

Texas's Student Success Acceleration Programs

Implementation Findings

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OVERVIEW

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) seeks to improve student outcomes by promoting a variety of student success efforts. These efforts include direct programs with well-defined target populations and program participants, offering specific student support services following a program model, and indirect programs aimed at providing faculty and staff members professional development or at improving campus facilities. MDRC led an implementation study of student success programs across the state that were funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Education Stabilization Fund Program Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER II) Fund. This fund was a COVID-19 recovery initiative, allowing recipients great flexibility in the use of grants, evident in the findings below. A total of nearly \$12 million in grants was disbursed to 59 institutions of higher education in Texas.

This report presents implementation research findings from the 59 institutions; highlights research findings from previously conducted, rigorous evaluations of student support programs; and offers recommendations for future research and practice.

- **Colleges and universities used grant funds on a diverse array of programs that directly support student success or indirectly support success by improving institutional practices.** Direct student support programs were implemented by 22 grantees. Indirect programs included campus-wide initiatives implemented by 34 grantees, and technology and infrastructure programs implemented by 5 grantees. Direct and indirect efforts varied widely in their approaches to supporting students' success.
- **The way the grant was administered had important implications for the ways grantees developed, implemented, and evaluated student support programs.** Delays in grant funding made it difficult for many institutions to begin implementing their initiatives and delayed some programs' start dates. Grantees described feeling rushed to spend the funds within the condensed timeline. Delays also had implications for the execution of the implementation research.
- **Of the 59 grantee institutions, 19 sent MDRC outcome data for their programs from the spring 2023 semester. Of those 19 institutions, 12 are categorized as direct student support programs and 7 as indirect campus initiatives.** A higher proportion of students in the indirect program sample completed the semester successfully (82 percent) than did students in the direct program sample (76 percent), possibly because direct programs targeted students most in need of additional support, whereas indirect efforts were more general and often targeted all students.
- Thirty-one grantees shared their costs for the spring semester. **Estimated personnel costs averaged \$71,240 for direct programs and \$87,960 for indirect programs.**
- The 22 direct student support program grantees were analyzed to observe similarities between their components and components shown to have evidence of effects on student outcomes in other studies and reviews of studies. **Several grantee colleges used components supported by the evidence base, including providing comprehensive programs that may induce greater use of advising.**

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The Authors

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Introduction and Background

Increasingly, obtaining a job that pays family-sustaining wages means getting a college degree or other postsecondary credential. However, only 48 percent of working-age Texans have certificates or degrees beyond high school diplomas. (Another 6 percent have short-term workforce credentials.)¹ The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) set out a strategic plan called *Building a Talent Strong Texas* to increase that percentage. Specifically, the plan calls for 60 percent of Texans ages 25 to 64 to have a postsecondary credential “of value” by 2030.² THECB seeks to improve student outcomes by promoting a variety of student success efforts. These efforts include direct programs with well-defined target populations and program participants, offering specific student support services following a program model, and indirect programs aimed at providing faculty and staff members professional development or at improving campus facilities.

MDRC conducted an implementation study of the THECB’s Student Success Acceleration Program Implementation Grants (SSAP-IG), funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Education Stabilization Fund Program Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER II) Fund. This fund was a COVID-19 recovery initiative, allowing recipients considerable flexibility in use of grants, as evident in the study findings below. Following a request for applications, just over \$12 million in grants was disbursed to 59 institutions of higher education to improve student success. Fifty of those 59 institutions participated in SSAP Planning Grants in the summer of 2022, receiving \$50,000 to draft an action plan for an intended program that was then funded by SSAP-IG. In addition to the financial support, planning grantees also received targeted technical assistance and support to help them develop their action plans. When they responded to the SSAP-IG request for applications, applicants received bonus points for having successfully completed an action plan.

