

December 2009

FOSTER CARE TO COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP: EVALUATION OF EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR FOSTER YOUTH

In 2004, a consortium of government agencies and non-profit organizations developed a multi-faceted proposal designed to improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates among foster youth in Washington State. This three-year, foundation-funded effort,¹ called the **Foster Care to College Partnership (FCTCP)**, started in 2006. Various organizations within Washington State played a key role in the implementation and design of FCTCP activities, including:

- Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration
- College Success Foundation (formerly Washington Education Foundation)
- Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board
- Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Casey Family Programs
- Treehouse (Seattle-based non-profit serving foster youth)

The Children's Administration provided organizational and management oversight for this effort and asked the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to evaluate the success of the FCTCP's initiative. Previous reports completed by the Institute describe the implementation and early outcomes for the Foster Care to College Partnership. This report assesses the impact of Partnership activities on foster youth participants.

SUMMARY

The Foster Care to College Partnership (FCTCP) was a three year foundation-funded initiative led by six different state and community agencies in Washington State. The aim of the FCTCP was to increase the high school graduation and college attendance rate for youth aging out of foster care.

Foster Care to College partners implemented an educational campaign (including a website, direct mail, and local seminars) to encourage youth to attend college and provide information and resources to foster students and their families. In addition, FCTCP agencies established a statewide volunteer mentor program and summer college assistance workshop for foster youth.

As part of the FCTCP initiative, the Institute was asked to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities. This report includes the results of this evaluation. We found that compared to similar youth in foster care, foster students who participated in FCTCP programs were significantly more likely to graduate from high school and attend the first year of college. While high school completion and college enrollment rates for this population are still low, this research shows that these programs hold promise in improving the educational outcomes for youth in foster care.

¹ Casey Family Programs, the Stuart Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Northwest Children's Fund, and the Norcliffe Foundation provided funding for all Foster Care to College Partnership activities.

Background

The Foster Care to College Partnership (FCTCP) initiative aimed to reach the approximately 3,000 foster youth over the age of 13 in Washington State. Specifically, FCTCP activities were designed to:

- Deliver curriculum-based college preparation seminars targeting foster youth and their caregivers (grades 6 and higher)
- Disseminate information to foster youth, parents, and caseworkers encouraging post-secondary participation and providing information on resources to help pay for college
- Provide a four-day college preparation summer program for foster youth prior to graduation
- Expand a regional foster youth mentoring program for foster students throughout the state²

The two strategies implemented by the FCTCP involved (1) system-wide education and promotion of pathways to college for foster youth, and (2) direct educational services designed to improve the likelihood that foster youth would graduate from high school and attend college.

The two sections in this report discuss each of these strategies. The first section looks at the overall high school graduation and college enrollment rates among foster youth in Washington State. These trends give background and statewide information about the educational outcomes of foster youth. Section II includes more detail about the impact of the direct service elements of the FCTCP initiative—mentoring and four-day college preparation seminars.

² The Foster Care to College Partnership. (2004, October). *Ensuring higher education and training access for Washington's most vulnerable youth*. Proposal. Olympia, WA: Author.

Section I: FCTCP Informational Campaign

The Foster Care to College Partnership was formed with the understanding that multiple agencies and persons share responsibility for improving the educational attainment of foster youth. Child welfare, local schools, education agencies, and the judiciary must operate in concert with parents and youth to meet shared educational goals.³ As a way to disseminate reliable information about educational opportunities and resources to all these parties, FCTCP:

- **Developed an online “portal” with resources and information for foster youth and parents**

The website, www.independence.wa.gov, includes grade level-specific steps for preparing for college, applications for scholarships, information on applying for financial aid, and resources for housing, health care, and independent living. This website is maintained by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children’s Administration.

- **Mailed informational packets on college assistance opportunities every year (for each of the three years of the project) to foster youth.**

Youth, caregivers, and supportive adults received a comprehensive information packet which contained information on programs and services available to foster youth. The mailing, prepared by DSHS, was sent to approximately 6,000 foster youth between the ages of 15 and 18, foster parents, high school counselors, and social workers each year. The FCTCP brochure, entitled “You Can Go To College,”⁴ discussed the benefits of post-secondary education, outlined resources available to help pay for college, and addressed frequently asked questions foster youth may have about college applications and attendance.

³ E. Yu, P. Day, & M. Williams (2002). *Improving educational outcomes for youth in care: Symposium summary report*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

⁴ See www.independence.wa.gov/pdf/YouCanGoToCollege.pdf

- **Delivered college preparation seminars for middle- and high-school foster youth**

Foster youth and their caregivers were invited to attend seminars (often held at local schools or colleges) that promoted the benefits of college attendance and discussed how youth could prepare for and fund a college education. During the three years of the Foster Care to College initiative, 106 middle school foster youth, 375 high school foster youth, and 202 caregivers attended these college preparation seminars held throughout the state.

- **Provided training opportunities for social workers and caregivers on educational planning**

The FCTCP collaborated to prepare an educational planning and advocacy curriculum that was delivered to social workers, educators, caregivers, and community partners throughout the state.⁵ In 2007 and 2008, the Children's Administration hosted an "Education Institute" for 193 foster parents at the annual caregiver's conference.

In addition, between 2006 and 2008, officials from state colleges, workforce development councils, and child welfare agencies convened 29 "Education Summits" which addressed educational needs of foster youth. Nearly 2,400 professionals received training and information designed to improve educational prospects for youth aging out of foster care.

This statewide education and college promotion campaign reached thousands of school-age foster youth and providers over the course of three years.

