
EDUCATIONAL PLANS OF ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RELATION TO FINANCIAL SITUATION AND ACADEMIC APTITUDE

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This report is concerned with the plans of Illinois high school juniors and seniors to continue their formal education beyond the high school level; with their ability, both scholastic and financial, to make these plans effective; and with the implications which arise out of the findings, both for our public educational system and for society at large.

The data for this study were collected by the High School Testing Bureau at the University of Illinois, which each year directs the Illinois statewide testing program. The data include: first, the information supplied by the juniors and seniors themselves concerning their plans for continuing formal education beyond the high school level; second, the report which the high school principal makes on each student concerning his scholastic promise and his financial ability to continue education after high school graduation; and, third, the scores which each student makes on the American Council on Education psychological examination. This test is primarily a measure of scholastic aptitude and is often used for guidance purposes in appraising the student's likelihood of success at the college level. It might be noted here that students' plans to continue formal education beyond the secondary school include plans for attending business college, vocational and trade schools, the

junior college, or other types of educational institutions as well as the standard four-year college and university.

Almost two thirds of the public and private high schools in Illinois, exclusive of the public schools in Chicago, participate in the Illinois statewide testing program. Most high schools test at the junior level, so that data on well over 30,000 junior students are available each year. The Bureau also receives data each year on approximately 8,000 senior students. It is these juniors and seniors, or representative groups of them, on which the figures in the present report are based.

STUDENTS' PLANS

Of the high school juniors who participated in the statewide testing program during the current year, approximately 2,000 were selected on a stratified sampling basis as representative of the total group. The responses of these students show that approximately 66 percent have plans for continuing education beyond the high school level. Thirty-three percent do not plan to seek further education, while about 1 percent are undecided. A breakdown by sex shows no statistically significant difference in these figures and would indicate that sex is not an important factor in determining whether a student will plan to con-

tinue with his formal schooling. The direction of difference, however, favors a slightly greater proportion of junior girls than of junior boys who plan to continue.

Data from three previous years, two of them since the war and one while the war was at its height, show only slightly lower percentages of junior students who plan to continue education beyond the high school than are shown in the figures of the current year. These figures range from 58 to 62 percent for the boys and from 62 to 65 percent for the girls. In other words, there is little variation in the percentage of juniors each year who plan to continue their formal education, although that variation which does exist points in the direction of an increase which currently includes almost two-thirds of all junior students in Illinois high schools.

The educational plans of high school seniors have not yet been studied for the present year, but data from previous years indicate that what is true for the juniors is generally true for the seniors as well. A slightly greater proportion of senior boys than of junior boys plan to continue with their education, for at this level the figures range from 60 to 65 percent. On the other hand, a slightly smaller proportion of senior girls than of junior girls have further educational plans, so that in the senior group the proportion of boys who plan to continue education after high school graduation is slightly greater than the proportion of girls, though the difference is still not statistically significant. It is safe to generalize that among both boys and girls, at both the junior and senior levels, approximately two thirds of all Illinois high school students plan to carry on school work beyond the secondary level.

SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE

How do these students with plans for further education stand scholastically? Are those who are most able to benefit by continuing education beyond high school the ones who plan to do so? These questions are important ones to ask if we are concerned with an educational system that meets the needs and abilities of every student and one that serves the best interests of society by preparing for responsible professional and leadership positions all those who have the ability to function at such levels in society.

When we consider the report made by the high school principal on each student in the statewide testing program, we find there is a definite positive correlation between the scholastic promise of students and their plans for continuing education. In the current year approximately 83 percent of all junior girls planning further education are reported as possessing scholastic promise, whereas, only 49 percent of the girls not planning further education are so reported. Among the junior boys the percentages are somewhat lower, being 70 percent of those planning to continue education and only 29 percent of those not planning to continue. The figures from former years are similar, in every case a higher percentage of girls than boys being reported as showing scholastic promise and a higher percentage of those with plans for further education than of those without plans being so reported. In every case, too, the percentage of those showing scholastic promise is higher for senior students than for juniors. The picture is always the same, however, in showing a considerably higher proportion of students with scholastic promise among those who plan to continue their education beyond the secondary school level than

among the group of students who do not have such plans.

Another way of determining the student's aptitude for scholastic achievement beyond the high school level is the score he makes on the American Council psychological examination, which is used in the statewide testing program. Current figures show that of those junior students who plan to continue education approximately 68 percent are in the upper half of scores on the A.C.E. psychological test. Only 37 percent of those who do not plan to continue stand in the upper half on the test. Putting it another way, of those students who stand in the upper half on test scores approximately 78 percent plan to continue education as compared with only 49 percent of those who stand in the lower half on test scores. These figures vary somewhat from group to group but remain substantially the same for both boys and girls and for both junior and senior students. Likewise, they are fairly constant over a period of several years, although a slight trend might be noted in the direction of an increased number planning to continue education both among the group in the upper half on test scores and among the group in the lower half.

