bachelor's, bachelor's or higher), and parent/other adult in household communication status about 529s or EASP (yes/no).

EASP Awareness and Engagement

All program-specific items were designed in collaboration with the EASP staff. Items regarding awareness of EASP were asked of all students in each surveyed grade. These included items about discussing the program with household adults or other methods of awareness such as billboards or mailings.

EASP award-specific engagement items were asked only of those who self-reported they were enrolled in the program. These items covered more detailed engagement such as how students keep informed about their scholarships and other specific program incentives they have received.

EASP Account Status

All parents and students were asked to report if they had an EASP account or fund. In addition, administrative data from EASP was used to ascertain actual program status.

College Planning

All students in 10th and 11th grade were asked questions about college planning actions with the goal of understanding current level of participation in a variety of activities during high school designed to

promote college-going success. For instance, students were asked whether they have participated in counseling sessions for college planning or whether the student has or is planning to take the SAT/ACT.

In addition to the individual college planning activity items, two continuous variables were created by summing across items to allow easier inspection by select characteristics of students and families. In other words, it is easier to compare on a single score or a few collapsed categories as opposed to each of the numerous response options individually.

Procedure

In early spring 2022, all parents of Wabash County public school students in grades 7-11 were invited to complete a survey as part of an evaluation of the Wabash Early Awards Scholarship Program. Whether or not a parent agreed to participate in the survey for themselves, they were also asked to provide consent for their child to complete a survey later in the semester.

Student survey administration took place at school in a group setting, such as in the auditorium during advisory period, between March and May 2022. Emails were sent to all parent-consented students notifying them of the time and place of the survey, along with a survey link. The emails were delivered the day before survey administration with a copy also sent to parents. At the time of survey administration, students were given a password allowing them to access the survey link. Hard copies were available for students who were having technical difficulties or otherwise requested a hard copy. Upon completion of the survey, each student received \$5 cash. Most student surveys (96%) were completed online.

Results

Descriptives – Full Sample

Select demographic variables from the matched parent survey are used to describe the sample (Table 1). Completed surveys were more likely to be from younger students with nearly one-half (48%, $n = 223$) coming from 7th and 8th grade and the fewest respondents from 11th grade (13%, $n = 61$). Respondents were equally split between male and female. Most parent respondents were married (75%, $n = 339$) with 52% ($n = 231$) living in a household with an annual income over \$75,000. Most parents had at least some college education (79%, $n = 356$), and more than two-thirds (67%, $n = 296$) expect their child to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. Compared to Census Bureau data for Wabash County (U.S. Census, 2020), this sample was made up of more college-educated, married, and higher-income respondents than typical residents of Wabash County.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (N = 468)

	n	%
Grade		
7 th	118	25%
8 th	105	22%
9 th	92	20%
10 th	92	20%
11 th	61	13%
Gender		
Female	251	54%
Male	217	46%
Parent marital status		
Married	339	75%
Other	111	25%
Household income		
\$75,000 or less	211	48%
\$75,001 or more	231	52%
Parent highest education		
Less than college	95	21%
Some college or AA degree	164	36%
bachelor's or higher	192	43%
Parent educational expectations		
Less than bachelor's	168	36%
bachelor's or higher	296	64%

Table 1a. groups items related to parent and student program awareness. For the question asking students whether a parent or other adult in their household talked specifically about a “Promise 529” or a “CollegeChoice 529” account or fund, 40% ($n = 187$) of the respondents replied that an adult had talked specifically about the program, 24% ($n = 111$) responded that an adult had not talked about the program. Two thirds (36%, $n = 169$) responded that they were not sure.

Fewer than one-half of student respondents (39%, $n = 183$) reported having a parent or adult in the household specifically talk with them about the Early Award Scholarship or Promise Scholarship in the last 12 months. Thirty percent ($n = 138$) answered that they have not heard about it while 31% ($n = 146$) replied that they were not sure.

Whereas students were asked separately about 529 or EASP communication from parents, parents were asked about both programs in one question. Nearly one-half (48%, $n = 218$) of parent respondents reporting talking to their child about either Promise/CollegeChoice 529 or EASP in the last 12 months.

