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# Academic Progress: Factors That Affect a Student's First Year Experience in College

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## Abstract

*The transition to higher education can be a journey of life changing experiences. These experiences culminate in factors that affect a student's academic success. This can lend itself to areas of growth, change, and maturation that cultivate and stimulate the intellectual curiosity which motivate a student to succeed in college. Specifically, this study attempts to measure three factors that affect student success in college; these factors are the formal education of your parents, student work status, and access to the internet.*

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The transition from high school to tertiary education is an expedition through uncharted territory for many first generation college students. First generation college students are defined as students neophyte to education beyond the secondary level and who do not have a kinship predecessor familiar with the college setting. This journey entails the idea of defining one's life path. This academic odyssey affects the psychology of the student in the areas of growth, change, and maturation that cultivate and stimulate the intellectual curiosity that motivates students' to succeed in college. Similarly, the student simultaneously makes the transition between adult and professional in the manner of learning-by-doing. In the labor market this is referred to as "on the job training".

College entails a different set of academic variables and environmental factors that were previously government funded (subsidized) or considered the *status quo* in education. This refers to free textbooks, free access to computer labs with internet, and school funded transportation such as school busses. These staple amenities in high school are now luxuries in college. A student has to provide for themselves what once was free. Does this affect their ability to succeed in their first year of college? The adjustment from secondary education to college in terms of academic progress and achievement is the interest of this design. Specifically, does a parent's educational background play an unintended role in a student's academic progress during their first year of college? Does the student's access to internet affect his or her grades? Does a student's employment status have an effect on student academic performance? These questions and answers to these experiences culminate in factors that affect a student's academic success.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine three factors that could affect a student's first year experience in college. Additionally, this research could be used to enhance conditions that increase student aptitude in educational endeavors. Similarly, this report could be used to see possible trends involving freshmen entering California State University Bakersfield. These trends could reflect a change in demographics among the incoming population. This analysis can be used as a proxy in making future decisions about types of classes, student interest, and parent expectation.

## Theoretical Overview

The importance of student learning is critical in the pursuit of education advancement. Some students are visual learners. This means they learn and understand concepts by seeing them. Cognitively, they are able to understand themes by visual stimulation. Leavitt (2011) described the idea of organizational learning where the cognitive school of thought included "thinking" and the behavioral school focuses on "doing". This can entail the idea that all students do not learn the same. The type of instruction may not be a match for the students style of learning. By contrast, this could have short and long term impacts on student motivation. Bandura (1974) posited that some people learn by observing and evaluating the actions of others. He defined this type of learning in his "Social Learning Theory". Learning is reciprocal between behavioral, cognitive, and environmental influences. It can be referred to as a type of learning osmosis. This entails learning from the elements of your environment. Similarly, according to Kim *et al.* (2008) and Bandura (1977) learning is specified through modeling, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. It is an interactive process. These interactions will further shape new behaviors. These behaviors would reflect the type of learning. The learning outcome would be the performance of the student. The debate between thinking and action learning is a process of change. David Kolb (1984) understood a similar model in his Experiential Learning theory. This learning model entails conceptualization and understanding through concrete experience. This includes multiple levels of cognitive development for various approaches to learning. This also involves a direct encounter that will ferment the conceptualization. This entails the concept of being exposed compared to just the thought of it. After the experience is encountered, the knowledge could be tested in a new environment.

## Parent Interaction

A parent's educational attainment can play a pivotal role in the educational expectation for their children. Parent education is referring to the level of education attained from schooling. Quilliams and Beran (2008) argued that student characteristics are related to success because their parents are encouraging them based on their academic achievement. Essentially, if the parents have not achieved much in terms of academic success, they will not be as enthusiastic for their children. In this scenario, some students

may have more to overcome than others. However, there is another way of looking at this. If parents are enthusiastic, then their children may be equally as motivated. According to Codjoe (2007), parents inform their children that once they receive education, nothing can stop them in life. The student will be able to get what they want, when they want. Education is viewed as freedom. Freedom comes with the expectation that the pursuit and attainment of education will be worth it. There is considerable evidence suggesting the link between a mother's high expectations for her children's academic pursuits and her children's educational outcomes (Flouri, & Hawkes, 2008). Codjoe (2007) offered a similar perspective, identifying the message that parents encourage children to do well in school and happiness because of life options will follow.

