

January 2008

## MAKE IT HAPPEN!: PRELIMINARY REPORT ON COLLEGE SUMMER PROGRAM FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

### Summary

The Foster Care to College Partnership (FCTCP) is a three-year, statewide, grant-funded initiative intended to improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates among foster youth. The DSHS Children's Administration, one of six agencies in the partnership, contracted with the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to evaluate FCTCP activities. The Foster Care to College Partnership currently focuses on four major initiatives for increasing the college enrollment of foster care youth: an educational campaign to encourage college enrollment; one-day informational seminars on college for middle and high school students; mentoring programs for youth in high school; and a summer program known as Make It Happen! (MIH) for foster youth in grade ten or higher who are interested in attending college.

This report presents information on the four-day Make It Happen! summer program. About 100 youth have attended the program in each of its first three years, 2005 to 2007. Both foster youth still in high school and those about to enter college can participate in the program. Most of the college-bound students attending MIH have received a Governor's Scholarship for Foster Youth; one requirement of the Governor's Scholarship program is attendance at MIH.

Participants at MIH filled out surveys at both the start and the end of the program. The responses by high school and college-bound students were analyzed separately. Highlights

from surveys filled out for the first three years of the program include the following:

- On entering the program, high school students agreed about 40 to 50 percent of the time that they felt ready to apply to college. By the conclusion of the program, they agreed over 80 percent of the time.
- At the start of the program, high school students agreed that they knew how to apply for financial aid and pay for college about 40 percent of the time. By the end, the percentage was between 87 and 95 percent.
- High school students went from agreeing with up to 60 percent of the statements indicating knowledge of college life to about 90 percent agreement.
- Changes in survey responses for students entering college in the fall were modest; the area with greatest change was in knowledge of college life.
- Foster youth, both high school and college-bound, entered the program with high academic and career expectations; these expectations changed only slightly during the program.

While MIH affects the knowledge and attitudes of participants at the time of the program, an assessment of the impact of the program ultimately depends on whether participants in MIH are more likely to enroll and succeed in college than non-participants. Subsequent reports by the Institute will examine actual college enrollment and college persistence rates for students participating in the program and compare these rates to those for foster youth with similar characteristics.

## Background

The Make It Happen! (MIH) summer program for foster youth is modeled after a summer program in Washington State for low-income youth. That program, developed as part of the Achievers Scholarship program, provides a four-day, overnight experience on college campuses to encourage college enrollment. The FCTCP obtained grant monies to establish a similar summer program in 2005 for foster youth—Make It Happen! MIH aims to raise college enrollment among foster youth by increasing their knowledge of how to pay for and apply to college. The four-day program provides a variety of activities, including workshops, a lecture by a college professor, a panel presentation by foster youth enrolled in college, and a college fair. Students also have the opportunity to live on a college campus and socialize with other foster youth. Foster youth who are in high school, in high school equivalent

programs, or entering college are eligible to participate in the program. Exhibit 1 shows the demographic composition of participants for the first three years of the program. Survey responses from students who received a GED or did not indicate their grade level are omitted from all subsequent exhibits.

This report uses surveys completed by participants before and after the program to assess the MIH program. These surveys provide information on students' reasons for attending the program; barriers they perceive to college enrollment and success; and their knowledge about college life, the college application process, and financing a college education. Later reports will compare actual college enrollment rates for participants in the MIH program with other selected groups of foster youth.

**Exhibit 1**  
**Characteristics of Participants in Make It Happen! Seminars**

		2005	2006	2007
<b>Gender</b>	Females	62	60	58
	Males	27	32	42
	Other or missing	1	0	7
<b>Grade in Fall</b>	10	6	4	5
	11	24	24	26
	12	32	30	42
	College	26	27	28
	GED Program, Not Enrolled, or Missing*	2	7	6
<b>Governor's Scholars**</b>		22	21	--
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	52	49	47
	African American	17	12	17
	Hispanic/Latino	6	11	8
	American Indian	5	6	7
	Asian or Pacific Islander	3	2	3
	Multi-Racial	6	7	20
	Other or Missing	1	5	5

\*This group was not used in the survey analysis.