Thirty-six percent ($n = 167$) of the respondents answered that a parent or other adult in the household had shown them a statement for either their Promise/CollegeChoice529 account or Early Award Scholarship Program in the past 12 months. Thirty-five percent ($n = 161$) replied to have not seen any statement while 30% ($n = 137$) replied not sure. In contrast, 46% ($n = 209$) of parent respondents reported showing their students a 529 or EASP account statement.

From administrative data we know that 84% of the sample is enrolled in EASP. Sixty percent ($n = 279$) of the student respondents replied that they had an Early Award Scholarship account or fund, while 10% ($n = 48$) said they did not have an account and 30% ($n = 138$) replied that they were not sure. When cross-checked against administrative data, 69% accurately reported their account status, 12 students (3%) who are in EASP indicated they were not, but 109 students (28%) indicated they were not sure if they had an Early Award Scholarship account or fund (also called a Promise Scholarship account or fund) when they actually did. Similarly, when parent self-report account status is compared against administrative data, we see the majority (87%) with accounts are aware of the accounts while about 13% without accounts believe they have an account and another 13% with accounts do not believe they have an account.

Table 1a. Parent and student communication and awareness of enrollment status (N = 468)

	n	%
Student reports parent talked to them about Promise/CollegeChoice 529		
Yes	187	40%
No or not sure	280	60%
Student reports parent talked with them about EASP in past 12 months		
Yes	183	39%
No or not sure	284	61%
Parent reports talked to student about 529 or EASP in past 12 months		
Yes	218	48%
No	237	52%
Student reports parent/adult showed 529 or EASP account statement		
Yes	167	36%
No or not sure	298	64%
Parent reports showing student 529 or EASP account statement		
Yes	209	46%
No	246	54%
EASP status from admin data		
Enrolled	395	84%
Not enrolled	73	16%
Parent report of EASP account status		

	n	%
Yes	342	76%
No	111	25%
Student report of EASP account status		
Yes	279	60%
No or not sure	186	40%

Given the prominence of parent educational expectations in the CSA field and education research broadly, data from Table 1 and Table 1a are also summarized based on level of parent educational expectations (e.g., Rauscher et al., 2017; Chen et al, 2020; Zheng, Starks et al., 2019) (Table 2).

Parents who expect their child to complete a bachelor's degree or higher tend to be parents of a female child, have a bachelor's degree or higher themselves, higher income and married. Student grade was not associated with parent educational expectations.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics by parent education expectations (N = 468)

	Less than bachelor's		Bachelor's or higher		Chi-square
	n	%	n	%	
Grade					
7 th	39	23%	79	27%	ns
8 th	39	23%	65	22%	
9 th	30	18%	62	21%	
10 th	34	20%	56	19%	
11 th	26	16%	34	12%	
Gender					
Female	73	44%	176	60%	11.043, p < .001
Male	95	57%	120	41%	
Parent marital status					
Married	111	69%	227	79%	5.412, p < .05
Other	50	31%	61	21%	
Household income					
\$75,000 or less	108	69%	102	36%	45.299, p < .001
\$75,001 or more	48	31%	183	64%	
Parent highest education					
Less than bachelor's	126	78%	132	46%	43.250, p < .001
bachelor's or higher	36	22%	156	54%	

Among families with higher parent educational expectations students are more likely to report communicating about EASPs or seeing a statement, and the student is more likely to be aware of their

enrollment status. Administrative EASP enrollment status was not significantly different by parent educational expectations.

Table 2a. Program communication and awareness by parent educational expectations (N = 468)

	Less than bachelor's		Bachelor's or higher		Chi-square
	n	%	n	%	
Student reports parent talked to them about Promise/CollegeChoice 529					
Yes	57	34%	130	44%	ns
No or not sure	110	66%	166	56%	
Student reports that parent talked with them about EASP in past 12 months					
Yes	48	29%	134	45%	12.225, p < .001
No	119	71%	162	55%	
Parent reports talked to student about 529 or EASP in past 12 months					
Yes	60	37%	158	54%	12.798, p < .001
No	103	63%	133	46%	
Student reports parent/adult showed 529 or EASP account statement					
Yes	43	26%	124	42%	15.860, p < .001
No or not sure	122	74%	172	58%	
Parent reports showing 529 or EASP account statement					
Yes	65	40%	143	49%	ns
No	98	60%	148	51%	
EASP status from admin data					
Not enrolled	33	20%	40	14%	ns
Enrolled	135	80%	256	87%	
Parent report of EASP account status					
Yes	115	71%	226	78%	ns
No	47	29%	64	22%	
Student report of EASP account status					
Yes	83	50%	195	66%	11.505, p < .001
No	83	50%	100	34%	

