

Supporting College Students During the Pandemic

Early Lessons from SUCCESS

By: Colleen Sommo, Marco Lepe, and Alyssa Ratledge

Contributors: Erick Alonzo, Osvaldo Avila, Katie Beal, Parker Cellura, Ben Cohen, Stanley Dai, Hannah Dalporto, Colin Hill, Viviana Plancarte, Austin Slaughter, Andrea Vasquez, Sienna Walker, Michelle Ware, Melissa Wavelet, and Michael Weiss

Introduction

Community colleges and broad-access four-year universities (those that have open or minimally selective admissions policies) serve as important pathways to degree attainment and economic mobility for millions of Americans. But graduation rates at these colleges are low—for example, only 36 percent of first-time, full-time freshmen enrolled in two-year programs at community colleges graduate within three years.¹ These rates are even lower for students from low-income families, students who are the first in their families to attend college, and students of color, all of whom must contend with many barriers making it harder for them to graduate or transfer to four-year institutions.²

Over the last two decades, MDRC and others have conducted research to build the evidence base about what works to help students attending community and broad-access colleges succeed once enrolled. Multifaceted, long-lasting student support models have emerged as an effective strategy to improve student success rates—including graduation rates at two-year colleges.³ Using lessons from the existing body of research, MDRC designed and is evaluating the Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success (SUCCESS) program, a multifaceted student support program designed for financial sustainability. SUCCESS centers on coaching with active outreach, monthly financial incentives, full-time enrollment, and data-driven program management.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States just as study enrollment for MDRC's rigorous evaluation of SUCCESS was set to begin. It dramatically changed life at every level of society, including for college students and staff members. Committed to serving their students, colleges implemented a different program model than intended in order to contend with the abrupt, unplanned shift to online-only operations and the hardships caused by the pandemic. For example, in-person coaching transitioned to virtual platforms and some

colleges relaxed students' full-time enrollment requirement. The decision to move forward with the study was made in Spring 2020, when it was unclear how long the pandemic would last or how much of an effect it would have on the states, institutions, and people in this study and across the world. The limited time period this brief examines—the Fall 2020 semester and part of the Spring 2021 semester—was during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, with staff members and students navigating shifting and often trying academic and domestic circumstances.

This brief thus describes not a test of the SUCCESS model as designed, but instead a test of a primarily virtual, online intervention offering students more flexibility, but not designed to fully address their heightened needs during this unprecedented year of their lives. It highlights the components of the original SUCCESS program model and how colleges adapted them in the face of the pandemic, and describes the study design and how the pandemic has affected it, too. It also presents some early implementation findings and preliminary impact findings for the first semester for the first group of students to enter the study (the first “cohort”) in this extraordinary time.

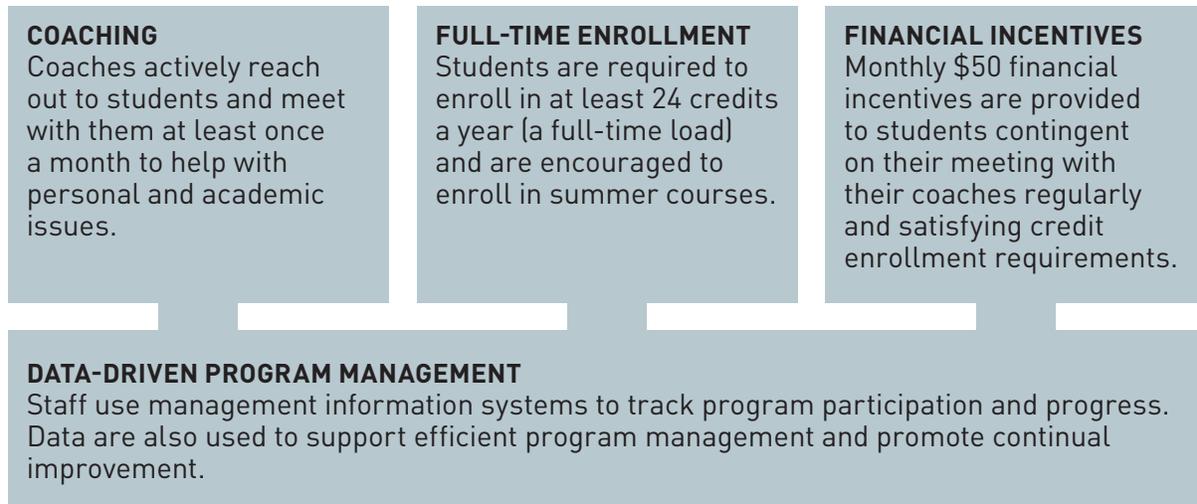
On early academic measures (for example, credits earned and retention in college), students in the program group performed similarly to students in the control group during this time. The research phase of this project has just begun, and the colleges will continue to provide services to new and returning SUCCESS cohorts in the years to come. Further publications will report on substantially larger numbers of students over longer periods of time, including students in later cohorts who may enter a different schooling context and may receive a version of SUCCESS closer to the original plan.

