

◆ When Casey Ravitz graduated in June from Poly Prep Country Day School in Brooklyn, she'd spent 14 years in three different private schools in New York City. For eight of those years, she'd kept weekly appointments with a \$100-an-hour Manhattan tutor.

"I had a lot of friends who were being tutored, too," says Ravitz, 18, an investment banker's daughter who moved to Chicago in August to attend DePaul University. "My last tutor wouldn't let me get away with anything. She was the most helpful person I've ever met."

In New York, where tuition at some private schools will top \$30,000 this fall, parents are spending thousands of dollars more on one-on-one instruction. Some teens need extra coaching—which can cost more than \$500 an hour—to get through chemistry or Kafka. Others seek help to nab the A's required for a seat at Harvard or Princeton universities, says Lisa Jacobson, 47, who started Manhattan-based Inspirica Ltd. in 1983 and now employs more than 100 tutors.

About 75 percent of private high school graduates in New York have had some tutoring, says Sandy Bass, editor of *Private School Insider*, a New York-based newsletter published five times a year. Rising demand for so-called homework help, which is distinct from prepping for the SAT college entrance exam, has led the city's tutoring companies to add teachers and services. Some are also jacking up prices. On Manhattan's Upper West Side, Allison Baer, 32, who has a doctorate in psychology from Columbia University, charges \$225 an hour for helping clients as young as 12 with writing skills. Baer had more business in this year's first half than in all of 2005, she says, and will raise her fee by 20 percent in October.

Many parents feel pushed into hiring tutors to offer their kids the same advantages as peers, Boston-based child psychiatrist Edward Hallowell says. Pressuring children to

BOOST YOUR KIDS' GRADES: \$500 AN HOUR

As competition among children of the baby boomers grows in elite New York schools, so too does demand for tutors.

By Lisa Kassenaar

New York private school student **Casey Ravitz**, who's going to DePaul, had eight years of tutoring.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER YANG



perform can quash their long-term interest in learning, says Hallowell, whose books include *CrazyBusy* (Ballantine Books, 256 pages, \$24.95) and *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness* (Ballantine Books, 256 pages, \$13.95). "It's madness," he says. "We are living in an age of incredible anxiety about children maintaining the lifestyle that their parents have achieved."

Bass says the boom in tutoring is powered in part by Wall Street bonuses, which have been at record levels in the past three years. Bankers at securities firms such as Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Merrill Lynch & Co. cashed a record \$21.5 billion in bonus checks last year, according to the New York state comptroller's office.

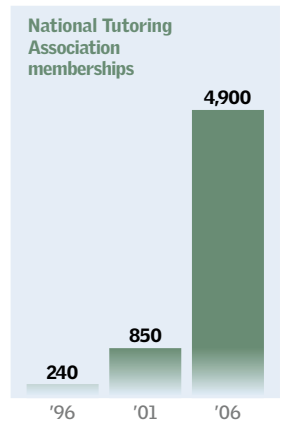
Bass also credits fierce competition for spots in elite high schools and colleges as the baby boom generation's teenagers create their own demographic bulge. From 2000 to '04, the number of children aged 10–19 in Manhattan jumped 18.7 percent to 128,817, according to U.S. Census data. The city's 87 independent schools, meanwhile, had 42,320 students in 2005, 11 percent more than in 2000, the New York State Association of Independent Schools says. "Kids are taking harder courses and filling their schedules with things that help them stand out," Bass says. "The tutor comes in to help them."

When it comes to pressuring kids to achieve in school, New York is the epicenter, says Lloyd Thacker, a former admissions officer at the University of Southern California and founder of the Education Conservancy, an advocacy group based in Portland, Oregon. "Tutoring is the symptom, and the fact there is so much of it says there is a sickness," he says. "If past trends hold up, it's likely to spread."

Ravitz, an only child who grew up on the Upper East Side, was first tutored as a 7-year-old at Trevor Day School on West 88th Street. By the time she graduated from Poly Prep, she'd had three more tutors. One helped with essay writing; another, called in when Ravitz was struggling in 10th-grade French, steered her to B+'s in the class, she says. "The tutors were able

Crammed

The number of tutors has exploded in the past decade.



Source: NTA

to help her to buckle down," her mother, Debbie Dunn, 52, says. Ravitz's final Poly Prep report card, with two A-'s and one B-, hung on Dunn's refrigerator as she helped her daughter pack for college.