To apprise applicants of their roles and responsibilities regarding program evaluation, MDRC developed a document called “Awarded Grantee Research Participation Obligations,” which provided detailed information on the evaluation components of the SSAP program and the

1 Keller and Martinez (2023).

2 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2022b).

expectations regarding data to be provided by the grantee participants.³ While applicants did not have to submit any data as part of the grant application, they were informed ahead of time about what kind of data they would be called upon to provide.

The study investigated what programs were funded, how they were implemented, what they cost, which outcomes they targeted, and how many students they reached. This report provides descriptive research findings based on staff surveys, staff focus groups and interviews, and student focus groups, along with participation, outcome, and cost data. It is meant to provide practitioners and policymakers in Texas and beyond with an understanding of how grants were used, how programs funded by these grants were implemented, which students were offered the programs, and how the program models relate to those studied in previous rigorous evaluations.

A note on the timeline: Most grantees received funding for their programs in January 2023 or later. Originally, colleges had anticipated launching programs in the summer of 2022, then in early November 2022, as had been stated in the original grant request for applications. All funds had to be spent by September 30, 2023. The delays in disbursement created unanticipated challenges and limitations to both program implementation and this evaluation. The timeline challenges are a recurring theme in the findings below. For more details on the timeline, see Appendix Figure A.1.

Grantee institutions developed numerous approaches to support student success. These efforts encompass both direct support programs provided to students and indirect support aimed at enhancing the overall campus environment for student success. Grantees' programs were categorized into these two categories based on their responses to a program questionnaire, which focused on program goals, populations served, and anticipated outcomes. The questionnaire was administered virtually to all grantees, who had a month to complete it and submit responses. The items on the questionnaire provided the team with an overview of the programs, efforts, and initiatives being implemented by grantees. All 59 grantees completed the questionnaire. The direct support category includes structured, targeted programs that offer services directly to students. The indirect support category includes a range of campus-wide initiatives, technological solutions, and institutional infrastructure improvements that are intended to enhance the student experience without requiring direct student participation. While some of these programs were already operational before the spring 2023 semester, due to delays in receiving grant funds, several programs had not yet started implementation while research was being conducted during that spring 2023 semester.

3 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2023).

DIRECT STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Grantees in this category operate student support programs and often chose to target specific student populations. Some grantees chose to expand existing programs, some long-standing, while others used the grant funds to develop new programs for implementation in the spring of 2023 or later.

A total of 22 grantee programs are classified as direct student support programs, 11 existing programs and 11 new programs. These programs encompass the following:

- Orientation, summer bridge, and first-year-experience programs designed to enhance students' transition to postsecondary education and acclimatization to a new institution
- Mentoring programs aimed at fostering peer mentoring relationships to support students' academic progress and engagement in activities, programs, and learning experiences that complement the academic curriculum
- Outreach programs that actively engage students facing academic challenges or those who have temporarily withdrawn from enrollment at the institution

INDIRECT STUDENT SUPPORT EFFORTS

These grantees developed broader initiatives aimed at supporting student success, often targeting their entire student populations. Grantees were classified into two categories based on their content: "Campus-wide Initiatives," which encompassed efforts designed to benefit students, faculty members, or staff members across the entire campus, and "Technology and Institutional Infrastructure," which involved improvements to physical or digital infrastructure as well as the procurement and implementation of new software.

A total of 32 grantees focused on campus-wide initiatives. These efforts included:

- Providing training to students, faculty members, and staff members on identifying and supporting students managing mental health issues
- Establishing a "learning enrichment center" that offers additional support to students, for example in the form of academic coaching and wellness workshops

- Promoting the use of open educational resources by faculty members to reduce students' cost of attendance and improve their access to course materials⁴
- Enhancing awareness among faculty members, staff members, and students regarding available student support services, including those pertaining to mental health and neurodiversity⁵

Five grantees concentrated on technology and infrastructure, implementing technological solutions to support student success or enhance physical campus spaces. Efforts in this category included:

- Establishing a “Zen space” on campus to promote students’ mental health and well-being
- Procuring student success engagement software and providing training to student success ambassadors and academic coaches in how to use the technology effectively
- Developing and promoting the use of a virtual writing lab

4 According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, open educational resources are “learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation, and redistribution by others.” See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (n.d.).