\*\*The Governor's scholarship program for foster youth requires recipients to attend MIH. However, recipients who cannot attend MIH are allowed to complete three essays based on the content of the program in order to retain their scholarship.

**Why did students attend Make It Happen!?**

Youth were asked about their reasons for attending Make It Happen! on a survey administered at the start of the program. The wording of the question varied by year, but the findings are similar. In 2007, students were asked to indicate whether each of nine listed reasons influenced their decision to attend the program. Exhibit 2 shows the percentage of students indicating that the listed reason strongly influenced their decision to attend. Results for high school and college-bound students are reported in separate columns.

The top reasons cited by students still in high school for attending MIH were wanting to: plan their careers (57 percent); meet other youth from foster care (56 percent); learn how to pay for college (48 percent); and stay on a college campus (48 percent). For students about to attend college, about two-thirds said that attendance was a scholarship requirement and almost half indicated that their desire to plan for their future career strongly influenced their desire to attend.

**Exhibit 2**  
**Strong Influences on Decision to Attend Make It Happen! 2007**

Reason	High School	College-Bound
I wanted to plan for my future career	57%	48%
I wanted to meet other young adults from foster care	56%	38%
I wanted to learn how to pay for college	48%	29%
I wanted to get away from home and stay on a college campus	48%	29%
I wanted to learn how to apply to college	45%	20%
My caregiver wanted me to go	43%	33%
My independent living provider wanted me to go	37%	33%
My social worker wanted me to go	27%	24%
It was a scholarship requirement	14%	67%

## What do students see as barriers to enrolling and succeeding in college?

Youth were asked about the barriers they perceived to enrolling and succeeding in college at both the start and end of the four-day program. Each year the question was slightly different. In 2007, students were given a list of potential barriers and asked to indicate whether or not they viewed each as an obstacle to their enrollment and success in college. Exhibit 3 shows the percentage of students who regarded each item as a barrier.

- Both high school and college-bound students saw their need to work as the biggest barrier to enrolling and succeeding in college. This finding held on both the pre-event and post-event survey.
- Students saw fewer barriers to enrolling and succeeding in college after attending the program. The change was more marked for high school students than for students about to enter college.
- On the pre-event survey, 54 percent of high school students believed that being able to pay for college was a barrier to their enrollment and success in college. After the program, only 12 percent saw this as a barrier, a decline of 42 percentage points.

- On the pre-event survey, 41 percent of high school students believed that not understanding the college application process was a barrier to their enrollment and success in college. By the end of the program, almost no students saw the application process as a barrier.

## How did Make It Happen! change students' perception of barriers to college?

Students were asked at the beginning and end of the program to indicate their agreement with statements relating to college selection and application, college financing, college life, and academic and career expectations. These statements relate to the primary workshops and activities of the Make It Happen! program. Looking at change in students' responses to these statements in college sheds light on how MIH affected students' perceptions of barriers reported in the prior section.

Statements were grouped into four categories: applying to college, paying for college, knowledge of college life, and academic and career expectations. The proportion of statements that students agreed with was calculated (Composite Agreement Index) for each category. Since the specific statements on the survey varied slightly by year, care should be taken in comparing changes across years. Responses to individual items are reported in the Appendix.

