

# **Rising to the Challenge:** *Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?*



*Key findings from surveys among recent public high school graduates  
Conducted November 2014*

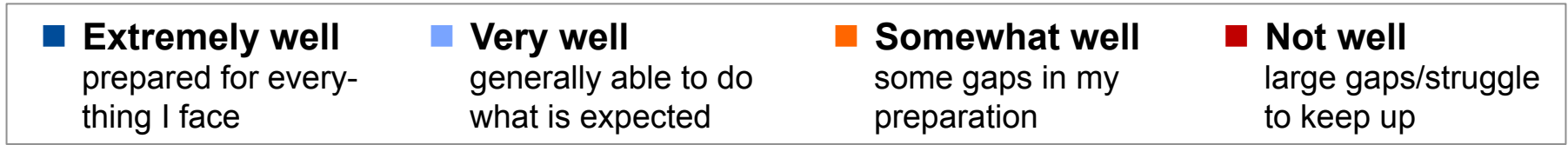
# Methodology

- A national online survey was conducted October 31 to November 17, 2014, among 1,347 recent public high school graduates from the classes of 2011 through 2014, including:
  - 741 students who are currently enrolled in two-year and four-year colleges (320 of whom have taken at least one remedial course)
  - 606 graduates who are not currently enrolled in two-year or four-year colleges, including 215 who attended college but quit before finishing
  - 277 African-American and 375 Hispanic recent public high school graduates

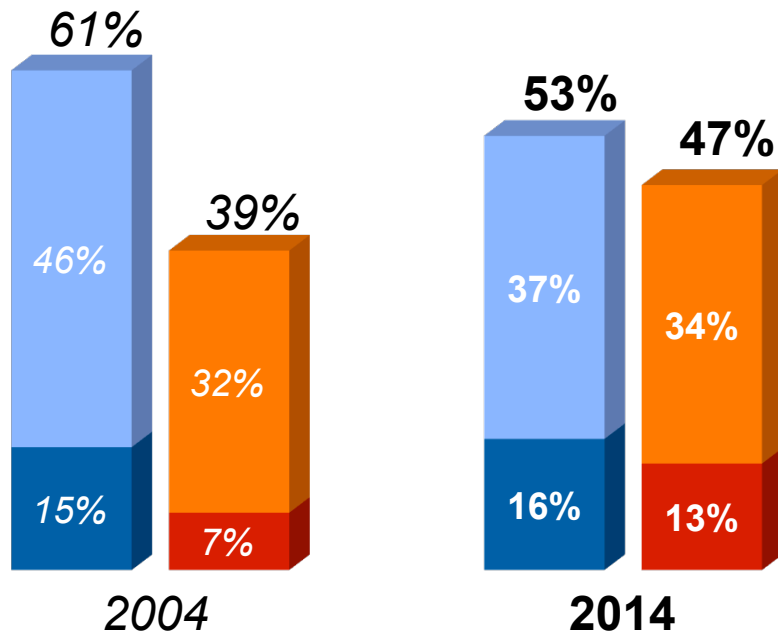
**Too many recent high school graduates report gaps in their preparedness for college and work after high school.**

# About half report gaps in preparation for life after high school

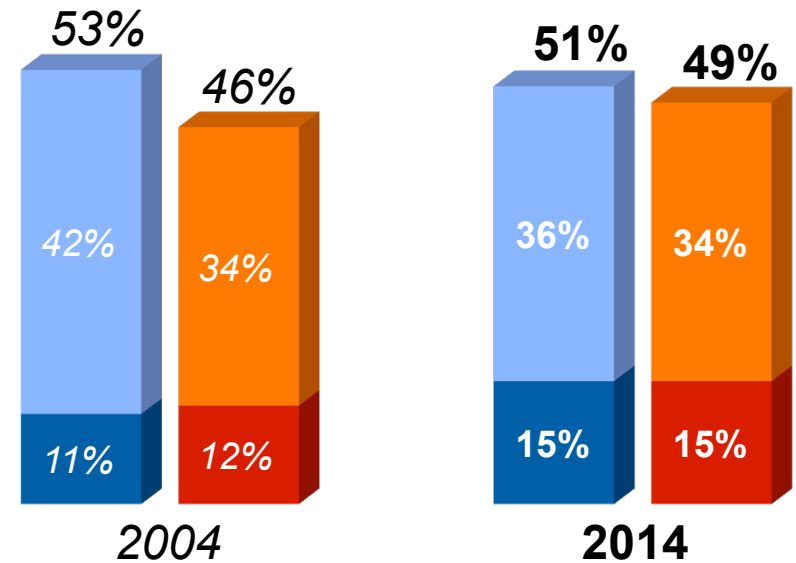
*How well did your high school education prepare you for college/the working world?*