The SUCCESS Program Model as Designed

A growing body of research shows that combining multiple interventions into a single, long-lasting program can help students succeed, but resource constraints have often made it hard for colleges and states to implement comprehensive programs on a large scale.⁴ SUCCESS partners with states and colleges to make programs financially sustainable by selecting the program components backed by the greatest evidence, aligning programs with state initiatives, and using existing resources to keep costs contained.

In particular, SUCCESS aims to increase graduation rates for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. These groups of students face a multitude of barriers to college completion, including financial constraints, logistical and procedural hurdles, a shortfall in academic preparation, and psychological and social challenges.⁵ Although many reforms have been enacted to help these students succeed, few have substantially boosted college completion.⁶ As shown in Figure 1, SUCCESS, as originally designed, combines components that have been proven to help students succeed in college—namely, personalized, in-person coaching; financial support; and a focus on full-time enrollment and encouragement to enroll during summer—into a single, integrated program that lasts for three years at two-year colleges and four years at four-year colleges.

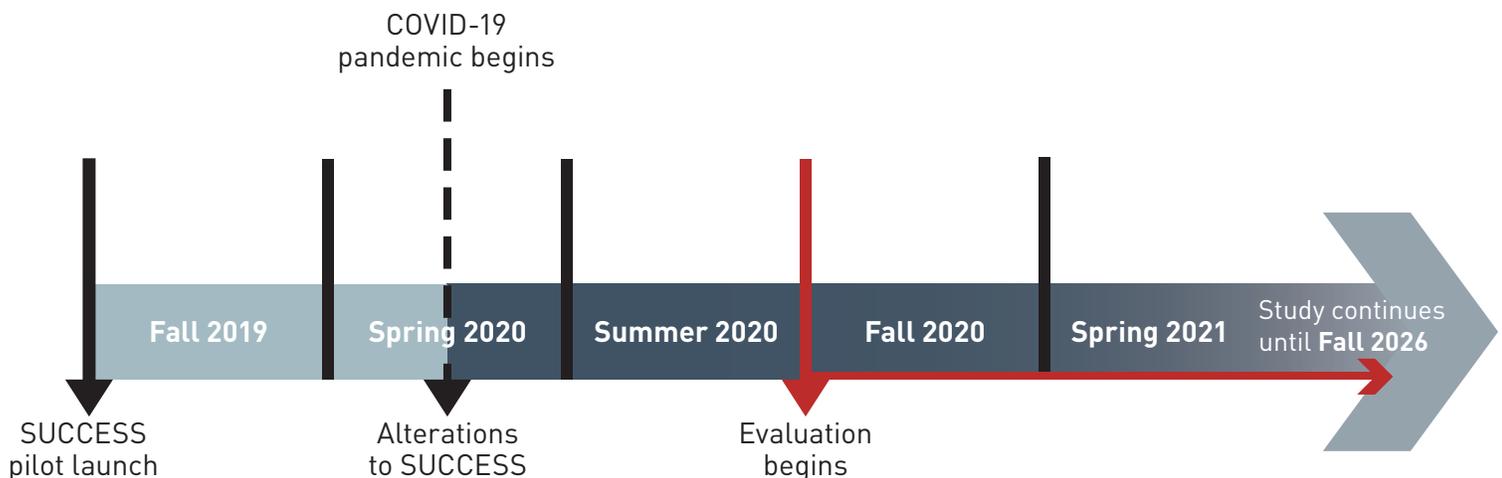
Figure 1. SUCCESS Program Model



Launching SUCCESS

Starting in 2019, 13 institutions across five states (California, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Ohio), along with their state higher education agencies, have worked with MDRC to customize and launch SUCCESS programs (see Figure 2). The colleges represent a mix of two- and four-year institutions in urban, suburban, and rural settings. The participating states and colleges joined because SUCCESS aligns strongly with their student success priorities.⁷ Participating colleges received modest support from philanthropies, state agencies, or both to offset some of the programs' start-up costs. The state partners also help the colleges align the new programs with statewide priorities and identify financial resources to continue the programs. In addition, the state partners have worked closely with the colleges to develop scale and sustainability plans, which identify strategies to expand the programs to additional students and sustain them financially in the long run. Before the SUCCESS pilot

Figure 2. SUCCESS Timeline



test launched, MDRC provided the first group of participating states and colleges with technical assistance to help them build robust programs that both applied the strongest research evidence and met the needs of their student populations. MDRC then continued to provide technical assistance to colleges during the 2020-2021 academic year to help colleges adjust their programs to the new, virtual environment. Colleges that joined the initiative later received similar levels of technical assistance.

SUCCESS Study Design and Sample