5 Neurodiversity refers to the differences in how individuals experience and interact with the world. It is used in the context of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or learning disabilities. See Baumer and Frueh (2021).

2

Implementation Research Findings

MDRC analyzed qualitative data obtained through interviews and focus groups with staff members implementing the 59 initiatives across Texas.¹ This chapter summarizes findings related to the rationale, structure, staffing, and external collaboration of these initiatives; the student populations they served; and the challenges they faced.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Program Rationale

The grant initiatives were generally intended to do one or more of the following:

- Address institutional challenges to student success
- Improve student retention and reengagement rates
- Promote student well-being
- Boost students' academic preparedness

Institutions tackled these objectives in different ways. Some expanded existing efforts that they believed were effective. At others, staff members began by examining their institutional priorities and data to identify student populations in need of additional support and designed new efforts to provide that support. Many of these efforts aimed to address the overarching student experience. As one staff member said, “So often, [student success] is defined by course outcomes and persistence in graduation, but we know that there’s much more to

1. Fifty-seven grantees had staff members participate in a focus group or interview and 56 grantees completed the program questionnaire. MDRC facilitated 7 focus groups and 6 interviews with program staff members during the spring 2023 semester.

the student experience.... There's also the support piece of it to look at how can we change, improve, evolve some of our programming to better support student thriving.”

The student success factors colleges were seeking to influence guided their choices of initiatives or program components. For example, the Undergraduate Equity and Excellence program at the University of Texas at Austin aimed to enhance student mental health and well-being by removing financial and institutional barriers at the institution to alleviate financial anxieties. The program includes components that expand on and reinforce the mechanisms that facilitate sharing professional and educational resources that were developed under the Student Success Acceleration Program Planning Grant (described in Chapter 1), such as financing Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) registration fees and travel expenses for graduate program visits and supplying preparatory materials for graduate-program admissions testing. It also offers professional development opportunities for faculty members and mental health campus professionals to help them better support students from diverse backgrounds, and covers the costs of mental health training and other professional development for interested staff members.

Another example is the Javelina Summer Bridge program at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, which was developed in response to low retention rates and low academic standing among students who began college just before the COVID-19 pandemic. This initiative aimed to improve students' confidence in their own academic and other abilities and sense of belonging through a five-day session of math, reading and writing, and student success courses. It provided students with access to peer mentorship, staff support, connection with other students enrolling with them, and extracurricular activities.

Approaches to Supporting Student Success

Of the 22 programs identified as direct student support programs, the analysis found that all 11 existing programs are currently operating as described in their applications. These programs began implementation before the spring 2023 semester. The 11 new programs did not begin implementation until grant contracts were executed. Therefore, while some have begun implementation, others were still in their planning or pilot-testing phases when this report was written (see Appendix Figure A.1).

Staff members reported that in developing these programs they sought to include best practices such as holistic coaching, which accounts for students' experiences outside of the classroom including their personal, emotional, and financial needs. In addition, staff members frequently named strengths-based approaches and student-centered practices as high-level concepts that not only influenced program design but also got implemented in student-facing components such as mentorship and coaching. Incorporating a strengths-based approach, which leads with students' assets rather than their deficits, into program services and staff training can help staff members to reframe common barriers to student success with a goal of collaborative problem solving, validating students as learners in the classroom, and creating

a sense of belonging—all of which are theorized to help students persist in college.² Training staff members to undertake student-centered approaches includes support on how best to communicate with students and how to conceive of student interactions as a partnership, moving away from the traditional, unidirectional relationship in which the institution provides a service to students who receive it passively.

Program administrators who highlighted mentorship said it was important to cultivate peer-to-peer mentorship and connection to engage students and help them feel comfortable at college. One program administrator mentioned a case management approach, which would automatically assign students to a single point of contact as well as connect them to resources available on campus to help them meet their nonacademic needs.

