

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### *Unprepared for Community College*

Thomas F. McLarty does a good job of making the case for the importance of community college in closing the income and opportunity gaps in the U.S. ("Equality Needs More Than Free Tuition," op-ed, Feb. 17). He also puts his finger squarely on the problem with community colleges: the 20% graduation rate. The main reason for the low graduation rate is low academic skills. Fifty-two percent of incoming community college students don't have the basic reading and math skills to do community college-level work. When they are given the standard skill-assessment tests used for course placement, either the Accuplacer or Compass or ACT, they fall short of the cut-off scores and are placed in noncredit remedial courses that cost full tuition and fees but don't count toward a degree. After a semester or two

of these remedial courses, 90% drop out, discouraged, depleted and often in debt.

The cure is to make sure that high-school students have the necessary reading and math skills to meet community college standards by preparing them for those placement tests. Almost all high schools prepare students for the SAT, yet almost no high schools prepare students for the crucial placement tests for community colleges. If every high school that sends graduates to community colleges instituted a preparatory course in junior and senior year for their state's college placement test, we would see community college graduation rates spike up like a hockey stick. This is an easy fix. We should just do it.

GARY KAPLAN  
*Executive Director*  
*JFYNetWorks*  
*Boston*