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Introduction

In its third year, the Bridge to College Program (B2C) continues to evolve and refine its approach towards meeting the needs of Stamford Public School's diverse senior class. The program, a collaborative partnership between Stamford Public Schools (SPS), the RISE Network, Stamford Cradle to Career (SC2C), and Stamford Public Education Foundation (SPEF), aims to reduce the summer melt rate for graduating seniors by providing a scaffolded approach to support. This approach ensures that students who have completed their college application, as well as those who have not, increase the likelihood they enroll in higher education in the fall. **In 2021, the program reached 982 seniors with regular messaging and reminders about completing all pieces of their college enrollment process. Of the 982 seniors, 117 (12%) students received additional, one-on-one support, from one of four school counselors working with the B2C program.**

1. 2021 Project Background

Like 2020, 2021's program was conducted virtually due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. However, based on student feedback, provided through interviews and surveys, it seems virtual may be the preferred method of delivery as students expressed a preference for access to the counselors via text message over in person interactions. After an evaluation and review of 2020's program, there were no major structural changes to B2C, as feedback from students and staff was overwhelmingly positive. The biggest change in 2021 was the program's approach to the tiered support offered to students. Based on the continuous improvement model used in B2C, a need was identified to indicate students who were receiving more individualized support versus those who were receiving once-off support from counselors. This update, as well as a description of the program population and structure is explained in more detail below.

1.1 Target Population

First-generation students remained a primary demographic for support, however, unlike 2020, they were no longer given their own automatic tier in the B2C three tier system. **Over 50% of the 2021 graduating class was considered first-generation.** First-generation status is designated by SC2C after reviewing student senior survey responses to questions about their primary caregiver's highest level of education. Students who indicate that neither primary caregiver have completed a two-year degree are designated as first-generation.

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All first-generation students were personally called by one of the four B2C counselors over the summer, in addition to receiving the same ongoing text message reminders all students received. In their phone calls, counselors asked if first-generation students had completed, or needed further assistance with, their college application, or if they were interested in being connected to non-college related resources, such as military recruiters or career training programs.

Counselor feedback during the weekly meetings between counselors, SPEF, and SC2C, identified the need to change the structure of the program's tiered support. As a result, the 2021 program focused on providing three levels of support to students. **Tier 1** students included all graduating seniors who completed a senior exit survey. Using survey data, students were uploaded to a mass texting platform called SignalVine and grouped according to their post-graduation intentions. Based on these post-high school plans, all students received tailored, ongoing, and strategic text messages around key dates to ensure they completed all college enrollment criteria. **Tier 2** students were those who reached out to counselors through SignalVine in response to a programmed message or with questions that required only a few exchanges between the student and counselor to resolve. Counselors indicated Tier 2 students in SignalVine under individual student profiles for tracking purposes. **Tier 3** students were defined as students who required ongoing support and follow-up from counselors to complete their application by the end of summer deadline. Tier 3 students often interacted with counselors via text but also used video chatting and email to ensure goals were met. Tier 3 students were also marked in SignalVine by counselors in addition to completing a separate, formal, enrollment form with their counselor to measure progress made over the summer.

1.2 Program Timeline

The B2C program has three phases of implementation. **Phase one** begins during the spring semester for high school seniors. Currently, SC2C is continuing to build out a more robust phase one program. The recent addition of a full-time College and Career Readiness Manager has better positioned SC2C to build out our phase one program for 2022. In our current format, phase one includes the kickoff event which SC2C was able to host outside and in person in 2021. Over 6 prospective students and their families attended this informational event where students could meet the counselors and learn more about the program.

Phase two runs during the summer months (June-August). This period runs roughly 10 weeks; from around the end of school (late June) until the end of August. It starts with our welcome and

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introductory text messages sent to all students and ends with a sendoff event for tier two and three students that offers students information on navigating their new academic environment as well as the opportunity for students to give feedback on their experience with the B2C program. New to the phase two period is a week of workshops, Keys to Success, that grew out of the weekly program check-in meetings. More information about these workshops can be found in the appendices.

Phase three covers students' first year in college where text message reminders about various fall and spring semester deadlines are pushed out to tier two and three students. Students who may have not finished the college application and enrollment process have the option of corresponding directly with Francesca Principe, the College and Career Readiness manager at SPEEF. Students who completed the process and are currently enrolled in college have the option of corresponding directly with Akosua Agyei, the College and Career Readiness manager at SC2C to receive support navigating their school and accessing resources. Furthermore, students will have the chance to come together through virtual events, such as “Lessons from My First Year of College” event and other opportunities.

1.3 Data Collection

Data collection for Bridge to College uses a Results Based Accountability framework to determine overall program benchmarks as well as a continuous improvement process that allows for improved data quality and data collection during the program. Data is collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a robust assessment of the program. Quantitative data comes from the SignalVine platform which allows admin users to see data points such as number of messages sent, engagement rates and opt out rates. Quantitative data is also gathered through forms such as the senior survey and an enrollment and end of program completion form which counselors use to assess the needs of students requiring tier 3 support. Qualitative data is collected during the weekly meetings with counselors as well as through interviews and feedback sessions with students at the end of the program. A complete list of data sources can be found in table 1 below.

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Table 1: Bridge to College Data Sources

Quantitative Sources	Qualitative Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior Survey – post grad intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly counselor check-ins – notes and open discussion feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SignalVine reporting – messages, engagement, opt outs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participant interviews – one on one interviews on experience in program
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participant Surveys – satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participant feedback sessions – small group feedback opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enrollment & Completion forms – areas of need/progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open-ended survey responses – satisfaction, changes, additions

2. Outcomes

The 2021 Bridge to College program served **982** seniors with tier one support and **117** seniors with tiers two and three support. This is five more students provided with one-on-one than support 2020's total of 112 seniors. The 2021 program also had more seniors enrolled into SignalVine as tier one, despite the senior class being smaller (-12 students). The reason around this higher tier one enrollment is unclear, but the fact that the class of 2021 finished their year in person may have impacted the senior survey completion rate which is used to upload students to SignalVine. The program will continue to look at how this number changes year to year and explore possible reasons for variation.