**College students**



**Non-students**



*How well did high school prepare you for college/work?*

- **Large gaps** in one or more subject areas:
  - **49%** of college students
  - **43%** of non-students
- **At least some gaps** in one or more areas:
  - **83%** of college students
  - **81%** of non-students

# Significant gaps across subject areas

*How well did high school prepare you for college/work in these areas?*

	College students		Non-students	
	At least some gaps	Large gaps/struggling	At least some gaps	Large gaps/struggling
Work and study habits	<b>50%</b>	22%	<b>41%</b>	13%
Oral communications/ public speaking	<b>46%</b>	18%	<b>47%</b>	16%
Doing research	<b>45%</b>	17%	32%	9%
Science	<b>41%</b>	14%	<b>49%</b>	18%
Applying what I have learned to solve problems	36%	12%	<b>41%</b>	13%
Mathematics	36%	12%	<b>41%</b>	15%
Writing	36%	9%	34%	10%
Computer and technology skills	31%	10%	34%	10%
Reading and understanding complicated materials	30%	7%	27%	6%

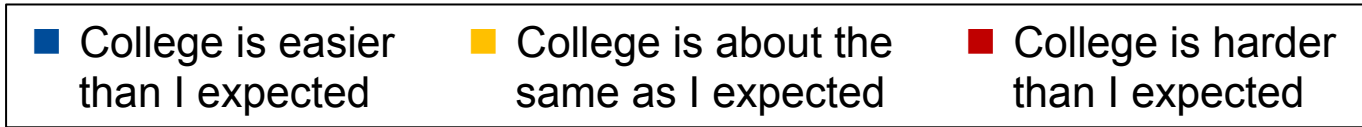
# Areas in which graduates wish their high school had done better

*In which two areas do you most wish your high school had done a better job of preparing you for the expectations of college/work world?*

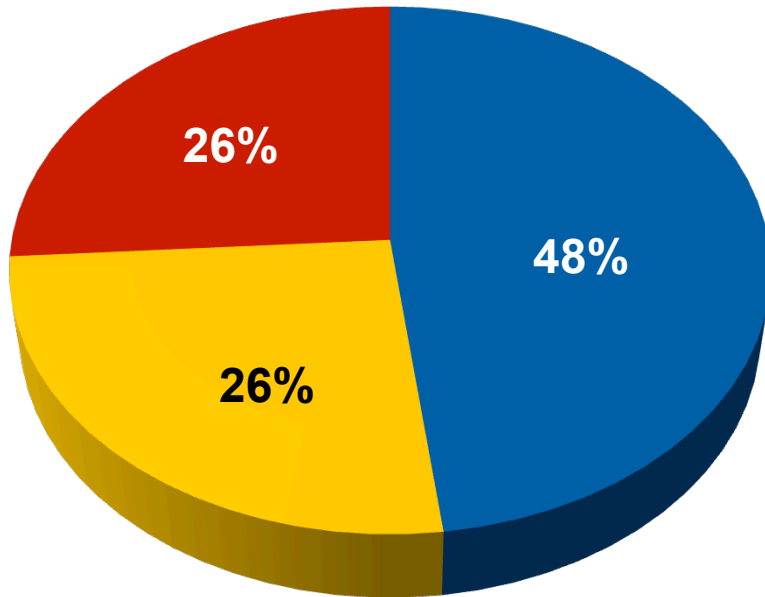
	College students		Non-students	
	2014	2004	2014	2004
Work and study habits	<b>31%</b>	<b>25%</b>	19%	12%
Oral communications/public speaking	<b>27%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>19%</b>
Mathematics	<b>24%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>22%</b>
Doing research	<b>20%</b>	13%	8%	7%
Writing	17%	15%	9%	11%
Computer and technology skills	14%	13%	18%	17%
Applying what I have learned to solve problems	13%	5%	19%	9%
Science	13%	13%	11%	13%
Reading and understanding complicated materials	10%	12%	9%	11%
Don't need to be better prepared in any of these areas	7%	2%	14%	3%

# College is more difficult than expected for those who had gaps in preparation

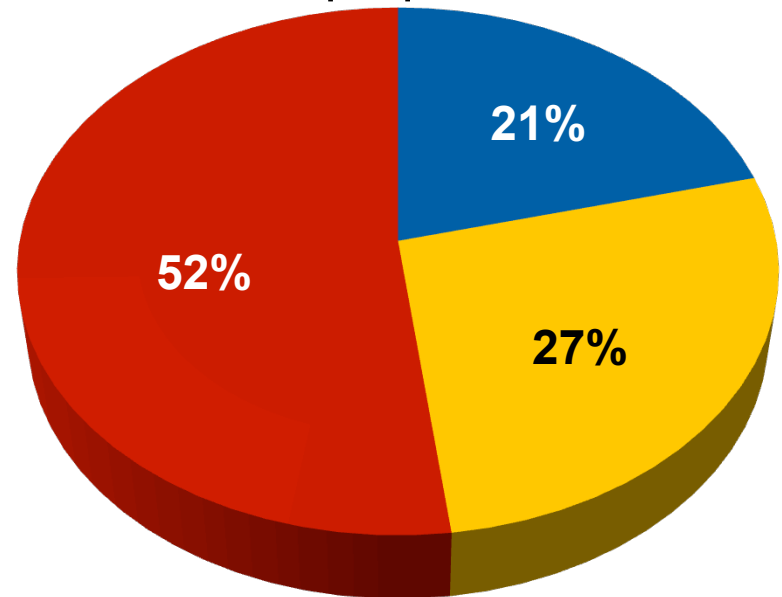
*When it comes to the school work expected of you in college, how has college been so far?*