Many private schools have loaded their curricula with university-level courses that demand hours of homework from students every night. At Horace Mann School in the Bronx, for example, an honors physics class that covers mechanics, thermodynamics, electricity and magnetism focuses on teaching students how to prepare scientific papers. At Saint Ann's School in Brooklyn, one 12th-grade English class stud-

ies novels by Honoré de Balzac, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Henry Fielding, Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Pynchon and Virginia Woolf.

"The pressure is real," says Edith Spiegel, whose daughter, now 20, was tutored while attending the Dalton School on the Upper East Side. Spiegel, 58, who taught in New York's public school system for 29 years, says the stigma attached to tutoring when she was a child has faded. "When my friends got tutored, we thought of them as stupid," she says. "Now, we need our kids to be as smart as they can be."

Ivy League Tutors Inc., which has offices on Manhattan's Madison Avenue, has instructors trained specifically to help students at Riverdale Country School in the Bronx complete a single 11th-grade course, Constructing America. The class combines advanced placement material in both history and English, says Ryan Chang, 26, who founded the company three years ago and holds a bachelor's degree from Columbia University in economics and creative writing. At least 25 kids used the service to get through Constructing America in the spring term, he says. Fall-semester students started booking in July.

Chang, whose instructors charge \$125–\$250 an hour, says competition is driving growth for his business, which now has about 100 clients and 20 tutors. "Parents are worried that if they aren't doing it, it's a disadvantage to their student," he says. Lately, he's been turning away those who want to start their seventh- and eighth-graders on SAT preparation. The test is given in the 11th grade.

Individual instruction has ramped up all over the U.S. in

About 75 percent of private high school graduates in New York have had some tutoring, says Sandy Bass of Private School Insider.





Tutors **Brig Boonswang**, left, and **Rachel Magid** offer teens Xbox video games and energy drinks while they wait for their \$250-an-hour tutoring sessions.

the past five years, especially in California, Illinois and Texas, says Sandi Ayaz, executive director of the Lakeland, Florida-based National Tutoring Association. Her organization is based in a state where home-schooled students are spurring demand for tutors. NTA membership, which includes private tutors, companies and others involved in administering educational services, jumped 62 percent to

4,900 this year and has risen almost six-fold since 2001, she says.

In New York, the price and quantity of tutoring surpasses other regions of the country, Ayaz says. "New York is on steroids, as usual," she says. Elsewhere, homework help goes for about \$15 an hour from a college student and \$25 from a graduate student.

Disparity in the quantity and quality of tutoring across the U.S. is deepening a divide between how wealthy and poorer kids are educated, says Arthur Levine, who left the presidency of Columbia's Teachers College in July to head the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation in Princeton, New Jersey. "We live in two different cultures in America," he says. "The result is that we have two educational systems that are separate but not equal."

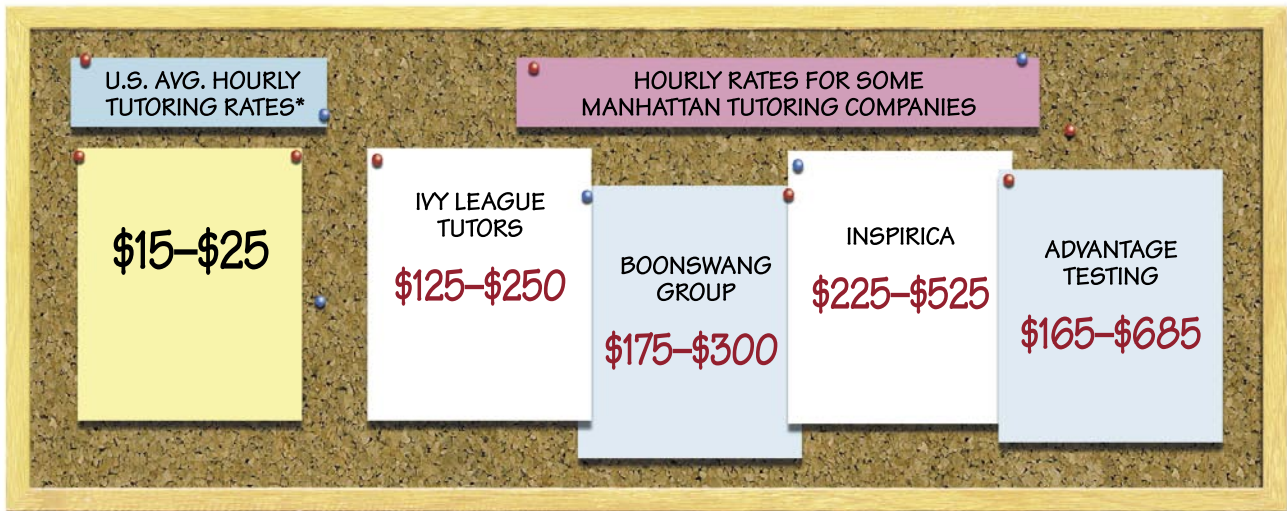
Wealthy parents in New York, Levine says, are increasingly seeking help for their children's course work and test preparation and for selecting a prestigious preschool, filling out private school applications and narrowing a roster of potential colleges. "Everything is on the table," he says. "The vast expansion in tutoring—sometimes at an enormously high price—is part of that phenomenon."