MDRC is using a random assignment research design to evaluate the effectiveness of SUCCESS at 10 two-year colleges in five states across the country.⁸ See Table 1 for a list of the participating study colleges. The first 7 study colleges began bringing students into the evaluation for the Fall 2020 semester, and cohorts will continue to be enrolled across the study colleges through Fall 2023. Eligible, interested individuals are randomly assigned either to a program group, whose members have the opportunity to participate in SUCCESS, or to a “standard services” control group, whose members cannot participate in SUCCESS but have the opportunity to participate in all of their colleges’ usual offerings and services. The academic outcomes of the program group and control group will be compared over time to estimate the impact, or added value, of the SUCCESS programs. Because of random assignment, later meaningful differences in outcomes can be attributed with confidence to the programs. As part of the evaluation, MDRC will conduct implementation research to gain

Table 1. SUCCESS Colleges Participating in the Evaluation

STUDY LAUNCH	COLLEGE	STATE
FALL 2020	Bakersfield College	CA
	Ivy Tech Bloomington	IN
	Ivy Tech Indianapolis	IN
	Ivy Tech Kokomo	IN
	Essex County College	NJ
	Passaic County Community College	NJ
	Stark State College	OH
FALL 2021	Owens Community College	OH
FALL 2022	Anoka-Ramsey Community College	MN
	Hennepin Technical College	MN

an in-depth understanding of program implementation, its fidelity to the intended model, and the contrast in the services received by the program and control groups, and will also conduct cost research to assess its sustainability and potential for expansion. This work will continue through 2026 and will collect data on all study students for at least three years after they enroll in the program.

Given the strong effect the pandemic has had on program implementation and students' experiences, MDRC is closely tracking programmatic and contextual differences among cohorts and colleges. This tracking will help researchers understand and describe how students who enter the study at different times experience the programs and college life overall. Depending on conditions in the coming academic years, MDRC may conduct analyses of how differing pandemic-related circumstances influence program effectiveness.

The SUCCESS intervention is designed to serve new or continuing students with fewer than 24 credits earned who are from low-income families, who are seeking degrees or certificates, and who are willing to enroll full time. Three colleges are focusing on students who self-identify as students of color, and one college is focusing on students who are the first in their families to attend college. The Fall 2020 cohort includes 1,148 students, roughly a quarter of the expected total study sample. As shown in Table 2, 35 percent of the sample self-reported as Hispanic, 31 percent as Black, and 26 percent as White. About seven out of ten students identify as female and three out of five students are the first in their families to attend college. Roughly half of the students were working when they entered the study and one in four are parents. These working students and parents may have been more affected by the pandemic as they had to deal with uncertainties related to employment and to school or day care for their children.⁹

Table 2. Selected SUCCESS Sample Characteristics, Fall 2020 Cohort

CHARACTERISTIC (%)	FALL 2020 COHORT	SAMPLE SIZE
Race/ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	35.4	1,133
Black or African American	30.5	1,133
White	26.4	1,133
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.3	1,133
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.0	1,133
Multiracial	3.8	1,133
A racial/ethnic identity not listed above	0.6	1,133
Age		
19 or younger	46.3	1,148
20 to 23	18.9	1,148
24 or older	34.8	1,148

