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Introduction

The 2022 Bridge to College (B2C) program was the first, non-pilot, iteration of the initiative that faced no COVID-19 related hurdles. With the return to full-time in person learning and more robust counseling supports offered during the school year, the number of students seeking one-on-one support from a B2C counselors was lower than the previous two years. Though too early to tell if this trend will remain and more accurately reflect the post-COVID learning environment, we note that the collective efforts of the Stamford Public Schools, Norwalk Community College, and community partners over the past four years since the inception of Bridge to College in 2019, may be having a positive impact on ensuring more Stamford Public School (SPS) students graduate high school with a plan for their post-high school endeavors, and thus fewer need hands-on support over the summer. **In 2022, the program reached 978 seniors with regular messaging and reminders about completing all pieces of their college enrollment process. Of the 978 seniors, 69 (7%) students received additional, one-on-one support, from one of four school counselors working with the B2C program.**

1. 2022 Project Background

Since 2010, when the number of students enrolling in college peaked, the volume of students pursuing a higher education degree has fallen by 9.6%¹. This trend was accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 and has disproportionately impacted enrollment at the community college level.² Reasons for this decline are varied. In Stamford, data on the enrollment of graduating seniors in 2020, mirror the national trends with fewer students pursuing a college degree after high school (69.4% down from 73.1% in 2019).³ Furthermore, enrollment rates for students of color in Stamford was lower at 63.4% versus 80.7% for white students in 2020.⁴ In order to ensure students who want to pursue higher education have the support to do so, Stamford Cradle to Career (SC2C), in partnership with Stamford Public Schools (SPS) and Stamford Public Education Foundation (SPEF), provides a summer program, Bridge to College, that uses a tiered approach to support all college intending graduates of SPS.

¹ Hanson, M. (2022, July 26). *College Enrollment Statistics [2022]: Total + by Demographic*. Education Data Initiative. <https://educationdata.org/college-enrollment-statistics>

² Ibid

³ *College Enrollment, Persistence, and Graduation Dashboard*. (n.d.). CT.Gov. Retrieved October 7, 2022, from <https://public-edsight.ct.gov/Performance/College-Enrollment-Dashboard>

⁴ *College Enrollment, Persistence, and Graduation Dashboard*. (n.d.). CT.Gov. Retrieved October 13, 2022, from <https://public-edsight.ct.gov/Performance/College-Enrollment-Dashboard>

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Using an online text messaging platform called SignalVine, the B2C program sends ongoing messages to all college intending graduates about key deadlines and enrollment requirements throughout the summer. SignalVine also allows for more targeted messaging to students based on sub-groups that the B2C program can create using data from NAVIANCE and the senior survey, an exit survey given to all graduating seniors. Sub-groups include targeted messaging about deadlines for two versus four-year institutions, messages to first-generation college students, and messages for those students intending to attend Norwalk Community College. The system also allows for two-way communication between students and one of our four college counselors on hand to answer their questions and support students with completing their enrollment requirements.

In addition to the text support, four college counselors, drawn from each of the three Stamford high schools, are available to speak with students who need assistance applying or finishing their college applications or enrollment process during the summer. Counselors also make direct contact through phone calls with all first-generation graduates. Just over 50% of SPS students are considered first-generation meaning neither parent has completed higher education. Knowing that students who are the first in their family to go on to college face additional obstacles and often lack support, this direct ask has helped the program to find and assist most of the students it works with one-on-one.

Lastly, building off a series of four workshops conducted in summer 2021 to help students with the transition to college, the B2C program expanded the workshop offerings to seven and opened enrollment to any graduated senior. Topics included areas such as managing financial aid and personal finances, developing a student's professional identity, and building their mental health skills. A list of workshops and attendance totals can be found in chart 5 of the appendix.

1.1 Target Population

The B2C program uses a three-tier approach to support students over the summer after high school graduation. Tier 1 includes all graduating seniors who are college intending, military bound, or interested in immediately joining the workforce. Supports to this group include ongoing text message reminders with messages tailored to their intended post-high school plans. From this Tier 1 group, first-generation students who are college intending are called by a college counselor to confirm they have all parts of their application and enrollment completed. These calls also remind first-generation students that they can message a counselor at any time if

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their situation changes or they have a question. Tier 2 students are those who reach out to a counselor either because of a message sent on SignalVine, the phone call they received from a counselor, or because they had a question and used SignalVine to reach their assigned summer counselor. Tier 2 students require only “light touch” support by the counselor meaning their need can generally be resolved in one to two meetings with the counselor. The last tier, Tier 3, are students who require multiple interactions with a counselor throughout the summer. These students come into the program similarly to Tier 2 students and Tier 2 students may become Tier 3 if the counselor realizes their needs are greater than initially thought. Similarly, Tier 3 students may end up being Tier 2 students once a counselor is able to meet with them and delve into their needs. The differentiation between supports to Tier 2 and Tier 3 students was developed as a result of regular weekly meetings between counselors and B2C partners. By looking at the type of support provided to students working with our counselors, the program could better understand the kind of support most needed by graduates to ensure they enroll in college in fall.

1.2 Data Collection

Data for the B2C program is collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Exact sources are detailed below in Table 1 and include quantitative sources such as the senior exit survey, enrollment forms used by counselors to identify student needs, and participant feedback surveys. Qualitative sources come from our weekly team check-ins, open ended survey questions and anecdotal stories from interactions between counselors and students. In previous years, we had attempted one-on-one interviews and focus groups, however participation was low, and we struggled to get students to show up for interviews despite offering gift cards as an incentive. Part of this challenge stems from the program being entirely virtual and the relationship existing only between the student and their counselor. As a result, in 2022 we did not attempt interviews and focus groups with students.

Table 1: Bridge to College Data Sources

Data Source	Data Collected	Quantitative	Qualitative
Senior Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post graduate intentions • First-generation students • Email • Phone Number 		
SignalVine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messages sent • Engagement with messages • Opt-outs 		
Participant Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction 		

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ease of Use Recommendations 		
Enrollment Form (Tier 2 & Tier 3 support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas of need Areas supported by counselor Anticipated fall plans (end of summer) Level of support provided by counselor 		
Weekly Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counselor feedback Updates on program 		

2. Outcomes

In 2022, **69 students received one-on-one support from one of our counselors.** It should be noted that there were nine additional students who were enrolled by counselors for one-on-one support, however no evidence of support was provided as students did not return calls or honor appointments. As a result, these students have been removed from final tally which reflects only students who received some type of support from a counselor over the summer. Demographic details about students served in 2022 can be found in Table 2 below.