Students who feel they were extremely/very well prepared



Students who feel they were less prepared



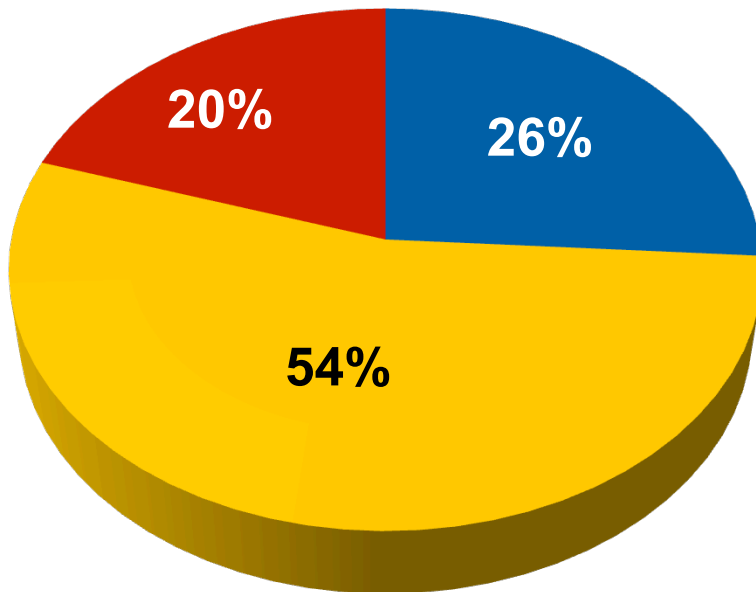


# Only one in four report their high school set high academic expectations

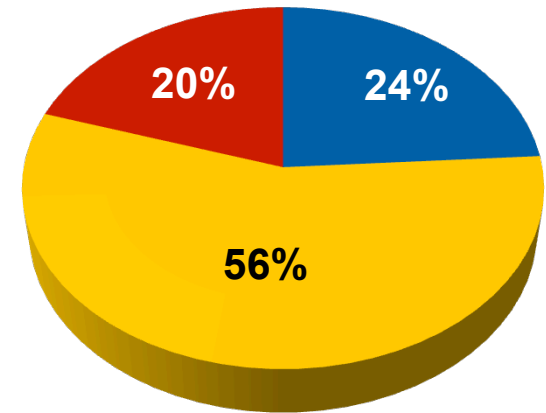
*Which best describes your experience in high school?*

- High academic expectations, significantly challenged
- Moderate expectations, somewhat challenged
- Low expectations, it was pretty easy to slide by

## All high school graduates 2014



## All HS graduates 2004



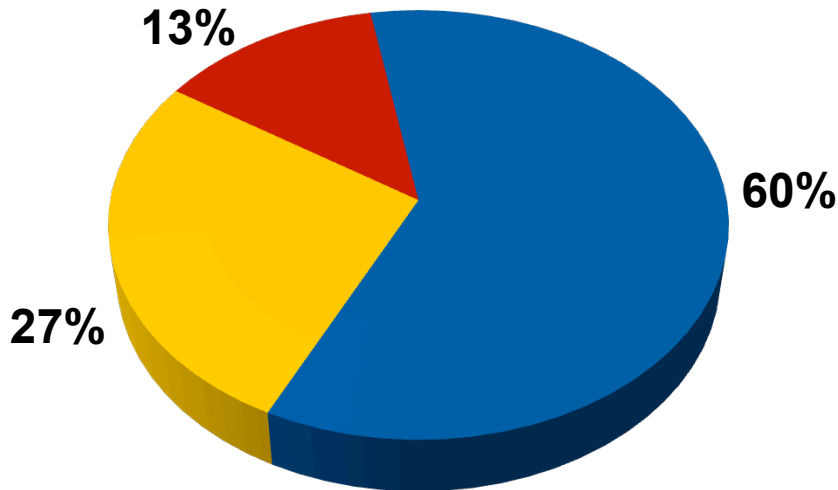
**Knowing what I know now,  
I would have worked harder.**