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Chart 1: Three Year Comparison of B2C Enrollment

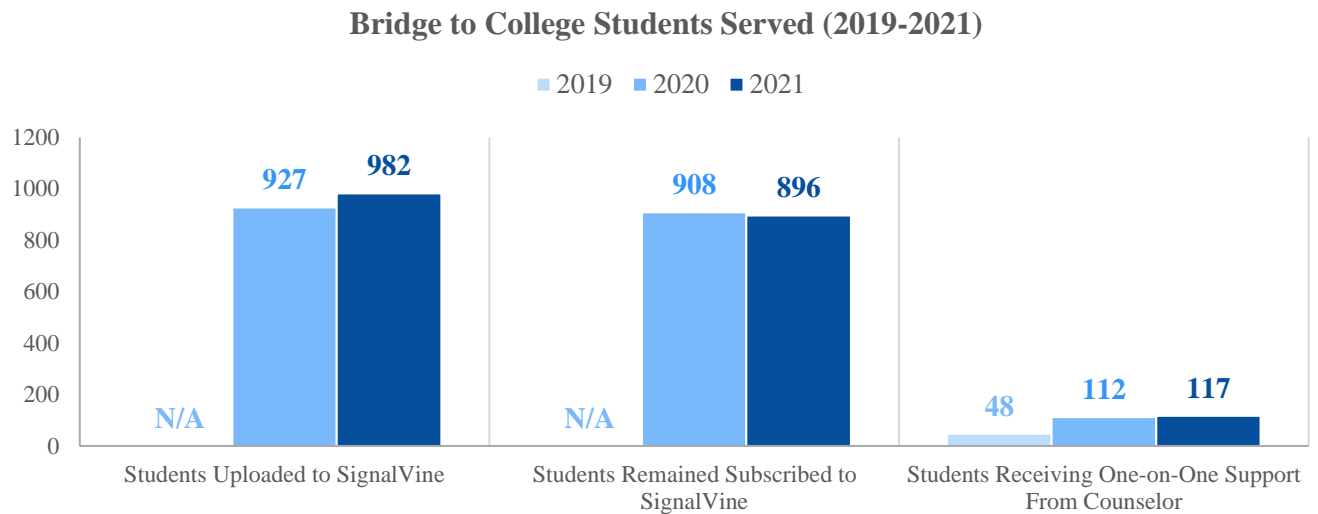


Table 2: Bridge to College Student Breakdown

Demographics	Tier 1: All Students		Tier 2+3: Combined		Tier 2: Light-touch Students		Tier 3: Ongoing Support Students	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
College-intending seniors Class of 2021	982	-	117	12%	62	6.3%	55	5.6%
Race/Ethnicity								
Asian	71	7%	5	4%	3	5%	2	4%
Black-African American	158	16%	23	20%	13	21%	10	18%
Hispanic-Latino	351	36%	64	55%	30	48%	34	62%
Two or more races	29	3%	4	3%	2	3%	2	4%
White	373	38%	21	18%	14	23%	7	12%
Gender								
Male	466	47%	53	45%	24	39%	29	53%
Female	516	53%	64	55%	38	61%	26	47%
First-generation								
First-Generation	506	51%	94	80%	50	81%	44	80%
High School								
Anchor	14	1%	3	3%	1	2%	2	4%
AITE	149	15%	23	20%	17	27%	6	11%
Stamford High School	367	37%	46	39%	25	40%	21	38%
Westhill High School	452	46%	45	38%	19	31%	26	47%

** %'s are out of the total in row 1 for each column indicating the number of students in that tier.

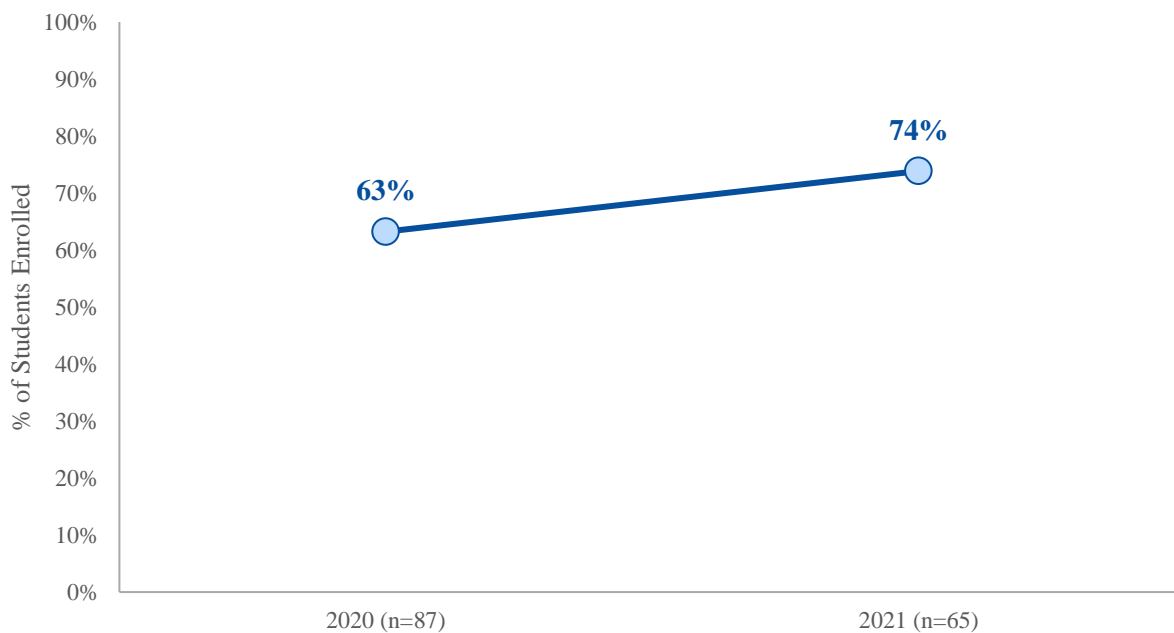
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NCC Enrollment

One early outcome of the B2C program was an improvement in the enrollment rate for NCC intending students receiving counselor support. Though the majority of B2C students are NCC intending, the program works with students intending to attend any school. In 2021, nine tier 3 students indicated plans to attend the following schools: UCONN, University of Bridgeport, Housatonic Community College, Gateway Community College, and Lincoln Tech. These student’s enrollment outcomes will be confirmed in the fall data from the National Student Clearinghouse. For NCC intending students, because of the B2C program’s strong partnership with NCC, the program was able to confirm whether students who indicated an intention to enroll in NCC were enrolled according to the college’s records. This data will be confirmed and cross-checked with the official report from the National Student Clearinghouse later in 2021, however this preliminary report shows promising outcomes. **Of the 65 NCC intending students in 2021, 74% were confirmed as enrolled up from 63% in 2020.**

Chart 2: NCC Intending Students with Confirmed Enrollment



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2.1 2021 Bridge to College RBA Results

An RBA framework was created to help guide reporting. The results of this framework can be found in table 2 below.

