WICHE LAC Meeting
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“Supporting students to boost retention and completion”

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About MDRC

- Nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with experience conducting demonstrations in postsecondary education

Specializes in:
- Finding what works
- Random assignment evaluations
- Qualitative studies
- Program enhancement & technical assistance
National college completion problem

• Less than 40% of students who start at community college earned a degree or credential within 6 years of enrolling.

• Large achievement gap in community colleges
  • Hispanic students: 12 percentage points lower than white students
  • Black students: 19 percentage points lower than white students

• Adults and rural students also have lower completion rates.
Why are college completion rates low?

- Academic Challenges
- Financial Barriers
- Work-Life-School Balance
- Lack of College Know-How
- Institutional Barriers
Postsecondary Interventions + Policies

What does the evidence say?
Evidence for Short-term interventions

• **Short-term** interventions designed to address just one or a few barriers can lead to positive, but modest, effects

• **Examples of intervention components:**
  - Financial aid
  - Learning communities
  - Developmental education reform
  - Coaching/Advising
  - Summer engagement
  - Outreach + communication
Big Picture: What Works

• Comprehensive programs that combine strategies and are sustained over time can dramatically impact completion.

• Examples:
  • CUNY ASAP
  • ASAP in Ohio
  • Project Quest
  • Bottom Line
  • One Million Degrees
  • Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement
CUNY ASAP Program Model

Financial Resources

- Tuition waivers
- Textbook stipend
- Monthly MetroCard

Structured Pathways

- Full-time course schedules
- First-year blocked courses
- Winter and summer courses

Comprehensive Supports

- High-touch, case management advising
- Career services
- Tutoring
- Early engagement

Evaluation and Data Use for Program Management
CUNY ASAP Increases Graduation Rates

Completion rate (%)

Program Group  Control Group

Semester 6

Completion rate (%)

40  18***

22
College Completion Strategy Guide

• Summarizes the research and provide clear policy guidance for strategies to increase college completion
  • Salient, relevant, and actionable
  • Centers Equity
  • Clear standards for evidence
• Leverages the expertise of MDRC, SHEEO, The Education Trust, and TICAS
• 16 briefs in production with 28 authors representing 17 organizations and universities
## College Completion Strategy Guide

### Specific Interventions or Topics
- Comprehensive Approaches to Student Success
- Career Pathways
- Advising
- Developmental Education
- Dual Enrollment
- Multiple Measures
- Corequisite Remediation
- Cost and Return on Investment
- Wrap-Around Supports

### Unique Populations or Context
- TCUs and Indigenous Students
- Women of Color
- Men of Color
- Post-traditional (Adult) Learners

### Cross-cutting Lessons for the Field
- Centering Equity in Higher Ed
- Equity Audits in Higher Education Finance
- Learning Agenda
Implementing Evidence-based Strategies

What does implementation look like?
SUCCESS

Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success

Multi-faceted, long term program that builds on MDRC’s 15 years of postsecondary research

Combines the most effective elements and uses existing resources to create lower-cost programs that are more likely to be sustained and scaled
SUCCESS Model

- Coaches who reach out proactively and meet frequently with students
- Financial incentives to encourage students to satisfy program requirements and to provide additional funding
- Programs that serve students for at least three years and focus on strategies to increase academic momentum. Students earn 24 credits per year through full-time enrollment in main semesters and summer term enrollment.
- Management information systems (MIS) that provides data to support program management and improvement
- Commitment to program affordability and sustainability by leveraging and consolidating existing resources
Building SUCCESS

1. **Streamline program model** – focused on multiple components with the strongest evidence-base

2. **Strengthen state partnerships** – state agencies support state expansion efforts

3. **Align with existing initiatives and priorities** – states and colleges find efficiencies

4. **Focus on ROI** – annual costs and long-term returns
SUCCESS

Bakersfield College, California
SUCCESS at Bakersfield College

Integrated with Kern Promise and Guided Pathways
SUCCESS Implementation Research Lessons

1. Students highly value coaching.
   a) Students reported asking for help with a variety of issues, both personal and academic.

2. Students are facing information overload.

3. Students desire community and support in the virtual college world.
SUCCESS Student Quotes

“They say it takes a village to raise children. Well, it also takes a village to help you get through college when you have children and work a full-time job...my coach is always there for me to talk to and help get me through issues.”

“Without my coach I might have dropped out after a bad experience...I was so discouraged and wanted to give up. But she called me, and I was able to be honest and express what was going on. She helped me through it.”

“My coach makes me more accountable...I know our appointment is always coming up, and I want to tell them good news.”
Tools for Postsecondary Schools

California, Hawaii, Montana
What is Tools for Postsecondary Schools (TfPS)?

- MDRC researchers and practitioners discuss **components of evidence-based comprehensive student supports strategies** to help close the success gap for students from low-income families and students of color.

- Over 30 colleges across 10 states participated in monthly, **interactive workshops**. Focused on **putting research into practice** in ways that make sense for the state and campus context.

- State higher education leaders in the 10 states participated in two learning community events. Discussed best practices for how state leaders can help scale and financially sustain comprehensive support strategies statewide.

- WICHE state participants: CA, MT, HI
What are the six topics?

- Student-Centered Program Design
- Core Components of High-Impact Coaching
- Data Management for Continuous Program Improvement
- Behavioral Science Principles for Effective Communications
- Encouraging Academic Momentum
- Return on Investment & Financial Sustainability
Montana’s Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) and participating colleges participated in TfPS to learn best practices to maximize student supports in their Montana 10 project.

Montana 10’s components are:

**Financial Supports** - scholarships, textbook stipends, monthly incentive

**Academic Momentum** - full-time schedule, corequisite math and writing tutoring

**Purpose & Belonging** - specialized advising, career development orientation, freshman seminar
Implementing evidence-based practices

1. Build on the evidence. There is room to experiment and grow

2. Align with campus and state priorities

3. Focus on understanding student needs and their experiences especially coming out of the pandemic

4. Focus on equity and addressing institutional practices that may continue to support inequalities.

5. Align staffing and monetary resources to support implementation
MDRC resources for states and campuses

ROI Tool
https://www.mdrc.org/intervention-roi-tool

Strategy Guide
https://www.mdrc.org/college-completion-strategy-guide
Discussion and Q&A