

## **Big Picture Longitudinal Study: Pilot Research Summary (May 2007)**

Big Picture schools have achieved notable success in getting underserved students through high school and into college. Providing students with access to a college does not guarantee them attainment of a college degree, however. Ultimately what matters to individuals and society is the adult contribution of Big Picture school graduates—in higher education, occupations, families, and communities. In keeping with this long-term goal, the Big Picture company has implemented a longitudinal study of its graduates. The Irvine and Lumina Foundations provided seed money to begin documenting the Big Picture model's effectiveness for students and their families in order to inform practice in both the high schools and institutions of higher education. Evaluation consultant, Dr. Karen Arnold, directs the study in collaboration with a national team of Big Picture transition specialists.

The pilot phase of the project (2006–2008) looks at the effectiveness of Big Picture schools in preparing students for college degree attainment and career-oriented employment. The program's long-term impact will be assessed in terms of alumni economic self-sufficiency, healthy family and social relationships, and community involvement, widely agreed upon thresholds for achievement as measured around specific parameters\*.

To date, data collections include the following: (Surveys are self-administered, web-based instruments.)

- **Student Transition Survey**

Participants: All Big Picture school graduating seniors  
Timing: One time administration in May/June of senior year  
Administered: Class of 2006 (n=187)  
Class of 2007 (n=206 as of 29 May, 2007)  
Content: Family and demographic information; evaluation of high school experiences and readiness for college; post-high school plans

- **Advisor Survey**

Participants: Advisors of Big Picture school graduating seniors  
Timing: One time administration in May/June for graduating advisory members  
Administered: Class of 2006 (n=126; Met Providence advisors, only)  
Class of 2007 (underway)  
Content: Assessment of each advisee's academic and personal college readiness

- **First Fall Update**

Participants: All Big Picture new graduates (from previous spring)  
Timing: One time administration in mid-October following graduation  
Administered: Class of 2006 (n=86)  
Content: College, work, community, and family status; assessment of postsecondary transition

- **All Alumni Update**

Participants: All Big Picture graduates except most recently graduated class  
Timing: Annually in October  
Administered: First administration in October 2007

- Content: Updated contact information; college, work, community, and family status; reflections on previous year
- Student Enrollment Tracker
    - Participants: All Big Picture graduates
    - Timing: Annually in December
    - Administered: Obtained annually from National Student Clearinghouse
    - Content: By semester, student postsecondary enrollment status, name of college, type of postsecondary institution, and degree(s) obtained
  - Qualitative Transition Study
    - Participants: Met Providence (n=2) and MetWest (n=2) Class of 2006 graduates
    - Timing: Bi-annually for 2 years
    - Administered: Audio interviews conducted by Sam Broun; 1<sup>st</sup> round completed Summer 2006; second round in progress
    - Content: In-depth personal stories of post-high school transition
  - Archival Study
    - Participants: Met Providence classes of 2000 and 2001
    - Timing: Retrospective
    - Administered: Archival records, including high school transcripts, college transition counselor and advisor evaluations, valedictory speeches
    - Content: In-depth qualitative longitudinal profile of earliest Big Picture classes

In brief, initial findings from these data collections indicate that Big Picture school graduates rate their high school experience very highly, especially in terms of relationships with advisors, usefulness of internships, personal growth, and preparation for college attendance. In contrast with their otherwise positive evaluation of high school academic preparation, many graduates expressed concern about their college readiness in mathematics, an assessment with which advisors concurred. Eighty-seven percent of 2006 graduates indicated in June that they planned to begin college in the following fall. Those responding to the First Fall Update survey the following October had attended college as planned, reporting generally good transitions to college socially and academically. However, the response rate for the October update was poor. In December, 2006 National Clearinghouse data on enrollment indicated that up to a third of the class had changed their college plans in the 6 months following high school graduation. Summer alumni check-ins from Met Providence college transition counselors showed a group of students who had decided to postpone college and another group who entered 2-year colleges instead of the 4-year institutions where they intended to enroll the previous spring.

In addition to continuing the annual data collections above, securing funding for the continuation and expansion of the longitudinal study will take priority next year. The longitudinal study will then follow Big Picture graduates into adulthood, ideally with a comparison group of urban public high school graduates.

\*Gambone, M.A., Klem, A.M. & Connell, J.P. (2002). *Finding Out What Matters for Youth: Testing Key Links in a Community Action Framework for Youth Development*. Philadelphia: Youth Development Strategies, Inc., and Institute for Research and Reform in Education.).