Student Populations Served

Some of the grantee institutions, especially those undertaking indirect support efforts, aim to serve all students. The goal of these initiatives is to benefit all students and create a campus-wide culture of inclusivity and belonging.

Among those institutions offering direct support programs, some aimed to serve all students but most targeted student populations who face specific barriers to persistence. Participants in the focus group sessions identified populations most frequently served by grantees as including students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with a combination of high-risk indicators for dropping out, such as students struggling academically. Of the 56 grantee institutions that answered the program questionnaire, 14 reported they were targeting one or more of the following populations: students from low-income backgrounds, Black/African American students, Asian students, Hispanic/Latinx students, Native American students, and Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian students.³ Program staff members cited the desire to reduce disparities in persistence rates, bolster equity and inclusion, and act in accordance with their institutions' statuses as Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs)/Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) as motivating factors when targeting students of color.⁴ As a program administrator said, "We're not excluding anyone, but primarily with ... the

2. Museus (2010).

3. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget defines "Hispanic or Latino" as any person of "Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin." See U.S. Census (n.d.). In recent years, some research publications and other sources have started using "Latinx" as a gender-neutral reference to this population. See Nichols (2017). "Hispanic/Latinx" is used in this report to reflect the language used by grantee institutions during focus groups and interviews, as well as the categorization in the program questionnaire administered to grantees during data collection.

4. Hispanic-Serving Institutions are defined in federal law as those that have "an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students." See U.S. Department of Education (n.d.). Minority-Serving Institutions are not defined in statute in the same way; it is a less formalized, umbrella term that encompasses HSIs, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and Tribal Colleges and Universities, among other categories.

scholarships that we're giving out with these funds, we're targeting those African American and Hispanic students because we too are an HSI, and an MSI."

When discussing programs targeting students from low-income backgrounds, program staff members mentioned rural status, financial insecurity, and lack of preparation for standard admission requirements as additional challenges to student persistence and academic success that continue beyond initial enrollment. Several interviewees also highlighted their need to reach out to students with multiple risk factors (that is, students struggling academically) through their respective initiatives, which address DFW (grades of D, F, or Withdrawal) rates.

A smaller number of programs chose to target other student populations, including first-generation students (students who are the first in their families to attend college) and neurodiverse students. In these cases, program staff members stressed the importance of providing guidance to these students about how to navigate college and connecting students with the support and resources they need. Another category of programs targeted part-time enrollees and students who have "stopped out" (students who have withdrawn from enrollment at a college or university for a time), and for them, program staff members focused on engaging students and addressing their financial barriers to enrollment or full-time enrollment.

Equity Agendas

The grant application asked all grantee institutions to describe how equity concepts applied to their initiatives in accordance with THECB's Equity Framework, with the context of how THECB defines "equity," "equity-mindedness," and "equity lens."⁵ In focus groups, six grantee institutions explicitly raised equity as part of their initiatives through addressing equity gaps and through incorporating equity into their pedagogy or as a core principle.

For example, Equity-Driven Faculty Student Success Partnerships at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley aims to close equity gaps in math and English courses through a two-sided strategy. The initiative provides peer mentors for students and a professional development academy in developing equity consciousness for faculty members who instruct first-year students. At South Texas College, the Student Re-Engagement Service Framework initiative aims to close equity gaps by targeting adult learners (students 25 and older) and those who lack the knowledge and resources (for example, time or money) to get reenrolled in college.

5. As defined by THECB: "Equity—An educational system in which race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or any social or cultural factors are not predictors of student success.

Equity-Mindedness—The recognition and analysis of the contradictions between the ideals of democratic education and the social, institutional, and individual, practices that contribute to persistent inequalities in outcomes among different racial and ethnic groups and socioeconomic classes.

Equity Lens—A framework that centers equity in decision-making to shape practice and policy." See Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2022c)..

This effort includes targeted outreach to engage students who have withdrawn from the institution.