Chart 1: Multi-year Comparison of B2C Enrollment

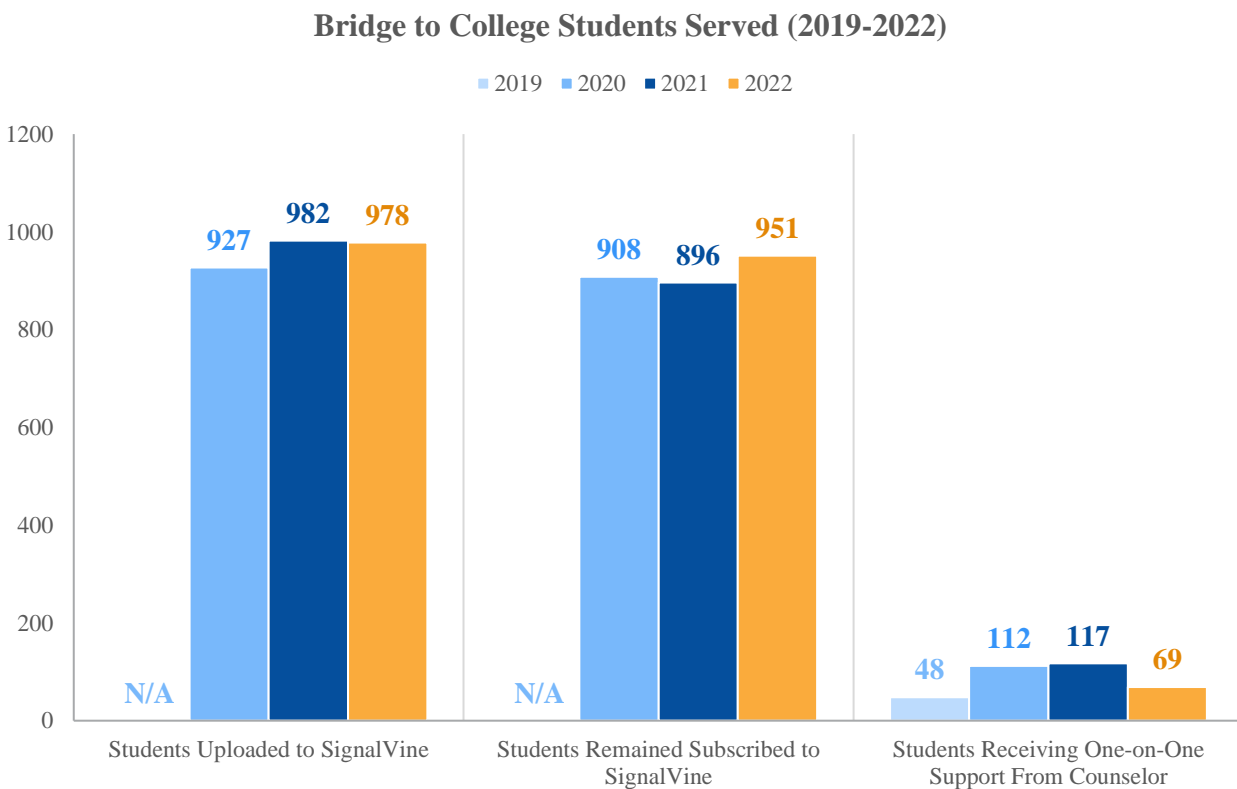




Table 2: Bridge to College Student Demographics

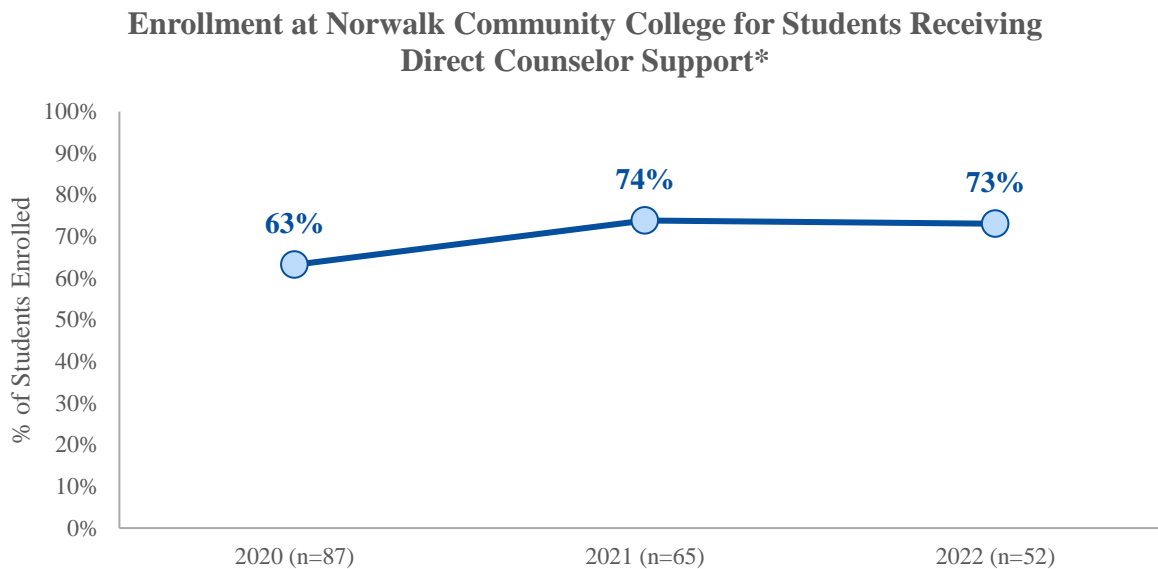
Demographics*	Tier 1: All Students		Tier 2+3: Combined	
	#	%	#	%
College-intending seniors Class of 2022	978	-	69	7%
Tier Breakdown				
Tier 2			36	52%
Tier 3			33	48%
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian			5	7%
Black-African American			17	25%
Hispanic-Latino			41	59%
Two or more races			0	0
White			6	9%
Gender				
Male	493	50%	25	36%
Female	484	49%	44	64%
First-generation				
First-Generation	535	55%	61	88%
High School				
Anchor	17	2%	2	3%
AITE	134	14%	7	10%
Stamford High School	365	37%	34	49%
Westhill High School	462	47%	26	38%

* %'s are out of the total in row 1 for each column.