Magnuson and McGroder (2002) made the claim that there are positive correlations between mothers' educational attainment and a children's well-being. The higher the education, the better off you will be. Mothers' expectations for their children's educational attainment are related to children's educational and occupational attainment (Flouri, & Hawkes, 2008). Educational attainment requires preparation.

### **Effects of Family Preparation**

One generation's preparation affects the next. This can apply to the appropriate school readiness for students. Sticht and McDonald (1990) described this idea by following the notion that educated adults influence their children's education, who also in time become adults, and produce more educable children. This chain of events represents a sequencing effect where one generation affects another. This requires the previous generation to have had the background knowledge for the successive generations to follow. Generational success can play a pivotal and critical role in a person's educational destiny. Some authors view this differently. This can also be done independently.

Averett and Rodriguez (2003) believe that students are able to develop their literacy skills in school and go to college. This means their upbringing may not be the end of the road. This idea allows the student to pursue higher degrees despite past scholastic achievement. Additionally, if parents are interested in education after having children, this can also make a difference. Martinez (2011) found that when teaching parents about value of education, it becomes more important to them. One educational tool is building the intrinsic value of motivation. According to Garrett, Antrop-González, and Vélez (2010), motivational strategies provided by mothers to their children were positive and still encouraging even when their child received low grades. They generally continued to tell them to try their best and work harder.

Similarly, academic success is predicated on developing a positive view of competence in learning (Quilliams, and Beran, 2009). This can be based on individual factors within the student or family factors that can substantiate learning. LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) claim that parental participation is valued and widely accepted. Similarly, although it is encouraged, they recognized that participation is difficult to promote and maintain. That is the maintenance portion of parental involvement. How do parents stay active? Likewise, Garrett, Antrop-González, and Vélez (2010), researched and found that parents can continue support by monitoring and

checking their child's schoolwork, offering to help with their child's homework, and even finding someone who could help if they were not able to. Codjoe (2007) found similar results stating that parents should tutor children in the areas they found difficult. Parent tutoring is a form of monitored support for the student.

It also is a relationship and support between the parties involved. Chavkin (2000) and in more recent literature (Alvermann, Phelps, and Gillis 2010), conferred that conducting effective partnerships at school is essential to the success of home.

### **Technology**

Access to the internet can play a pivotal role in how well students will perform in their classes. If schools are adding internet based additions to their curriculum, then students could be at risk of not performing to the standards of the institution. Moore and Kearsley (2005) stated that advances in internet-based technologies have changed the way it is viewed in education. It was once viewed as a poor substitute for instruction and now it is popular among the mainstream.

Technology plays an important role in how well students are able excel and advance in their education. In general, students have taken an interest in using the computer and the internet to complete their assignments. An example of this would be using the computer to save work and type lectures in class. Nummenmaa and Nummenmaa (2008) offered the perspective that emotional reactions of students fluctuate but are positive when working with the internet. There appears to be a trend with student access to the internet. Likewise, Norton and Hathaway (2008) added that students said internet content was interesting and engaging. Additionally, they mentioned that students had a great experience when they worked online. The idea that the internet is interactive could play a role in this. Likewise, Doering, and Veletsianos (2008) found in their research that students thought it was fun to go online to see if others in their class had commented on their projects.

As internet access becomes more popular, institutions of higher learning will adapt. According to Supon and Ruffini (2009), educators at all levels will recognize the impact and implications of the internet. In some cases the internet has reinvented knowledge. Shank (2000) found the internet has reshaped education on multiple levels. This includes higher education at the college levels. Similarly, Dillon and Greene (2003) concluded that postsecondary institutions have recognized that the demand for learning online is growing and that a major shift has occurred from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning.

A new age is emerging where times are changing in regards to the internet and its role in student learning. Students, administrators, and teachers will need to be up to date in regards to the direction of education. Technology has been an encourager for educators to explore and envision possibilities for the future.