Communication between parents and students about CSAs is an emerging area of research and is seen as an increasingly key mechanism to CSA program effectiveness (Zheng, Elliott, & O'Brien, 2022). In Table 3, we see that parents who have communicated with their child in the past 12 months about Promise 529/CollegeChoice 529 or EASP are more likely to be married with higher income, expect their child to go to college (also found in Zheng, Elliott, & O'Brien, 2022) and have higher education. Grade or gender of the student was not statistically significant.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics by parent reported 529/EASP communication status (N = 468)

	Communicated		Did not communicate		Chi-square
	n	%	n	%	
Grade					
7 th	64	29%	54	23%	ns
8 th	52	24%	51	22%	
9 th	41	19%	46	19%	
10 th	38	17%	50	21%	
11 th	23	11%	36	15%	
Gender					
Female	116	53%	127	54%	ns
Male	102	47%	110	46%	
Parent marital status					
Married	172	80%	166	71%	4.942, p < .05
Other	43	20%	68	29%	
Household income					
\$75,000 or less	82	39%	129	56%	12.437, p < .001
\$75,001 or more	128	61%	102	44%	
Parent highest education					
Less than bachelor's	107	50%	152	65%	10.933, p < .001
bachelor's or higher	109	51%	82	35%	
Parent educational expectations					
Less than bachelor's	60	28%	103	44%	12.798, p < .001
bachelor's or higher	158	73%	133	56%	

Furthermore, in Table 3a we see that parents who have communicated about Promise 529/CollegeChoice 529 or EASP are also more likely to have a student who reports receiving parent communication about EASP.

Table 3a. Program communication and awareness by parent communication (N = 468)

	Communicated		Did not communicate		Chi-square
	n	%	n	%	
Student reports parent talked with them about 529 in past 12 months					
Yes	111	51%	74	31%	18.503, p < .001
No or not sure	107	49%	162	69%	
Student reports parent talked with them about EASP in past 12 months					
Yes	106	49%	77	33%	12.052, p < .001
No or not sure	112	51%	159	67%	
Student reports parent/adult showed 529 or EASP account statement					
Yes	65	40%	143	59%	ns
No/not sure	98	60%	148	51%	
Parent reports showing student 529 or EASP account statement					
Yes	163	75%	45	19%	143.755, p < .001
No	54	25%	192	81%	
EASP status from admin data					
Not enrolled	10	5%	61	26%	38.674, p < .001
Enrolled	208	95%	176	74%	
Parent report of EASP account status					
Yes	200	92%	141	60%	60.393, p < .001
No	18	8%	93	40%	
Student report of EASP account status					
Yes	149	68%	125	53%	10.538, p < .001
No or not sure	69	32%	109	47%	

Program Awareness Sources

Table 4 displays the frequencies for the question asking all the sources from which the student has heard about the Early Award Scholarship Program. Students were instructed to select all that apply. Most students heard from their teacher (60%, $n = 281$) and 50% from family members ($n = 232$). A fair number of students replied they heard about it from an event (44%, $n = 204$) or poster at school (39%, $n = 180$), 35% remembered something mailed to their home ($n = 163$), 38% replied that they heard about the program through a flyer sent home from school ($n = 176$). A smaller number of students replied they heard about the program from another student (23%, $n = 108$), 12% heard from a sibling ($n = 58$). The

least endorsed communication mechanism was a billboard on the road (2%, $n = 8$) or an advertisement at the drive-in (2%, $n = 9$); 17% ($n = 80$) of the students replied to have never heard about the program until this survey.

Table 4. Student EASP sources of information, select all that apply (N = 468)

	n	%
My teacher	281	60%
Mom, Dad, or other family member	232	50%
An event at school	204	44%
Poster at school	180	39%
Flyer sent home from school	176	38%
Something mailed to my home	163	25%
Another student	108	23%
I never heard about it until this survey	80	17%
Sibling (brother or sister)	58	12%
Ad at the drive-in	9	2%
Billboard on the road	8	2%

Note. Missing values are not included in the calculation of count.

EASP Students Only. The 279 students who answered yes to having an EASP fund or account were then asked a set of EASP award-specific communication questions summarized in Tables 5-9.