Table 3: 2021 RBA Results

RBA AREA	OUTCOME	T1	T2	T3	Description
How Much?	# of students targeted with programming	982	62	55	Total number of students uploaded to SignalVine and targeted with messaging over the summer
	# of students who did not unsubscribe from SV	896	N/A	N/A	Decide on date to make a cutoff for kids who unsubscribe
	# of students attending kickoff event	4	N/A	N/A	Looking at number signed up vs. number attended
	# of students attending wrap-up event	N/A	N/A	24	Looking at number signed up vs. number attended
	# of students not yet applied for college	N/A	N/A	16	Based on intake form for students joining T3 who are marked as in progress or not yet
	# of students with outstanding FAFSA	N/A	N/A	23	Based on intake form for students joining T3 and cross-checked with SPS data
How Well	% of students who did not unsubscribe from SV	91%	N/A	N/A	% out of total number of students enrolled in SV who did not unsubscribe by established deadline.
	% of students served with T3 support	N/A	6.3%	5.6%	% out of T1 students who were enrolled in T2 or T3 support
	% of students who completed college applications	N/A	N/A	56%	% out of T3 students with verified completed applications at end of summer
	% of students who completed FAFSA	N/A	N/A	52%	% out of T3 students with verified completed FAFSA at end of summer
	% of students who were satisfied with SV	65% (59/90)	56% (9/16)	75% (12/16)	% of students responding to the SignalVine satisfaction survey with a 4 or 5 response
	% of students who were satisfied with Tier 3 support	N/A	N/A	93%	% of T3 students responding to SC2C's end of program satisfaction survey with a 4 or 5 response
	Net Promoter Score	N/A	N/A	63.3	NPS based on SC2C's end of program satisfaction survey.
Better Off	% of students confirmed to be enrolled in higher education the fall following their high school graduation	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	% based on results from fall National Clearinghouse data
	% of students confirmed to be enrolled in higher education at any time during the year following their high school graduation	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	% based on results from fall and spring National Clearinghouse data
	% of students persisted to second semester freshman year	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	% based on results from spring National Clearinghouse data
	% of students persisting to second year of college	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	% based on results from fall National Clearinghouse data
	% of students graduating from a 2- or 4-year institution (after 6 years)	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	<i>TBD</i>	% based on results from spring National Clearinghouse data

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2.2 Bridge to College Counselor Goals

Another result of the continuous improvement approach was the development of counselor led goals for the program. In addition to the RBA framework, the counselor goals were meant to help keep counselors focused on important outcomes for students that determine successful fall enrollment. The four goals and their outcomes are listed in table 3 below.

Table 4: Counselor B2C Goals:

Goal	Outcome	Source
75% of students receiving counselor support intending to attend Norwalk Community College will be registered for classes by August 20, 2021	74%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NCC enrollment confirmation
100% of Tier 3 students will be connected to campus resources by August 20, 2021	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SignalVine profiles updated by counselors
100% of first-generation students will be contacted by a counselor by July 30, 2021	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call tracking by counselors
90% of all two and four-year intending students will be contacted by a counselor to inquire if they know how they are paying for school by July 30, 2021	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-reported

3. Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Based on weekly check-ins with counselors and backbone staff, interviews with students, and service satisfaction surveys, the following lessons and recommendations have been gathered for the 2021 program to incorporate into planning for 2022.

3.1 Lessons Learned: Continuous Improvement Works

Building off the success of the 2020 program, B2C continued using weekly check-ins as opportunities to identify and address challenges in reaching students with quality programming. Through these meetings, the program made key adjustments to the tier structure allowing counselors to spend more quality time with students who needed the most help, while still tracking those students were helped but who required less effort. Weekly meetings also identified challenges with NCC enrollment which was impacting student's ability to register for classes. Lastly, these meetings provided opportunities to close the gaps in data quickly so results were up to date and could be shared with staff weekly.

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3.1.1 Recommendation: Continue Using Continuous Improvement

It is recommended to continue using a Continuous Improvement model as it allows for adaptive programming and improved data quality. Meetings should include a review of current data metrics, as well as a review and discussion of identified gaps. It is also recommended that early check-in meetings be used as an opportunity for counselors to set internal goals for the program.

3.2 Lessons Learned: Marketing

Highlighted as a need in 2020's report as well, B2C needs to continue building out a plan to introduce program messaging to seniors earlier in the year. Students commented in both one-on-one and group discussions that earlier messaging explaining both the B2C program and the SignalVine texts would be helpful. Building off the feedback from 2020, SC2C created fliers that were distributed through multiple channels using school counselors, principals, and Cradle to Career's network of community partners. Additionally, while COVID protocols prevented SC2C from having someone inside the building meeting with students, the newly hired College and Career Readiness Manager was able to set up a table to talk to students outside, once at Stamford High School during their senior carnival and another at AITE during student's cap and gown pickup. The new College and Career Readiness position has enabled SC2C to begin strategically increasing the ways the program reaches out to students with messaging throughout the year, better positioning the program to build more awareness earlier among students.

3.2.1 Recommendation: More and Earlier Messaging

Continue to work on ways to introduce the B2C program to students prior to the end of school. Identifying ways to use previous participants as advocates for the benefits of the program could help forge a stronger connection between the program and graduating seniors. Recommendations from program meetings include the creation of a B2C video using footage submitted by 2021 students about their experience in both English and Spanish.

What Students Said About Marketing (source: end of program survey):

- *I would change the marketing strategy; I wish I found out about this program sooner!* – SHS Student
- *I'd like it to have started during the latter half of senior year and to get more info about it before participating* – Westhill Student

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3.3 Lessons Learned: Student Voice

Centering student voice is a central focus of the work at SC2C. The B2C program offers an ideal opportunity to engage youth in co-developing a program that best supports their transition from high school to college. Learning from challenges around engaging youth in feedback during the 2020 program, the 2021 program sought more proactive opportunities to engage youth in the feedback process. There was more success than in 2021 but finding ways to bring in youth voice from start to finish should be the goal.

3.3.1 Recommendation: Identify Youth During Planning Phase

Working with B2C counselors, SC2C should look for ways to bring on board youth who have an interest in shaping the design of this program. A part of SC2C Youth Engagement Framework includes creating a pathway for high school youth to inform and shape the planning, implementing, and evaluation of Bridge to College through our established Youth Leadership. Incorporation of youth and alumni voice can also be used towards the recommendation 3.2.1 around marketing. Alumni will be involved in facilitating the college-going workshops, Bridge to College: Keys to Success, and other opportunities where they can share their lived-experience transitioning to college to support the high school graduates in their transition.