⁵ See Casey Family Foundation's "Supporting Success" publications for information on the framework of this educational curriculum: www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/SupportingSuccess.pdf, and "It's My Life" www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/ItsMyLife/Education.htm.

During this three-year period, several additional efforts were launched to promote stability and improve educational attainment of foster youth. These efforts included:

- **Foster Care to 21:** In 2006, the Washington State Legislature authorized DSHS to allow 50 youth per year with either a high school diploma or GED to remain in foster care until they reach age 21. These "continuing foster care" youth must be enrolled in a post-secondary academic or vocational program.
- **Passport for Foster Youth Promise Program:** The Passport to College Promise Program (created in 2007) provides supplemental scholarship and student assistance for Washington State foster students who have spent at least one year in foster care since their 16th birthday.
- **Educational Advocacy:** In 2006, the Children's Administration contracted with Treehouse (an educational support organization for foster youth) to provide educational advocates in all six DSHS regions. Educational advocates are trained to work with school staff, social workers, and families to help students access support services, prevent school changes, and mediate disciplinary problems that may keep students out of school.

One of the stated goals of the Foster Care to College Partnership was to "significantly increase the high school completion and college entrance rates of foster youth in permanent long-term care."⁶ From an evaluation standpoint, it is difficult to assess the direct impact of the FCTCP informational campaign on educational outcomes because there are so many other factors that may be contributing to these outcomes. Nevertheless, we can observe trends in high school graduation and college enrollment that occurred during this period. Such an analysis can provide a benchmark for following improvements (or declines) in the overall educational progression of foster youth.

⁶ The Foster Care to College Partnership, October 2004, p.9.

Tracking Educational Progress

The Foster Care to College activities described above were targeted to foster youth aged 13 and above. This initiative may improve educational opportunities and outcomes for foster youth still in school. However, a longer follow-up period is needed to determine if graduation rates improve for the younger foster cohort (ages 13 to 16).

Given the data available for this study, we can examine high school completion rates for older youth in foster care during the time FCTCP took place. To assess these outcomes, we analyzed foster care records for youth who were in an out-of-home placement at any time after their 16th birthday. These records were then matched to statewide school enrollment and graduation data by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Following this match, OSPI staff removed all identifying information and provided a research dataset to the Institute.

Based on this data, we identified four cohorts of youth who would be expected to turn 18 and graduate from high school between 2005 and 2008. Exhibit 1 displays the number of youth included in each cohort. As Exhibit 1 shows, between approximately 600 and 800 youth were initially identified from foster care records. Between 80 and 90 percent of these youth were found in state enrollment records. Of these youth, between approximately 530 and 670 in each cohort were in a foster care placement for 90 days or more. Among this final group, we excluded those students whose last known enrollment status was “transfer.” When a transfer to a new school has not been confirmed, these youth are not counted in state graduation statistics.

After this process, we can track high school completion outcomes for approximately 400 to 500 youth in each graduating class. Exhibit 2 (next page) displays the trend in high school completions for these youth.

Exhibit 1
Foster Youth in Study Cohort (2005–2008)

Cohort (Expected Year of Graduation)	All Foster Youth	Foster Youth With School Records	Foster Youth in Care 90 Days or More	Foster Youth With No Transfers (Final Study Cohort)
2005	744	600	558	440
2006	797	692	631	459
2007	815	728	669	486
2008	622	571	531	387

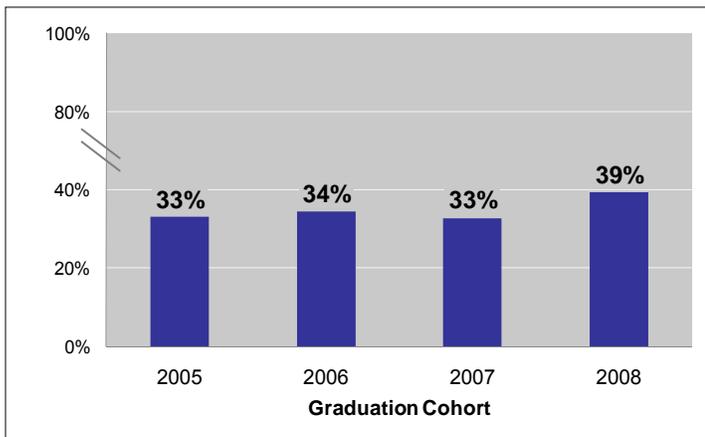
High School Completion Rate

Recent research completed by the Institute found that 34 percent of foster youth enrolled in the 9th grade will graduate “on-time” (by the end of 12th grade).⁷ Many foster youth may go on to complete a high school diploma or General Education Development certificate (GED) after age 18. For this study, we have data available through the 2007–08 school year and can follow on-time graduation for the four cohorts identified earlier. Exhibit 2 presents the on-time graduation rates for foster students expected to graduate between 2005 and 2008.

As noted previously, the strategies implemented by the Foster Care to College Partnership started in 2006. Youth from the graduating class of 2006 and 2007 were in grades 11 and 12 during the time these strategies were active. The graduation rate for these cohorts (33 to 34 percent) did not differ from 2005, the year prior to implementation.

In 2008, the graduation rate for this population increased to 39 percent (a 6 percent increase from previous years). Youth from this class were in grade 10 at the onset of the FCTCP initiative. While the increase in high school completion this year was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), more follow-up years are needed to determine if this change constitutes a reliable trend.