**Exhibit 3**  
**Barriers to Enrolling and Succeeding in College, 2007**

Barrier	High School		College-Bound	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
I will need to work a lot once I age out of care	73%	45%	43%	33%
I cannot afford to pay for college	54%	12%	19%	4%
I do not understand how to apply to college	41%	3%	10%	4%
College courses will be difficult for me to pass	32%	21%	15%	4%
My grades are not good enough to be admitted to college	31%	13%	5%	7%
Language or cultural factors will make college difficult for me	16%	12%	5%	7%
I don't know why I should go to college	16%	6%	5%	7%
I will be raising a child and will not have time for college	6%	3%	0%	4%

## Applying to college

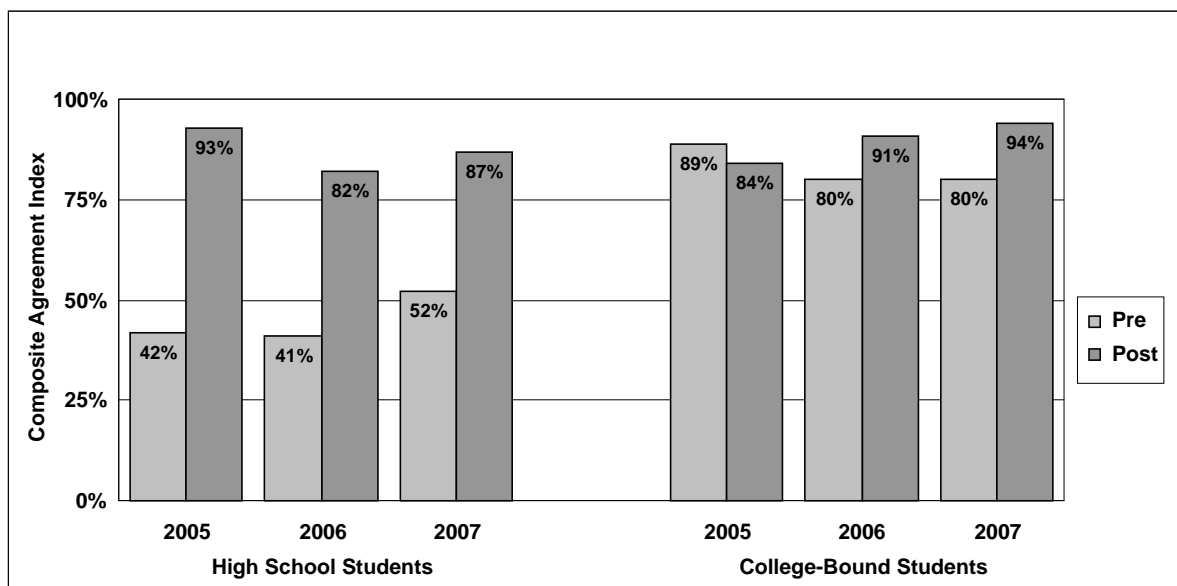
A major emphasis of the MIH program was increasing students' knowledge of how to decide which colleges to apply to, how to complete college applications, and how to make their decision about which college to attend. MIH activities included a college fair with representatives from state colleges and workshops for high school students on courses to take in high school, differences between community and four-year colleges, how to prepare a college application, and how to write a personal essay. The statements included in the survey relating to preparedness to select and apply to college varied slightly from year to year, but they generally included statements such as the following:

- I know the steps to take in order to go to college
- I know how to choose which college I should attend
- I know the difference between Certificates, Associates and Bachelors degrees
- I know how to write an effective personal statement essay

Exhibit 4 shows the average percentage of statements that students agreed with at the start (pre) and close (post) of the four-day program.

- On entering the program, high school students agreed about 40 to 50 percent of the time that they felt ready to apply to college. By the conclusion of the program, they agreed over 80 percent of the time.
- High school students came into the program less likely to indicate that they knew how to apply to college than students about to enter college; by the end of the program their responses were similar to those for college-bound students.
- At the start of the program, high school students in 2007 were more likely to agree with statements indicating that they knew how to apply to college than participants in earlier years.

