

Success in college tied to parents, federal report finds

Students whose parents went have easier time

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WASHINGTON — Youngsters whose parents didn't go to college have a tougher time getting into a school and finishing with a degree. That's just one of many observations highlighted in an annual federal report released yesterday on the state of education in the United States.

"The Condition of Education 2001," from the National Center for Research Statistics in Washington, contains a grab-bag of

previously released figures that together present a national snapshot of who's going to school, what they're learning and what difference it makes.

Other notable findings: Americans of all ages are trooping to school in greater numbers, from preschool tots to adult hobbyists. Students with lower college admission test scores are more likely than others to teach.

This year's report also turns a special focus on students whose parents never attended college, and finds they walk a rockier road, from gaining entry to earning a degree.

But those so-called "first-generation" students who come out with a college diploma discover their degree is an equal-opportunity ticket. Four years after earn-

ing a bachelor's, the report noted, graduates' incomes were the same regardless of parents' schooling.

When extra help guides those youngsters into taking and passing the tougher courses that prepare students for college, the statistical gap between their attainments and those of other students shrinks or disappears, the report said.

The finding put Education Secretary Rod Paige on the spot by reporting that without extra help, these children are only one-third as likely as other children to go to college. The Bush administration is proposing to cut funds to one such program.

Paige defended President Bush's decision to ask Congress to phase out funding for Gear Up, the federal program that subsidiz-

es such extra help for 1.2 million low-income students in grades 7 through 12.

"The philosophy of this administration is that these categorical programs are not as effective as the broad, comprehensive nature of the entire program" proposed in Bush's education plan, Paige said.

In an introductory summary, Gary Phillips, acting commissioner of education statistics, called the rising number of students encouraging. But he noted U.S. schools are nothing to brag about, when compared with student performance and teacher quality in other developed countries.

Phillips also called "disturbing" the persistent gaps dividing children along economic and racial and ethnic lines.

Other report highlights:

■ More children ages 3 to 5 are in school. Those youngest scholars rose from 53 percent to 60 percent of that age group, between 1991-1999.

■ Student performance through grade 12 is mixed, but there is a bright spot: More youngsters are taking advanced courses in math, science, English and foreign languages. For instance, between 1982 and 1998, the percentage of high school graduates finishing at least one honors English course jumped from 13 percent to 29 percent.

■ The percentage of high school students armed or fighting at school has fallen since 1993, though threats and weapons injuries are unchanged.

■ More people are finishing

high school. From 1972 to 1999, the percentage of 16- to 24-year-old dropouts fell, from 15 percent to 11 percent. Among all ages, the United States is tops among the world's seven richest countries in terms of high school graduates.

■ Overall, the likelihood of earning some degree after high school has risen since 1983, with more African American and white high school graduates going on to college. Latino students, though, showed no steady rise.

■ Women earn more than half the country's bachelor's degrees.

■ Adult learning of all kinds was on the upswing in the 1990s, although not necessarily for college degrees. Many adults were taking courses related to work.

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