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

CHARACTERISTIC (%)	FALL 2020 COHORT	SAMPLE SIZE
Gender		
Male	27.9	1,140
Female	72.0	1,140
Nonbinary	0.1	1,140
Parents' highest level of education		
Not a high school graduate	14.3	1,099
High school diploma or equivalent	30.4	1,099
Some college	14.5	1,099
College degree	27.4	1,099
Do not know	13.3	1,099
Employed	49.8	1,098
Parent	25.0	1,093
Total sample size		1,148

SOURCE: MDRC's baseline information form collected during study intake.

NOTES: Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Sample limited to the Fall 2020 cohort.

An omnibus F-test was conducted to see whether students' baseline characteristics were jointly predictive of their random assignment status. The results are not statistically significant ($p = 0.106$).

SUCCESS Program Implementation During the 2020-2021 Academic Year

As described above, the first group of study colleges began implementing their programs in Fall 2019, giving them a chance to put the intervention into operation and pilot test it in advance of the study. When the pandemic hit, during the Spring 2020 semester, it forced SUCCESS programs to evolve from predominantly in-person, one-on-one coaching programs serving students taking most of their classes in person and on campus, to virtual programs serving students by email, phone, and video chat while they took courses online for the first time with no in-person option. This crisis interrupted operations at all levels across all colleges, reducing course availability and limiting in-person access and referrals to essential services. It also forced all instruction (regardless of course content or instructor experience) and support services into online formats, with little time to prepare for the transition. These conditions exacerbated existing equity gaps in higher education for traditionally underserved students, who faced additional hurdles such as a lack of access to technology and the internet, insufficient space to attend school from home, and reduced financial and health-related security.¹⁰ Despite the worldwide challenge, the SUCCESS colleges and programs remained committed to serving students and worked incredibly hard to adapt their services quickly.

To understand how the colleges adapted their programs during the pandemic, the team took an early look at the implementation of the programs and variations in implementation forced by the pandemic. The variations described here are those that occurred during the 2020-2021 school year. These findings may shed light on the quantitative findings from the same period.

- **COACHING:** SUCCESS originally called for students to meet with their coaches in person.¹¹ They were to meet one-on-one, twice per month during students' first semester in the programs, as well as any semester where they were facing a high need, such as struggling in class or experiencing personal issues. In semesters where they had less need, students would meet with their coaches in person, one-on-one, once per month, with another check-in by email, phone, or text message. Students were to stay on the same coach's caseload consistently, and coaches were to reach out to students actively rather than waiting for them to "drop in."

During the pandemic lockdowns, all colleges moved to completely virtual coaching meetings. Most colleges replaced in-person, one-on-one meetings with one-on-one meetings held by phone or videoconference; a few colleges also allowed briefer interactions, such as back-and-forth email exchanges, to qualify as coaching meetings. Many colleges experimented with various strategies for engaging students, for example trying to reach students through phone calls, emails, text messages, and even physical mail. While their coaching caseloads typically remained at about the level originally envisioned, many coaches were asked to perform other duties at the college, such as helping other students or working on recruiting. These other duties took some time away from SUCCESS during the 2020-2021 academic year.

- **FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT:** SUCCESS originally called for students to enroll full time, meaning 12 or more credits in the fall and spring semesters.¹² The programs also were to encourage students to take courses in summer sessions and winter sessions (at schools that offered that option).

After the pandemic moved all courses online, some colleges continued to push full-time enrollment. Other colleges chose to allow students to participate in their programs and receive monthly incentives even when not enrolled full time. Colleges were more likely to make this decision when their students reported struggling with the demands of all-virtual courses. Some colleges continued to push enrollment in the Summer 2021 semester, while others were less insistent, because the condensed courses typically offered in shorter summer semesters could be even more challenging to handle online and because students reported being burned out from the past virtual semesters. Notably, some students hoped that by Fall 2021, they would once more have classes in person, and were not interested in taking online summer courses while they waited. Some students also told coaches that they struggled with reliable home internet and Wi-Fi-enabled device access, making it hard for them to commit to taking online courses.

