

# Students' Educational Aspirations Are Related to Their Academic Achievement and Parents' Education Level

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Using data collected from students in the 2024 ACT®-tested graduating class, I examined the relationship between students' educational aspirations and their parents'¹ education level, as well as the relationship between students' aspirations and academic achievement. Among students in the 2024 ACT-tested graduating class, 42% provided information about the education level they expected to attain (educational aspirations), as well as the education level that their parents had attained. The analyses presented here are based on this sample of 580,114 students.

Among the students in the sample, 41% expected to earn more than a 4-year college degree, 47% expected to earn a 4-year college degree, 8% expected to go to college and earn less than a 4-year college degree, and 4% expected to earn a high school diploma. Parent education level was determined from the highest level of education attained by the students' mother (or guardian 1) and father (or guardian 2). Among the students in the sample, 33% had a parent with more than a 4-year college degree, 32% had a parent with a 4-year college degree, 18% had a parent with some college but less than a 4-year college degree, and 16% had a parent with a high school diploma or less.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of students with different expected educational aspirations, by parent education level. For example, the figure shows that for the students whose parents earned a 4-year degree, 2% expected to earn only a high school diploma, 6% expected to go to college and earn less than a 4-year degree, 57% expected to earn a 4-year degree, and 35% expected to earn more than a 4-year degree.

While the data suggest a clear positive relationship between parent education level and student educational aspirations, there are many students with high aspirations, even those whose parents attained lower education levels. Overall, 40% of students had educational aspirations higher than their parents' education level, 45% had educational aspirations the same as their parents' education level, and 15% had educational aspirations lower than their parents' education level.

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¹ Throughout report, the word *parent* refers to a student's parent, guardian, or other primary caregiver.