# Many say they would have worked harder if they knew then what they know now

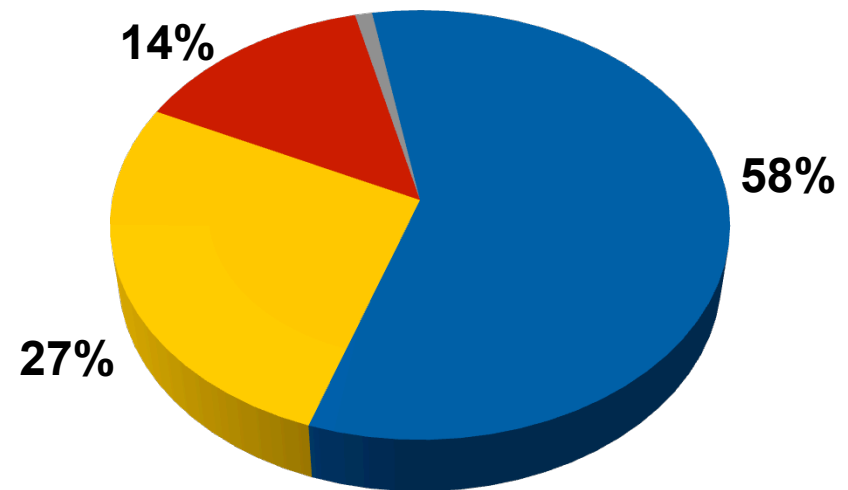
*Knowing what I know today about the expectations of college/the work world, if I were able to do high school over again, I would:*

- Work harder/apply myself more to coursework even if it means less time for other activities
- Apply myself to my coursework the same as I did
- Apply myself less to my coursework and spend more time doing other activities