- **INCENTIVES:** SUCCESS originally called for students to receive \$50 monthly incentives contingent on participating in the programs, attending two coaching meetings per month, and enrolling in college full time (in 12 or more credits).¹³

During the 2020-2021 academic year, there was some variation in how colleges handled the coaching and participation requirements for receiving incentives. Some colleges maintained these requirements throughout the pandemic. Other colleges relaxed their requirements, as they did not want students who were struggling financially to lose further financial support; they continued to give students incentives if they were participating at all—even if they were not enrolled full time or had just one coaching session. The colleges all found ways to disburse money remotely: Several began to use virtual gift cards, some chose to put money in students' college accounts, and some even experimented with mailing physical checks.

- **DATA-DRIVEN PROGRAM MANAGEMENT:** SUCCESS is built on robust data-driven program management to track students' interactions with the programs and identify areas for improvement.

The pandemic did not cause any notable changes to the SUCCESS management information systems. Some program staff members reported being slower to enter data or fulfill reporting requirements due to the demands the pandemic placed on them. For example, in some colleges facing pandemic-related budget constraints and hiring freezes, some program coordinators unexpectedly took on coaching and other responsibilities at the colleges, which took up some time originally earmarked for SUCCESS coordination and management tasks.

- **OTHER:** Beyond the model, some SUCCESS programs also endeavored to help their students with other needs during the pandemic. For example, a couple of colleges gave students old, unused desktop computers, if they did not have enough devices at home to continue with their classes remotely.

Taken together, these changes demonstrate how hard colleges worked to adapt their programs to the virtual environment, yet how different the intervention looked to students during the 2020-2021 academic year from what was originally designed. Converting an intensive, in-person intervention into a virtual one required many changes, and staff members were purposeful in creating an experience that would still be valuable to students.¹⁴

At the same time, student needs were higher than ever. Many students were unable to continue a full-time course load online, and students who were recruited for the programs virtually seemed to have a harder time forging relationships with coaches and with other students in the virtual environment. Hiring freezes occurred at several colleges, leading to stretches of time where program staff members were stretched thin. The uncertainty about how long the lockdowns would last—and, importantly for students, how long they would need to stay enrolled in only online courses—made it much more difficult for them to make enrollment and participation decisions than would be the case in normal circumstances. The pandemic also meant students were also facing uncertainty related to employment, health, childcare, internet access, and a variety of other issues. The programs were not in a position to meet the full complement of students' needs during this academic year. See Box 1 for some examples of how students experienced SUCCESS during this challenging year.

An encouraging finding has been that participation rates have remained high despite the year of upheaval. During Fall 2020, in the average month in which incentives were offered at all

Box 1. Students' Experiences in SUCCESS During a Challenging Year

These two composite stories of students' experiences illustrate how the program worked to keep students engaged, supported, and enrolled during a challenging pandemic year—both for students who were able to stay in school and those who were not.

“MARIA”

“Maria” thought that SUCCESS was too good to be true when the recruitment email landed in her inbox. As an older student returning to college after being in low-paying retail jobs and then at home with her child for a few years, she was skeptical that a program would actually offer \$50 per month just for meeting with a coach. She signed up for the program to get the \$50 but quickly forged a close relationship with her coach, “Catherine,” through semimonthly video calls.

Maria was interested in entering a male-dominated trade program, but she worried she would not be accepted socially as an older student and a woman. Her coach built up her confidence to enter the program and connected her with other women in the program who could provide her with informal peer mentoring.

Like many people, Maria had originally hoped that the pandemic would be short-lived and her child would be able to return to fully in-person elementary school during the 2020-2021 school year. When local schools continued to be remote, however, Maria worried about her ability to complete her online classes given her child's need to use the family's single computer. Catherine connected Maria with a local nonprofit organization giving out iPads to families with low incomes who were affected by the pandemic, and also signed her up for a federal program that offsets internet costs for students who receive Pell Grants. Maria felt that these two forms of support enabled her to stay in her classes, finishing her general education requirements during the year of online courses so that she would be ready for program courses in her trade when in-person school resumed.