Kim, Jain, Westhoff, and Rezabek (2008) found that technology will ultimately affect the way administrators operate, the way teachers will deliver instruction, and students' ability to learn. Although students like the use of internet and technology, it is

important to monitor because it is always changing. The internet is not stagnant. The formats are changing and can be difficult to keep up with.

The future of teaching in classrooms will be considered full of "N-Gen" (Internet Generation) students. Technology continues to impact many aspects of the classroom, school, community, and society (Supon, & Ruffini, 2009).

Lastly, students who have educated parents appear to have more educational knowledge than students with less educated parents. However, parent activism is another component of success that can be used to level this inequality. If parents are ambitious about their child's education, their child will see this. A parent's expectation of the child will have an effect on how the child views learning.

Similarly, the use of the internet is becoming more apparent in education. In previous years, ink pens were the tools of education. In education today, the internet is being utilized in the classroom. Within the last decade, technology has become a priority and staple in teacher education programs. Many programs have a long way to go before they can definitively prepare their graduates with adequate implementation of technology (Moore, Knuth, Borse, & Mitchell, 1999). Students and faculty will need to make adjustments to keep the pace. Students are interested in learning through online assignments and teachers are using this to their advantage. Technology is helping teachers to do more with less resources. Teachers are able to simulate their learning environments and direct classroom lessons without interruption. This controlled learning environment can help teachers to maximize their strengths. This is a winning situation for both students and teachers of all grades.

### **Methodology**

The quantitative methods design was used to implement this study. Surveys were used to implement this concept. These procedures were used to help the researcher acquire data and conduct the surveys. The quantitative design method was chosen to enrich, enhance, and endow the findings. The cross tabulation and chi-square method was used to analyze this data. Similarly, certain criteria needed to be met in order to be included in this survey.

### *Sample*

The study population consisted of individuals who were at least eighteen years of age or older. Individuals participating were college freshmen. A college freshman is considered to be a person attending college for the first time, in his or her first quarter.

### **Instrumentation**

The surveys were implemented in GST-101 classes at California State University Bakersfield. GST-101 classes are general studies classes taken by freshmen in their first year of college. The academic school year at California State University Bakersfield consist of three quarters. The quarters are Fall, Winter, and Spring. This survey was

administered over a two year period. The survey was implemented by pencil and paper in 2007 and in an online format in 2008. There was no baseline minimum or maximum number of surveys to be completed each year. The number of individuals used for this study varied over the years as the format of the survey was administered. The sample size consisted of 446 students. In 2007, 308 students responded to the survey. There was one teacher who passed out all of the surveys in class. The directions were given to circle the correct multiple choice or yes/no answer. In 2008, 138 students responded to the survey. This survey was to be completed by the student outside of class at their discretion.

The survey covering both years was designed with two types of questions. One type of question addressed answers in a multiple choice A, B, C, D, E, F format. The second type of question was formatted with a yes or no format. In order to calculate results, the survey was recoded from raw form and assigned a numerical value. The values were A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5, F=6, and G=7. Similarly, the Yes/No questions were recoded to No=0 and Yes=1. In order to insure confidentiality in the event that others might view this research, the participants were identified by last names only. A cross tabulation and chi-square test was used to analyze this data. The dependent variable used in this study was the question asking, "How do you feel about your academic success this quarter"?

**Dependent Variable:** This is the variable that was measured against different independent variables. In question 8.1, the question asked the student about how they felt about their academic progress this quarter.

- Question 8.1

How do you feel about your academic progress this quarter? (circle only one)

- a I am making good progress in all of my classes
- b I am having problems with one of my classes
- c I am having problems with two of my classes
- d I am having problems with all of my classes

**Independent Variable (s):** Questions 17.1, and 26.1, were the independent variables that were manipulated. In question 17.1, the question asked the student how much formal education did their parents receive. They responded by marking the appropriate grade level.

**Question 17.1**

How much formal education did your parents obtain?