**College students**

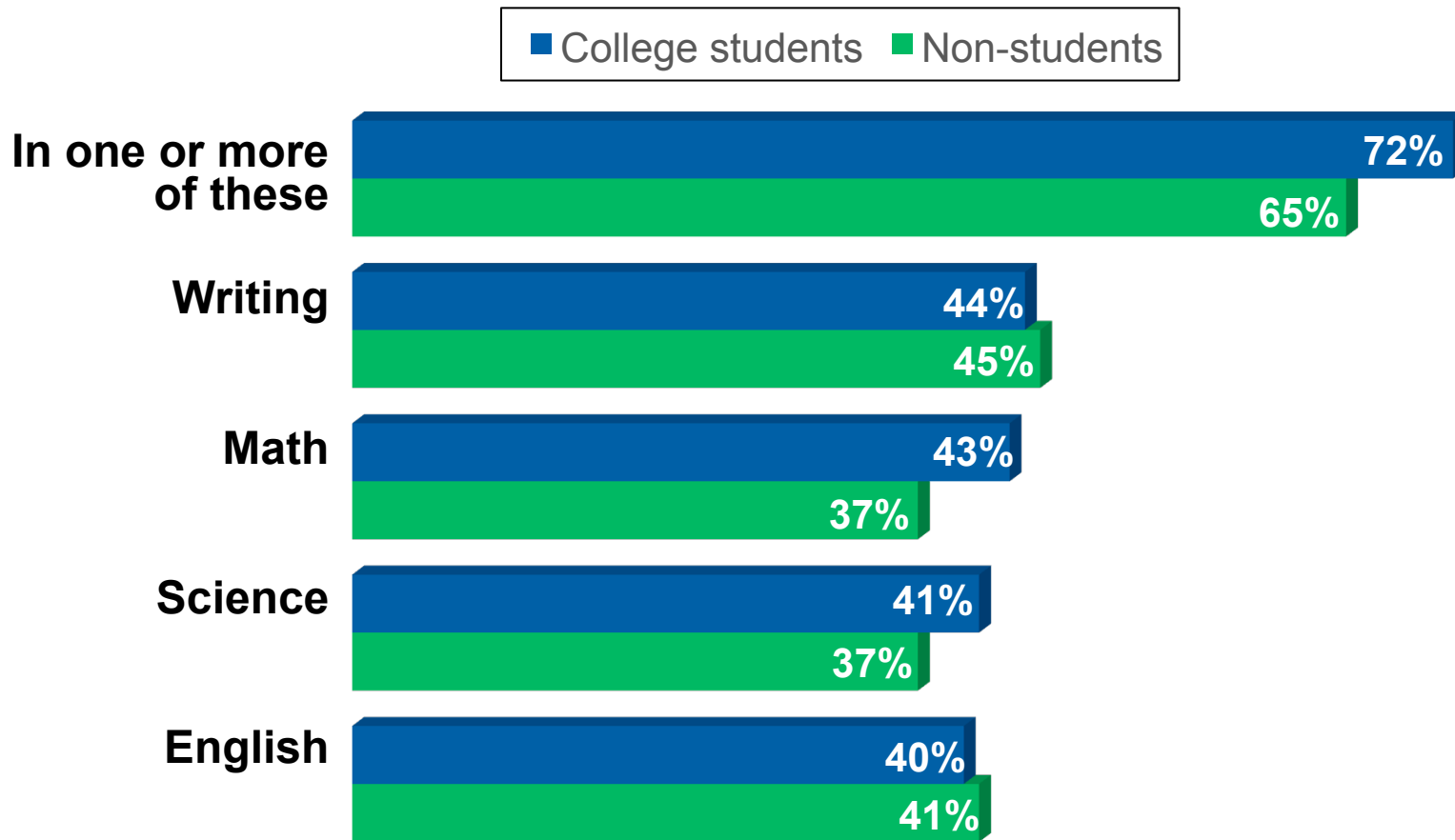


**Non-students**



# Most say they would have taken higher-level or more challenging courses

*Knowing what I know today about the expectations of college/the work world, I would have taken higher-level/more challenging courses in high school in these areas:*



## In their own words...

**“[If I could go back to high school], I would study hard and go to school every day. It wouldn’t matter if I like the teacher or not, I just have to get through it to take that next step and go to college without taking pre-reqs, wasting money.”**

Female, New Orleans,  
2-Year College Student

**“I’m struggling. I made it harder on myself. My family told me ‘do what you have to do to take that next step.’ I didn’t do that. I rebelled and I was failing classes. I didn’t get the basic skills I should have had when I got to college and it was harder for me.”**

Female, New Orleans,  
2-Year College Student

**“I would put a little more effort into math class. I didn’t put forth the extra effort and as a result I scored one point below what I needed for [University of New Orleans]. So, I had to go to Delgado instead and couldn’t go into my major because I was set back and had to take a math remedial class to do what I want to.”**

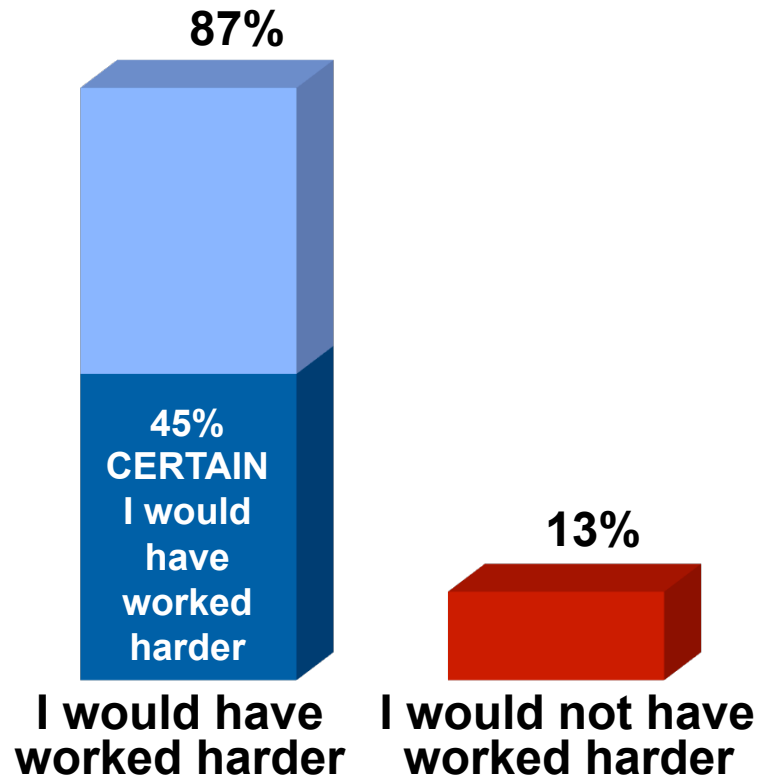
Male, New Orleans,  
2-Year College Student

# Potential Solutions Exist.

# Most say they would have worked harder if expectations had been higher

*If my high school had demanded more, set higher academic standards, and raised expectations of the course work and studying necessary to earn a diploma:*