**Exhibit 4**  
**Knowledge of How to Apply to College**



## Paying for college

Providing information to students about how to pay for college was a major component of the MIH program. All students attended a workshop which included information on financial aid, scholarships available for foster youth, and how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students were asked at the start and end of the program to indicate if they agreed with statements pertaining to college financing:

- I know how to pay for college
- I know how to fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)
- I know of at least two scholarships I can apply for to help pay for college

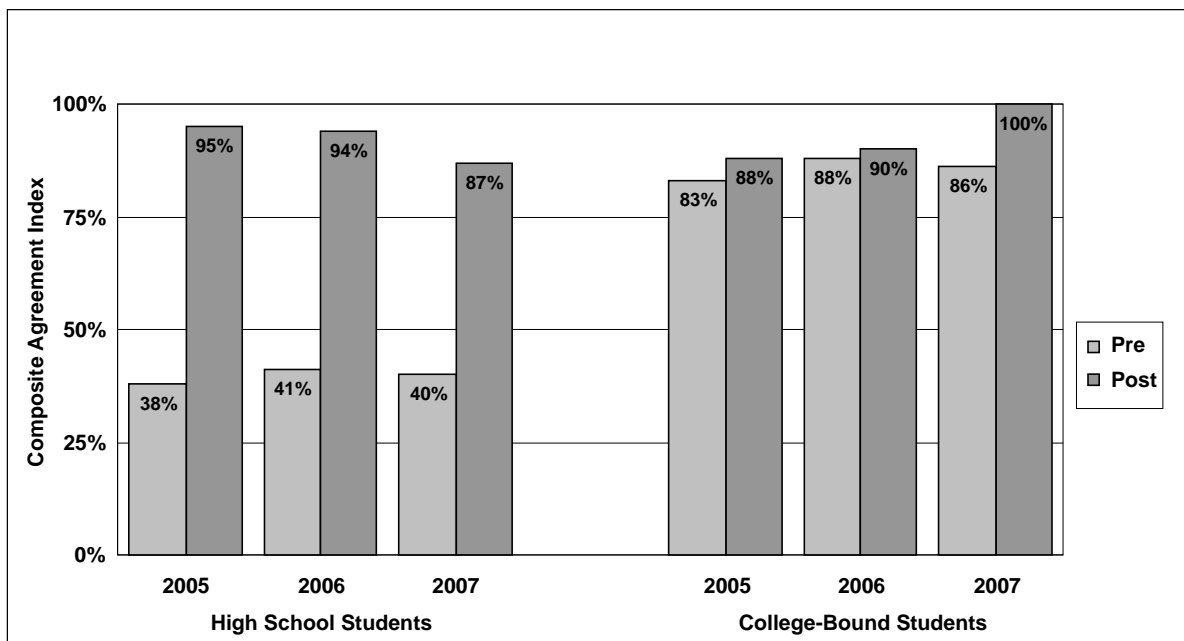
Exhibit 5 shows the proportion of statements that students agreed with, both before and after the program.

- At the start of the program, high school students agreed that they knew how to apply for financial aid and pay for college about 40 percent of the time. The

percentage is stable across all three years of the program. By the end of the four-day program, the percentage was between 87 and 95 percent.

- Students entering college had high levels of knowledge about how to pay for college at the start of the program and showed only a slight change between the start and conclusion of the program.
- In 2007 all college-bound youth leaving the Make It Happen! seminar expressed confidence in their knowledge of how to finance their college education.
- The change in the proportion of high school students agreeing that they knew how to fill out the FAFSA was large: only about one-quarter of students indicated that they knew how to fill out the FAFSA at the start of MIH and, by the end, between 77 and 95 percent of students indicated that they had such knowledge, depending on the year. (See the Appendix for responses to this item.)