Exhibit 2
High School Completion Rates for Foster Youth in Study Cohort (2005–2008)



WSIPP, 2009

⁷ Mason Burley (2009). *Graduation and dropout outcomes for children in state care (2005–2008)*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 09-11-3901.

It should also be noted that 12 percent of youth from the study sample reported graduating the year beyond the expected graduation date (Exhibit 3). Unfortunately, this additional year of follow-up was only available for the 2005–2007 cohorts, and not the most recent group (2008).

Exhibit 3
On-Time and Delayed Graduation for Foster Youth in Study Cohort (2005–2008)

Cohort (Expected Year of Graduation)	On-Time Graduation	Delayed Graduation	Total
2005	145 (33%)	53 (12%)	440
2006	158 (34%)	57 (12%)	459
2007	159 (33%)	56 (12%)	486
2008	152 (39%)	n/a	387

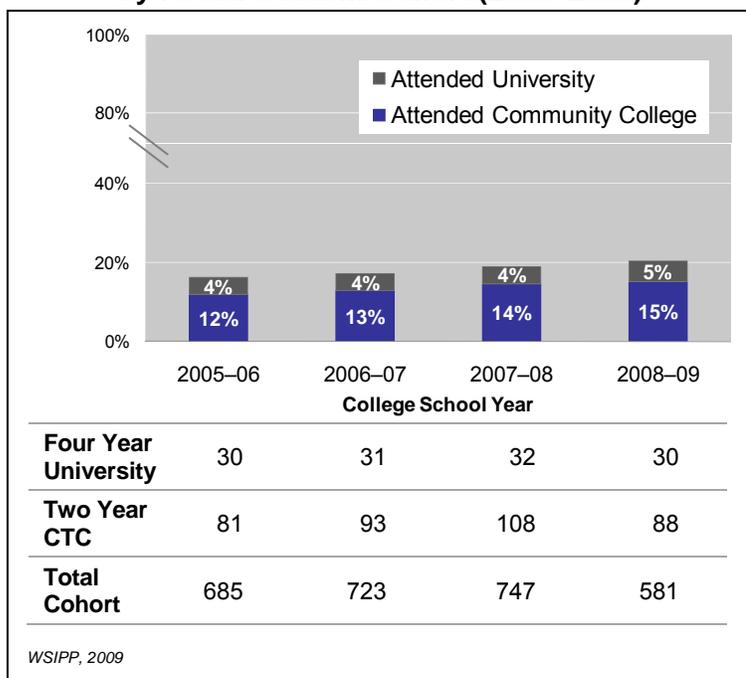
Section II of this report will explore some factors associated with high school graduation for these foster youth. In addition to a youth’s demographic characteristics and background in foster care, we will also explore how participation in mentoring or other Foster Care to College direct services relates to educational outcomes. College enrollment is the other key outcome that will be included in this analysis. Prior to this detailed analysis, we will explore overall trends in college enrollment for foster students.

College Enrollment and Persistence

This report includes the first analysis of statewide college enrollment levels for foster students in Washington State. Under an agreement with the National Student Clearinghouse, data on college enrollments for the study cohort were obtained. The National Student Clearinghouse database includes information for approximately 90 percent of college enrollments nationwide.⁸ For this study, we obtained enrollment data for the 2005–06 through 2008–09 school years.

Exhibit 4 shows the college enrollment rate for each cohort in the first year after expected graduation. For example, for students expected to graduate in 2006, 16 percent attended college during the 2005–06 college school year. Approximately three-quarters of all college attendees in this group attended a two-year community or technical college (CTC). And, enrollments have increased gradually each year, from 16 percent in 2005–06 to 20 percent by the 2008–09 college school year.

Exhibit 4
First Year College Enrollment
by Foster Student Cohort (2006–2009)



Since college enrollment data were only available through the 2008–09 school year, we can only complete a one-year follow-up for all four cohorts. However, following the high school graduation and college persistence of foster youth is an important measure of educational progress. Exhibit 5 (next page) shows how students in Washington State progress from high school through college.

Statewide, approximately 70 percent of students in the class of 2006 graduated on-time with a high school diploma.⁹ Every year, Washington State University’s Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (WSU-SESRC) completes the College Enrollment Study.¹⁰ This study reports on the college participation of students in Washington State. This study found that 42 percent of youth in the class of 2006 went on to attend college within a year of graduation. Most of the students in the cohort (35 percent) re-enrolled in the second year of college, as well.

For the foster youth in this study, we analyzed educational progression in a similar manner for the class of 2006 and 2007. As shown on Exhibit 5:

- 33 to 34 percent of foster youth graduated on-time
- 17 to 18 percent attended college within a year of graduation
- 10 to 12 percent re-enrolled in college in the second year after graduation

