

Post Affirmative Action: Evening the Score

Since the abolishment of affirmative action in Texas and California, minority admissions at the state's law schools have plummeted. At some elite institutions, a candidate's score on the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) can count for as much as half the admission criteria. Although some undergraduate schools are talking about eliminating the SAT, there is no such talk at law schools. Some administrators agree that the LSAT is not a very accurate predictor of first year success, but they have nothing better. On the average, black applicants score ten points below white test-takers on the LSAT, so it looks as if there is little hope. What can be done? Test preparation. And the more expensive the test preparation, it appears, the better. Whites and Asians are more likely than blacks to take commercial courses designed to prepare students for the LSAT, but while whites take high-end, intensive courses offered by Kaplan and the Princeton Review, minorities tend to settle for cheaper, weekend crash courses. There are many reasons for this—affordability, availability, inexperience—but the difference can be crucial. Kaplan's students average a seven point jump in scores, and they tend to end up at the top twenty-five law schools. Of students at those prestigious law schools, three out of four took the Kaplan course. Though law schools are interested in increasing the diversity of their student populations, they are barred from promoting the commercial test-prep courses. Fortunately, other organizations have heard the call. In Texas, California, and New York City, nonprofit groups are providing minority students with knowledge of and scholarships for taking either the Kaplan or the Princeton Review courses, and the results have netted more admissions for these students.

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Parents' Survival Tips for High School

San Francisco educator Michael Riera gives tips for surviving high school—not for the students, but for their parents. How many parents of adolescents today are not sure whether they and their children will survive this arduous journey? Riera's tips sound easy but promise to be harder to carry out: (1) Embrace estrangement while your child moves away from family but does not completely disconnect. Also expect to be criticized. (2) Expect to be fired as parent/manager but rehired as consultant. (3) Forget heart-to-heart talks and communicate indirectly, even if it has to be in writing. (4) Don't give advice, even when solicited. Encourage your teens to come up with their own solutions, which will encourage them to believe in themselves. Riera has a couple of books, one for parents and another for teens, both with some unorthodox advice. This seems appropriate, since oftentimes the only thing orthodox about some adolescents is that they are very unorthodox.

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