Table 5 displays the frequencies for the questions asking about sources of information and specific EASP program components. Thirty percent ($n = 83$) of students replied they did not remember getting something in the mail about Early Award Scholarships, while 42% ($n = 118$) of students remembered receiving a savings postcard, 28% ($n = 77$) remembered an invitation to be honored at a basketball game halftime and 43% ($n = 121$) remembered receiving a Fund Statement showing how much money is in the fund. It should be noted that these values assume all respondents were eligible for these mailings.

Table 5. Student EASP sources of information received in the mail, select all that apply (EASP students only, n = 279)

<i>Do you remember ever getting something in the mail about EASP?</i>	n	%
No	83	30%
Yes - a savings postcard	118	42%
Yes - an invitation to be honored at a basketball game halftime	77	28%
Yes - a Fund Statement showing how much money is in my Fund	121	43%

Note. *Missing values are not included in the calculation of count.

Table 6 addresses the question asking how the student knows they are earning Early Award Scholarships. The largest number of students replied that they received an object connected to the program (44%, $n = 134$), followed by their teacher tells them an assignment will bring them closer to earning a scholarship (46%, $n = 129$). Another large portion of students replied that their parent shows them a Fund Statement or tells them how much scholarship money is in the fund (45%, $n = 125$). Also, a fair number of students replied that their teacher gives them their Early Award Scholarship Progress Report (39%, $n = 109$) or received something in the mail about a scholarship award they have earned

(30%, $n = 119$). A smaller number of students have replied that they were invited to an event because they earned scholarships (36%, $n = 101$) or learned that they are earning Scholarships through a medium not mentioned in the survey (6%, $n = 17$).

Table 6. Student EASP sources of information about awards, select all that apply (EASP students only, $n = 279$)

<i>How do you know you are earning Early Award Scholarships?</i>	n	%
I receive an object connected to the program (ruler, candy bar, pencil, sports bag, stress ball, popcorn, etc.)	134	48%
My teacher tells me an assignment will bring me closer to earning a scholarship.	129	46%
My parent shows me a Fund Statement or tells me how much scholarship money is in my fund.	125	45%
My teacher gives me my Early Award Scholarship Progress Report.	109	39%
I get something in the mail about a scholarship award I have earned.	101	36%
I was invited to an event because I earned scholarships.	54	19%
Other	17	6%

Note. *Missing values are not included in the calculation of count.

Students were asked to rank their top three choices for who talks to them the most about earning Early Award Scholarships. Table 7 displays how respondents ranked different individuals. Looking at who was ranked first most often, students ranked their parent or guardian as the person they talk with most about Early Award Scholarships (51%, $n = 121$) while their teacher was also a frequent top-ranked response from students (37%, $n = 102$). School principal was a popular second rank (34%) or third-rank choice (47%). The rest of the answers; brother or sister, someone else in family, other students, another adult showed low response rates ranked as first.

Table 7. Student EASP source of information, rank of top three ($n = 279$)

<i>Who talks to you the most about earning Early Award Scholarships?</i>	Rank		
	1	2	3
Source	n	n	n
My parent or guardian	121	71	45
My brother or sister	3	10	17
Someone else in my family	6	15	10
My teacher	102	98	35
My principal	24	43	59
Other students/friends	3	11	55
Another adult in my life such as a coach or a teacher at church	7	10	33

Note. Missing values are not included in the calculation of count.

Table 8 displays the response rate of the question asking whether students have received a special award from the Early Award Scholarship Program and if so, what kind reward the student has received. Students could select multiple responses. Fourteen percent ($n = 38$) of students replied to have not received any special award. The largest number of students received a candy bar (44%, $n = 124$), a prize such as a pencil, ruler, bag, stress ball, lanyard (37%, $n = 102$) or a certificate (35%, $n = 98$). A smaller number of students responded that their picture was on a poster/social media (16%, $n = 45$), received an award but could not remember what it was for (18%, $n = 51$) and was recognized in front of a

basketball crowd (23%, $n = 63$). The smallest number of students did not specify their award and answered as “Other” (4%, $n = 11$). Again, activities in Table 8 may not have been available to all students so the proportion remembering them may be underestimated.