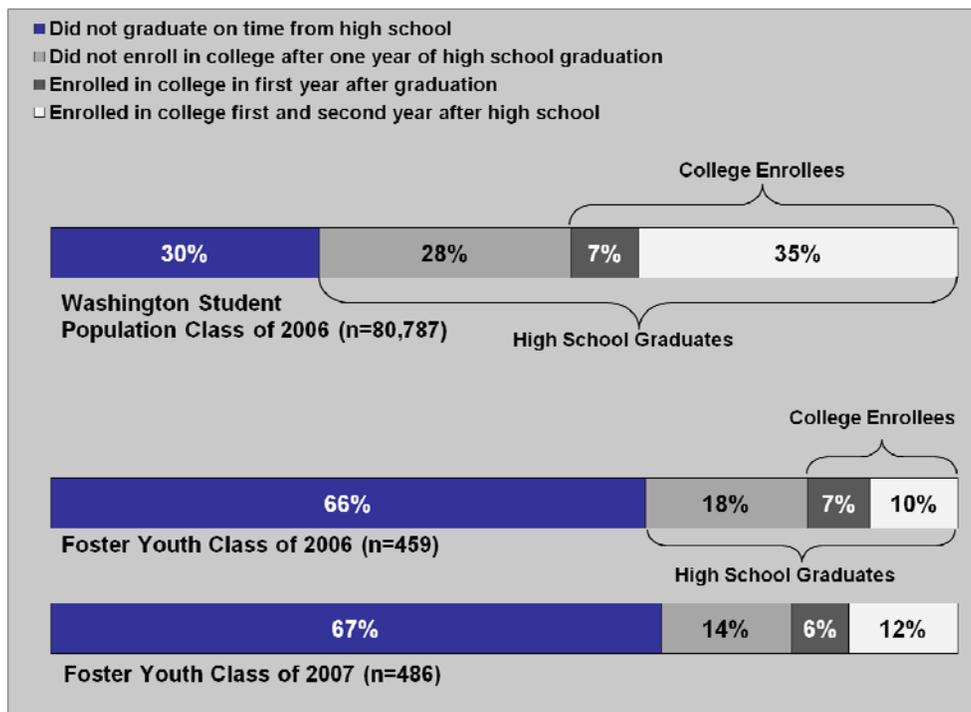
Unfortunately, data on degree completion were not available for this study. However, this measure will be a valuable outcome to track for programs aimed at assisting foster youth. The Institute is also evaluating other college assistance programs, such as the Passport for Foster Youth Promise Program, and will report on degree completion for foster youth by 2012.

The next section discusses the impact of two FCTCP programs—educational mentoring and intensive summer seminars—on high school completion and college attendance.

⁸ See: www.studentclearinghouse.org for more information

⁹ L. Ireland (2007). *Graduation and dropout statistics for Washington’s counties, districts, and schools 2005–06*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.
¹⁰ See: www.sesrc.wsu.edu/PugetSound/K12/nsc/reportsbyclass.htm

Exhibit 5
Educational Progression—High School Through College:
All Washington State Students Compared With Foster Youth (2006 and 2007)



Sources: Washington State 2005–06 Graduation and Dropout Statistics (OSPI); College Enrollment Study: Washington State University’s Social and Economic Sciences Research Center, Puget Sound Division; and Institute analysis of Washington State foster care and educational data.
www.k12.wa.us/dataAdmin/pubdocs/GradDropout/05-06/2005-06GradDropoutStatistics.pdf
www.sesrc.wsu.edu/PugetSound/K12/gfs/ReportsbyClass/Class2006/Class2006Y2AllGrads.pdf

Section II: FCTCP Direct Services

As discussed previously, two direct service initiatives for foster youth were implemented as a result of the Foster Care to College Partnership. The first, a foster youth mentoring program, was based on a program called “Coaching to College,” created by the Seattle-based non-profit, Treehouse. Treehouse contracted with the Children’s Administration to implement and oversee this program in all six DSHS Regions between 2007 and 2009.

The second program was a four-day residential summer program for older foster youth held at a state college or university. This program, called Make It Happen!, offers a variety of seminars and workshops designed to teach foster youth how to apply to and pay for college. Foster youth also have the opportunity to stay overnight in a college

dorm through this program, so they can have a sense of the college living experience.

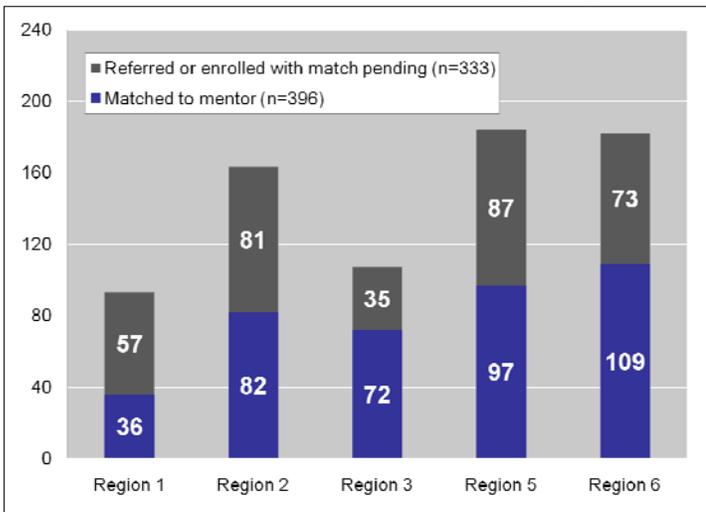
This section describes the activities for both these programs and assesses their effectiveness in improving high school graduation and college enrollment.

Foster Care Mentors

Over three years, 280 volunteer adult mentors throughout the state provided guidance and support to foster youth as part of the FCTCP’s mentoring program. Qualifying mentors agreed to a 12- to 18-month commitment, and pledged to meet with their foster care mentees from four to 16 hours each month. Mentors tutored youth, helped with post-secondary and career planning, and assisted with the completion of scholarship and financial aid applications.