3.4 Lessons Learned: Sharing Findings

Ensuring outcomes data and lessons learned are shared back to stakeholders such as the full SPS counseling staff and Norwalk Community College is an important final piece of the B2C program. While the program has done this in small ways, a larger, more coordinated, and stakeholder specific effort should be explored for 2022. A missing piece in the current model is sharing findings with students to validate their concerns and experiences and help them see the broader impact of the B2C program. Expanding how the B2C concludes and shares its findings going forward will help with the continuous improvement of services offered.

3.4.1 Recommendation: Create Custom Program Summaries for Specific Stakeholders

Creating summaries and arranging for debriefs with key partners of B2C is recommended for future years. Debrief meetings should share data, learnings, and recommendations relevant to the partner. In addition to the debrief meetings, bringing partners such as NCC into the planning process would also be recommended to ensure that B2C is supporting NCC intending students in ways that align with the college.

3.5 Lessons Learned: More Collaboration with NCC

Of the 20 NCC intending students who responded to our end of program survey, 25% rated their experience of applying to NCC a four or five indicating it was a difficult process while nearly 1/3 (30%) rated it a three. When asked about what made the application process challenging, students cited, all the additional forms, figuring out how the system worked to log in and create their email, knowing what documents to send where, along with understanding how to take the placement tests and submit financial aid information. With these potential barriers identified, and the majority of tier 2 and 3 students intending to go to NCC, it would benefit the B2C program to coordinate with NCC contacts more closely to ensure students, and their SPS counselor, can easily navigate these potential challenges. Also, connecting students directly to NCC staff and resources that can help them navigate the application and enrollment process will help ease students worries. Existing connections to key NCC staff should allow for improved coordination between B2C stakeholders and NCC, thereby improving the process for students in the future.

3.5.1 Recommendation: Increased Coordination and Collaboration with NCC

Identifying key relationships at NCC to involve in the B2C program more thoroughly can help problem solve some of the student identified challenges in the application process to the school. One idea offered during a feedback session was to collaborate with NCC more electronically by providing NCC with a list of B2C students who applied and identify where they are in this process (have they done their PAW, attended orientation, enrolled in classes etc.). This level of coordination will help counselors be able to target students proactively to ensure these steps are completed before the fall.

3.5.2 Recommendation: Creation of Enrollment Guides

Another recommendation that came out of feedback meetings was the creation of a video guide to help students better understand and complete the multiple steps in the enrollment process. This guide would serve as a resource for both counselors and students.

4. Conclusion

The 2021 B2C program continued to build off its success from 2020 by thoughtfully evaluating the previous year and using continuous improvement methods to create a more adaptive program that better met student needs. By continuing to use these methods, along with improving the marketing of the program to current seniors and building on existing relationships at NCC, the 2022 B2C program can provide an even more robust support network to college intending seniors in Stamford.

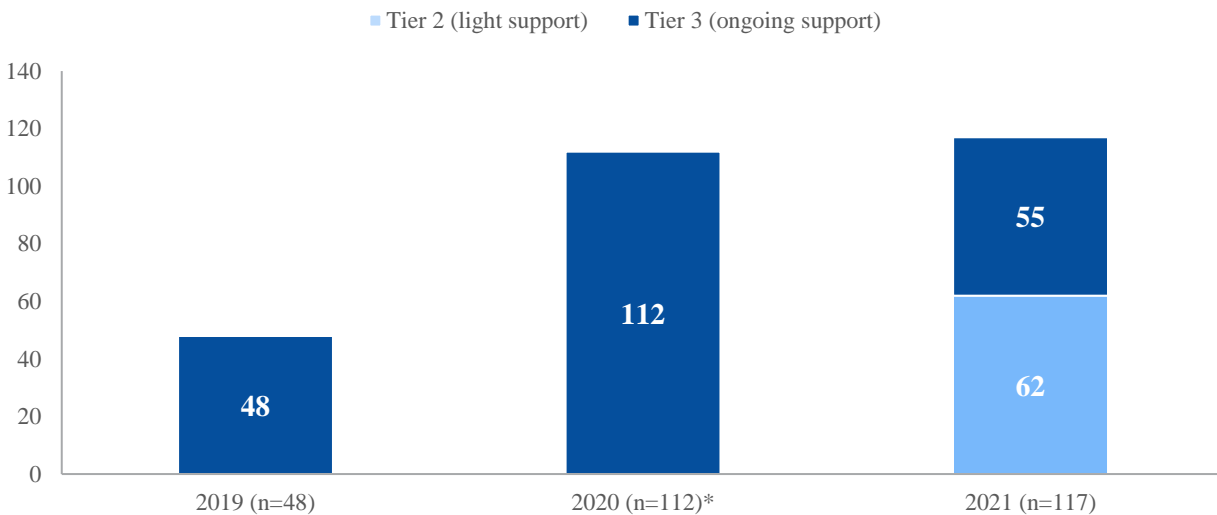
5. Appendix

Since 2019, the B2C program has more than doubled the number of children supported by college counselors. The charts below are visual comparisons of the program using data points from the past three years (2019-2021) when possible.

5.1 Program Enrollment

As mentioned in the report, 2021 was the first year the program disaggregated students served by counselors into those receiving a “light touch”, or once-off discussion with a counselor, and those who communicated regularly with counselors throughout the summer. Using this new designation, **53%** of students served in 2021 were considered tier 2 by counselors.