Additionally, various programs incorporated equity principles to increase their own understanding of underserved student populations' needs and to improve the support available to them. Some programs, such as the Somos Unidos—One Word initiative at the University of the Incarnate Word, used grant funds to expand professional development training and increase the number of faculty members certified in serving first-generation and Hispanic students. The expansion of the initiative allows faculty members to incorporate student experiences that help to address the “hidden curriculum” (a set of unofficial yet implicit norms, rules, expectations, and values in teaching environments) and to promote equity pedagogy (teaching styles and strategies that meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds). The goal is for faculty members to help develop a sense of belonging for first-generation and Hispanic students; a sense of belonging is often cited by researchers as a crucial component of building a culturally responsive and equitable campus climate.⁶ At College of the Mainland, the program Identifying and Removing Barriers to Mental Health and Student Success in Admissions and Matriculation Processes focuses on assessments to identify the basic needs of the first-generation students from low-income backgrounds who make up over 80 percent of the institution's student population.⁷ The program aims to use this knowledge to direct students to services that can help meet those needs, thereby improving the equity and inclusion—and ultimately the graduation rates—of the college's first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, Hispanic students, and African American students.

IMPLEMENTATION

Staffing and External Collaboration

At many institutions, staff members collaborated extensively both within and beyond their departments, as well as with external partners and vendors. They engaged faculty members, seeking their involvement at various stages of program implementation, and worked closely with student workers and ambassadors who played crucial roles in recruiting students to participate in these grantees' initiatives.

Several programs, direct and indirect, established partnerships with local agencies or gave contracts to external vendors. Staff members reported that these external collaborations expanded the range of supportive services available to students and enhanced the staff's ability to implement supportive activities. For example, some initiatives partnered with local high schools. The University of North Texas's TSI Math Success Project collaborated with high schools to communicate to their students the academic and financial benefits of being

6. Museus (2010).

7. “Basic needs” refers to, for example, food, shelter, and clothing.

considered ready for a college-credit-bearing math course.⁸ The program provided a summer bridge program in mathematics that could enable directly matriculating students (those who are enrolling at a college or university in the fall semester after graduating from high school) to take credit-bearing, college-level courses during their first semester, rather than the remedial courses they might otherwise be required to take.

Many initiatives formed partnerships with local social service agencies to address needs beyond the colleges' existing capabilities. For example, the University of Houston—Downtown's Comprehensive Basic Needs Program partnered with local food pantries. Moreover, certain initiatives were deliberately designed to complement ongoing state or system-wide efforts. An example is Tarleton State University's Success Through Increased Affordability program, which draws on open educational resources to make class materials more affordable for students.

Through these collaborative endeavors, staff members aimed to enhance student support, broaden resources available to students, and align efforts with existing initiatives to promote student success.

Implementation Challenges

Institutions described several challenges limiting their ability to follow the program implementation timeline initially proposed. These challenges fit into three categories:

- Difficulty navigating bureaucratic processes to receive and spend the grant funds on the expected timeline
- Difficulty with operational challenges such as hiring and retaining staff members
- Difficulty securing the investment and support of internal and external partners

According to the anticipated timeline, grantees should have received the funds to implement their student success programs or initiatives by mid-November 2022 (see Appendix Figure A.1). However, grantees did not receive those funds until late January or early February of 2023. Experiencing this delay in an already abbreviated project period made it difficult for many institutions to begin implementing their initiatives and delayed some institutions' program start dates.⁹ Some grantees were able to implement parts of the program on time by work-

8. The Texas Success Initiative (TSI) is a state law that requires institutions to assess the readiness of all nonexempt students (those who have not met other college-readiness benchmarks) entering as undergraduates to enroll in entry-level college courses in the subject areas of English Language Arts and Reading (that is, reading and writing) and mathematics. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2022d).

9. Grantees could be reimbursed the costs of activities related to the funded project that were incurred between August 26, 2022 and the execution of the grant agreement.

ing with their finance offices or external partners to repurpose internal funds while waiting for the grant funds. Other grantees were not able to implement any parts of their programs until the funds were distributed, which delayed hiring processes, technology purchases, and other aspects of those programs.