A FCTCP mentor coordinator from the contracting organization in each region (see Appendix A) recruited and screened mentors and matched volunteer adults with foster students.¹¹ The first referrals to this mentoring program started in January 2007 and ended in June 2009. Mentors served youth between the ages of 14 and 21 in five DSHS regions (Region 4, King County, has an existing mentoring program and was not part of the grant proposal). Over 700 youth were referred to the mentoring program, and nearly 400 were matched with a mentor, as shown in Exhibit 6.¹²

Exhibit 6
Foster Care to College Mentoring Program
Referred and Matched Youth by Region



WSIPP, 2009

There were many reasons provided why youth did not enroll in the program following a referral. The most common reasons identified by the mentor or coordinator included:

- Youth did not respond to contact attempts
- Youth declined participation
- Youth moved out of the region, or ran from placement

¹¹ See L. Schrage (2008). *Foster care to college mentoring program: Preliminary report*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 08-07-3903 for additional information about the FCTCP mentoring program.

¹² Mentoring programs in Regions 1 and 3 started in the second year of the FCTCP funding period.

About 400, or 76 percent, of the 518 youth who did enroll in the program were matched with a mentor. Exhibit 7 displays information on the mentor matches in each region.

Exhibit 7
Foster Care to College Mentor Matches

Region	Month of First Match	Average Length of Match (months)	Percentage of Youth With Multiple Matches
One	January 2008	4.5	3%
Two	January 2007	10.9	21%
Three	July 2007	8.0	14%
Five	January 2007	10.3	5%
Six	January 2007	10.7	7%

During the phased-in start-up, FCTCP coordinators in three regions (2, 5, and 6) began matching adult mentors and foster mentees in January 2007. In these regions, the average match lasted for 10 to 11 months. In phase two, the mentor recruitment and matching process began in July 2007 for Region 3. Finally, youth matches for Region 1 began in January 2008.

In addition to the duration of time with a mentor, the stability of the completed matches may also have played a role in the quality of the relationship. Most youth in the program had a single match to an adult mentor. However, in Regions 2 and 3, between 14 and 21 percent of youth had two or more matches. At the end of this section, we will explore these regional differences further and analyze outcomes for youth in FCTCP programs compared to similar foster youth.

Impact of Foster Care to College Mentoring

To assess the impact of the Foster Care to College mentoring program, we compared the high school graduation and college enrollment rates of mentor participants to a similar group of foster youth who did not receive mentoring. To follow these outcomes, we selected older foster youth who enrolled in the mentoring program and were expected to graduate prior to June 2008.

Using these criteria, we found **155 youth** who were matched with a mentor and expected to graduate during the study period. To evaluate the impact of the mentoring program on graduation outcomes, we selected a group of older foster youth in care prior to the start of the mentoring program. Compared with this pre-program group, however, youth in the mentoring program were more likely to be female, have an emotional or behavioral disability, and have a history of neglect. Youth from Regions 2 and 6 were also slightly over-represented among the mentoring group compared with the general foster population (see Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8
Differences Among FCTCP Mentees

	FCTCP Mentor Program	Pre-Program Foster Youth (2005–2006)
Sex		
Male	64 (41%)	421 (51%)
Female	91 (59%)	404 (49%)
Reason Removed From Home		
Abuse	51 (33%)	258 (31%)
Behavior	14 (9%)	103 (12%)
Neglect	61 (39%)	237 (29%)
Other	29 (19%)	227 (28%)
Emotional Disability		
	28 (18%)	26 (3%)
Region		
One	2 (1%)	126 (15%)
Two	38 (25%)	153 (19%)
Three	28 (18%)	161 (20%)
Five	37 (24%)	198 (24%)
Six	50 (32%)	187 (23%)

Outcome: High School Completion

To develop a more meaningful comparison, we used a “matched-pair” technique to select comparison group members who shared the same characteristics as mentored youth. Among youth from the pre-program group (2005–06), we selected a cohort of students who had the same profile (including sex, region, grade point average, and disability status) as mentored youth. This approach helps diminish some of the differences shown in Exhibit 8.

Selected comparison foster youth were also expected to graduate in 2005 or 2006. Observed graduation outcomes for these youth and the mentoring program group (expected to graduate in 2007 or 2008) are presented in Exhibit 9.

Exhibit 9
Observed and Adjusted High School Completion Rate Among FCTCP Mentor Program and Comparison Groups

	FCTCP Mentor Program	Selected Comparison Group
Observed Graduation Rate	48%	29%
Adjusted Graduation Rate	41%	29%

As Exhibit 9 shows, 48 percent of youth who participated in the FCTCP mentoring program graduated on time, compared to 29 percent of the selected comparison group. While this is a significant difference, the goal of this research is to determine the extent to which high school graduation was related to the FCTCP program.

To evaluate the actual impact of the FCTCP mentoring program, we estimated an ‘adjusted’ rate that accounts for other factors that may influence graduation rates among both the program and comparison groups, and gives an indication of the program’s effect. To adjust for variables that may be associated with high school graduation, we utilized a statistical model (logistic regression) to estimate a student’s “odds” of completing high school, given certain characteristics.

Based on this model (Appendix B), we found that mentoring significantly improved a foster youth's chances of graduating from high school, after accounting for other factors. As noted below, non-random studies typically overstate the potential effects of a program. The Institute routinely discounts these effects to reflect different study designs. Using our standard approach, we calculate a graduation rate of 41 percent for mentored youth as compared to 29 percent of youth in the comparison group: an increase of 12 percentage points.¹³

