

# When a College Degree May Not Be Enough

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

It would seem that graduating from a good college with solid grades is no longer sufficient to be competitive in today's job market. This is the conclusion drawn by the Editor in Chief of Kiplinger Magazine, Knight Kiplinger, who recently told a story about his college-educated daughter, who was asked to take two skill tests at a job interview for a position she was seeking ("Kiplinger's Personal Finance" December 2013). Although these skills are typically associated with more technical aptitude (his daughter was seeking a graphic arts and web design position), Kiplinger did some digging around and found that skill testing is a growing trend among employers seeking to hire the most talented and skilled from among the growing numbers of college graduates entering the market.

While talk of skills may first bring to mind a vision of technical capacity like the ability to build a website or manage an information system, the research seems to indicate the trend is far broader. Just as graduate school programs have long used the GRE along with its Subject Tests in Science, Math and Literature to rank students' potential for graduate study,

employers are beginning to use those scores to assess job applicants. The implication is that job seekers can take the GRE and brandish top scores on their resume to entice employers with their mental aptitude.

The trend toward employer testing appears to be running parallel with the bent toward rising minimum education requirements for employment in the United States. A survey of over 2,700 employers published by Lorin-Hitt (Professor, Wharton School, UPenn) and Prasanna Tambe (Stern School, NYU) showed that 18 percent of private sector employers increased educational requirements over the last five years and nearly one-third state they require a college education for jobs previously filled by high school graduates. But the important question for a business's bottom line is whether a more educated work force results in greater revenues. According to researchers who analyzed 20 million resumes and connected them to the company performance of thousands of employers, the answer is 'yes' but not necessarily in all occupations. For example, in customer service and in sales positions, the profits are significantly larger when companies hire

college-educated individuals. The results of these studies show simple correlations, which do not prove causality. However, human resource managers who were surveyed seem to provide further information that supports the correlations. Of managers who hire more workers with college degrees for jobs traditionally held by high school educated workers, 64 percent cite higher work quality and 45 percent cite higher productivity. These are some of the factors that may account for the relationship found between a better educated workforce and increased company revenues.

Interestingly, this relationship did not hold when the researchers examined information technology workforces; it appears that persons with strong technical capacity (if skills are kept current by training) contribute to a company's success regardless of level of education. Thus, hiring for degrees alone does not seem to ensure a successful workforce in all companies and under all conditions. People of all ages and backgrounds can and do learn valuable skills through on the job experiences as well as through self-education in courses taken outside of a formal de-

gree program. Some employers also argue why pay more for a college grad when an applicant can demonstrate knowledge and reasoning skills needed to do the job well. What difference does where or if they went to school make? This trend is further fueled by a backlash against mounting student debt coupled with the high cost of a four-year college degree, which can cost families easily \$100,000 to upwards of \$250,000. Many young people are opting for a condensed, tailored education, such as vocational training or an associate degree path from a community college, while others who have taken the four-year route to a degree work for a few years and then choose to complete a certification or two in order to further qualify them for the job they want rather than paying for a pricey graduate diploma.

A traditional college education may be a great foundation, but the lesson here is to develop skillsets as you earn your degree so that your classroom knowledge is supplemented by practical applications. Internships and summer jobs are critical components for all college students. And for students in liberal arts as well as more technical fields,

it pays to remember that critical reading and writing are valuable skillsets too. This very point is made clear by Kiplinger, who notes that his magazine has long assigned freelance stories (for pay) to individuals applying for writing positions at the company in an effort to assess determination, writing ability and creativity.



Elizabeth LaScala Ph.D. guides families through the sometimes complex world of college admission. She helps students identify college majors and career paths, develops good fit college lists, and provides essay coaching and application support to help students tackle each step of the admission process with confidence and success. Elizabeth also helps families maximize opportunities for scholarships and financial aid awards. Visit [www.doingcollege.com](http://www.doingcollege.com); Call (925) 891-4491 or email at [elizabeth@doingcollege.com](mailto:elizabeth@doingcollege.com).

