

# Research and Activism for Change

R

We conduct **Research** about issues that concern us

A

We take **Action** to make change

C

We want to leave a legacy by making a positive **Change** in our school



The Brighton High School (BHS) RAC class consists of 25 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders selected by interview process. We are diverse with regards to race/ethnicity, language, and academic experience.

## Research Questions

- What are BHS students' academic experiences?
- How well does BHS prepare students for college?
- What could BHS better do to prepare students for college?

## Methodology

**Surveys:** We administered surveys to 400 9-12 grade students (BHS has 1,246 students). The surveys focused on how prepared the students felt for college, their current academic experience and classroom environment.

**Guidance counselor shadows/interviews:** We shadowed all four guidance counselors of BHS for a day to understand how they handle the challenging responsibility of 1,246 students. We followed the shadowing with an interview on college preparation, relationships to students and the school system.

**Focus Groups:** We also held focus groups of mainly juniors and seniors to ask them personal question on how they felt about their school and their preparation for college.

**Principal Interview:** We interviewed headmaster Romer to get his views on the matters that students are concerned about as well as his future plans for BHS.

**Individual Interviews:** We interviewed 16 11th grade students from Honors, Regular Education, Sheltered English Immersion (SEI), and Special Education (SPED) classes. Topics included what they know about high school graduation requirements, their expectations for college, and how well prepared they feel for college.

**Alumni Interview:** We conducted phone interviews with BHS alumni asking them questions about their high school experiences and how well prepared they felt for college.

**College/Universities Interviews:** We called colleges/universities to ask them about their student selection criteria.



# Survey Findings

Students reported many positive experiences with BHS.

The following percentages of students agreed with each statement...

71%

"Our high school promotes a culture of high academic achievement for all students"

59%

"Adults value what I have to say"

75%

"Most teachers really care about me"

90%

"Most teachers encourage me to do my best"

81%

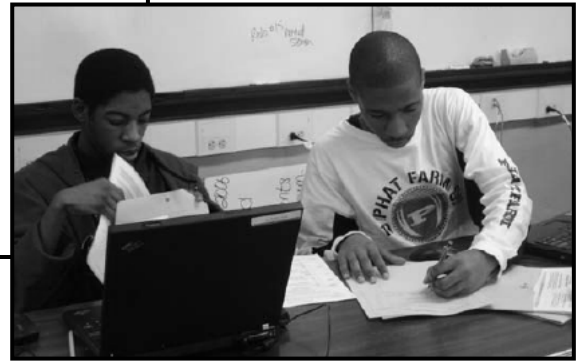
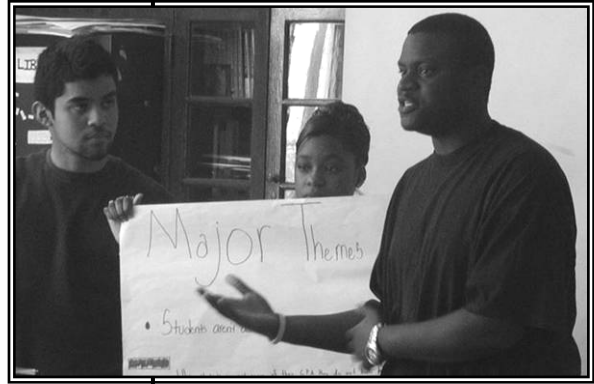
"Most teachers have high expectations for students"

56%

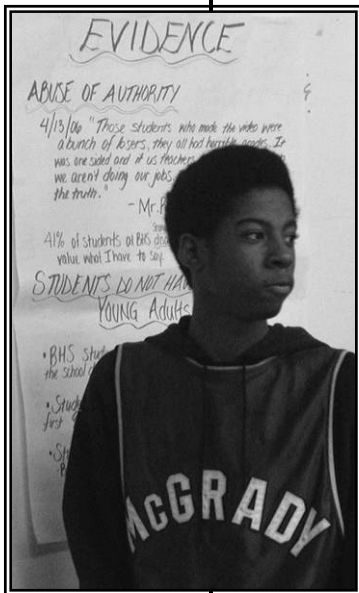
"Most teachers talk to me about my interests and talents"

44%

"Most teachers talk to me about my worries"



We found important information about experiences related to college preparation



Of the students we sampled...