*All high school graduates*



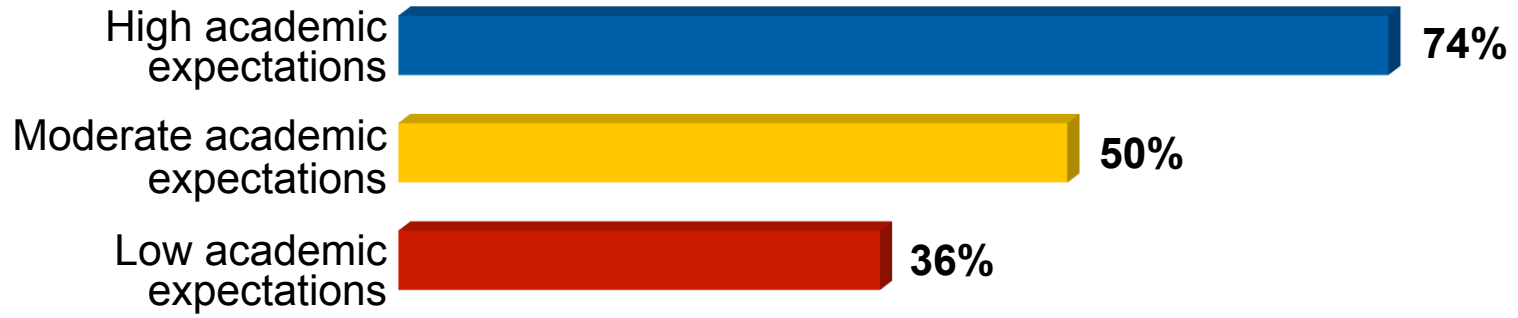
## ***I am CERTAIN I would have worked harder:***

Men	43%
Women	48%
Whites	42%
African Americans	<b>53%</b>
Hispanics	<b>50%</b>
All college students	48%
In two-year college	49%
In four-year college	47%
Took remedial classes	<b>54%</b>
No college	39%
Some college/dropped out	45%
Extremely/very prepared	<b>51%</b>
Less prepared	39%

# Those who experienced higher expectations feel better prepared

*The education I received in high school prepared me extremely or very well for college/the working world:*

## *College students whose high school had:*



## *Non-students whose high school had:*





# Grads of schools that excel at encouraging students to take the most advanced courses feel better prepared

*The education I received in high school prepared me extremely or very well for college/ the working world:*

## **College students who say their high school did:**



## **Non-students who say their high school did:**



# Grads who took math beyond Algebra II feel better prepared

*The math I took in high school prepared me extremely or very well for college/ the working world:*

## **College students who took:**



## **Non-students who took:**



# Gender and race/ethnicity gaps exist in high level math achievement

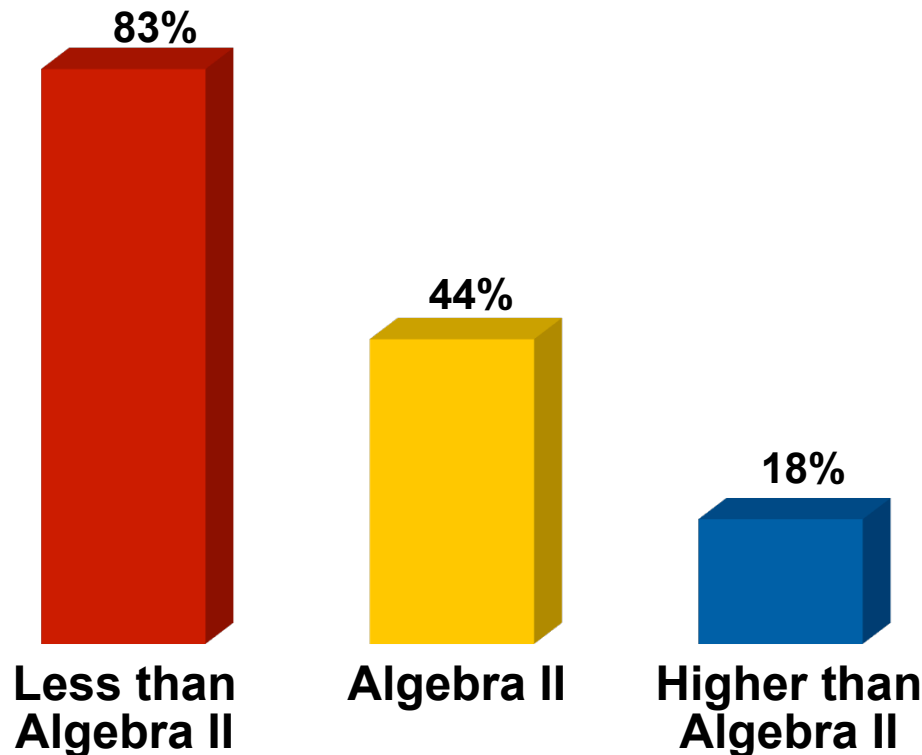
*What is the highest level math course you took and passed in high school?*

	Lower than Algebra II	Algebra II	Higher than Algebra II
<b>All high school grads</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>54%</b>
Men	16%	23%	56%
Women	14%	31%	52%
Whites	13%	27%	<b>57%</b>
African Americans	22%	26%	<b>46%</b>
Hispanics	16%	32%	<b>47%</b>
All college students	10%	23%	65%
Grads with no college ever	25%	33%	<b>32%</b>
Grads with some college/dropped out	18%	33%	<b>45%</b>
College men	9%	21%	<b>69%</b>
College women	10%	26%	<b>61%</b>
White college students	7%	23%	<b>69%</b>
African American college students	18%	25%	<b>55%</b>
Hispanic college students	13%	28%	<b>56%</b>