NCC Enrollment

Of the **52 NCC intending students in 2022, 73% were confirmed as enrolled** by our contacts at NCC. This is a preliminary number used to assess impact on students we know are more vulnerable to summer melt. Official numbers about student enrollment will be recalculated once National Student Clearinghouse data is shared with SPS in the late fall/winter. The National Student Clearinghouse tracks student enrollment and graduation from higher education institutions and is the standardized measure used to indicate the enrollment and retention rate of first year students. This enrollment number as of now is about on par with the 2021 number and up from our 2020 figure.

Chart 2: NCC Intending Students with Confirmed Enrollment



* 2022 percentage is a preliminary figure. A list of students who intended to attend NCC was sent to our partners at NCC to confirm their enrollment. National Clearinghouse fall data will be used as the final indicator of how many NCC intending students enrolled at the school.

2.1 2022 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: 2022 RBA Results

RBA AREA	OUTCOME	Students Served	Description
How Much?	# of students targeted with SignalVine text messages	978	Total number of students uploaded to SignalVine and targeted with messaging over the summer
	# of students who did unsubscribe from SignalVine	28	Total users in SignalVine marked as Inactive by the system at the end of the summer
	# of students provided with 1 on 1 counselor support	69	Total number of students receiving direct counselor support during the summer
	<i># of Tier 2 students supported by counselor</i>	36 (36/69)	Total number of students receiving “light touch” or support for an issue that can be resolved quickly within a few days with the counselor
	<i># of Tier 3 students supported by counselor</i>	33 (33/69)	Total number of students receiving more intensive support towards their application that requires more ongoing meetings with the student.
	<i># of Tier 2 & 3 students not yet applied for college</i>	22 (22/69)	Based on intake form for students receiving 1:1 counselor support who are marked as in progress or not yet for college applications.
	<i># of Tier 2 & 3 students with outstanding FAFSA</i>	36 (36/69)	Based on intake form for students receiving 1:1 counselor support who are marked as in



			progress or not yet for FAFSA (cross checked with SPS data on FAFSA completion).
How Well	% of students who did not unsubscribe from SV	3%	% out of total number of students enrolled in SV who unsubscribed from SignalVine.
	% of students who were satisfied with SV	78% (50/64)	% of students responding to the SignalVine satisfaction survey with a 4 or 5 response
	% of students served with Tier 2 and 3 support	7% (69/987)	% out of T1 students who were enrolled in T2 or T3 support
	<i>% of students who completed college applications</i>	77% (17/22)	% out of T2 and T3 students with verified completed applications at end of summer
	<i>% of students who completed FAFSA</i>	64% (23/36)	% out of T2 and T3 students with verified completed FAFSA at end of summer
	<i>% of students who were satisfied with 1:1 counselor support</i>	90%	% of T2 and T3 students responding to SC2C's end of program satisfaction survey with a 4 or 5 response
	<i>Net Promoter Score for students receiving 1:1 counselor support</i>	80	NPS based on SC2C's end of program satisfaction survey.
Better Off	% of NCC intending Tier 2 and 3 students confirmed as enrolled by NCC	73%	SC2C sends NCC a list of NCC intending students who worked with our counselors over the summer to confirm which students are currently on the NCC roster prior to official confirmation using National Clearinghouse data in the fall.
	% of students confirmed to be enrolled in higher education the fall following their high school graduation	<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>	% based on results from fall and spring National Clearinghouse data
	% of students persisted to second semester freshman year	<i>TBD</i>	% based on results from spring National Clearinghouse data
	% of students persisting to second year of college	<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>	% based on results from spring National Clearinghouse data

3. Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Lessons learned are compiled through a review of weekly meeting minutes, survey responses, and other anecdotal offerings by partners involved in the B2C program.

3.1 Lessons Learned: Understanding Efforts to Increase College Enrollment

During the School Year

While supporting students to enroll in college after high school is a primary goal of the counseling department at Stamford Public Schools, changes in approach and multiple new initiatives are conducted each year in an effort to improve results. Coming out of COVID-19, additional efforts were made to improve ease of access to information and enrollment in local

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schools such as Norwalk Community College. Knowing more about these efforts, how they differ by school, and how well they were utilized by students would be helpful to know at the start of the program, to continue gauging if the lower number of students seeking one-on-one counselor support could be tied back to these efforts. This information would also help the B2C program make any necessary adaptations to meet any changing needs of students upon graduation.

3.1.1 Recommendation: Sharing School-based Efforts Early

Prior to the start of the program, counselors and SPS leadership should share efforts by each school to increase college enrollment among graduates. SC2C typically begins B2C planning meetings in January, and this should be an agenda item for these meetings.

3.2 Lessons Learned: Building Awareness of B2C Before the End of Year

Feedback from participants in our end of program survey indicated an ongoing need to continue raising awareness of this program prior to the end of school. In previous years, this had been a challenge with COVID-19 policies restricting access to schools, however, in 2022, SC2C's College and Career Readiness Manager did visit campuses to table at school events about the B2C program. An initial text message was also sent to students via SignalVine explaining what the text messages were that they would be receiving over the summer and how they could reach out to a counselor if interested. Continuing to build off these efforts in 2023 as COVID restrictions are no longer a barrier are important to raising awareness among graduates about the existence and benefits of the B2C program.

3.2.1 Recommendation: Increasing Student Voice and Marketing of B2C

Using students to build more awareness of the program is an important next step. Building off the in-school tabling events conducted in 2022, SC2C can work with their newly established Youth Leadership Interns to help plan and support outreach about B2C at each of the high schools in Stamford in the spring before school ends. Additionally, finding ways to increase student relationships between not just counselors but other B2C partners is key to improving the feedback loop and raising awareness about this service. SC2C should continue to share and partner with school counselors and school administration at the high schools to share and promote the program directly to students. Finally, SC2C should continue to work with partner organizations on the best methods to engage students and make them aware about this important summer resource.

3.3 Lessons Learned: Continue Building Out Workshops

The workshop addition to the B2C program is valued by students and should continue to grow in the coming years. Related to recommendation 3.2, improved marketing of these workshops to all students, regardless of their post-high school plans should be considered and expanded.