Selection Bias

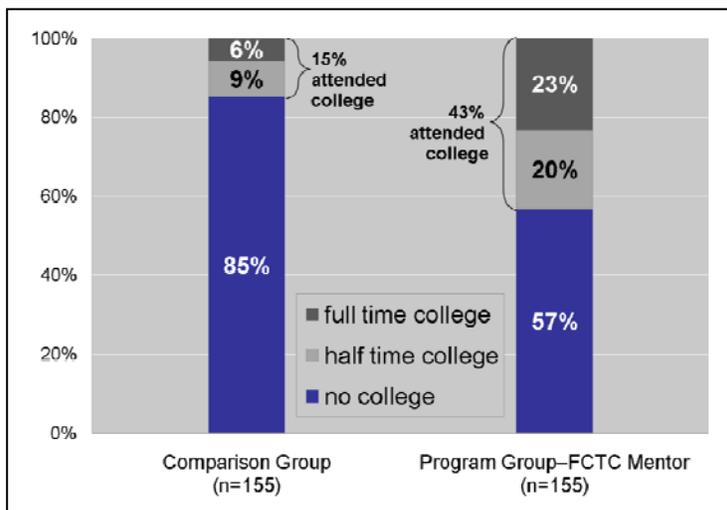
Any non-random method of selecting a study comparison group can potentially overstate the effectiveness of a program. Mentored youth, for example, demonstrated a motivation to participate in the program and engage with a mentor. While comparison youth had similar grades and profiles, we cannot know if they had similar motivation levels. This "selection bias" can cause some uncertainty in estimating the impact of the program versus the effect of unobserved characteristics. For each of the models presented in this paper, however, we attempted multiple methods to address any selection bias. Results from our final models were discounted to reflect the potential bias present from youth self selecting into the program. Even after this standard adjustment, results were consistently positive for all outcomes analyzed.

Outcome: College Attendance

One goal of the FCTCP mentoring program is helping youth prepare for college by increasing the likelihood they will graduate from high school and assisting with the college application process. Based on college enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse (discussed in Section I), youth in the FCTCP mentoring program had a significantly higher rate of college enrollment compared to similar youth in foster care who were not in the mentoring program.

As Exhibit 10 shows, 43 percent of older foster youth in the FCTCP mentoring program attended college following their expected year of graduation. This rate was more than twice the college enrollment level of a similar group of youth in foster care before implementation of the mentoring program.

Exhibit 10
College Enrollment Levels Among FCTCP Mentor Program and Comparison Groups



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¹³ See Appendix B for details on this adjustment

While Exhibit 10 includes the observed percentages of college enrollees among the program and comparison groups, we need to analyze how participation in the mentoring program relates to college enrollment, given other factors that may also affect college attendance. Using a multivariate statistical model (see Appendix C), we estimated a foster youth's likelihood of attending college, based on observed characteristics of that youth. This analysis found that the effect of the mentoring program on college participation was significant, with participants having a predicted 27 percent college enrollment rate, after adjustments. This enrollment rate represents a 12 percentage point increase above the college enrollment rate of the comparison group (Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11
Observed and Adjusted College Enrollment Rate Among FCTCP Mentor Program and Comparison Groups

	FCTCP Mentor Program	Selected Comparison Group
Observed Enrollment Rate	43%	15%
Adjusted Enrollment Rate	27%	15%

In both the analysis of high school graduation and college enrollment, it should be noted that geographic and demographic characteristics were not significant predictors of success. This result is an indication that the program was delivered uniformly (throughout the state) and compared to similar foster youth, a program participant's race or sex was not related to educational attainment.

Make It Happen! Summer Program

Every summer, the Washington State College Success Foundation hosts a four-day program for foster youth held at a state college or university. The Make It Happen! program is attended by about 100 foster students entering grades 11, 12, or their first year of college. Foster Care to College Partnership funds have paid for these summer programs since in 2005.

Workshops held at Make It Happen! help explain campus life, teach foster youth about financial aid and college funding, allow students to interact with college alumni, discuss the college application and admissions process, and provide assistance with career exploration. The number of youth attending each summer program is provided in Exhibit 12.

Exhibit 12
Make It Happen! Student Attendance

Year	Location	Attendance
2005	University of Puget Sound	90
2006	Seattle University	91
2007	University of Puget Sound	110
2008	Pacific Lutheran University	123

Students attending Make It Happen! completed surveys at both the beginning and end of the program. Before starting the program, about 40 percent of attendees described themselves as feeling ready to apply to college. At the conclusion of the four-day session, over 80 percent reported they were ready to attend college.¹⁴ These workshops are meant to educate foster students on the steps required to apply to and pay for college. In addition to the technical information and resources, however, Make It Happen! aims to encourage high school foster youth to pursue higher education and develop a network that will support those goals.

¹⁴ L. Schrager & C. Nunlist (2008). *Make It Happen!: Preliminary report on college summer program for youth in foster care*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 08-01-3902.

Make It Happen! Participant Characteristics

To analyze outcomes for Make It Happen! participants, we selected a cohort of **160 students** in the program who were expected to graduate between 2005 and 2009. As expected, foster students attending the Make It Happen! summer program were more likely than their peers to have a grade point average above 3.0 (29 percent versus 14 percent) and graduate on-time (70 percent versus 34 percent). Foster youth who leave care at age 18 are also eligible for financial assistance (up to \$5,000 per year) through the federal Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program. As Exhibit 13 shows, 31 percent of Make It Happen! participants received ETV funds (compared with 7 percent of non-participants).

Exhibit 13
Educational Achievement Differences Among Make It Happen! Participants

	Make It Happen! Participants	Eligible Foster Youth, Non-Participants
GPA		
Missing	4 (3%)	145 (8%)
0–1.0	3 (2%)	126 (7%)
1.1–2.0	28 (18%)	539 (29%)
2.1–3.0	78 (49%)	822 (44%)
3.1–4.0	47 (29%)	255 (14%)
On-Time Graduation		
	112 (70%)	647 (34%)
Received Education and Training Voucher (ETV)		
	50 (31%)	141 (7%)
Total	160	1,887

College Enrollment for Make It Happen! Youth

Comparing outcomes among Make It Happen! participants and non-participants would not be meaningful given the observable differences between the two populations of foster youth. College enrollment data available for this study begins in 2005, so we are also unable to compare outcomes to an earlier cohort of foster youth.