Manhattan tutoring companies ratchet up prices by offering extra services. Inspirica, which bills \$225-\$525 an hour, offers seminars on school admissions and sets apart three of its full-time employees just to deal with parents' questions, Jacobson says. Instructors are hired for their teaching ability, she says, and are trained how to behave professionally when they give lessons, whether in a client's Manhattan apartment, on a yacht or in a vacation home in the Hamptons or in Europe.

Brig Boonswang, 34, a former investment banker at Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette Inc., offers teens the use of a 42-inch (1.1-meter) flat-screen TV, one of Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 video game consoles and a fridge stocked with Red Bull energy drinks at his tutoring shop on East 95th Street. Some teens drop by four times a week and may stay hours beyond their 60-minute, \$250 session, he says.

Pricey pedagogues

Tutors in New York can charge as much as 46 times more than those in other parts of the country.



*U.S. average rates are \$15 for tutoring from a college student and \$25 from a graduate student. Sources: Companies, National Tutoring Association

Boonswang, who has a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Columbia, began tutoring as a career in 2001 after talking to Stephen Spahn, chancellor of the Dwight School on the Upper West Side, at a cocktail party. Boonswang says he was unemployed after a Brazilian Internet company for which he'd helped raise \$2 million went bust. In April 2005, he was joined at Boonswang Group by Rachel Magid, 28, a 2004 graduate of Harvard Business School who previously worked as a consultant at McKinsey & Co. The partners now employ 10 part-time tutors and aim to have the same number working full time and revenue of \$3.5 million in five years.

Boonswang says his job is much more rewarding than banking ever was. Buoyant kids text-message him after receiving good grades and sometimes seek his support as late as 2 a.m., he says.

Magid says hiring a tutor lets parents maintain a smooth relationship with their teens. "The parents would rather us deal with the kids and the homework," she says. "It cuts out an ongoing struggle between them."

There's a deepening divide between how wealthy and poorer kids are educated in the U.S., says Arthur Levine, former president of Columbia's Teachers College.

Highly compensated Wall Street professionals often have little free time for their families and don't want those precious hours to be muddled with homework stress, says Kathryn Smerling, an Upper East Side-based family therapist who has a doctorate in early childhood education. They're also competitive, driven people who see their children's success as their own, she says. "Having your kid perform is an important aspect for many people who live in New York," she says. "And there is more competition now for your kid to be a superkid."

The surge of teenagers also means it's harder to land a place in a top high school, and students who don't manage to get good grades are more likely to be "counseled out," or nudged by school guidance counselors toward less-rigorous programs, Bass says.

Recognizing how tough their classes can be, many private schools employ learning specialists, hold study sessions and ensure teachers are available for extra help. "The school discourages extra tutoring when it's not necessary," says Bernice Hauser, Horace Mann's director of intercampus activities. "We can't stop parents from seeking it."

Julia Calabrese, 18, graduated from the Spence School on the Upper East Side in June and entered Barnard College, a women's college affiliated with Columbia, across town in August. Her math grades shot up after a tutor taught her how to draw a chart of how the sine and cosine relate to the tangent in trigonometry, she says. "I was having trouble grasping this, and the entire last term of 10th grade was trig," says Calabrese, who was also tutored in French.

Anxiety about college is helping fuel business at Advantage Testing Inc. on East 86th Street. Arun Alagappan, 46, president of the 20-year-old firm, is probably the city's most expensive tutor. Alagappan charges \$685 for a 50-minute



Dan Levine, who starred in the role of Marius in *Les Misérables*, says his business grew because some parents liked having a connection with a Broadway actor.

'It's not worth it to sacrifice childhood to go to the Ivy League,' a psychiatrist says.

session—if you can get one. The waiting list for his time sometimes stretches to two years, Advantage spokesman Charles Loxton says.