Table 8. Student EASP special award recipients, select all that apply (n = 279)

<i>Have you ever received a special award from the Early Award Scholarship Program?</i>	n	%
No	38	14%
Yes, a certificate	98	35%
Yes, my picture was on a poster/social media	45	16%
Yes, but I don't remember what it was for	51	18%
Yes, I got a candy bar	124	44%
Yes, I got another prize such as a pencil, ruler, bag, stress ball, lanyard, etc.	102	37%
Yes, I was recognized in front of a basketball crowd	63	23%
Other	11	4%

Lastly, table 9 displays the responses for the question asking how often the students think about the Early Award Scholarship Program. Fifty-eight percent ($n = 161$) of the students responded that they think about the program a few times a year. Twenty-nine percent ($n = 76$) responded they think about the program once a month. Twelve percent ($n = 32$) replied to think about it once a week and less than two percent ($n = 5$) report thinking about EASP every day.

Table 9. How often student thinks about EASP (n = 279)

	n	%
Every day	5	2%
Once a week	32	12%
Once a month	79	29%
A few times a year	161	58%

Note. * Missing values are not included in the calculation of count.

Conclusion

Previous research from Early Award Scholarship Program parents and students indicate parent/student communication about EASP is positively associated with development of a student’s college-bound identity (Zheng, Elliott, & O’Brien, 2022). Awareness not just of having an account, but also specific program features, is an integral part of communication. The findings from this survey sample reveal solid levels of student-parent communication, a high degree of EASP awareness among students, and opportunities for growth. Moreover, we see that in addition to families, teachers and school activities play a central role in providing specific program information to students as evidenced by substantial endorsement by students.

Key takeaways are summarized below:

- Student reports of parent 529 or EASP communication (talking or showing statements) hover around 40%. These increase to closer to 45% among high educational expectation families and

closer to 50% among families where a parent reports communicating with the student about 529 or EASP in the past 12 months. Nearly 60% of students in communicator families report that their parent showed them an account statement. These rates are notable and reflect a high degree of focused effort from EASP overall.

- Efforts to encourage parent-student communication about the program would be worthwhile, particularly among lower SES families where we see that parent communicators are more likely to be married, and higher education and income.
- Overall, parent reports of communicating with students about the 529 or EASP (either talking or showing account statement) are just under 50%. Parent reports of sharing an account statement are notably higher (75%) among communicator families and only increase somewhat among higher educational expectation families.
- Overall, sharing account statements was not a highly endorsed activity by either parents (53%) or students (40%) but savings postcards in the mail and Fund Statements are ranked as a memorable source of awards knowledge (45%). This could reflect an opportunity to build on the account statement as a touchstone for communication.
- Overall self-report of enrollment is 76% among parents; 60% among students. These rates increase among families with higher educational expectations and families that report communicating with their student about 529 or EASP.
- Parents, teachers, and school activities are the most common resources of program information for students. Opportunities exist to increase exposure from school principals, coaches, or other non-school figures.
- Community-based advertising such as billboards were not highly endorsed by students and may represent a potential opportunity to jointly engage the community and students.

CHAPTER TWO: COLLEGE PLANNING

Methods

The same matched student-parent survey data from Chapter 1 is used here but limited to students in 10th and 11th grade. Refer to Methods section of Chapter 1 for additional details.

Results

Descriptives

Select demographic variables from the matched parent survey are used to describe the sample of 10th and 11th grade students who received college planning questions (Table 10). Younger students were slightly more likely to complete the survey with over one-half (60%) coming from 10th grade.

Respondents were equally split between male and female. Most parent respondents were married (79%) with one-half living in a household with an annual income over \$75,000. Just under one-half of parents had at least a bachelor's degree (46%) and more than one-half (60%) expect their child to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. The majority of students were enrolled in EASP (75%), according to administrative records.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics (N = 153)

	n	%
Grade		
10th	92	60%
11th	61	40%
Gender		
Female	79	52%
Male	74	48%
Parent marital status		
Married	115	79%
Other	30	21%
Household income		
Less than \$55,000	46	33%
\$55,001 or more	95	67%
Parent highest education		
Less than bachelor's	78	54%
bachelor's or higher	67	46%
Parent educational expectations		