Chart 3: Bridge to College Students Receiving One-on-One Counselor Support



5.2 Tier 3 Summer Progress

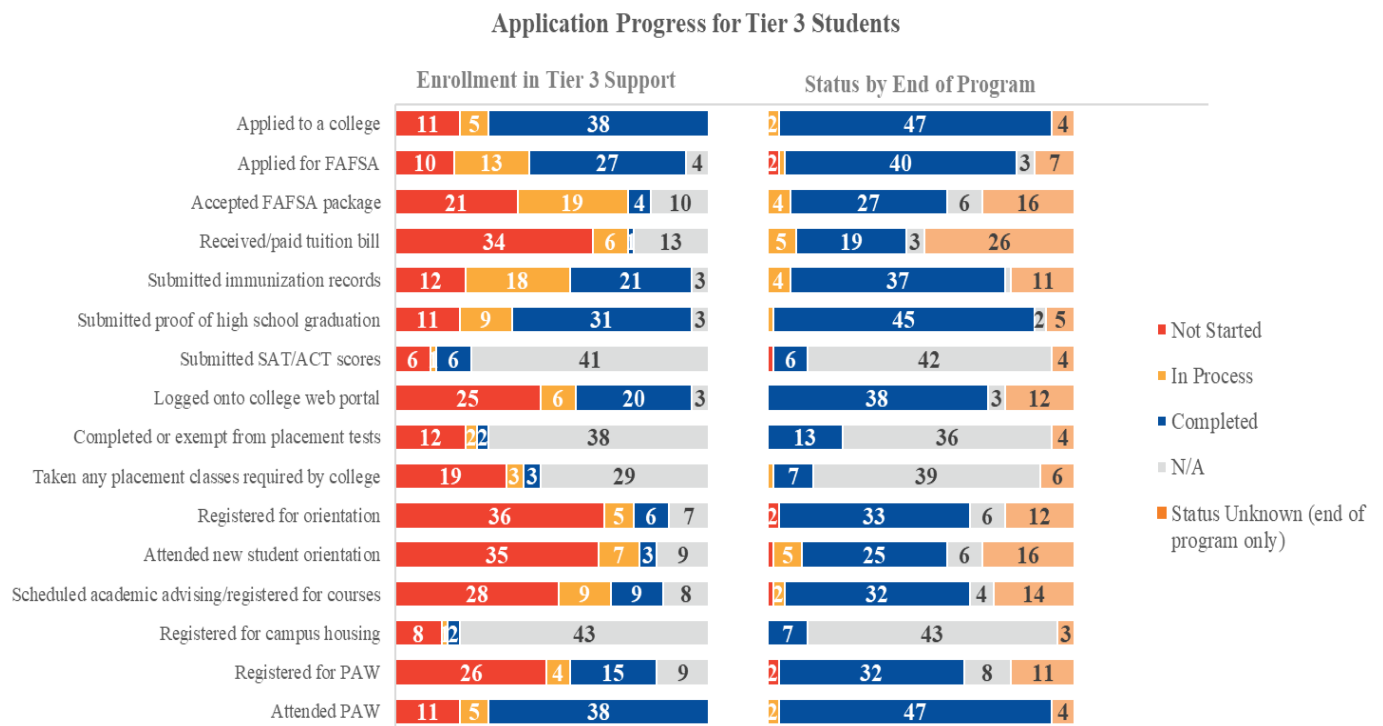
Students receiving tier 3 support were asked a series of questions when joining to help counselors better understand where students were in the application and enrollment process. Counselors reviewed these same questions at the end of the program and indicated where students had made progress or decided not to apply. The chart below looks at the comparison in status for tier 3 students between June and August. Counselors unable to reach and confirm updates with students at the end of the program selected “Status Unknown” if they could not verify a change for the student from enrollment to the end of program. Looking at the left chart, there are high rates of students who had yet to register for orientation, log into their college portal, register for classes, and pay their tuition bill; all factors that could result in summer melt had students not received ongoing support to complete these tasks. The chart on the right shows

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how much improvement there was among students in these key areas with almost no students having not yet started that process.

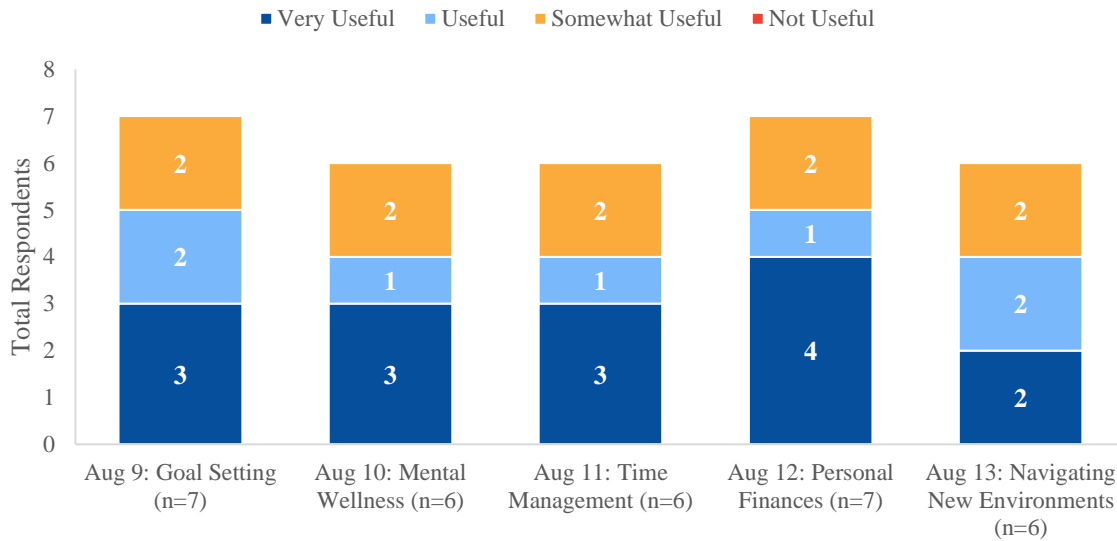
Chart 4: Progress for Tier 3 Students (June-August 2021)



5.3 Keys to Success Workshops

During the week of August 9th tier 3 students had the ability to take part in the first ever Keys to Success workshop series. Five, virtual, workshops focused on providing students with information that would help prepare them for their first year in school. Workshops had, on average, 7 attendees and covered topics such as personal finances, mental wellness, and time management. All attendees were sent a satisfaction survey at the end of the week. Seven students responded and rated their satisfaction in whichever workshops they attended. Overall, satisfaction was high, particularly in the personal finance workshop which corresponds to the request for more personal finances lessons articulated by seniors in the SPS Senior Survey. Results from the satisfaction survey can be found below.

Chart 5: Keys to Success Participant Satisfaction Results



5.4 Tier 3 Student Composition & Caseloads

The charts below compare tier 2 and 3 student high schools and counselor caseloads from the past two years. Caseloads are not reassigned for balance, though this may be a practice explored in future years if they become too unbalanced. Based on the number of seniors uploaded to SignalVine, counselors are assigned about half the students uploaded that correspond with the high school the counselor works in during the school year. As students respond to counselor phone calls or SignalVine texts, counselors build their one-on-one caseloads which are represented in the chart below.