3.3.1 Recommendation: Improve Marketing of Workshops and Align Offerings with Student Interest

This is another opportunity to utilize student voice. Identifying key areas of interest among graduates and ensuring marketing efforts are reaching students will be critical to building on the success of the initial offerings in 2021 and 2022. Utilizing data from the senior survey, feedback from partner organizations working with youth, and input from SC2C's Youth Leadership Interns, would enhance these offerings to ensure they meet student needs, are scheduled at time accessible to students, and that students know about the offerings.

3.4 Lessons Learned: Increase Collaboration with Norwalk Community College (NCC)

The B2C partnership with NCC has grown each year the program has run. Continuing to grow this relationship and collaborating on ways the B2C program can ensure NCC intending students arrive ready to succeed was a recommendation from counselors in 2022. Counselors remarked about an interest in being more prepared to help students know the NCC application and selecting the right major.

3.4.1 Recommendation: NCC Workshop with Counselors

Building off the NCC introductory session conducted in 2022 for counselors, they recommended specifically reviewing the NCC application (recommended live walk through of the process), website, and course selection to better assist students over the summer.

3.5 Lessons Learned: More FAFSA Awareness

Feedback from counselors indicated a need to increase the awareness among students about the FAFSA application and the difference between FAFSA and ACTUS. Counselors mentioned many students were confused by what FAFSA questions were really asking for and which students would be better served by ACTUS.

3.5.1 Recommendation: Additional Messaging and Workshops on FAFSA and ACTUS

Counselors recommended adding messaging about FAFSA and clarifying questions in the application, so students know what is needed to apply. Similarly, more information on when ACTUS may be a better option than FAFSA was also discussed so students could compare and

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decide. Increased messaging should be considered using multiple approaches through both SignalVine, making sure counselors know to bring this up with students when speaking during the summer, and improving messaging during the school year.

3.6 Lessons Learned: Extending Weekly Check-in Meetings

To ensure ample time for counselors to discuss caseloads, challenges, successes, and data; it was recommended that weekly meetings be extended from 60 to 90min with the last 30min centered on data. Incorporating data reviews into each weekly meeting results in less confusion and less time spent cleaning data at the end of the summer.

3.6.1 Recommendation: 90 minutes for Weekly Check-ins

Blocking 90 min will ensure ample time for discussion and if meetings adjourn earlier that is ok.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the 2022 B2C program was able to successfully reach a majority of graduating SPS seniors with important messaging about college readiness. Though the number of students receiving one-on-one support from counselors was lower than the previous two years, the return to full in-person learning and increased college application efforts by counselors at all three high schools are likely contributing factors in this reduction. Additionally, SC2C and partners are hopeful that the preliminary data on enrollment for NCC intending students who received direct counselor support are a continued indication of the impact this program has, especially on our first generation NCC intending students.

5. Appendix

The charts below are visual comparisons of the program using data points for 2022 and across the past four years (2019-2022) when possible.

5.1 Program Enrollment

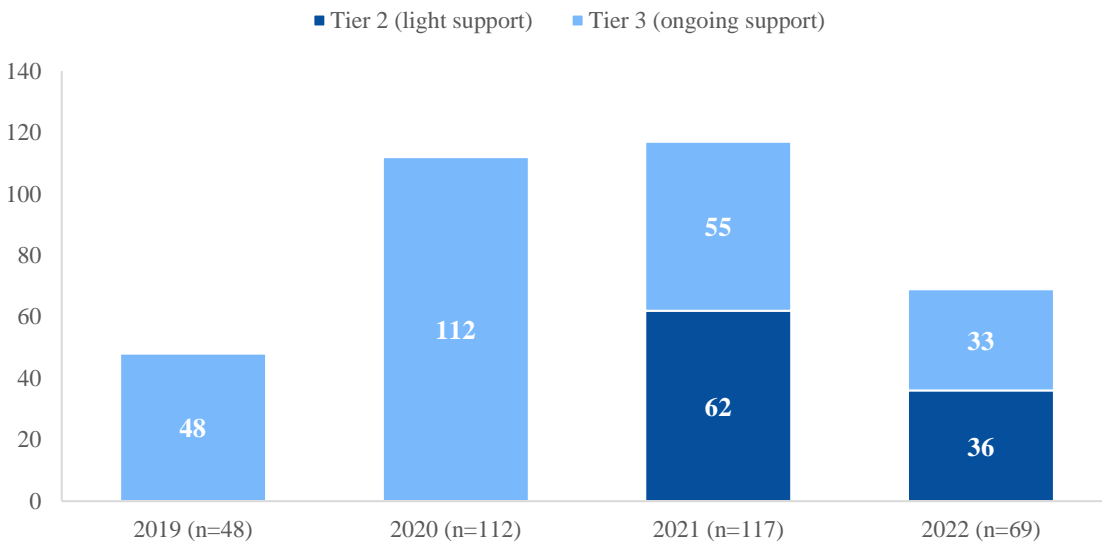
Program enrollment has varied over the four years of the initiative due to changes in both design and context. Enrollment in 2019 was targeted towards a small group of first-generation college students intending to attend NCC. Building off the 2019 pilot program, we expanded the program considerably in 2020-2022 with the addition of the texting platform (Signal Vine) to reach all students with text messaging, an increase in the number of counselors to work with more students one-on-one, and direct outreach effort to call all first-generation students asking if they needed help finalizing their college applications. The shift in how students worked with

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counselors, coupled with the disruption of in-person learning due to COVID-19, were likely drivers in the higher rates of students seeking one-on-one counselor support in 2020 and 2021. The number of students receiving one-on-one support in 2022 was lower, which could be due to the full year of in-person learning and increased on site college enrollment efforts across the district, but this will become clearer as we work with students in 2023 and beyond.