**Exhibit 5**  
**Knowledge of How to Pay for College**



### **Knowledge of college life**

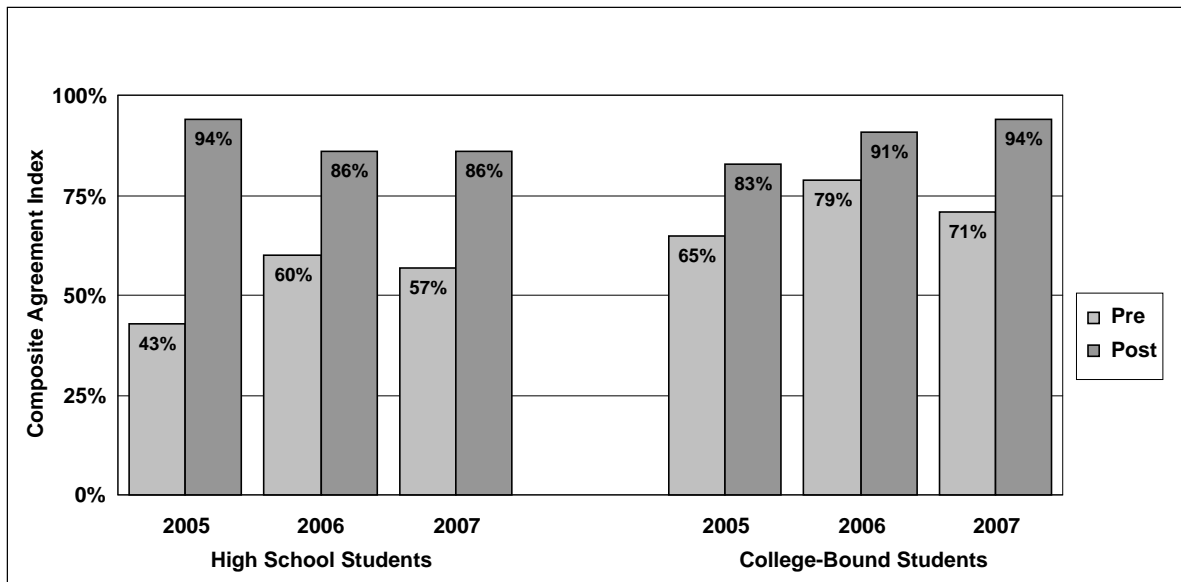
The MIH program also aimed to increase foster youths' knowledge of college life. All students had the opportunity to live on a college campus for four days: eating meals in the campus dining hall, living in a college dorm, having classes scheduled in various college buildings, and exploring the campus. All students also received some information on college life, and students about to enter college attended two additional workshops to help prepare for college life. Following are examples of statements on the survey relating to life at college:

- I can find my way around a college campus
- I know how to become involved with activities on a college campus
- I know what to expect from a college level course
- I know where to go for help at college if I need it

Exhibit 6 displays the percentage of items that students agreed with in this area.

- High school students went from agreeing with up to 60 percent of the statements about knowledge of college life to about 90 percent agreement. The rise among students about to attend college was more modest, between 10 and 20 percentage points.
- High school students started the program less likely to agree that they knew about college life than college-bound students, but at the close of the program their levels were comparable to those for college-bound students.