Chart 6: Students Provided with Counselor Support by High School

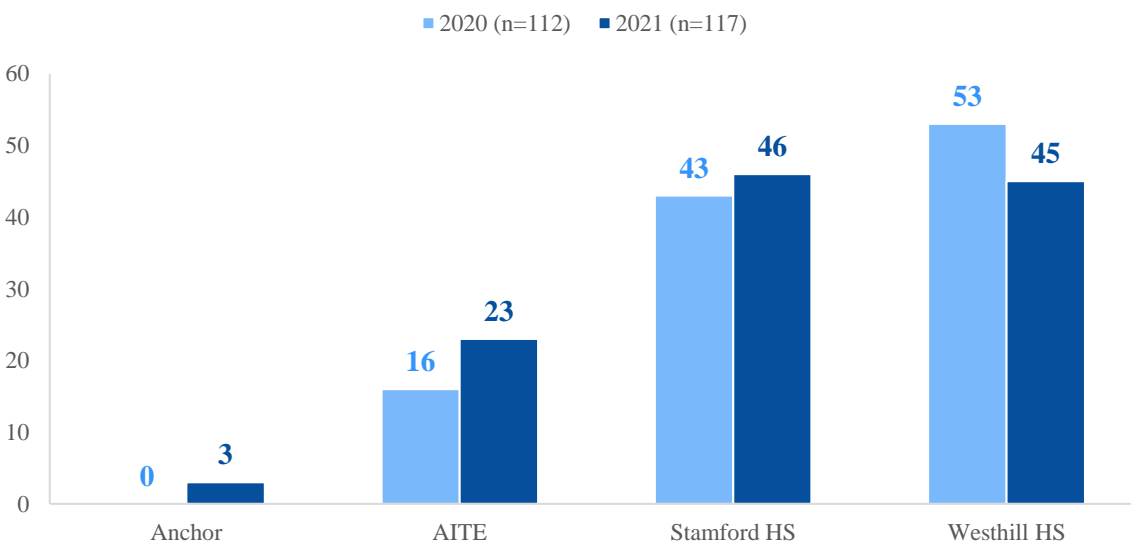
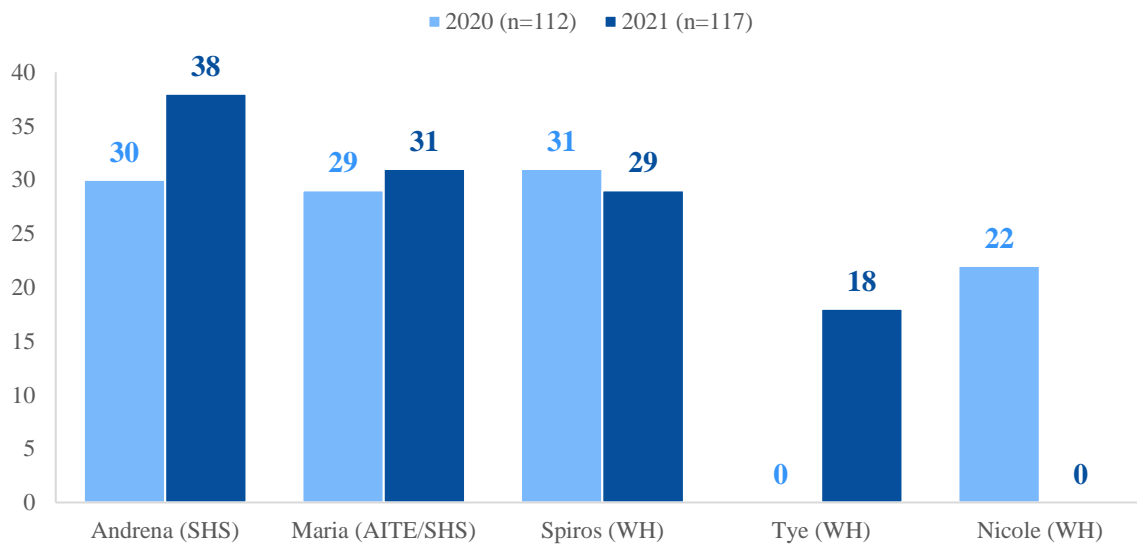


Chart 7: Counselor Tier 3 Caseloads



5.5 End of Program Survey Results

Students receiving tier 3 support received a satisfaction survey at the end of the summer. Results of this survey are shown below in comparison to the same survey from 2020. Interestingly, NCC intending students rated the application process easier this year. Though still considered more difficult by a quarter of the applicants, the rate of students ranking the process a 4 out of 5 for difficulty was significantly lower in 2021 while the rate of students rating it as a 1 for easy was higher in 2021. In 2021, students also reported slightly higher rates of satisfaction with counselor communication and helpfulness which may have been behind the higher Net Promoter Score used to measure satisfaction.

Another improvement highlighted by the end of program survey, was an increase in the number of students who said they learned about the program through their school. Though students did express the need for more awareness of the program, the increase from 2020 indicates the small changes made in 2021 were reaching students.

Lastly, when it came to students fall plans and the impact of the program on student's fall plans, results between the two years were nearly the same. Nearly three quarters of the respondents in 2020 and 2021 said they would have attended college, despite their involvement in the B2C program, and over 90% indicated their intention was to attend either NCC or another college in the fall.

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Chart 8: How did you hear of the Bridge to College Program?

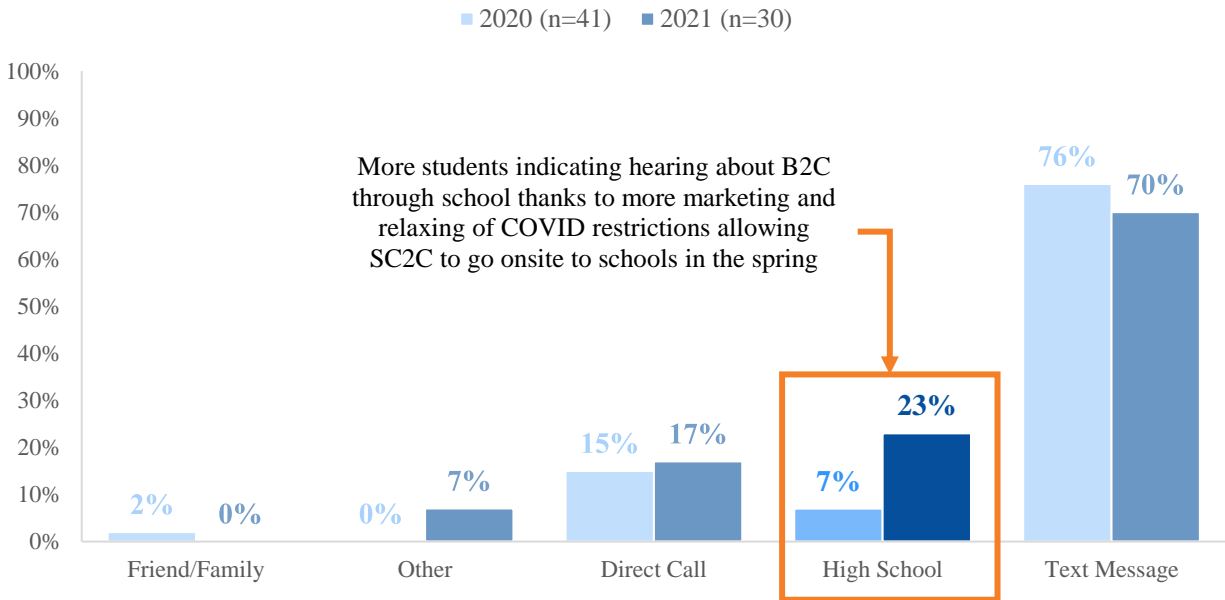


Chart 9: Ease of NCC Application Process (NCC intending students only)