Based on the contract, grantees would have a little under a year to spend the funds, from November 2022 until September 2023; however, this timeline was shortened to seven months due to the delay in grant funding. Grantees described feeling rushed to spend the funds within the more condensed timeline. One staff member stated that because of the compacted timeline, the grantee institution would not be able to spend enough time comparing software options or hiring staff:

I think the other thing also is, you know, the length of the grant, right? You know, you're giving so much money, and now you have to spend it really quickly. And so, my concern with that is that, you know, we try to spend it so quickly that perhaps we're not as diligent in looking at the software, at least in my case, right? Looking at the software we want to incorporate, looking at the technology, you know, we're hiring peer mentors with this grant, you know, and that takes time. And so, am I only going to be able to have the mentors with us for a short couple of months, because now the grant is over, and we have to close everything out?

Many grantees commented on this pressure to spend the funds quickly. In fact, some grantees advocated for an extension to use the funds until January 2024. Grantees thought that with this additional time, they could make sure all their grant activities were accomplished and that they could develop plans to continue their programs after the grant ended. However, the underlying federal grant program had an expiration date for the funds, so THECB was unable to provide extensions.

At a program level, grantees shared that it was challenging to find, hire, and orient staff members. For example, one grantee highlighted that since the pandemic, staff turnover rates have increased dramatically, and it has been difficult to hire and train new people while implementing a new program. Many interviewees shared that at their institutions, staff members take on multiple roles, which makes it very challenging to find people who can commit to the grantee program because they would have to balance it with their current workloads. For example, one staff member said:

Things are sometimes run on tight staffing, tight budget, tight space. And so, asking folks to do something a little bit more can sometimes take some persuasion or can be sometimes a hard sell to get past, even though it's going to make folks' life easier in the long run. I think the scarcity model of resources on campus sometimes makes some of these things difficult.

Commitment from All Involved

During focus group sessions, staff members expressed that a common concern that was given significant attention when developing their grant initiatives was securing the support and involvement of senior administrators, other implementation staff members, participating students, and external partners. Staff members often considered the commitment of these stakeholders crucial for the successful execution of the initiatives during the grant period and for ensuring their sustainability beyond the grant funding, which concludes on September 30, 2023.

My vision is a holistic center for students that includes accessibility support, mental health counseling, case management for the entire wraparound services for students, emergency funds.... But only time will tell because we have to have the buy-in from the people that are going to approve the institutional budget. So as long as we get grant funding, they're happy. But we need something more sustainable.... The current president that's going out is just not very connected with the reality of what students are, what the current student landscape looks like, and our board of trustees: same thing.

3

Descriptive Data Analysis

To quantify how many students these programs reached and to get information on student outcomes of interest to THECB, MDRC collected aggregate participation and outcome data from grantee institutions at the end of the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters. The data show the demographic composition of program participants by program type and basic measures of semester completion for participants of direct and indirect programs for the fall and spring semesters. As programs and their scope vary amongst grantee institutions, outcomes often differ, meaning that student success is difficult to generalize. Even common outcomes such as enrollment must be interpreted within the context of the programs. For example, programs targeting students who have been unenrolled for a time might consider enrollment a primary outcome to measure, while programs seeking to improve course completion would begin with students already enrolled.

The analysis sample is different for direct and indirect programs. For example, for direct programs that existed in the fall of 2022, the sample consists solely of direct program participants. However, indirect programs span a wide range of activities and target a broader population of students, so the data can include up to an entire student body as indirect program participants. For example, the indirect program First Year Experience Early Alert Program at El Paso Community College targets first-year students, whereas the Alamo Thrive campus-wide initiative in the Alamo College District provides program services to all students.