The significant fact in the figures presented thus far is not that those students who plan to continue education beyond the high school level are predominantly the ones who possess scholastic promise or stand high on test scores. That is not an unexpected discovery. But it is important to note that from 30 to 50 percent of those students who *do not plan* to continue further education possess the ability and promise of doing successful work at the college level. What is the reason that such a large proportion of students have no plans for pursuing further education even though they have the

ability to do so, and even though our educational system purports to meet individual and societal needs by offering the maximum opportunity for development to all individuals?

FINANCIAL ABILITY OF STUDENTS

Perhaps one answer to the question just asked lies in the financial ability of students to continue schooling beyond the high school level. Our principals' reports show that over 45 percent of all students are not able financially to continue with their education after high school graduation. Undoubtedly a large number of these also lack the scholastic ability or promise that would make it desirable for them to go on with advanced education. But the reports indicate that of those students who are rated as possessing scholastic promise, an average of over 35 percent, or one in three, does not have the financial ability to continue his education beyond high school. Of those students who stand in the upper half on the A.C.E. psychological test, approximately one third are reported from families whose financial situation does not encourage them to make plans for further education.

We can look at the figures in another way by comparing the group who have educational plans with the group who do not have such plans. In the latter group there is approximately twice as great a percentage reported as having scholastic promise but lacking in financial ability as there is in the group planning to continue education. Among the students who rank in the upper half on the A.C.E. test, over 60 percent of those who do not plan to continue are financially unable to do so, whereas less than 30 percent of those who do plan to continue education are reported in unfavorable financial circumstances. These

figures would seem to indicate that lack of financial ability is one of the major reasons why many high school students do not plan to continue their education beyond the secondary level, even though they possess the scholastic promise and aptitude for doing successful work at a higher level.

DEMOCRATIC IMPLICATIONS

The figures presented thus far tell a story that carries meaning for our schools and for the community and nation at large. At the local school level the question of individual pupil guidance concerning educational matters involves: how especially to assist and encourage the student to continue with his education when he has the scholastic promise and ability but has made no plans to carry on beyond the high school level; how, too, to help the individual student overcome problems which stand in the way of continuing his education because of financial circumstances that are unfavorable to his continuance. These are problems that are local and specific in nature, but above and beyond them are more important problems which concern our entire educational program and the part that our educational system plays in the society in which we live.

The fundamental purpose of the schools in a democratic society is promotion of the maximum development of every individual to the end that both individual and group welfare are served in the greatest possible extent. If democracy is to triumph over communism and other forms of totalitarian society, it must do more than pay lip service to its ideals. As a nation we cannot afford to squander human resources by failing in our schools to achieve the optimum development of every individual in order that he may con-

tribute his best to our democratic way of life. Yet when we find that over one third of our young people who possess capacities for growth and development beyond the high school level are unable to make plans for continuing their education because of financial reasons, we realize that our educational system has a long way to go to meet individual needs and a long way to go to fulfill its function in society.

The schools alone are not to be blamed, but educators themselves have the major responsibility in thinking through the problem and promoting an adequate solution for it. Our educational system may have to be expanded until the junior college becomes recognized as a fundamental part of the free public school structure. It may be necessary to establish educational benefits for civilian youth, as President Stoddard of the University of Illinois has suggested, in order to provide an advanced educational program for all those who can benefit by it, regardless of their financial circumstances. Certainly the problem is one which concerns our national government as well as the states. It is a problem for all of society to ponder, for it involves the fundamental democratic issue of whether every individual can expect to achieve maximum personal growth and development or whether some, because of the circumstances into which they fall or are born, cannot expect the same opportunities and advantages as others.

The Illinois State Academy of Science is already recognizing the problem to a limited extent through its participation in the science talent search, which is sponsored each year by Westinghouse. The Academy endeavors to secure scholarships in Illinois colleges and universities for top-ranking high school science students who have entered the national

competitive program but have not been selected at that level. This effort is an example of what can be done in selecting students who show outstanding promise and giving them the opportunity and encouragement to go on. It is a limited effort, however, for it is restricted to students interested only in the various fields of science. It does not purport to recognize financial need as one of the factors in the selection of students for scholarships, although in some cases, undoubtedly, selection for a scholarship provides the opportunity without which talented students could not plan to continue their education. Perhaps a program of selection might be worked out which would give greater recognition to financial need but at the same time maintain present high standards in the recognition of science ability. Perhaps, too, the pro-

gram could be adopted by other state and national groups for granting recognition and aid to promising students in fields other than science. In this way, we might at least alleviate the situation by providing greater opportunity for outstanding students regardless of their financial circumstances.

In this paper, however, I do not presume to find an answer to the problem. I only wish to call to your attention that a problem does exist, and that our democratic values and welfare as a nation will suffer until a solution is found. The problem remains one of promoting greater democracy and the social good by finding an answer which will enable all high school students who possess scholastic ability to continue with their education at an advanced level without regard to their financial ability to carry them through such a program.