Table 1.1

	Father	Mother
8 <sup>th</sup> grade or less		
Some high school		
High school graduate		
Some college		
College graduate		
Post baccalaureate or graduate		
Don't know		

**Question 26.1**

Do you have internet access at home? Yes No

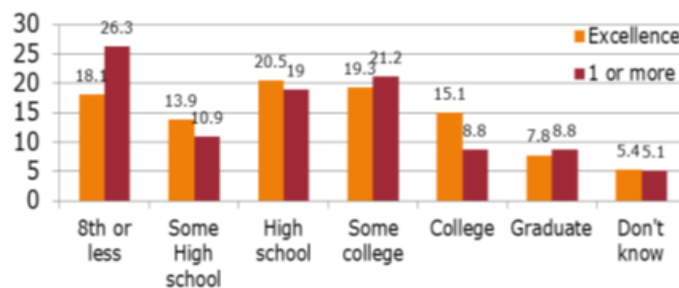
**Results****Question 17/2007**

How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Mother)

The results of the survey for Mothers in 2007 indicated that 18.1% (column 1) of students whose mothers had an education level of 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less were doing well in all of their classes. 26.3% of students who had mothers with less than an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education were having problems in 1 or more of their classes. Another disparity was revealed in the data. 15.1% (column 5) of students whose mother had a bachelors degree were doing well in all of their classes. Similarly, 8.8% of students whose mother had a bachelor's degree were having problems in 1 or more of their classes.

**Question 17/2007**

How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Mother)



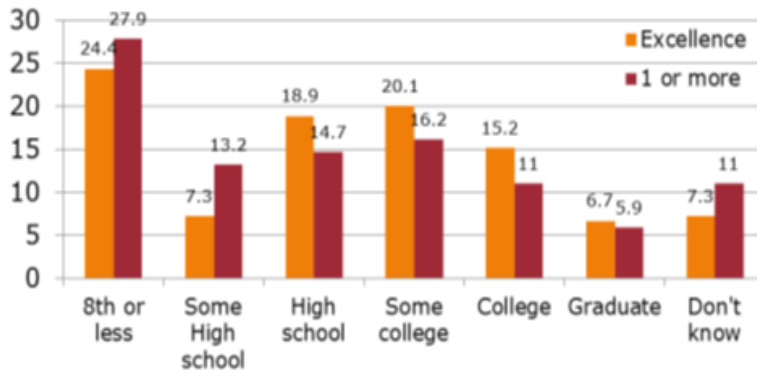


**Question 17/2007**

How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Father)

The results of the survey for Fathers in 2007 indicated (column 2) that 7.3% of students whose fathers had some high school education were making good progress in all of their classes. Comparatively, 13.2% of students who had fathers with some high school education were having problems in 1 or more of their classes.

Figure 1.22



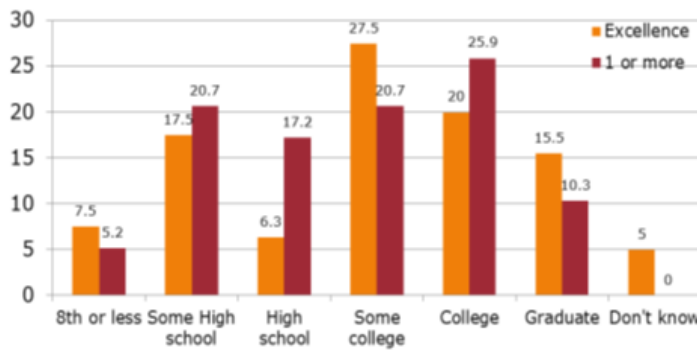
**Question 17/2008**

How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Mother)

The results of the survey for mothers in 2008 indicated 6.3% (column 3) of students who had a mother with high school education were making good progress in all of their classes. Comparatively, 17.2% of students with a mother who had a high school education were having problems in 1 or more of their classes.