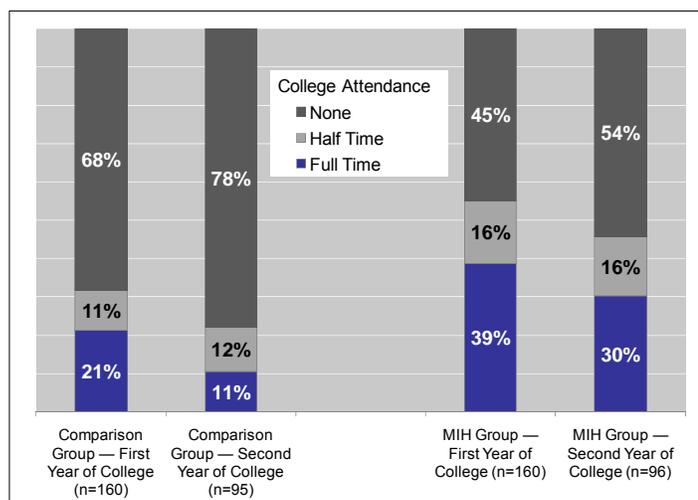
To overcome these limitations, we created a matched pair comparison group. For each youth in the Make It Happen! program, we identified a non-participant with the same characteristics. The program and comparison group members were matched based on sex, grade in school, DSHS region, graduation status, and grade point average.

It is important to note that this process only controls for a selected number of key attributes between the program and comparison groups. Make It Happen! participants may have a higher interest in attending college, and issues with selection bias (discussed earlier) cannot be completely accounted for without a randomized assignment of program participants.

In the absence of such a research design, we identified approximately 200 youth with similar academic and demographic characteristics as Make It Happen! participants. While the comparison group had the same distribution of grades and the same high school graduation rates, college enrollment levels for each group were significantly different.

Exhibit 14 shows college attendance in the first year after graduation for Make It Happen! participants and the selected comparison group. Among students who attended the Make It Happen! workshops, 39 percent attended college full time (8 months or more) in the first year after high school, and over half (55 percent) were in college either full or half time. These college attendance rates were about twice as high as similar comparison group foster youth. Among the comparison group, 32 percent attended college in the first year after high school (21 percent full time).

Exhibit 14
College Attendance Rates for Make It Happen!
Program and Comparison Groups



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Exhibit 14 also illustrates that college attendance among Make It Happen! members was higher than expected in subsequent years as well. In the second year after high school, 46 percent of program youth attended college full- or part-time.¹⁵ One reason for the college persistence of program group members may be the rate at which these youth access available financial resources. We analyzed the receipt of Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) for both program and comparison group members, and found:

- **31 percent** of Make It Happen! participants received ETV funds
- **17 percent** of comparable foster youth received ETV dollars

Of course, many other factors may be associated with college enrollment. To further investigate the relationship between these factors, we constructed a statistical model to estimate college attendance (in either year) among program participants and their counterparts.

Our unadjusted, observed rate of Make It Happen! participants enrolling in college was 58 percent (Exhibit 15). Among the selected comparison group, 34 percent enrolled in college in the two years after graduation. However, as noted in our previous discussion about selection bias (page 10), there may be unobserved or immeasurable factors between the participants and the comparison group that could explain this difference.

Based on our statistical analysis (Appendix D) we estimated that the adjusted college enrollment rate for Make It Happen! participants was 46 percent. This adjusted rate represents the increase in college attendance after accounting for differences in a student's grade point average, time of graduation, receipt of ETV funds, and other unobserved characteristics.

Exhibit 15
Observed and Adjusted College Enrollment
Rate Among Make It Happen! Program and
Comparison Groups

	Make It Happen! Program	Selected Comparison Group
Observed Enrollment Rate	58%	34%
Adjusted Enrollment Rate	46%	34%

¹⁵ Youth attending the 2008 Make It Happen! program are excluded from the two-year follow-up results, since long-term college enrollment data are not available for this cohort.

Conclusion

Although the foundation funds provided for the Foster Care to College Partnership ended in 2009, additional funding was located to continue the Make It Happen! summer program in 2010.¹⁶ The FCTCP mentoring program, however, was discontinued in mid-2009. Compared to similar youth, participants in both programs had a significantly higher likelihood of graduating from high school and attending college.

The statistical models in this report represent our best estimates of the impact of FCTCP programs. While we could not fully account for the influence of factors such as student initiative and external supports, we did adjust for regional variation, demographic differences, and measures of aptitude (grade point average). After these adjustments, we did find better educational outcomes for participants in mentoring and college preparation seminars.

While a longer follow-up period is necessary to monitor the completion of college and earning a degree, both approaches showed promising results for boosting high school graduation rates and college attendance for youth aging out of foster care in Washington State.