**Exhibit 6**  
**Knowledge of College Life**



### Academic and career expectations

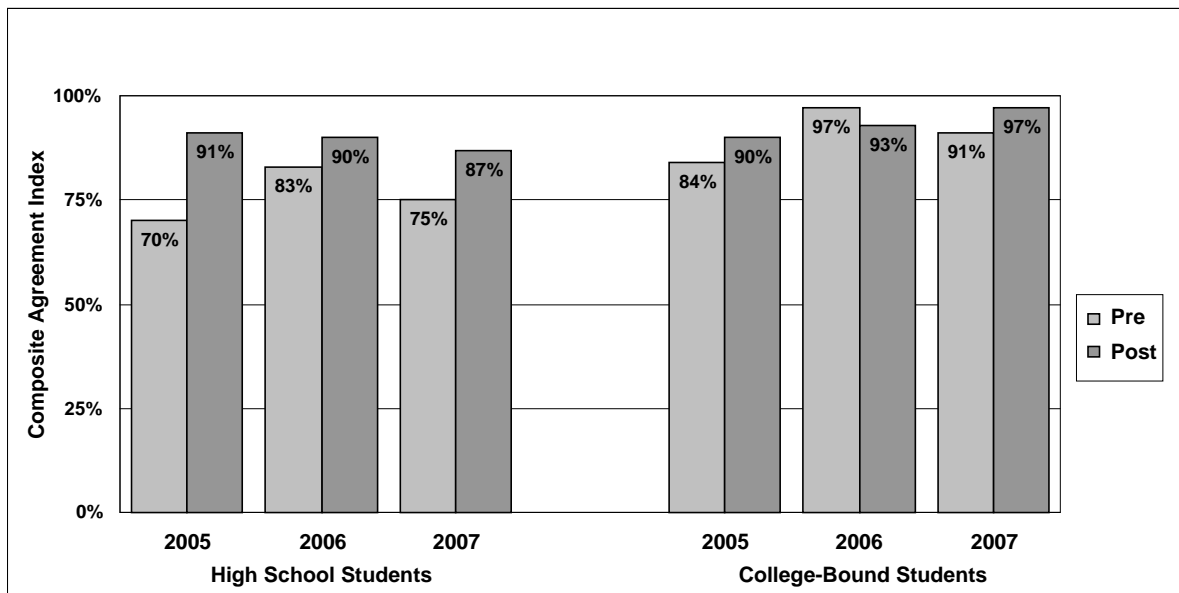
The MIH program included activities such as attending a college lecture by a university professor and a career exploration workshop, to support students' academic and career aspirations. The panel presentation by former foster youth attending college and interaction with college-bound attendees may also have affected students' belief that they could go to college and pursue their career goals. Following are examples of the statements related to academic and career expectations:

- I can pursue the career of my choice
- I will go to college
- I will graduate from college with at least a two-year degree
- I will graduate from college with at least a four-year degree

The results in Exhibit 7 show the following:

- Foster youth, both high school and college-bound, entered the program with high academic and career expectations; these expectations changed only slightly during the program.
- College-bound youth entered MIH with slightly higher academic and career expectations than students still in high school.
- Because of high pre-survey scores, changes for high school students were modest, ranging from 7 to 21 percentage points.
- At the end of the MIH seminar, over 80 percent of all high school and college-bound students expected to get a four-year degree. Among the college-bound attendees of the 2007 program, all respondents at the conclusion of the program indicated that they expected to graduate from college with a four-year degree. (See the Appendix for responses to this item.)

**Exhibit 7**  
**Academic and Career Expectations**





## **What did students say about Make It Happen!?**

At the close of the program, foster youth were invited to give feedback on the most and least helpful parts of the MIH program. Almost all the comments were positive, with about a third of all attendees saying they found the financial aid materials most helpful. Many also mentioned their appreciation for the chance to spend time connecting with other foster youth and their increased motivation to go to college. Less than one-quarter of the students noted some aspect of the program as being least helpful; many of these same students commented that they enjoyed being with foster youth, and that they felt increased confidence that they would go to college.

## **Did attendance at Make It Happen! affect college enrollment and success?**

Results from surveys filled out by participants in the Make It Happen! program show that it was a positive experience for most youth and that it allayed high school students' concerns about how to pay for and apply to college. By the end of the program, the only major barrier that many high school or college-bound students still saw to their success in college was their need to work once they left foster care. High school

students showed marked increases in their knowledge about college life, and how to apply to and pay for college. Change among attendees about to begin college was less, but they entered the program with fewer concerns about college enrollment and success and higher levels of knowledge about paying for and applying to college. The area of greatest change for college-bound students was in their knowledge of college life. Comments by participants were overwhelmingly positive, both about the content of the workshops and the opportunity to spend time with other foster youth.

While this report shows that the Make It Happen! program affects the knowledge and attitudes of participants at the time of the program, it does not make any claims about the long-term impact of the program. Such an assessment ultimately depends on whether participants in Make It Happen! are more likely to enroll and succeed in college than non-participants. Because program participants are likely to differ from non-participants in other significant ways than just attendance at the Make It Happen! program, this analysis must attempt to control for the bias introduced by self-selection into the program. Subsequent reports by the Institute will examine actual college enrollment and college persistence rates for students participating in the program and compare these rates to those for foster youth with similar characteristics.

