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NEWS RELEASE

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High schools fall short on college support, student researchers find

PROVIDENCE, RI—Students do not get the college-going help they need from schools until far too late in the game, according to an extraordinary new report by a research team of 25 diverse high school students from Washington state and Tennessee.

Instead, parents and guardians largely step into the gap, according to their study, *Hear Us Out*, which was released today by the [Center for Youth Voice in Policy and Practice at What Kids Can Do, Inc.](#), a nonprofit based in Providence, RI.

Three-quarters of the respondents named their families as the chief source of college motivation and support, even when their parents and guardians had not attended college themselves.

In contrast, **almost a third said they had never spoken with a school counselor about college**. Although that percentage dropped to 12 percent by twelfth grade, 28 percent of seniors said they had completed their college application mostly on their own.

Student researchers based their findings on surveys of close to 5,000 peers in nine comprehensive high schools, five in Seattle and four in Chattanooga and Hamilton County, Tennessee. Another 225 students participated in [videotaped student-led focus groups and individual interviews](#).

High motivation, little help

Conversations about setting their sights on college began early for 86 percent of students and came to a peak in sixth through ninth grades. But respondents said they lacked concrete advice from school sources in the critical early high school years.

Encountering a problem moving ahead with college plans, 86 percent of students said they would turn to a parent or guardian, compared to 38 percent who said they would consult a school counselor, and 33 percent a teacher.

The cost of college was the biggest hurdle, according to more than two-thirds of students. Forty percent said they knew little or nothing about financial aid. Of

students eligible for free and reduced lunch, only 64 percent expected to attend college directly after high school, compared with 78 percent of higher-income students.

Aware of the constraints caused by overloaded counselors and shrinking school budgets, the student researchers urged community partners to step in with support and coaching for families and youth. They also asked for mentoring from “near peers” — college students from similar backgrounds who could share practical advice about access and success.

“I usually don’t like asking for help,” said one young respondent. “But when someone says, ‘Hey, check this out, I don’t know if you’ll like it, but you should look at it anyway,’ that goes pretty far.”

Supported by [Lumina Foundation for Education](#), *Hear Us Out* was a collaborative effort by What Kids Can Do (WKCD), the [Public Education Foundation](#) in Chattanooga, and the [Alliance for Education](#) in Seattle. The [Public Science Project](#) at CUNY Graduate Center helped design the survey and train the students. Students carried out their research and analysis in the spring of 2010.

“We found no shortage of ambition among these high school students, whatever their family income, race or ethnicity,” said WKCD president Barbara Cervone, who presented the report along with videotaped student voices to a national group of college access organizations at Lumina’s Indianapolis headquarters on December 2. “But making college dreams come true for America’s youth is a joint production, requiring all of us.”

[Download the Executive Summary, Hear Us Out](#) (PDF, 5 pp.)

[Download the full report, Hear Us Out](#) (PDF, 37 pp.)

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