**Question 17/2008**

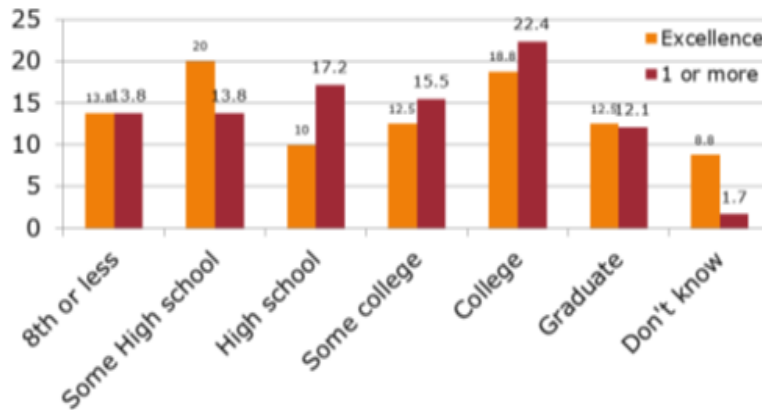
How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Mother)



**Question 17/2008**

How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Father)

The results of the survey for Fathers in 2008 indicated 10.0% (column 3) of students whose father had a high school education were making good progress in all of their classes. Comparatively, 17.2% of students whose father had a high school education were having problems in 1 or more of their classes.

**Question 26/2007**

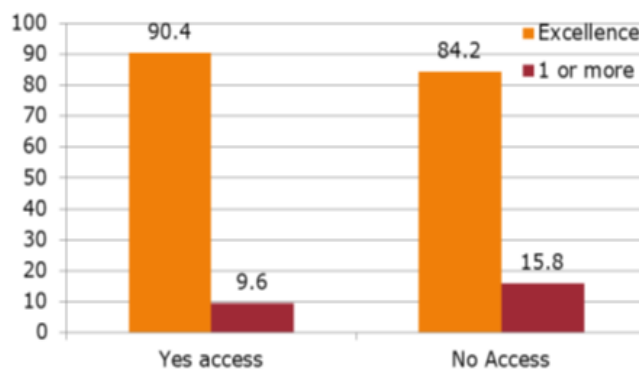
Do you have internet access at home? Yes NO

In 2007, the data revealed that 9.6% (column 0) of students who did not have access to the internet were making good academic progress in all of their classes. Comparatively, 15.8% of students who did not have access to the internet were

**Question 26/2007**

Do you have internet access at home? Yes NO

Figure 15.7



### Question 26/2008

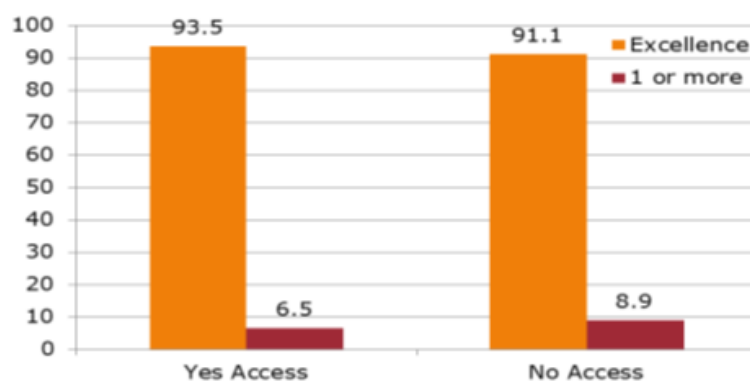
Do you have internet access at home? Yes NO

In 2008, the data revealed that 6.5% (column 0) of students who did not have access to the internet were making good academic progress in all of their classes. Comparatively, 8.9% of students who did not have access to the internet were having problems in 1 or more of their classes.

### Question 26/2008

Do you have internet access at home? Yes NO

Figure 15.8



### Conclusion, Discussion, Recommendations

In conclusion, the transition from high school to tertiary education is a journey of uncertainty for many first generation college students. Some goods and services of high school that were part of the norm now represent an added expense. This experiment explored the emerging trends that reflected a possible change in demographics. The data revealed that there was no significant findings in this design. However, there was some slight incremental change within some of the questions which could suggest that further research should be conducted in the future.

In Question 17, from 2007 to 2008, the data revealed there was a decrease in fathers with less than an eighth grade education while trending toward an increase of fathers with post baccalaureate degrees and students making good progress in all of their classes. Similarly, from 2007 to 2008, there was a decrease in mothers with an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education or less and an increase in mothers in the areas of high school graduates, some college, and post baccalaureate degrees. This means that students who were doing well and making good progress in all of their classes are reporting that their mothers are acquiring more education than in previous years. The data in 2008 revealed incremental changes for students who were having problems in one or more of their classes. There was a decrease in the number of students having problems in one or more classes whose mothers had an education of 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less. In 2007, 26.3% of students who were

having problems in one or more classes had mothers with an education ceiling of 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less. In 2008 this number decreased by five times. In 2008, the number declined to 5.2%. Additionally, there was an increase in students having problems in one or more classes by students who had mothers with college degrees. This increase was three fold. There was an increase in student mothers with college degrees and an increase in students having problems in one or more classes.