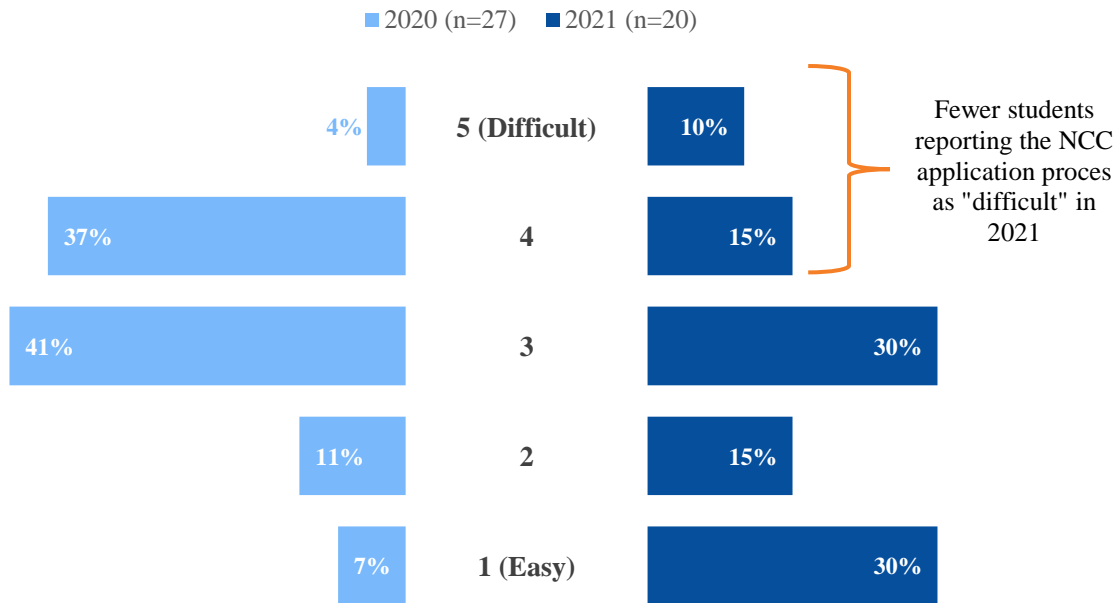


Chart 10: Student Rating of Counselor Communication

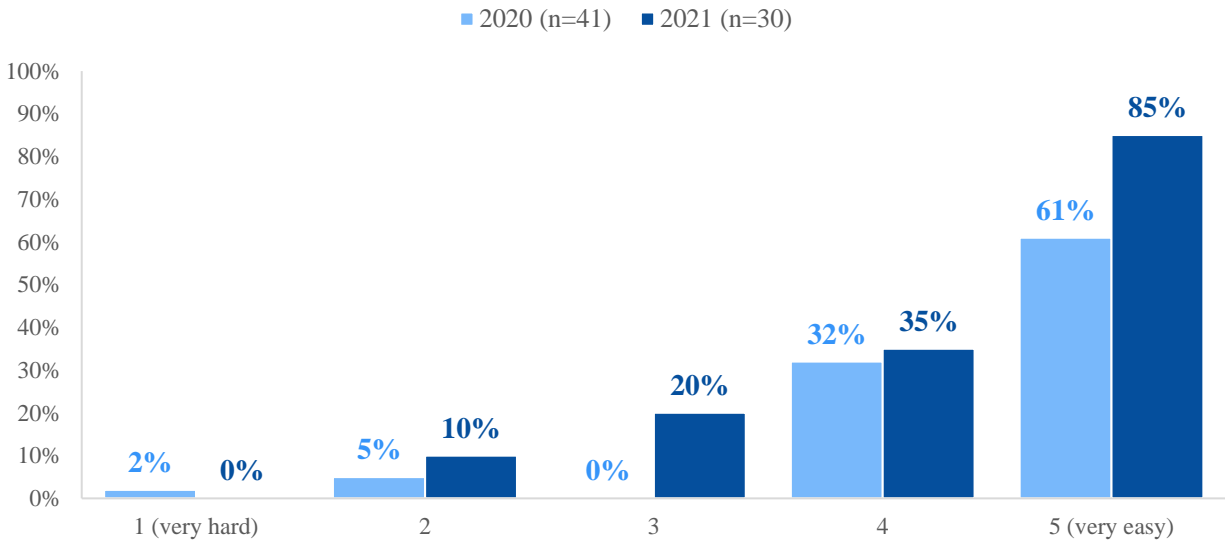
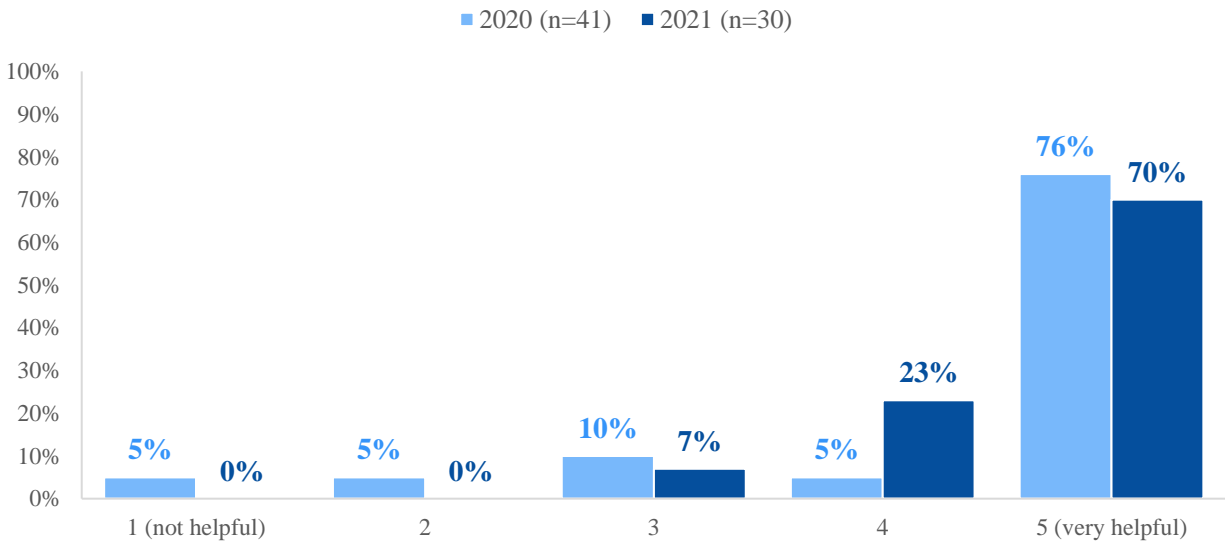