Less than bachelor's	60	40%
bachelor's or higher	90	60%

College Planning

Tables 11 and 13 display results of two sets college planning items asked of all 10th and 11th grade students ($n = 153$). Table 11 includes 8 questions about participating in college/career planning sessions or events since the beginning of the school year. Most students (90%, $n = 135$) have met a counselor at school to discuss about the classes they need to graduate from high school. A fair number of students replied they have talked to their counselor or someone else at school about the classes to get into college (63%, $n = 95$), attended a class or meeting about possible careers (60.2%, $n = 68$), and have visited a job site or talked with someone about their job (59%, $n = 88$). However, there was a low number of students who attended any one-on-one advising sessions about getting ready for college (27%, $n = 40$), attended a class or meeting about getting ready for college (36% $n = 54$), talked with their school counselor or anyone about the PSAT/Plan or ACT Plan (46%, $n = 42$) or attended a class or meeting preparing for the PSAT/Plan or ACT Plan (41%, $n = 61$).

Table 11. College planning, current school year (N = 153)

	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Have you talked with your school counselor or someone else at your school about the classes you need to graduate from high school?	135	90%	15	10%
Have you talked with your school counselor or someone else at your school about the classes you need to get into college?	95	63%	55	37%
Since the beginning of the school year, have you attended a class or meeting about possible careers after you finish school?	88	59%	61	41%
Since the beginning of the school year, have you visited a job site or talked with someone about their job?	85	57%	64	43%
Since the beginning of the school year, have you talked with your school counselor or someone else at your school about the PSAT/Plan or ACT Plan?*	42	46%	49	54%
Since the beginning of the school year, have you attended a class or meeting about preparing for the PSAT/PLAN or ACT Plan?	61	41%	87	59%
Since the beginning of the school year, have you attended a class or meeting about getting ready for college?	54	36%	96	64%
Since the beginning of the school year, have you attended a one-on-one counseling or advising session about getting ready for college?	40	27%	110	73%

Note. Missing values are not included in the calculation of count and percentages. *41% missing

Table 12 displays the frequencies for the single question asking whether the student is planning to take the SAT or ACT. The response options for this question are: "You haven't thought about it", "No, you don't plan to take it", "Yes, you've already taken it", and "Yes, you plan to take it". Out of 148 replies, one-half replied that they plan to take the exam ($n = 74$) and 33% ($n = 49$) replied they have already

taken it. In contrast, 13% replied they have not thought about it ($n = 19$) while only 4% ($n = 6$) students replied that they were not planning to take it.

Table 12. Have taken or are planning to take the SAT or ACT (N = 153)

	n	%
You haven't thought about it	19	13%
No, you don't plan to take it	6	4%
Yes, you've already taken it	49	33%
Yes, you plan to take it	74	50%

Note. Missing values are not included in the calculation of count.

Responses from all but one item in Table 11 and a dichotomized version of the single item in Table 12 were summed to create a single overall score with a minimum possible value of zero and maximum value of 8. On average, students had participated in 5 of the 8 activities (min 0, max 8) with 30% ($n = 44$) completing 3 or fewer; 43% ($n = 63$) completing 4 or 5; and 28% ($n = 41$) completing six or more. The item asking whether a student had talked with school counselor or someone else at your school about the PSAT/Plan (College Board's Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test or ACT's Plan) was not include in the overall score due to a very high degree of missingness ($n = 62$, 41%). The reason for missing data on this one item is unclear. No statistically significant relationships were found when examining the continuous version of this variable or the three-level categorical version (3 or fewer; 4 or 5; 6 or more) in relation to parent educational expectations, household income, parent report of communication about 529 or EASP or student report of parent communication about EASP.

However, looking at the item from Table 12 in isolation, we find that students who report they have taken or are planning to take the ACT/SAT are more likely to have parents with higher educational expectations and higher incomes as well as parents that report having talked to their student about 529 or EASP.

Table 13 displays the frequencies of a series of questions asking students whether they have engaged in specific college preparation activities since starting high school. Most students have researched career possibilities (89%, $n = 133$), 86% of students ($n = 126$) report they have taken the PSAT/NMSQT (the pre-SAT) while 65% ($n = 97$) students have replied to have taken practice ACT/SAT exams. Just over one-third (36%, $n = 54$) of students have taken the SAT/ACT (which aligns with the 33% reporting on a similar question in Table 11). A fair number of students have engaged in direct college related activities as 55% of ($n = 82$) students have attended college fairs, 61% ($n = 91$) have spoken with college representatives, 46% ($n = 68$) have visited in-state college campuses and 69% of ($n = 103$) students have obtained information from college web sites. Only 7% ($n = 11$) of the students have visited out-of-state college campuses. About one-quarter (28%, $n = 42$) of the students have sat in on a college-level course; 27% ($n = 40$) have used college guidebooks.