## Appendix

### Exhibit A.1

#### Make It Happen! 2005 Survey, Percentage of Students Agreeing with Each Statement

Survey Questions	High School		College-Bound		Change	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	High School	College-Bound
<b>Getting to college:</b>						
I know the steps to take in order to go to college	53%	98%	91%	88%	45%	-3%
I know how to choose which college I should attend	50%	97%	96%	83%	47%	-13%
I know what is required for admission to college	45%	95%	91%	88%	50%	-3%
I know how to fill out a college admission application	36%	87%	96%	88%	51%	-8%
I know how to write a personal statement	27%	86%	70%	75%	59%	5%
<b>Average</b>	42%	93%	89%	84%	51%	-5%
<b>Paying for college:</b>						
I know how to pay for college	47%	93%	74%	92%	46%	18%
I know how to fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)	25%	95%	91%	88%	70%	-3%
I know of scholarships I can apply for to help pay for college	42%	97%	83%	83%	55%	0%
<b>Average</b>	38%	95%	83%	88%	57%	5%
<b>Academic and career achievement:</b>						
I believe I can pursue the career of my choice	79%	95%	96%	96%	16%	0%
I believe I will go to college	81%	100%	96%	96%	19%	0%
I believe I will graduate from college with at least a two-year degree	73%	83%	77%	92%	10%	15%
I believe I will graduate from college with at least a four-year degree	53%	83%	87%	88%	30%	1%
I believe I will do well in college	71%	98%	87%	92%	27%	5%
I believe I will complete a college certificate program of two years or less	64%	87%	59%	75%	23%	16%
<b>Average</b>	70%	91%	84%	90%	21%	6%
<b>College life:</b>						
I know what to expect from a college level course	39%	93%	78%	71%	54%	-7%
I can find my way around a college campus	26%	90%	57%	83%	64%	26%
I know where to go for help at college if I need it	40%	97%	57%	88%	57%	31%
I know how to become involved with activities on a college campus	37%	95%	52%	67%	58%	15%
I know how to manage my time between studying, working, and having fun	51%	92%	74%	79%	41%	5%
I know how to budget my money	45%	93%	70%	96%	48%	26%
I feel comfortable on a college campus	62%	97%	70%	96%	35%	26%
<b>Average</b>	43%	94%	65%	83%	51%	18%

**Exhibit A.2**  
**Make It Happen! 2006 Survey, Percentage of Students Agreeing with Each Statement**

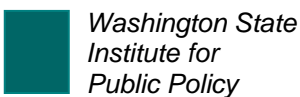
Survey Questions	High School		College-Bound		Change	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	High School	College-Bound
<b>Getting to college:</b>						
I know the steps to take in order to go to college	55%	91%	82%	95%	36%	13%
I know how to choose which college I should attend	56%	89%	91%	90%	33%	-1%
I know what is required for admission to 2-year and 4-year colleges	41%	86%	86%	95%	45%	9%
I know the difference between Certificates, Associates and Bachelors degrees	18%	81%	77%	95%	63%	18%
I know how to write a personal statement	37%	65%	64%	80%	28%	16%
<b>Average</b>	41%	82%	80%	91%	41%	11%
<b>Paying for college:</b>						
I know how to pay for college	51%	95%	82%	95%	44%	13%
I know how to fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)	26%	93%	91%	85%	67%	-6%
I know of at least two scholarships I can apply for to help pay for college	45%	93%	91%	90%	48%	-1%
<b>Average</b>	41%	94%	88%	90%	53%	2%
<b>Academic and career achievement:</b>						
I can pursue the career of my choice	77%	91%	95%	90%	14%	-5%
I <u>will</u> go to college	89%	93%	100%	90%	4%	-10%
I will graduate from college with <u>at least</u> a two-year degree	84%	91%	100%	95%	7%	-5%
I will graduate from college with <u>at least</u> a four-year degree	74%	84%	91%	95%	10%	4%
I want to go to college	91%	93%	100%	95%	2%	-5%
<b>Average</b>	83%	90%	97%	93%	7%	-4%
<b>College life:</b>						
I know how much work to expect from a college level course	52%	86%	82%	85%	34%	3%
I could find my classes on a college campus	55%	84%	68%	95%	29%	27%
I know where to go for help at college if I need it	61%	86%	86%	95%	25%	9%
I know where to meet friends and participate in activities on a college campus	50%	86%	76%	89%	36%	13%
I know how to manage my time between studying, working, and having fun	75%	88%	86%	95%	13%	9%
I know how to budget my money	57%	86%	73%	90%	29%	17%
I am comfortable on a college campus	68%	86%	82%	90%	18%	8%
<b>Average</b>	60%	86%	79%	91%	26%	12%