# Students Drive School Safety Initiatives

Submitted by Theresa Schmidt and Diane Sharp



Sleepy Hollow Elementary School Principal Ken Gallegos and Miramonte High School freshman Stephen Schmidt smile near one of the new compass roses on campus. Photo provided

With campus shootings, and incidences of cyber bullying on the rise, student safety is top of mind for many Lamorindans. Four local high school students decided to take the initiative and make life a little safer for others.

After reading a story about school safety in the Acalanes High School newspaper, Blueprint, following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., junior Megan Yee looked into the issue of student and campus safety at her school and at the Acalanes Union High School District. "During an interview with school safety expert Chris Dorn about ways to improve Acalanes' safety, we discussed that classroom doors should be able to lock from the inside as well as the outside," said Yee. "Acalanes' doors only lock from the outside; if an intruder were to come on campus, teachers would have to open their doors in order to lock them. This puts teachers and students at risk."

Dorn said some schools purchased small magnetic strips that teachers can leave on their door frames, and, in the case of an emergency, could easily pull off without opening their doors fully (the door will lock once the strip is removed). Yee discussed the door issue with the Acalanes associate principal, Peter Stewart, and forwarded him the link about the strips from Dorn. "Mr. Stewart, in turn, shared the information with one of our associate superintendents," said Yee, "and he ended

up ordering them for the entire school district."

Miramonte High School freshman Stephen Schmidt was also concerned about school safety and began to research school emergency protocols. He met with Sleepy Hollow Elementary School Principal Ken Gallegos to discuss safety ideas as part of his Eagle Scout project. Schmidt learned that in an emergency, responders would ask for a directional location to indicate a particular site on campus. "For example: 'The earthquake damage is in the playground bathrooms, located on the western part of the campus,'" he explained. But quickly communicating the directional location of a disaster can be difficult, so Schmidt suggested installing two-foot diameter, five-color compass roses at seven strategic locations on the campus and training students and staff how to use them so they could easily determine north, south, east and west from several locations on campus. He hopes to expand the Campus Compass Project to all Lamorinda schools and across the nation.

For Miramonte senior Nick Coufal, the issue of student safety took a different turn when his sister, Sarah, was severely cyber-bullied. "Someone stole her identity and opened an Ask.fm account impersonating her," he said. "There were hundreds of fraudulent and appalling posts." Ironically, Coufal won as student body president with his anti-bullying campaign.

Coufal persuaded the principal at Miramonte to show the film, "The

Bully Project" about five bullied teens, and to conduct a survey that would uncover how and where bullying was taking place. He also created posters and incorporated a "bully fact" in each of his daily broadcasts on the school PA system, and the vice principal asked him to help write the lesson plan for the day of the film. "Follow-up questions generated thoughtful discussions about creating a more inclusive environment, safe Internet practices, and abandoning intellectual superiority," he said. "To give bystanders tools to combat bullying, I developed a handout called '10 Ways to be an Upstander.'" Coufal is planning future assemblies where experts will give on-going training to bystanders and victims, and several other schools plan to show the film thanks to his efforts.

Another senior at Acalanes High School, Brian Lilienstein, also made a difference after a personal experience. When he was 13 years old, he helplessly watched as a man died on a street after jumping from his vehicle. "I sat stunned with no idea what to do," said Lilienstein. "That night has haunted me. It was the most terrifying and defining moment of my life. I never again wanted to feel so helpless." He decided he needed to know CPR, and began work to develop a training program for students (see the

related story at <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0717/Brothers-Take-CPR-Training-to-Las-Lomas-High-School-Honoring-Wrestlers-Memory.html>). To date, Lilienstein and many others involved

in the program have helped train over 1,500 high school and middle school students in CPR.

These students went beyond simple curiosity, or even a desire to make a difference – they took action.

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