As things began to open up during Spring 2021, Maria applied for a summer internship in her trade. Because she had been out of the workforce for multiple years, she asked Catherine to provide a professional reference—and she got the job. Catherine received a video call from Maria overflowing with gratitude for the support of the program. Between the connection to external resources she had not known about to the financial support in the form of the monthly incentive and internship, Maria was able to stay enrolled in school full time without feeling like a drain on her household's finances.

“JEAN-LUC”

“Jean-Luc” started college during the Spring 2020 semester. He was excited to be on campus, as he was the first person in his family ever to attend postsecondary education. However, when March 2020 came, all his courses went online. Jean-Luc struggled to find the time and space to study, as the family's lone computer was taken up by his younger siblings' online schooling. So when he saw the invitation to join SUCCESS in his email inbox toward the end of the spring semester, he signed up right away.

He started meeting with his campus coach, “Dante,” over the summer. Jean-Luc's parents had lost their jobs during the pandemic, and his family was struggling to make rent each month. Dante helped Jean-Luc sign up for financial support including emergency aid that would take care of a balance he had accrued in the previous semester. Dante also helped Jean-Luc get a loaner laptop through a campus lending program that Jean-Luc had not known about.

(continued)

Box 1 (continued)

As the Fall 2020 semester approached, Jean-Luc was skeptical about his ability to take a full-time course load. While he liked some of his classes, he found it very difficult to concentrate on fully online courses in the spring semester. He found that faculty members weren't as engaging in the online environment, and it was easy to get distracted at home. While his parents were supportive of his college ambitions, they also asked that he help watch his younger siblings, to ensure that they were attending their elementary school courses online. Jean-Luc and Dante tried to design a course schedule that would accommodate his needs, but he still struggled to attend his classes reliably.

Then, toward the end of the fall semester, Jean-Luc's parents both caught coronavirus. All the childcare and household management fell to Jean-Luc. As a result, he stopped attending his online courses entirely. Dante continued to reach out to Jean-Luc to provide support; Dante even made contact with Jean-Luc's professors to explain the situation. While the professors were sympathetic, Jean-Luc had been maintaining only about a C average in his courses, so missing assignments dropped his grades dramatically. Jean-Luc felt hopeless about the courses and decided to drop out of school. Jean-Luc told Dante that he hoped to reenroll in a future semester, but the combination of family needs during the pandemic and his struggles with online courses meant he wanted to wait until things were back to normal and he could be back on campus ... even if that were a year away. As of Fall 2021, Jean-Luc has not yet returned to college. Dante continues to reach out to Jean-Luc periodically.

colleges (that is, September to November), 82 percent of enrolled students attended one or more coaching sessions. On average, about two-thirds of enrolled students met the monthly two-meeting coaching requirement.

Early Academic Impact Findings

The academic data available for this brief are limited to the Fall 2020 semester and part of the Spring 2021 semester—data from students' first semester after joining the study and their preliminary registration data for the second semester. These early findings show that students in the program group performed similarly to students in the control group during this period.

As shown in Table 3, in the first semester, the program and control groups enrolled in one or more courses at similar rates (both around 86 percent). During this semester similar percentages of students in both research groups also enrolled full time, defined as being enrolled in 12 or more credits (63 percent compared with 60 percent).¹⁵ While students were already enrolled before joining the study, the programs had hoped to increase full-time enrollment by helping more students maintain their full-time course loads or add shorter, eight-week courses (at some institutions) to reach the 12-credit benchmark. However, no such increase occurred. Even though SUCCESS as designed was to require full-time enrollment, fewer than three in four enrolled program group students attended full time, leaving room for improvement in implementing this component. In the second semester, the research groups again

Table 3. Enrollment and Credit Accumulation

OUTCOME	PROGRAM GROUP MEAN	CONTROL GROUP MEAN	IMPACT ESTIMATE	P-VALUE
Semester 1				
Enrolled (%)	86.41	85.71	0.71	0.7290
Enrolled full time (%)	62.55	60.39	2.16	0.3933
Credits attempted	10.79	10.51	0.28	0.3329
Credits earned	7.81	8.00	-0.20	0.5560
Semester 2				
Enrolled (%)	69.95	70.51	-0.57	0.8351
Enrolled full time (%)	47.96	49.30	-1.34	0.6324
Credits attempted	8.51	8.76	-0.25	0.4975
Sample size (total = 1,148)	663	485		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using transcript data from the study colleges.