Chart 11: Student Rating of Counselor Helpfulness



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Chart 12: Student's Self-Reported Fall Intentions

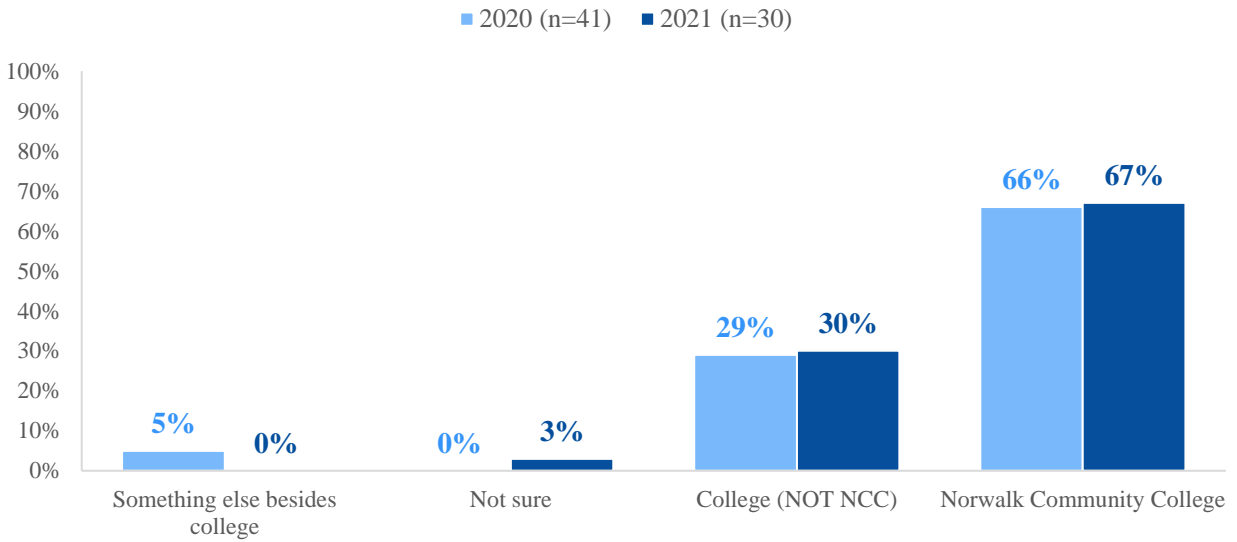


Chart 13: Student's Self-Reported Impact of B2C on Fall Plans

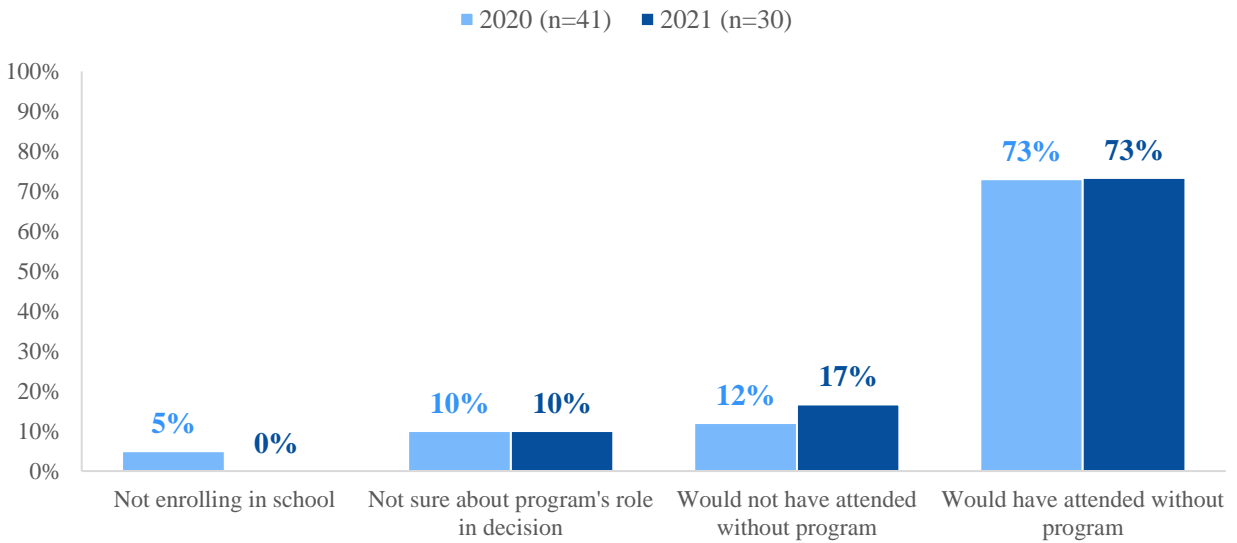


Chart 14: Net Promoter Scores



What students **LIKED** about the Bridge to College Program

- I loved the way every one of my questions was answered and it helped me out a lot. – *Stamford HS Student*
- I liked that the counselors were there for you even when you’ve already graduated and help you get to your next step in education – *AITE Student*
- The quality of communication and dedication from the counselors! – *Westhill HS Student*
- I liked that they made sure to remind you about important events and gave room to give any general updates – *Stamford HS Student*

What students would **CHANGE** about the Bridge to College Program

- Increased awareness on what benefits it can provide and that it can assist students – *Stamford HS Student*
- Honestly not a lot the text messages aren’t too much their just about right, the reminders are perfect. – *Westhill HS Student*
- I’d like it to have started during the later half of senior year and to get more info about it before participating – *Stamford HS Student*

What students think we should know for 2022’s Bridge to College Program

- Tell kids that they are entering the program. I kinda just got messages one day and thought it was spam – *AITE Student*
- Students may need help but they won’t ask so the more encouragement the better. – *Stamford HS Student*