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High School Students' Success for Higher Education Requires Proper College Guidance
From School Staff.

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High school students who feel that they are being left behind express a disconnect from academic counselors and a lack of willingness from teachers to help them. This is apparent in an informal interview I conducted, where a student asked me how I went to college. This question was difficult to answer because while I wanted to say that college was accessible, the reality was that it was harder than I imagined.

My response to this student was that I had devoted the majority of my time in high school advocating for myself, learning graduation and University course requirements on my own, all while demonstrating a strong enthusiasm for college to my academic counselors. I did this to be prioritized for placement in limited, competitive classes available in my high school. The student's reply reflected what I had just shared, "That makes sense. In my school, my math teacher didn't care about me, and I failed. Now I have to go to a community college if I want to go to a University because I don't meet the requirements anymore." Referring to the three-year eligibility requirement in mathematics for the University of California and California State University.

His response highlighted a key aspect of going to college, which is the importance of building a close relationship with academic counselors for additional support. He adds, "I don't know much. No one told me that I needed that class. They only care about certain students."

The issue here is not that academic counselors only care about *certain students*; it is that the student-to-counselor ratio is disproportionate to the student body. An academic counselor should ideally serve "250 students per 1 academic counselor," as recommended by the American School Counselor Association. Not 370 students per 1 academic counselor, as it is for students in the Santa Maria High School District. The district from which the students I interviewed attend, the similarities displayed by these students in their educational experience are not surprising. The fault does not solely fall on teachers and academic counselors; it is also the lack of funding that is not given to these specific issue areas.

Financial hardship and lack of knowledge of the prerequisites for higher education is something that first-generation students suffer with the most. From lack of support from schools to minimal, if any, support from parents, students are left to figure their future out on their own. Thankfully there are non-profits and organizations that assume the role and responsibility as college advisors to help alleviate the burden on school staff. Future Leaders of America is an organization that empowers students to advocate for themselves and take control of their

education. Outreach to students is a work in progress for programs like these, but it is an active attempt to help students in the college-going process.

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