Had never been contacted by their guidance counselor. **51%**

Discussed courses or programs at school in depth with their parent/guardian. **52%**

Never discussed colleges/universities that are suited their needs and interests. **55%**

Never discussed financial aid for college with an adult. **35%**

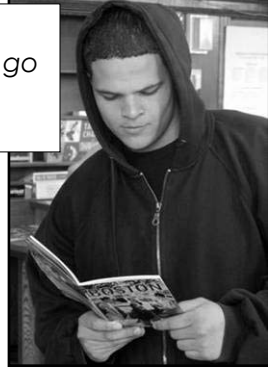
Never discussed their readiness for college level coursework with an adult. **44%**

Never discussed what SAT score they need to get into the colleges of their choice. **31%**

Did not know their GPA (In January 2006, **21% of seniors did not know their GPA**). **41%**

# Qualitative Findings

*"You can't stereotype people... someone I thought did not want to go to college, he ended up surprising me."* -Fidias Pina, RAC Researcher



**Students want to/intend to go to college**  
15 out of 16 students interviewed said they wanted to go to college. This finding was consistent throughout the Honors, Regular Education, SEI and SPED classrooms.



*"Not that I would want a lot of pressure but I would like to be encouraged more for college and not just settling for community college"*  
-BHS Student in an RAC focus group



**There are not enough adults providing students with support in the college process**  
Many of the students we interviewed identified one of their teachers who had encouraged them to go to college.

**Guidance counselors have too many students**  
Each guidance counselor is responsible for 311 students. Guidance counselors have a range of responsibilities in addition to meeting with students. 311 students is too many for each guidance counselor to effectively work with.



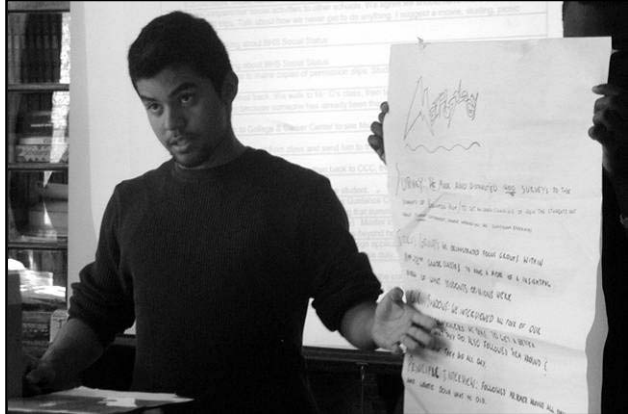
*"A lot of kids think they are getting support for college but when you break it down they really aren't getting the best support."*  
-Damara Reid, RAC researcher



**Although students say they are prepared for college, they are not getting the preparation they actually need to get them there**  
Students did say they were prepared for college, but when we asked them whether they had visited colleges, knew about financial aid, or got help from BHS college-support programs, they hadn't. Most students knew about GEAR UP, but didn't take part in it. None of the students we interviewed knew about HOPE, a program designed to help the students find financial aid.



*"Many students really want to go to college, but they have doubts because they feel unprepared."*  
-Wisline Francois, RAC Researcher



# Recommendations

"The whole idea is to put those who aren't being heard in the spot light."  
-Steven Joseph, RAC Researcher



"In order to improve, they (Brighton High School) need more teachers and guidance counselors willing to speak to students on a one-on-one basis about college or how to be prepared."  
-BHS student

## Guidance Counselor Drop Box

Fill out form (name/hr/need/preferred time). If a guidance counselor is busy with a meeting, or etc. then you could fill out a form to make an appointment with the guidance counselor in the time you're free and when they're free.

"I knew I had a GPA, but I didn't know I had to check it."  
-BHS student

## GPA Bulletin Board

This will show the students ID number and the student's grade point average (GPA) and also describe ways in which you can increase your GPA and it would also contain average GPA in most preferred colleges. GPA should also be on the report card or on a slip that is inserted into the report card envelope. Students should be able to access their GPA on a website. This will help the students be aware of what they need in order to be prepared for the college of their choice.

## More Guidance Counselors

We need more guidance counselors. 311 students is too many for one person.

## College Prep Support Meetings or Classes

This class will be operated by teachers who choose to do so, and will be mandatory for juniors during their spring term. In these classes we will also have admissions officers come by to give more insight on what colleges are looking for. This is important because in our research we found out that students are not aware of financial aid or any scholarships. These classes will help students better understand the amount they need for college.

## Group Meetings with Guidance Counselors

Guidance counselors should meet with groups of students (rather than meeting with them individually). The reason why is because each guidance counselor has around 300 students, and it is very hard to help each student.

## Older students tutor/share information with younger students

Students could support one another by having seniors and juniors share information with freshmen and sophomores.

"We are in this class to make a change, and this research will only better our understanding of how to develop a change."  
-James Guaragna, RAC Researcher