Table 13. College/Career Preparation Related Activities, (N = 153)

<i>Since you started high school, have you:</i>	No		Yes	
	n	%	n	%
Researched career possibilities	17	11%	133	89%
Taken the PSAT/NMSQT (the pre-SAT)	21	14%	126	86%
Obtained information from college web sites	46	31%	103	69%
Taken practice ACT/SAT exams	53	35%	97	65%
Spoken with college representatives	58	39%	91	61%
Attended College Fairs	67	45%	82	55%
Visited in-state college campuses	81	54%	68	46%
Taken the SAT/ACT	96	64%	54	36%
Sat in on a college-level course	106	72%	42	28%
Used college guidebooks (on-line or print)	109	73%	40	27%
Visited out-of-state college campuses	138	93%	11	7%

Note. *Missing values are not included in the calculation of count.

These items in Table 13 were summed to create a single score with a minimum possible value of 0 and a maximum value of 11. On average students reported completing 6 of the college preparation activities (min 0, max 10) with one-fifth (20%, $n = 29$) completing 0 to 3 activities; 28% ($n = 40$) 4-5 activities; 30% ($n = 44$) 6-7 activities; and 22% ($n = 32$) 8 or more activities. No statistically significant relationships were found between this overall variable and parent educational expectations, household income, or parent report of communication about 529 or EASP or student report of parent communication about EASP.

Overall, the most common college preparation activities appear to be having talked with a school counselor or someone from school about classes needed to graduate (90%) followed by have or planning to take ACT/SAT (83%) or PSAT (86%). However, many students also report activities reflecting interest in college such talking with a college representative (61%) and visiting college websites (69%). Least common is one-on-one counseling or advising session about getting ready for college although even then 27% reported having had engaged in this activity.

Conclusion

Many college-preparation activities are offered as part of the regular school-year activities. For example, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) covers the costs associated with administration of the PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) for 11th graders. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that 86% of student respondents in Wabash report they have taken these preliminary exams.

The IDOE (2023) and the College Board (2020, 2021, 2022) report that the percentage of high school graduates in Indiana taking the SAT has increased from 43% in 2021 to 48% in 2022, and then to 50.5% in 2023. While the current survey data shows that only about 36% have taken the exam already, we

know that another 50% are planning on taking it. Given this, while more research is needed, there is a good chance that the percent taking the SAT/ACT will be higher among participants in the program. Currently, among 10th and 11th grade respondents that are in EASP, 54% express plans to take the SAT/ACT compared to 39% of those that are not enrolled in EASP. Looking at it another way, 81% of those who say they plan to take it are enrolled in EASP compared to 20% planning to take it among non-EASP 10th and 11th graders. However, it is important to note the very small sample size of non-enrolled students in this group (n = 14) and that it is unclear how the timing of this survey administration coincided with the time of the exams, both factors that reduce our precision in determining the relationship between EASP enrollment and SAT/ACT test taking.

It is also notable that 90% of students reported talking to a school counselor about classes needed for graduation and 63% talked about classes needed for going to college. These relatively high percentages of students talking to a counselor are notable in light of the very high student-to-counselor ratio in Indiana, suggesting it may be harder for students to meet with a counselor (Smith, 2023). In the 2021-2022 academic year, Indiana schools noted a student-to-counselor ratio of 694 to 1, a figure markedly higher than the national average of 408 students per counselor, according to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2023). This ratio far exceeds the ASCA's recommended standard of 250 students per counselor. The data reveal a rapid increase in Indiana's student-to-counselor ratio, rising from 486 students per counselor in the 2019-2020 academic year to 665 in 2020-2021, and then to 694 in 2021-2022. This significant rise positions Indiana as the state with the highest student-to-counselor ratio in the nation between 2021 and 2022.

A greater understanding of how these college planning activities are approached in Wabash County schools will be needed for accurate interpretation of the data. For the purposes of EASP programmatic planning, because these activities occur after students graduate from EASP, they offer less opportunity for direct influence through savings incentives. Although current data do not show a relationship between EASP parent-student communication and college-planning activities, there could be opportunities to promote these later college planning activities while couched in early EASP parent-student communication-based rewards.

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