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

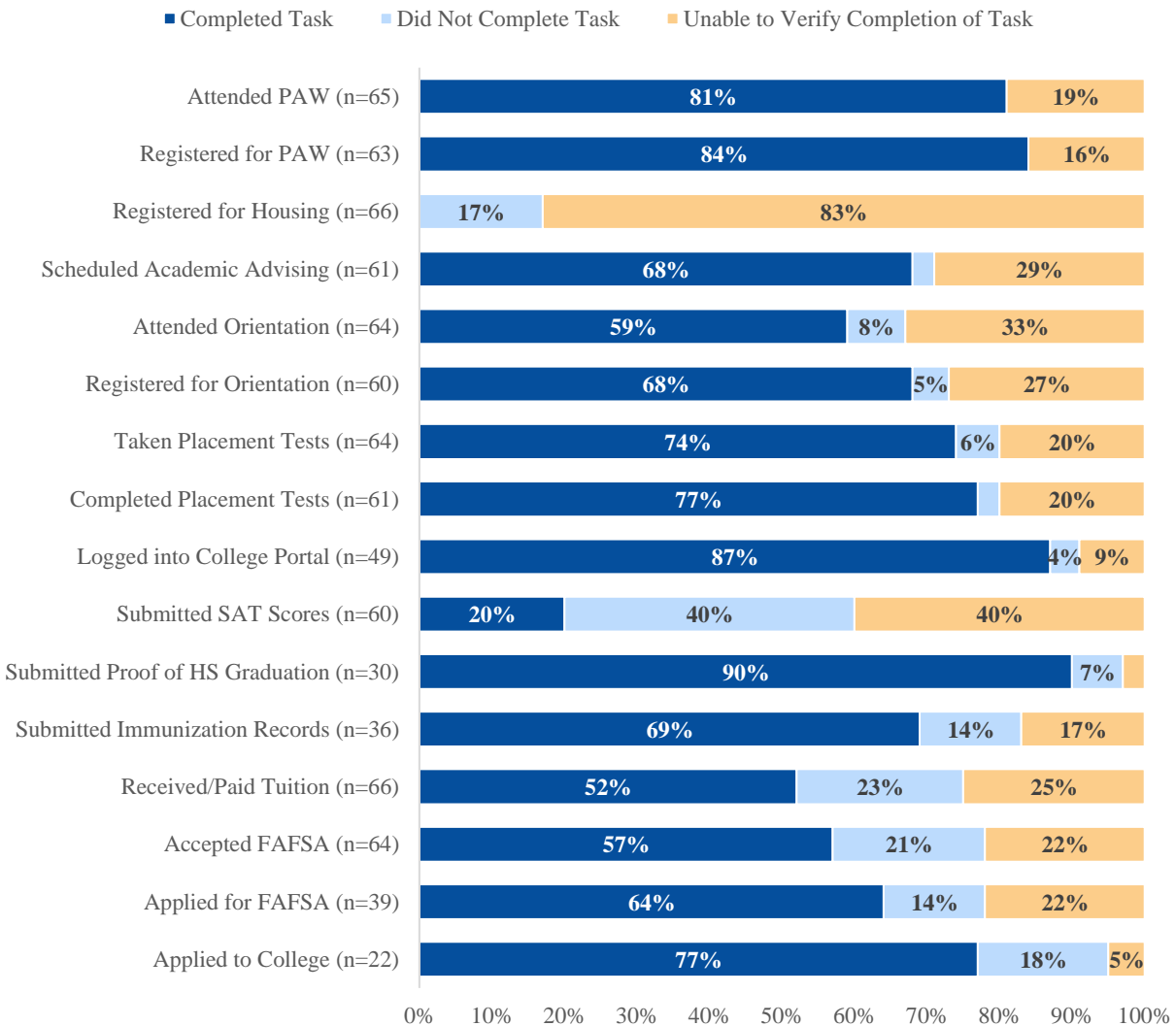


**note there was no Tier 2 designation in 2019 and 2020 so all students receiving any type of counselor support (light or in depth) are noted above at Tier 3*

5.2 Tier 2 & 3 Summer Progress

Students working one-on-one with counselors go through a checklist of actions that need to be completed prior to the first day of school to find out where counselors can help students start or finish these tasks. Using a Google Form, counselors mark off where students are with each task as either: completed, in progress, or not yet started. At the end of the summer, counselors go through this list with students again and update the student’s status on each task that wasn’t initially completed at enrollment. The chart below looks at where counselors were able to move students to a completed status across each area. Attending the PAW workshop at NCC is a key step for new students and counselors had a large impact ensuring students knew to register and attend this session which provides students with critical information on how to log into their portal, register for classes, and receive information about the start of school.

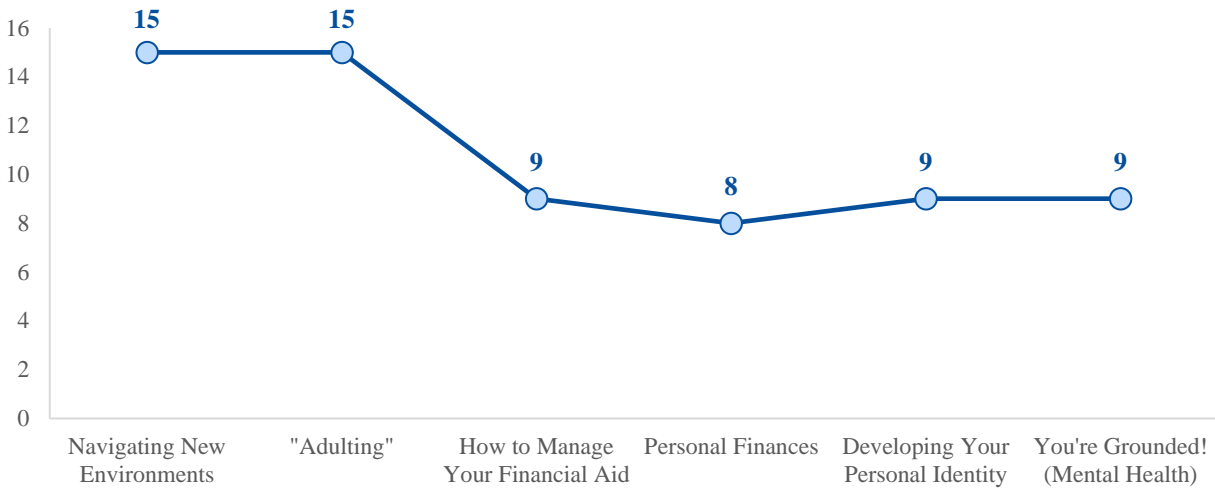
Chart 4: Progress for Students Receiving 1:1 Counselor Support (June-August 2022)



5.3 Keys to Success Workshops

These seven workshops were held over the course of three weeks between July and August 2022. Building off 2021’s 5 workshops, two more were added in 2022 including an additional finance workshop on managing financial aid and developing student’s personal identities. Held virtually, Zoom polls for each workshop found respondents unanimously agreed that they were more informed as a result of attending and that they would recommend them to a friend.