# College students who have lower math attainment take remedial courses at much higher rates

*What is the highest level math course you took and passed in high school?*

*Current college students who took any remedial classes*



# Biggest gaps in communicating /encouraging are in connecting high school to future success

*How did your high school do in each of these areas?*

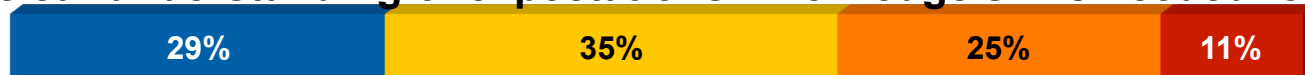
*All high school graduates*

■ Very good job 
 ■ Good, should have done a little more 
 ■ Fair, should have done a lot more 
 ■ Poor job

## Encouraging you to explore various professional/career opportunities



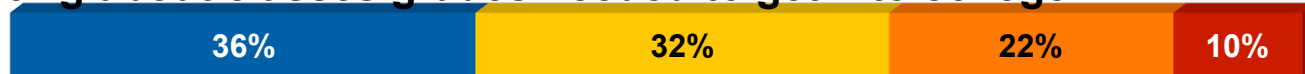
## Giving you clear understanding of expectations/ knowledge/skills needed for future



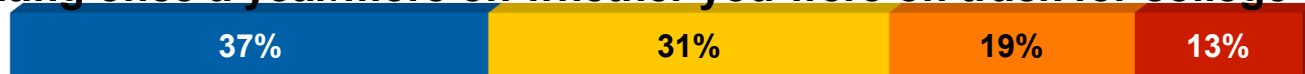
## Encouraging you to take the most advanced courses



## Communicating about classes/grades needed to get into college



## Communicating once a year/more on whether you were on track for college



## Communicating about classes/grades needed to graduate

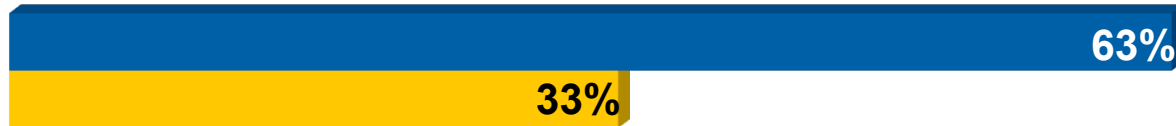


# Grads of schools that excel at communicating/encouraging feel better prepared

*The education I received in high school prepared me extremely or very well for college/the working world:*

- High school graduates who say their HS did a very good/good job on this
- High school graduates who say their HS did a fair/poor job on this

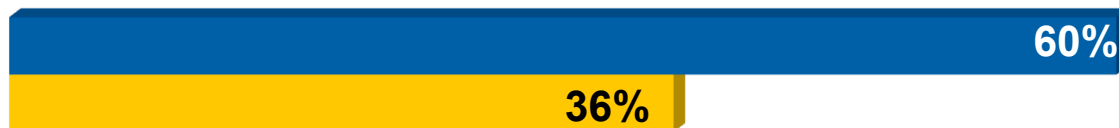
**Giving me clear understanding of expectations/knowledge/skills needed for future**



**Encouraging me to explore various professional/career opportunities**



**Communicating about classes/grades needed to get into college**



# Grads of schools that excel at communicating/encouraging feel better prepared

*The education I received in high school prepared me extremely or very well for college/the working world:*

- High school graduates who say their HS did a very good/good job on this
- High school graduates who say their HS did a fair/poor job on this

## Encouraging me to take the most advanced courses



## Communicating at least once a year whether I was on track for college



## Communicating about classes/grades needed to graduate high school



# Lower income graduates are least likely to report their high schools excelled at communicating/encouraging

*My high school did a very good/good job in in each of these areas*

	HS grads from below average income family	HS grads from average income family	HS grads from above average income family
Encouraging you to explore various professional/career opportunities	52%	61%	62%
Giving you clear understanding of expectations/knowledge/skills needed for future	57%	66%	68%
Encouraging you to take the most advanced courses	57%	64%	73%
Communicating about classes/grades needed to get into college	64%	67%	74%
Communicating once a year/more on whether you were on track for college	63%	65%	77%
Communicating about classes/grades needed to graduate from high school	74%	77%	80%

