

My study involved an examination of the post-secondary educational experiences of the graduates of Fenway High School. My aim was to look at how a student's experiences at Fenway affected a student's experiences in college with reference to a student's ability to persist after the first year of college. The study is of particular importance to urban education reform considering the lower persistence rates of low-income students and students of color in higher education as well as the lack of research connecting a student's experiences in secondary education with a student's ability to persist after the first year of post-secondary education. My study consisted of two parts: telephone surveys of Fenway graduates in the classes of 1998-2002 and in-depth interviews with recent Fenway graduates. I also engaged in a brief examination of student engagement at the colleges commonly attended by Fenway graduates. My findings show that Fenway graduates reflect positively on Fenway's ability to prepare them for integration into the social and academic systems of college. One exception to this claim is that Fenway graduates do not feel as well prepared for college work in mathematics as they do in other areas; however, in-depth interviews with graduates reveal ambiguity in the claim that Fenway does not prepare its students for college work in mathematics. Furthermore, the study points to the weaknesses in Fenway's established methods of following its graduates into college, suggests areas for improvement in follow-up work on graduates of Fenway, and points out areas for fruitful future research on college persistence. The results of this study have serious implications for larger constituencies in urban education reform such as the small schools movement and the early college movement in terms of a reform's ability to not only offer students college access but also to improve a student's chances of college success.