¹⁶ See: www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/makeithappen

Appendix A

Foster Care to College Mentor Program Contracting Organizations

Region	Organization Name
Region One (Eastern Washington)	Service Alternatives
Region Two (Southeast Washington)	Catholic Family and Child Services
Region Three (North Sound)	Youthnet
Region Five (Pierce and Kitsap Counties)	Pierce County Alliance
Region Six (Coastal Counties)	Community Youth Services

Appendix B

Likelihood of Completing High School: Foster Care to College Mentoring

	Odds Ratio	95 Percent Confidence Interval (lower)	95 Percent Confidence Interval (upper)
Participated in Mentor Program	2.778***	1.647	4.684
GPA over 2.0	5.797**	1.187	28.314
Female	1.244	0.731	2.117
African American	1.392	0.589	3.287
Native American	0.739	0.300	1.818
Hispanic/Latino	1.413	0.576	3.464
Other	0.692	0.203	2.356
Region One	0.300	0.026	3.534
Region Two	1.395	0.703	2.771
Region Three	0.779	0.364	1.671
Region Five	0.676	0.316	1.447
Placement Events After Age 16	0.939	0.846	1.043
Runs From Foster Care	0.455**	0.216	0.957
Reason Placed in Foster Care			
Abuse	0.676	0.338	1.354
Behavior	0.354*	0.114	1.099
Neglect	0.596	0.292	1.215
First Foster Placement Age 13 or Older	0.678	0.384	1.196
	Cases	Rsq	AUC
	310	0.2447	0.742

Notes: *significant at 0.10 level, **significant at 0.05 level, ***significant at 0.01 level.

Race estimates are relative to Caucasian; reason for foster placements relative to other; Region relative to Region 6.

Technical note: Given potential selection bias effects, the coefficient for the treatment group was reduced by 50 percent. Given this (adjusted) increase in the odds of high school completion relative to the comparison group, we can calculate a predicted percentage of high school completion for the treatment group using the following formula:

$$\frac{\frac{x}{1-x} * e(\beta)}{1 + \left[\left(\frac{x}{1-x} \right) * e(\beta) \right]}$$

Where $\beta = 0.5108$ (adjusted coefficient) and $x = 0.29$ (high school completion rate of the comparison group). This gives an adjusted high school completion rate of 0.41 for the treatment group.

Appendix C

Likelihood of Attending College in First Year After Expected Graduation: Foster Care to College Mentoring

	Odds Ratio	95 Percent Confidence Interval (lower)	95 Percent Confidence Interval (upper)
Participated in Mentor Program	4.556***	2.554	8.127
GPA over 3.0	2.017***	1.124	3.617
Female	1.276	0.720	2.259
African American	1.017	0.406	2.547
Native American	0.524	0.171	1.603
Hispanic/Latino	0.524	0.171	1.603
Other	1.847	0.574	5.945
Region One	0.931	0.068	12.821
Region Two	1.297	0.613	2.743
Region Three	1.297	0.613	2.743
Region Five	1.857	0.834	4.135
Recorded Disability	0.428	0.174	1.052
Reason Placed in Foster Care			
Abuse	1.038	0.493	2.185
Behavior	0.353	0.097	1.280
Neglect	0.888	0.419	1.885
	Cases	Rsq	AUC
	310	0.2302	0.756

Notes: *significant at 0.10 level, **significant at 0.05 level, ***significant at 0.01 level.

Race estimates are relative to Caucasian; reason for foster placements relative to abuse; Region relative to Region 6.

Technical note: Given potential selection bias effects, the coefficient for the treatment group was reduced by 50 percent. Given this (adjusted) increase in the odds of college enrollment relative to the comparison group, we can calculate a predicted percentage of college enrollment for the treatment group using the following formula:

$$\frac{\frac{x}{1-x} * e(\beta)}{1 + \left[\left(\frac{x}{1-x} \right) * e(\beta) \right]}$$

Where $\beta = 0.7583$ (adjusted coefficient) and $x = 0.15$ (college enrollment rate of the comparison group). This gives an adjusted college enrollment rate of 0.27 for the treatment group.

Appendix D

Likelihood of Attending College in First or Second Year After Expected Graduation: Make It Happen! College Seminar Participants

	Odds Ratio	95 Percent Confidence Interval (lower)	95 Percent Confidence Interval (upper)
<i>Participated in Make It Happen!</i>	2.890***	1.679	4.974
GPA over 3.0	3.184***	1.479	6.858
Graduated On-Time	3.134***	1.586	6.191
Received ETV Funds	4.142***	2.119	8.098
Reported Disability	0.440**	0.205	0.942
African American	0.827	0.362	1.886
Native American	0.729	0.297	1.790
Hispanic/Latino	0.362*	0.126	1.038
Other	1.778	0.487	6.490
Number of Months in Out-of-Home Placement	1.778	0.487	6.490
Total Placement Events (since age 16)	1.068	0.985	1.159
Placement Instability (number of events per placement episode)	1.035	0.767	1.395
	Cases	Rsq	AUC
	320	0.3698	0.811

Notes: *significant at 0.10 level, **significant at 0.05 level, ***significant at 0.01 level.
Race estimates are relative to Caucasian.

Technical note: Given potential selection bias effects, the coefficient for the treatment group was reduced by 50 percent. Given this (adjusted) increase in the odds of college enrollment relative to the comparison group, we can calculate a predicted percentage of college enrollment for the treatment group using the following formula:

$$\frac{\frac{x}{1-x} * e(\beta)}{1 + \left[\left(\frac{x}{1-x} \right) * e(\beta) \right]}$$

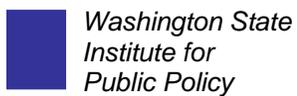
Where $\beta = 0.5306$ (adjusted coefficient) and $x = 0.34$ (college enrollment rate of the comparison group). This gives an adjusted college enrollment rate of 0.46 for the treatment group.

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