**Exhibit A.3**  
**Make It Happen! 2007 Survey, Percentage of Students Agreeing with Each Statement**

Survey Questions	High School		College-Bound		Change	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	High School	College-Bound
<b>Getting to college:</b>						
I know who to ask to write my letter of recommendations for college	54%	84%	76%	96%	30%	20%
I know someone who can help me apply for college and scholarships	78%	93%	90%	100%	15%	10%
I know how to figure out which college is best for me	47%	89%	90%	93%	42%	3%
I know the difference between Certificates, Associates and Bachelors degrees	47%	79%	67%	93%	32%	26%
I know what is required for admission to 2-year and 4-year colleges	52%	86%	81%	93%	34%	12%
I know how to write an effective personal statement essay	40%	87%	70%	86%	47%	16%
My questions about going to college have been realistically answered	44%	91%	86%	100%	47%	14%
<b>Average</b>	52%	87%	80%	94%	35%	14%
<b>Paying for college:</b>						
I will be able to find enough money to help pay for college	48%	90%	81%	100%	42%	19%
I know how to fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)	23%	77%	95%	100%	54%	5%
I know of at least two scholarships I can apply for to help pay for college	49%	93%	81%	100%	44%	19%
<b>Average</b>	40%	87%	86%	100%	47%	14%
<b>Academic and career achievement:</b>						
I have a strong idea about what my future career will be	67%	89%	81%	93%	22%	12%
I <u>will</u> go to college	89%	88%	100%	100%	-1%	0%
I will graduate from college with <u>at least</u> a two-year degree	80%	91%	95%	100%	11%	5%
I will graduate from college with <u>at least</u> a four-year degree	68%	88%	86%	100%	20%	14%
I know what is required to meet my career goals	69%	81%	95%	93%	12%	-2%
<b>Average</b>	75%	87%	91%	97%	12%	6%
<b>College life:</b>						
I know what to expect from a college level course	49%	84%	62%	93%	35%	31%
I know how to access health insurance during college	27%	77%	45%	96%	50%	51%
I am comfortable asking questions to college staff	69%	91%	71%	100%	22%	29%
I know how to meet friends and participate in activities during college	66%	91%	90%	100%	25%	10%
I know at least two housing options during college	58%	84%	81%	93%	26%	12%
I know how to budget my money	69%	84%	76%	82%	15%	6%
I feel comfortable and safe on a college campus	64%	94%	71%	96%	30%	25%
<b>Average</b>	57%	86%	71%	94%	29%	23%
<b>Other:</b>						
I know where to find information to help me when I leave foster care	58%	90%	86%	100%	32%	14%
I know other people like me who have graduated from college	55%	87%	70%	96%	32%	26%
I understand why my culture is important to knowing who I am	63%	86%	71%	96%	23%	25%

For further information, please contact Laura Schrager at (360) 586-2792, [schrager@wsipp.wa.gov](mailto:schrager@wsipp.wa.gov), or Corey Nunlist at (360) 586-2782, or [corey@wsipp.wa.gov](mailto:corey@wsipp.wa.gov).

Document No. 08-01-3902



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