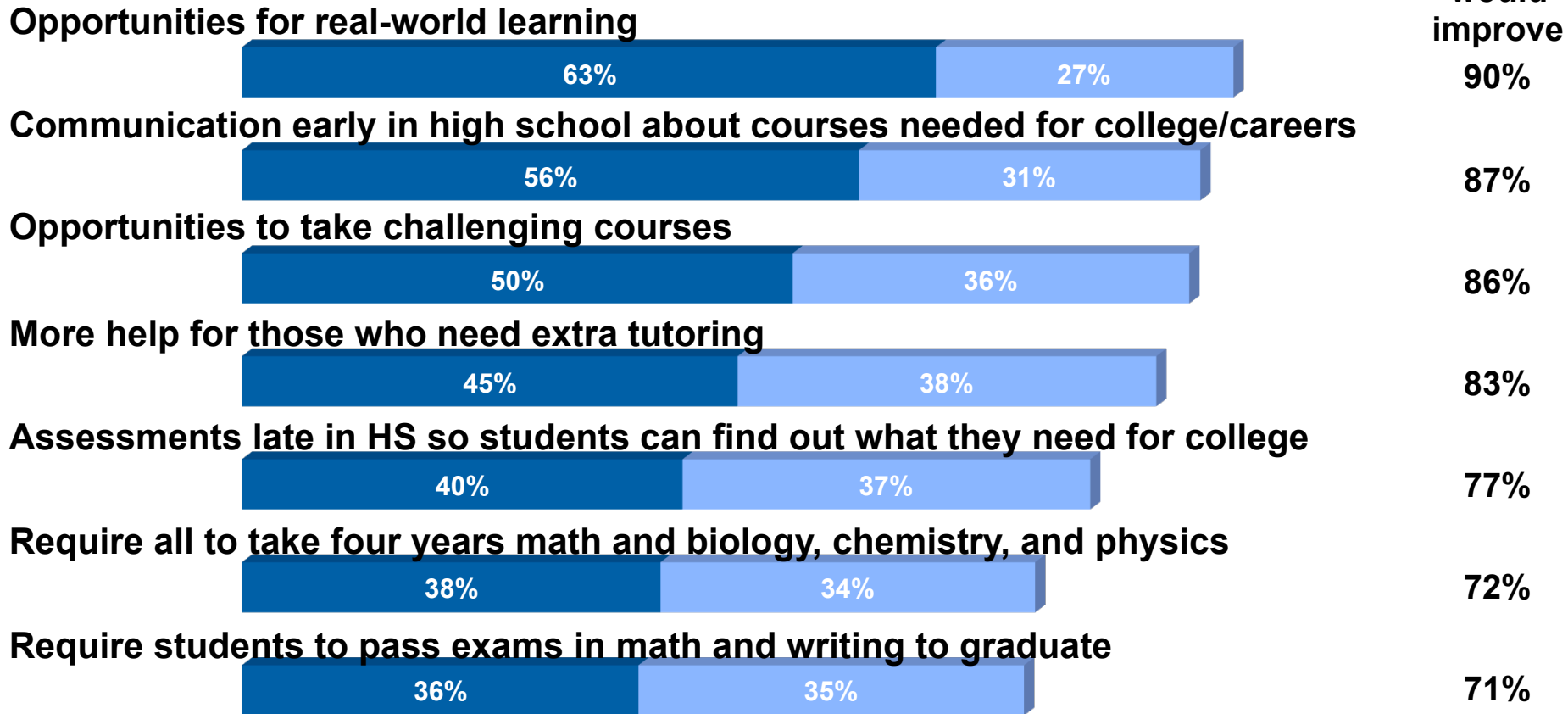


# Broad agreement on proposals

*What impact would this have in encouraging high school students to work harder and be better prepared for life after high school?*

*All high school graduates*

■ Would improve things a great deal    ■ Would improve things somewhat



# The bottom line: Findings

- Nearly half of recent high school graduates report they were not fully prepared for their next steps
- They see clear gaps in their preparation, and this has real consequences:
  - Only one quarter feel their high school set high expectations
  - Over one quarter wish their high school had done a better job in key areas: study habits, communications, and math
  - Four in ten current students find college more difficult than expected
- Recent grads tell us they would have worked harder if they had fully understood the challenges that lay ahead
- Both college students AND non-college students report not having as much academic preparation as they needed
- Recent Grads—whether they are in college or working—feel better prepared if they took more advanced courses in high school

# The bottom line: Solutions

- The research suggests that providing real academic challenge for high school students and communicating with them about what is needed for future success helps to better prepare grads for the road ahead
- Providing consistent and regular signals to ALL high school students about what academics are needed to be ready for college and careers is key:
  - Set rigorous expectations, students will rise to the challenge
  - Have graduation requirements that ensure academic preparation for all
  - Encourage all students to take the most advanced classes
  - Ensure the rigor of classes offered; reliance on course titles can lead to watered down courses
  - Communicate with students early in high school (if not before) about the expectations and skills (including courses) needed for future success—including college admissions and career interests
  - Regularly tell students whether they are “on track”
  - Tie learning in high school to life outside the classroom by providing real-world learning opportunities
  - Provide support/help for students who need it (e.g. tutoring)
  - All means ALL. Be sure all students understand and know the benefit of academic preparation for college and careers; everyone needs to be prepared for their next steps.