Chart 5: 2022 Keys to Success Participants by Workshop



5.4 Tier 2 & 3 Student Composition

Bridge to College supports students across all four high schools in Stamford. Stamford and Westhill are the two primary high schools in the city along with AITE, an inter-district magnet school, and Anchor, a specialized school, having much smaller student bodies. Participation in one-to-one counselor support is self-selected by students; however, counselors make direct phone calls to all first-generation students to ensure they know this resource exists for them to utilize at any point during the summer. With over 50% of students considered first-generation college bound, this personalized contact is a critical step to ensuring enrollment in the fall.

Chart 6: Students Provided with Counselor Support by High School

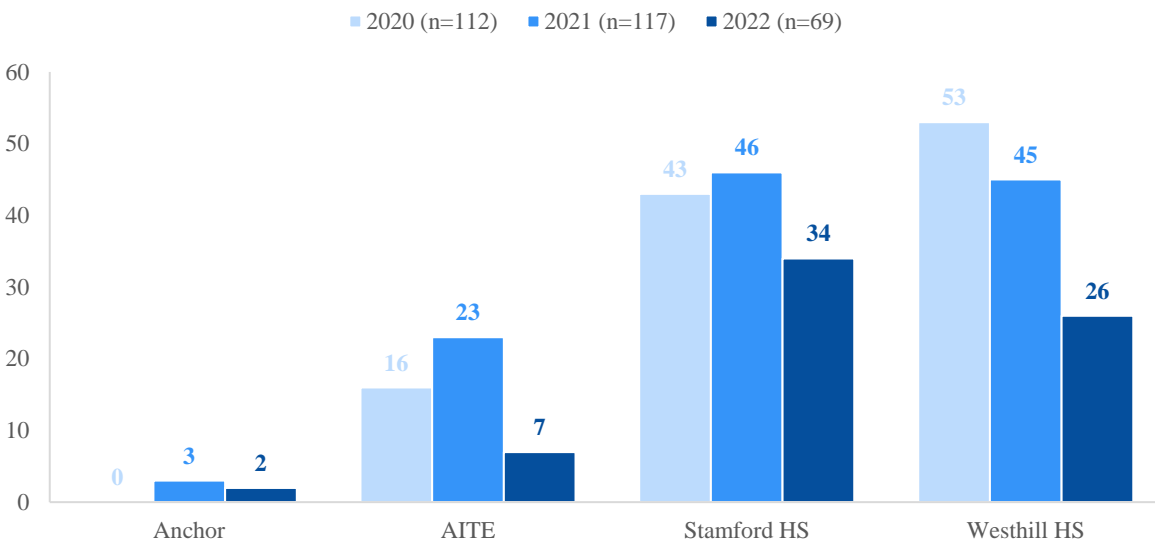
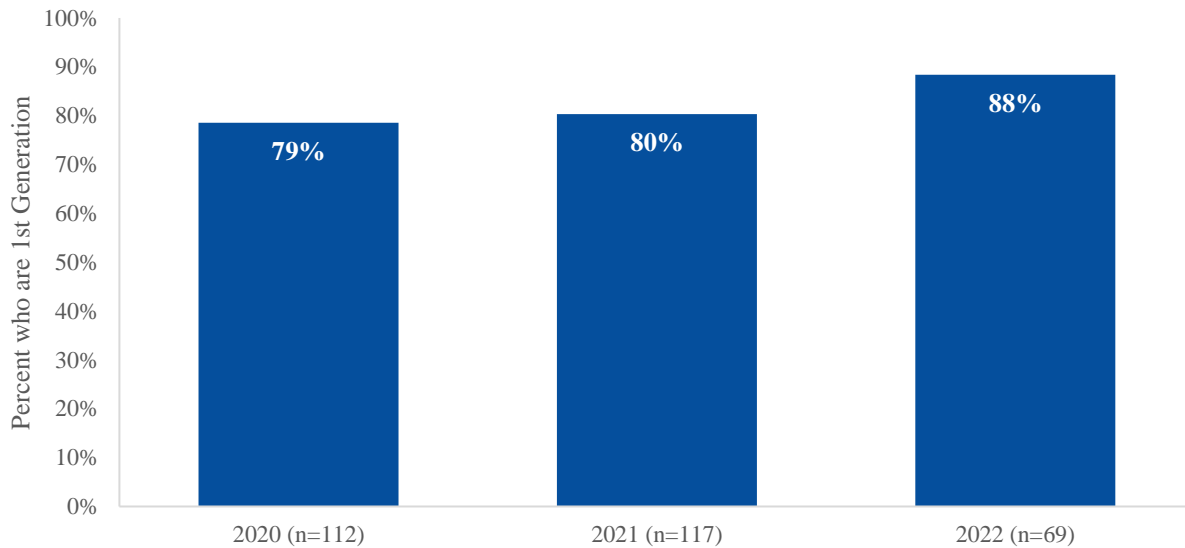


Chart 7: First-generation Students Receiving 1:1 Counselor Support



5.5 End of Program Survey Results

At the end of the program students receiving one-on-one support from a counselor (Tier 2 and 3 students) are sent a survey to help SC2C and partners get feedback on student’s experience and how we can improve going forward. In 2022, 20 of the 69 participants (29%) completed the survey. Of the 20 who took the survey, the overwhelming majority found their counselors helpful and 90% said the program played a role in helping them finalize their plans for the fall. The charts below compare the results for this student feedback survey over the past three years.