**Figure 1. Students' Expected Educational Aspirations, by Parent Education Level**

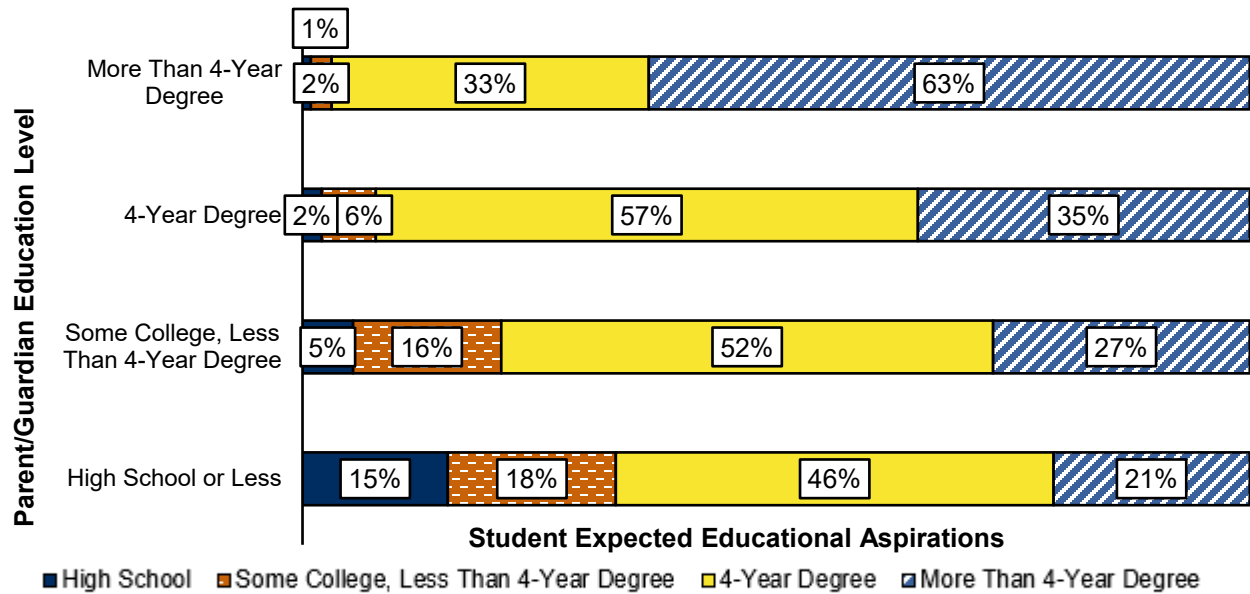
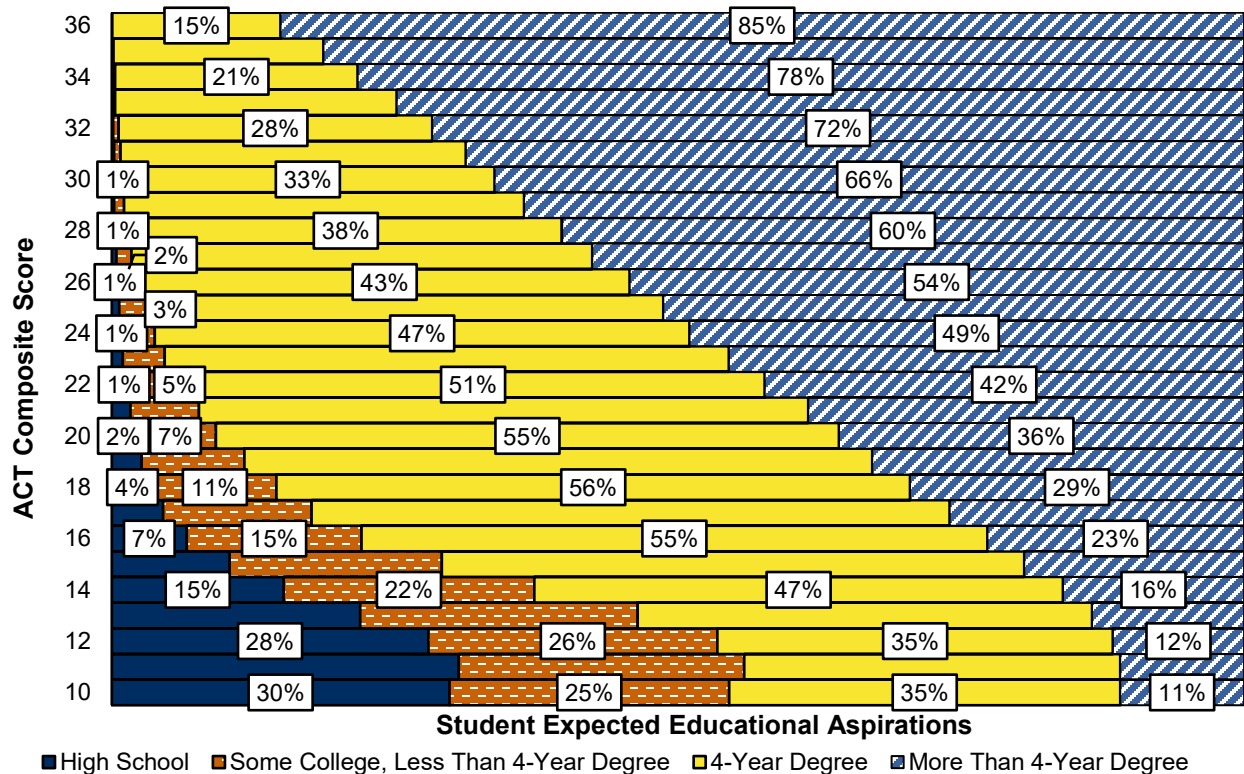


Figure 2 shows that students with higher academic achievement, as measured by ACT Composite score, are more likely to have higher educational aspirations. Students with higher ACT Composite scores are more likely to aspire to earn more than a 4-year college degree and less likely to aspire to earn less than a 4-year degree.

**Figure 2. Students' Expected Educational Aspirations, by ACT Composite Score**



The average ACT Composite score for students in the sample was 21.6, whereas the average ACT Composite score for the entire 2024 ACT-tested graduating class was 19.4. Therefore, this sample is not representative of the entire ACT-tested graduating class. If I had complete data on the expected educational aspirations for all students in the ACT-tested graduating class, I predict that I would see relatively fewer students aspiring to attain higher education levels. However, I would still expect to see a positive association between students' academic achievement and educational aspirations. Clearly, students' educational aspirations are related to their parents' education level, but other factors are also related, including students' academic achievement.

In summary, these are my findings:

- There is a positive relationship between parent education level and student educational aspirations.
- Many students (40%) aspire to attain education levels that exceed their parents' education levels.
- Students with higher ACT scores are more likely to have higher educational aspirations.



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