Alagappan, who answered questions for this story via e-mail, says about half of his clients are strong students who want to get higher grades or delve deeper into material that intrigues them. “Students are more ambitious and competitive today than they were 20 years ago, and many are now applying to colleges with truly outstanding qualifications,” he says. Alagappan is a Harvard Law School graduate who once worked at Sullivan & Cromwell LLP, last year’s top law firm for mergers and acquisitions.

A wall of academic honors isn’t necessary for a good tutor, says Steven Pines, executive director of the Rockville, Maryland-based Education Industry Association. A college degree, a state teaching certificate and classroom experience can be much more relevant credentials, he says.

“You can be a great mathematician but not able to teach math,” says Pines, who worked for 10 years at Baltimore-based Sylvan Learning Centers,

a unit of Educate Inc., which has 1,200 offices around the country, including nine in New York. “You need to be able to convey it in a way that’s meaningful.”

Hallowell founded a medical center in 1996 that offers treatment for attention deficit disorder, anxiety and stress. The psychiatrist encourages tutoring for children with learning problems. For other students, he says, parents may be better off banking the money and giving it to their children when they grow up and start a business. “It’s not worth

it to sacrifice childhood to go to the Ivy League,” he says.

The college admissions frenzy is at its worst in the New York metropolitan area because so many families are looking for spots in the same schools, Jacobson says. New York, New Jersey and Connecticut teens face longer odds of getting into the 25 most-selective U.S. colleges because of limits on how many are accepted from each region of the country.

Princeton, which tied with Harvard, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for first place in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2006 ranking of the best U.S. colleges, had a record 17,563 applicants last year. It accepted 10.2 percent for the class of 2010, down from 11 percent for the class of 2009, spokeswoman Cass Clait says. More than 7,000 of the school's applicants had high school averages of A- or better, and 95 percent of those accepted ranked in the top 10 percent of their class.

While doing better in school is the No. 1 reason people hire tutors, status is a close second. Daniel Levine, who

began tutoring in 1995 while he was playing the role of Marius in the Broadway musical *Les Misérables*, says parents passed his name around and bragged of their connection to a leading man. Levine, who has a bachelor's degree from Brandeis University and once planned to be a dentist, has performed as a singer, dancer and actor in seven Broadway shows.

His companies, Big Apple Tutoring and Exclusive Education, have 40 staff instructors and charge \$85–\$115 an hour to teach children in clients' homes. “There's a lot of money around, and parents see that neighbors and friends are hiring tutors, too,” Levine says. “There's certainly no shortage of clients.” He says he's just received a call from a mother seeking tutoring for a child who isn't reading well enough. The child is 5 years old. ▶

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BLOOMBERG TOOLS

Planning for College

For a directory of U.S. private schools, type SCLS <Go>, as shown below. Click on Phillips Academy Andover, for example, to see the Web site of the prep school in Andover, Massachusetts, that was founded in 1778 and whose alumni include both Presidents Bush.

For a menu of Web sites related to education for children, type EDFC <Go>. Type NI KIDS <Go> to see headlines of news stories related to children. For headlines of stories about education in the U.S., type TNI US EDU <Go>. For a menu of college-related Web sites, type COUV <Go>.

You can use the Expected Future Education Cost (EF) function to calculate how much you'll need to save to pay to send a child to college. For example, to calculate how much you'd need to save to send a child born this year to Harvard College, the undergraduate college of Harvard University, type EF <Go>.

Tab in to the FIRST YEAR OF EDUCATION field, and enter 2024, the year a baby born in 2006 will turn 18. In the YEARS OF EDUCATION field, enter the length of time you expect your child will need to graduate. The PAYOUT PERIODS/YEAR (1–4) field lets you set the number of payments you expect to make in each year of college. Tab in to the

PRESENT ANNUAL COST OF EDUCATION field, and enter 43655, which is the overall cost of attending Harvard for the 2006–07 academic year. That figure includes tuition of \$30,275 a year, which is slightly less than the \$31,200 annual cost of attending grades six through 12 at Riverdale Country School in the Bronx.

The EXPECTED INVESTMENT RETURN field defaults to the current U.S. short-term interest rate, and the MARGINAL TAX RATE field defaults to the current capital gains tax rate. To change those assumptions, tab in to the fields and enter your own numbers. Press <Go> to perform the calculation. EF shows that the cost of a degree for a member of the class of '29 will be close to \$400,000, or about \$100,000 a year.

JON ASMUNDSSON