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

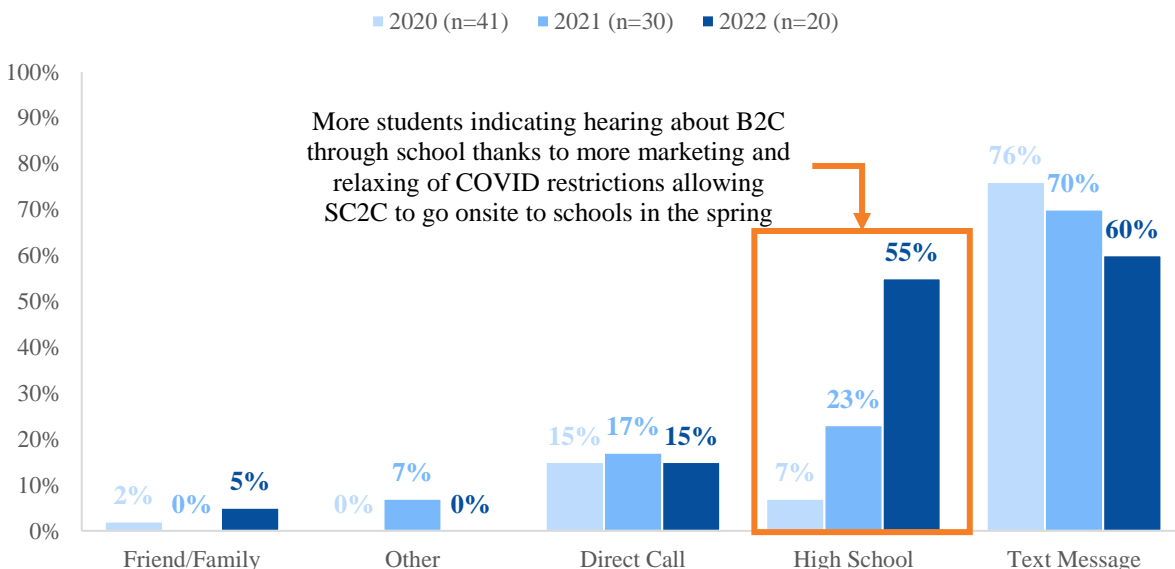


Chart 9: Ease of NCC Application Process (NCC intending students only)

Since 2020, students have found the application process to NCC easier in line with changes made at NCC to make this process more accessible.