NOTES: Full-time enrollment is 12 or more credits per semester.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Estimates are for Cohort 1 (Fall 2020) only, a total of 1,148 students.

Second-semester data are preliminary and may not include short (for example, four-week) courses that occurred in the second half of the semester. Estimates are adjusted by site, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between research groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The standard deviations for credits attempted in semester 1 are 5.43 for the program group and 5.36 for the control group. For credits earned in semester 1, they are 5.91 and 5.71, respectively. For credits attempted in semester 2, they are 6.59 and 6.64, respectively.

enrolled in courses at similar rates (70 percent and 71 percent) and enrolled full time at similar rates (48 percent and 49 percent). In other words, the programs did not lead to more students enrolling in courses or more students enrolling full time during their second semester in the program. Similarly, the programs did not have a discernable effect on credits attempted or earned during this time.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The SUCCESS demonstration set out to evaluate an ambitious, multifaceted student success strategy. This brief presents early findings on its effects during the COVID pandemic. In the face of the pandemic, the colleges had to modify the intervention and, along with their students, contend with unprecedented and unpredictable changes and stresses. Despite these pressures, the colleges managed to convert the intervention as designed into a different,

virtual version. Findings from the 2020-2021 academic year show that SUCCESS, as adapted and implemented in the context of a pandemic, had no discernable effect on students' academic progress. These results do not necessarily indicate that virtual coaching programs are not effective (for example, in a nonpandemic environment, results could be different) or that the SUCCESS model as originally designed is not effective. Rather, they indicate that the adapted version of the program was not able to improve outcomes during a challenging year full of uncertainty.

The broader study has just begun, and there is much more to learn. Additional colleges have joined SUCCESS, and students continue to enroll in the study. Colleges will continue to provide services to new and returning students as they aim to restore "normal," with the clear-eyed acknowledgment that complications from the pandemic remain unpredictable and ongoing. The diverse colleges in the study are all approaching the current state of the pandemic in different ways: Each has its own timeline, administrative and educational formats, and adaptations to the constraints of the pandemic. Colleges are implementing lessons from the past year as a variety of adapted forms of administrative and classroom services continue to predominate. Among these adaptations are new strategies for building relationships between staff members and students in the virtual environment, approaches to better support students in online courses, and referrals to community programs to alleviate more serious issues of mental health, internet access, food insecurity, and childcare shortages. Given the large number of colleges in the study sample, and the diverse combination of adapted approaches to delivering SUCCESS and other student services during this unprecedented time, there are many crucial, cross-disciplinary lessons to be learned from this study yet. Further publications will examine follow-up data collected over a longer period and for a substantially larger sample, and will incorporate in-depth implementation research and a cost analysis.

In Spring 2022, MDRC will release a research brief on implementation lessons from the early years of SUCCESS for practitioners and policymakers looking to implement or strengthen multifaceted support programs of their own. The next report on academic impacts will be released in late 2023 and will include the cohort who entered SUCCESS in Fall 2021.