In question 26, there was no significant change. However, the data revealed a decrease in students who did not have access to the internet. In 2007, 9.6% of students did not have access to the internet. In 2008, only 6.5% of students did not have access to the internet. This means that incoming students have more internet access resources available to them than in previous years.

APPENDIX

**Question 8.1**

How do you feel about your academic progress this quarter? (circle only one)

- e I am making good progress in all of my classes
- f I am having problems with one of my classes
- g I am having problems with two of my classes
- h I am having problems with all of my classes

	Father	Mother
8 <sup>th</sup> grade or less		
Some high school		
High school graduate		
Some college		
College graduate		
Post baccalaureate or graduate		
Don't know		

**Independent Variable (s):** Questions 17.1, and 26.1, are the variables that were manipulated.

**Question 17.1**

How much formal education did your parents obtain?

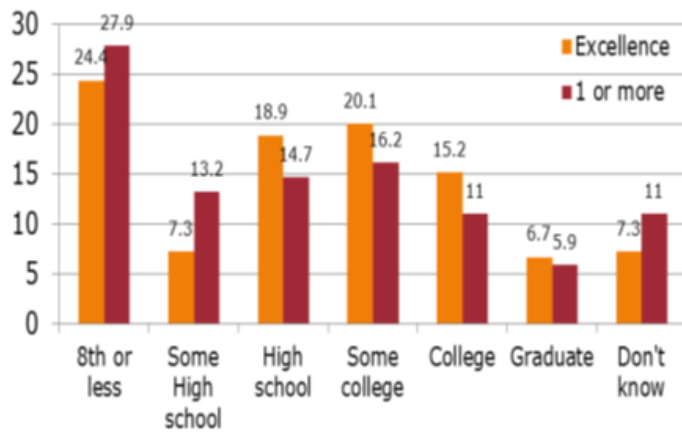
**Question 26.1**

Do you have internet access at home? Yes No

**Question 17/2007**

How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Father)

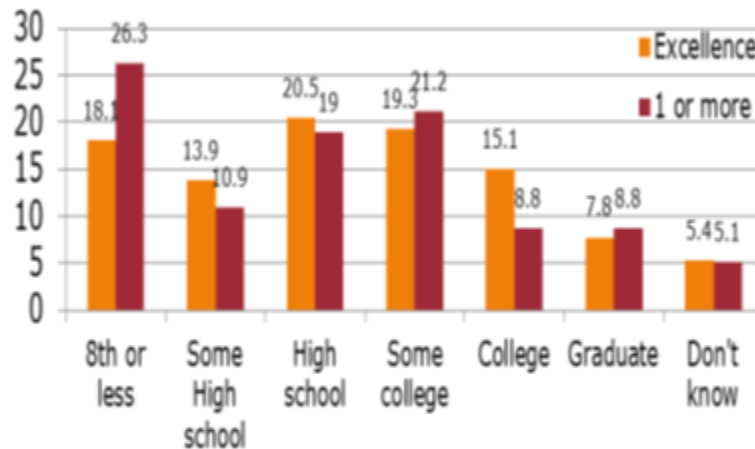
Figure 1.22



**Question 17/2007**

How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Mother)