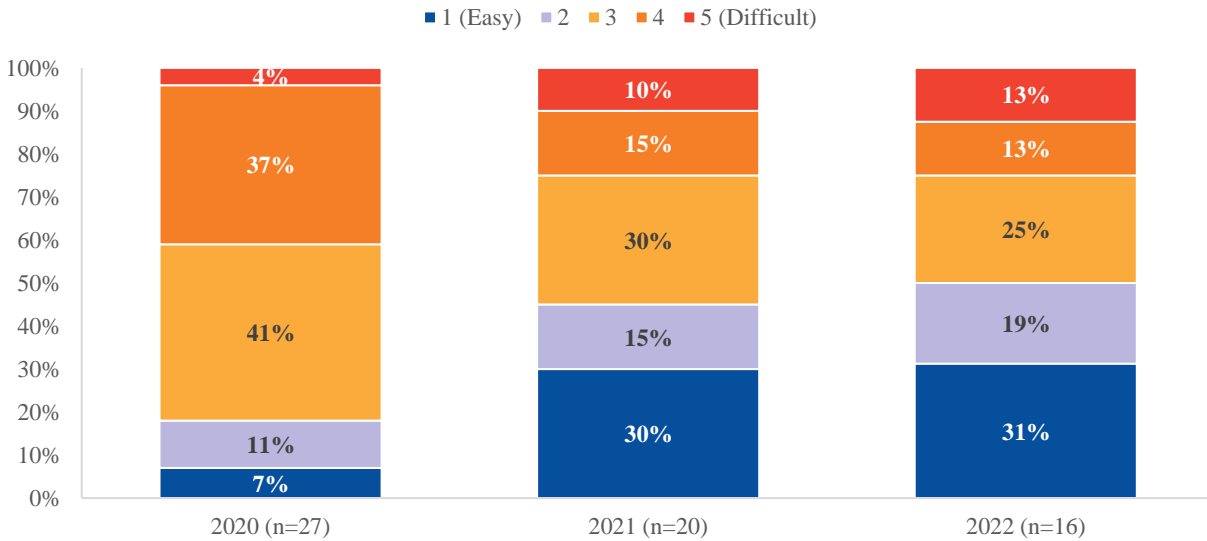


Chart 10: Student rating of communication with their counselor

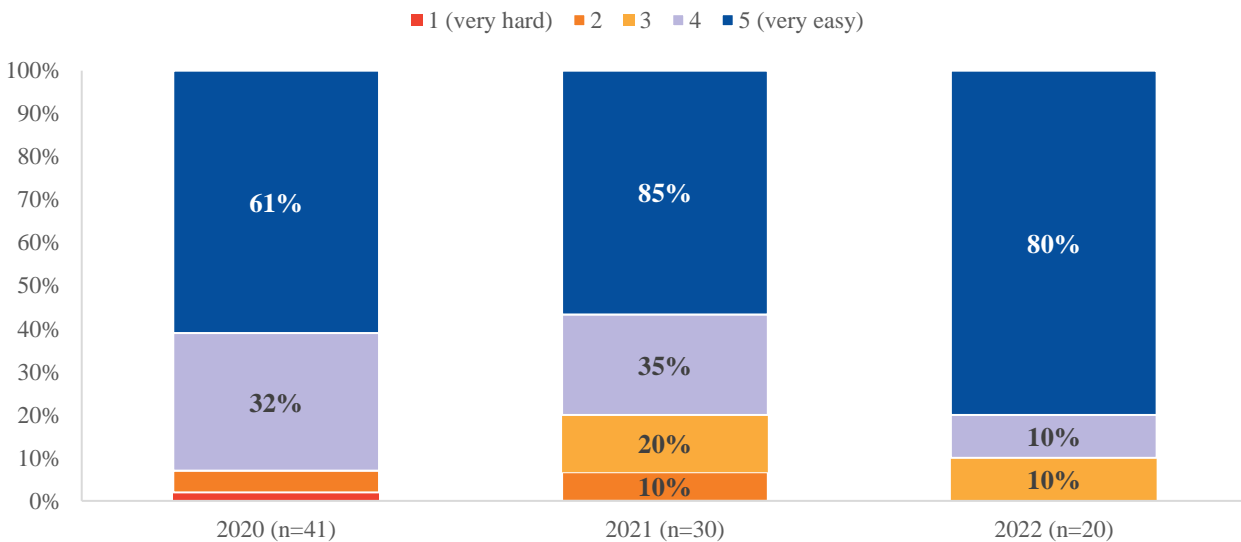


Chart 11: Student rating of how helpful they found their counselor

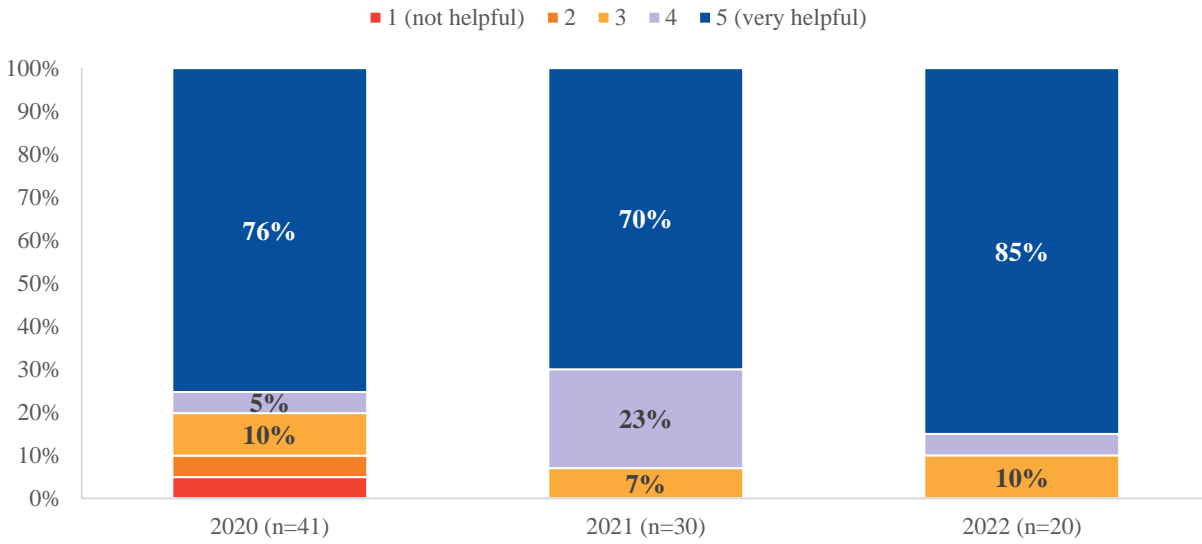
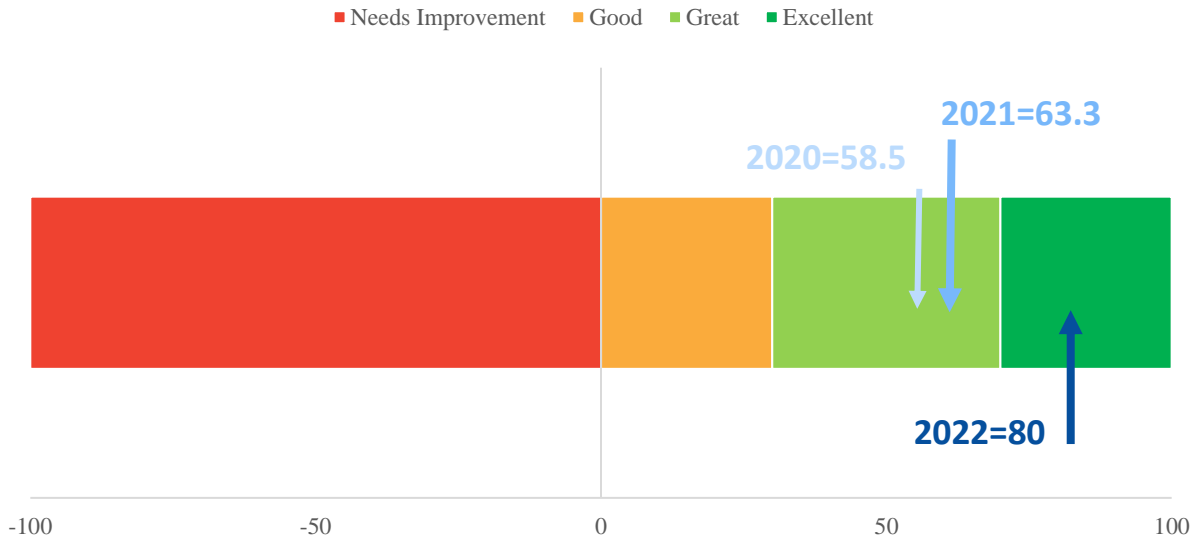


Chart 14: Net Promoter Scores

Since 2020, the percentage of participants who would recommend this program to a friend has steadily increased and moved from the great to excellent category within the Net Promoter Scoring for customer satisfaction.



What students LIKED about the Bridge to College Program

Students commented a lot about the ease of reaching their counselor, the help they received around financial aid, and the fact there was this safety net after graduation to help them finalize their applications and answer their questions.

- “The counselors are really accessible. It takes the pressure off of this summer which is really crucial for the rest of our lives but often forgotten and because of that, many teens don’t know what to do during it. Plus it offers a ton of important resources”. – *Stamford HS participant*
- “Ms. Rodríguez helped me in June with an issue I had in the FASFA application. She guided me through and during the month of August I had seen her again because I had yet to send my form application. She printed out the form and gave me what I needed to go to the post office. She then helped me figure out how to start up my email account for NCC and showed me where to find it. I was unaware of my new student ID so that was very helpful. I had no idea that we had to go to PAW and she helped me fill in everything including the appointment. Even after I haven’t seen her she checked in on me and gave me the option date for the orientation at NCC. She’s the only counselor that’s helped me the most and she wasn’t even my counselor. I’m grateful and appreciate the help I got. I don’t think I would’ve ever done my application without her help.” – *Stamford HS participant*
- “What I liked about the Bridge to College summer college counseling program is that I got to receive help from a counselor I was familiar with in High School, and she was able to answer my questions that I wasn’t comfortable asking anyone else. She helped me understand the fall fee bill.” – *AITE participant*
- “He [my counselor] helped me see how good NCC is to improve myself and get to higher place takes time and work and that I can do it. – *Westhill HS participant*

What students would CHANGE about the Bridge to College Program

All students who responded said they would change nothing about the program. Only one student commented that just making it easier to find out about might be helpful.

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

Here again, many students just commented how helpful the program was, however the few suggestions they offered related to building more awareness among students about this program and the value it offers graduating students.