Notes and References

1. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS, "Table 1. Graduation Rates Within 150 Percent of Normal Program Completion Time at Title IV Institutions Among Students Who Started as Full-Time, First-Time Degree/Certificate-Seeking Undergraduate Students, by Race/Ethnicity, Level and Control of Institution, and Gender: United States, Cohort Years 2014 and 2017," website: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/Search/ViewTable?tableId=30448>, 2020.
2. The Institute for College Access & Success, "Inequitable Funding, Inequitable Results: Racial Disparities at Public Colleges," May [Oakland, CA: The Institute for College Access & Success, 2019]; Community College Research Center, "Community College FAQs," website: <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html>, 2021; Takako Nomi, *Faces of the Future: A Portrait of First-Generation Community College Students* (Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges, 2005); Richard Fry, "First-Generation College Graduates Lag Behind Their Peers on Key Economic Outcomes" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2021), website: www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2021/05/18/first-generation-college-graduates-lag-behind-their-peers-on-key-economic-outcomes.
3. Rachel F. Dawson, Melissa S. Kearney, and James X. Sullivan, "Comprehensive Approaches to Increasing Student Completion in Higher Education: A Survey of the Landscape," Working Paper 28046 [Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020].
4. Alyssa Ratledge and Melissa Wavelet, "Improving College Graduation Rates with Multifaceted Student Support Programs: Here's What Institutions and State Agencies Need to Know" (New York: MDRC, 2021).
5. Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarski, "Gains and Gaps: Changing Inequality in US College Entry and Completion," Working Paper 17633 [Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011]; Benjamin L. Castleman and Lindsay C. Page, *Summer Melt: Supporting Low-Income Students Through the Transition to College*. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2014]; Sue K. Grimes, "Underprepared Community College Students: Characteristics, Persistence, and Academic Success," *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 21,1 [2006]: 47–56; Joshua Aronson, Carrie B. Fried, Catherine Good, "Reducing the Effects of Stereotype Threat on African American College Students by Shaping Theories of Intelligence," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2 [2002]: 113–125.
6. Alexander Mayer and Kate Tromble, "Understanding What Works in Postsecondary Education" (New York: MDRC, 2020).
7. For more information on the inception of the SUCCESS demonstration, see MDRC, "Implementing Evidence-Based Programs to Support College Success" (New York: MDRC, 2021), website: www.mdrc.org/publication/implementing-evidence-based-programs-support-college-success.
8. As noted above, MDRC partnered with 13 colleges to launch SUCCESS programs, but 3 of these colleges are not included in the randomized controlled trial: Chaffey College, Bemidji State University, and Southwest Minnesota State University. If additional evaluation funding becomes available, Bemidji and Southwest Minnesota State may be included in the evaluation. Chaffey is aiming to integrate SUCCESS principles into its school-wide services, which reduces the likelihood of inclusion in a future randomized controlled trial.
9. Lindsey R. Cruse, Susana Mendez Contreras, and Tessa Holtzman, "Student Parents in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Heightened Need & the Imperative for Strengthened Support," (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020), website: <https://iwpr.org/iwpr-issues/student-parent-success-initiative/student-parents-in-the-covid-19-pandemic-heightened-need-the-imperative-for-strengthened-support-2>.
10. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students* (Washington, DC: Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2021); Shawn Hubler, "Colleges Slash Budgets in the Pandemic, With 'Nothing Off-Limits,'" *New York Times* (October 26, 2020), www.nytimes.com/2020/10/26/us/colleges-coronavirus-budget-cuts.html.
11. Some colleges use the term "advisers" or "navigators" to describe this role. For simplicity, this brief uses the term "coaches" to apply to all these roles.
12. Full-time enrollment was typically defined as 12 credits per semester but in some cases was defined as 24 credits per academic year.
13. Since the program allowed coaches to distinguish among students after their first semester based on their need, some students could qualify for the incentive after one in-person coaching session and a check-in by email, phone, or text message.
14. For more detail, see Katie Beal, Colleen Sommo, and Alyssa Ratledge, "Forging Ahead with SUCCESS: Providing Remote Support Services to College Students" (New York: MDRC, 2020), website: www.mdrc.org/publication/forging-ahead-success.
15. One college defined full-time enrollment as 24 credits across the academic year, rather than 12 credits per semester. Three additional colleges made exceptions for some students that allowed them to use that definition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MDRC would like to thank all of the administrators, faculty, and staff members at SUCCESS campuses across the country who worked so hard to launch and manage these programs at one of the most difficult times in modern history. We would also like to thank the state system leaders whose partnership was crucial to both MDRC and the colleges. In particular, we thank the Minnesota State System Office and the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services for their financial contributions to the project. Special thanks to Arnold Ventures, Lumina Foundation, and The Kresge Foundation, who made this project possible through their generous funding. Thanks to past and present members of the MDRC SUCCESS team who acted in operations and technical roles, and those who served as important advisors on the project including Robert Ivry, Richard Kazis, Alex Mayer, and Sue Scrivener. Thanks also to those who shared thoughtful comments on early versions of this brief, including John Hutchins and the SUCCESS policy advisory group. Additionally, we thank Joshua Malbin for editing the brief and Carolyn Thomas for preparing it for publication. Finally, but most importantly, we express deep gratitude to the students who participated in this demonstration. Without you, there would be no study.

Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following organizations and individuals that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Arnold Ventures, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Daniel and Corinne Goldman, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., The JPB Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and Sandler Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our website: www.mdrc.org.