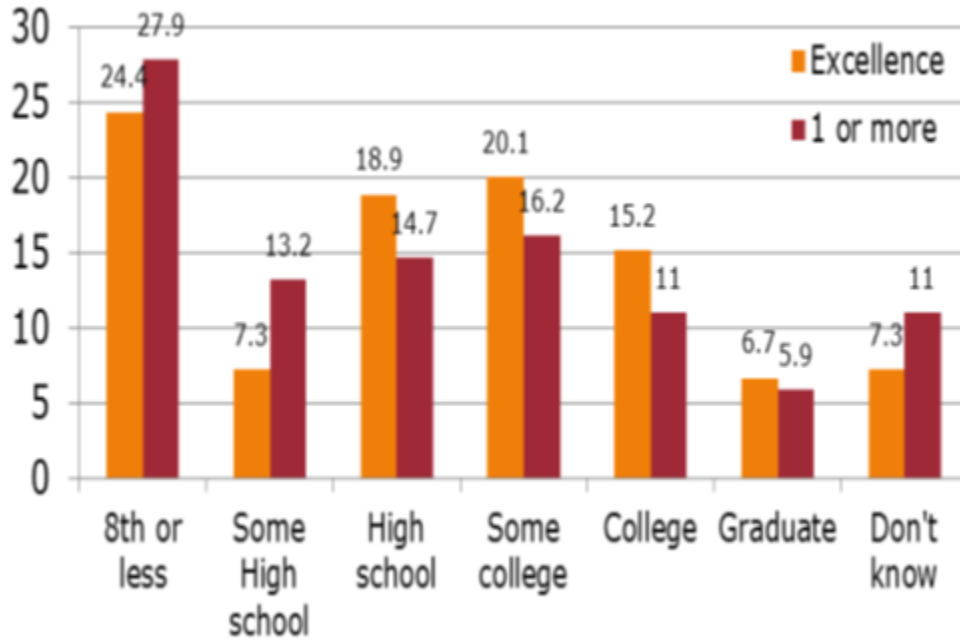
Figure 11.1



**Question 17/2008**

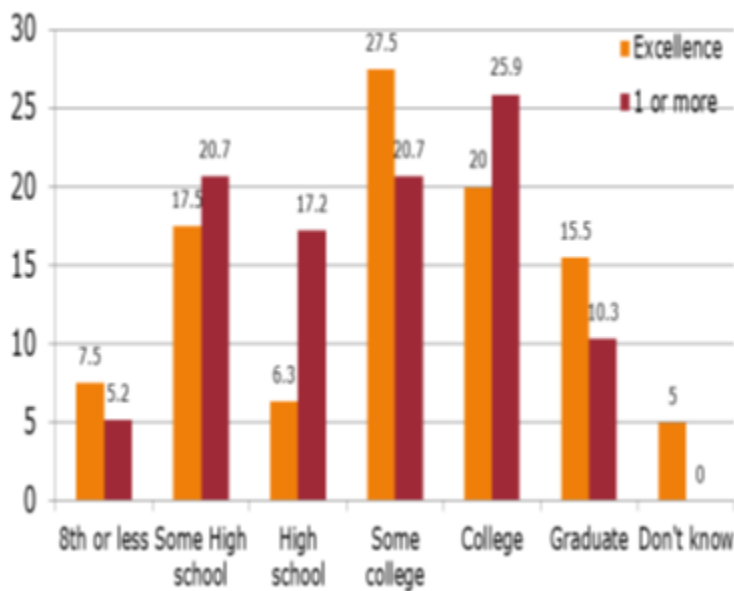
How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Mother)

Figure 11.3



**Question 17/2008**

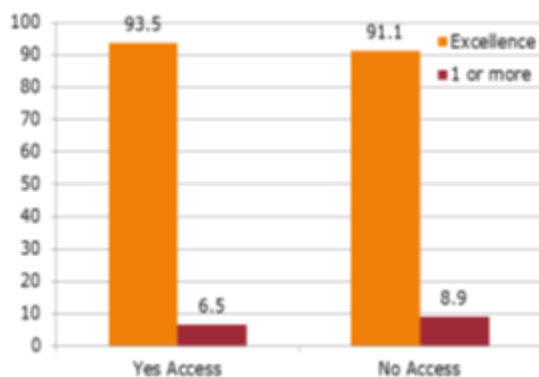
How much formal education did your parents obtain? (Father)



**Question 26/2008**

Do you have internet access at home? Yes NO

Figure 15.8



In 2008, the data revealed that 6.5% (column 0) of students who did not have access to the internet were making good academic progress in all of their classes. Comparatively, 8.9% of students who did not have access to the internet were having problems in 1 or more of their classes.



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