Of the 59 grantee institutions, 19 sent MDRC outcome data for their programs for the spring 2023 semester. Of those 19 institutions, 12 are categorized as direct student support programs and 7 as indirect campus initiatives. Tables in Appendix B that aggregate measures by program type include three outcomes for each college available: the number of students who enrolled in the spring of 2023, the percentage of those students who withdrew in the spring of 2023, and the percentage who completed the spring 2023 semester with passing grades. Spring 2023 represents the first semester after grant funding was distributed. Many institutions that were planning their programs in the fall of 2022 began to implement them by the spring of 2023. While there are examples of programs included in these tables that are narrower in scope (for example, those targeting math completion only), few institutions provided such data. All 19 programs in the sample use semester completion as a metric and provided data on the outcomes presented.

Appendix Tables B.1 and B.2 present aggregated, spring 2023 demographic and outcome data for the 19 grantees that provided it. Appendix Table B.1 focuses on 12 such direct programs and B.2 focuses on 7 such indirect programs. Among the 12 direct programs in Appendix Table B.1, participants were mostly students of color (79 percent), female (57 percent), and eligible for Pell Grants (64 percent).¹ Among the 7 institutions operating indirect programs in Appendix Table B.2, students affected were mostly students of color (83 percent), female (61 percent), and eligible for Pell Grants (62 percent). Completing the semester successfully was more common in the indirect program sample (82 percent) than in the direct program sample (76 percent), possibly because direct programs targeted students most in need of additional support whereas indirect efforts were more general and often targeted the full student population.

1. Pell Grants are the primary federal program providing need-based aid to college students from low-income backgrounds.

4

Cost Analysis

Planning and executing program activities requires substantial effort of colleges, in addition to their business-as-usual processes. Cost data were captured at the end of the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters using staff questionnaires that asked about hours spent on activities that would not have occurred in the absence of the programs.

In the fall of 2022, 34 grantees shared with MDRC their costs before their receipt of grant funding. Of those, 22 have cost data representing operating costs of implemented programs and for 12 those data represent planning costs for programs not yet implemented. Program costs consisted predominantly of personnel time. Estimated fall 2022 personnel costs, where available, were low, averaging \$21,840 for direct programs and \$49,440 for indirect programs.

At the end of the spring of 2023, 31 grantees shared their costs for the spring semester. Of those, 24 have data representing the operating costs of implemented programs and for 7 the data represent planning costs for programs yet implemented. As spring 2023 represents the first postgrant semester for institutions, cost data specifically for the 24 implemented programs are presented by program type for the spring 2023 semester in Appendix Tables B.3 and B.4. Appendix Table B.3 shows the aggregate personnel costs of grantee programs for 12 already operating, direct programs, and Appendix Table B.4 shows the same costs for 12 already operating, indirect programs. Estimated spring 2023 personnel costs averaged \$71,240 for direct programs and \$87,960 for indirect programs. Hours spent on the program were provided by the grantees. Wage data for higher education personnel comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics when not provided by the institution.¹

Average costs across both program types are higher in the spring semester than they were in the fall 2022 semester. Since spring 2023 represents the first postgrant semester, many of the programs were planned in the fall and have new operating costs after coming into operation in the spring, whereas most of the programs operating in the fall 2022 semester were existing programs, which may have used existing infrastructure to function.

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (n.d.).

As a percentage of total personnel costs in spring 2023, among the 12 direct programs, administrators accounted for 38 percent, information technology (IT) staff for less than 1 percent, admissions staff for less than 1 percent, faculty for 10 percent, advisers/counselors for 40 percent, consultants for 1 percent, and other program staff for 10 percent. As a percentage of total cost among 12 indirect programs, administrators accounted for 38 percent, IT staff for 3 percent, admissions staff for 10 percent, faculty for 10 percent, advisers/counselors for 34 percent, consultants for 2 percent, and other program staff for 2 percent. The category of other program staff mostly consists of grant specialists and student staff members. While the distribution of personnel is mostly similar between programs, the difference in average cost and the larger cost associated with admissions staff for indirect programs reflects their increased scope relative to the direct programs.

5

Evidence Base and Promising Practices

While a rigorous evaluation of the effects of the Student Success Acceleration Program (SSAP) grants is beyond the scope of this project, past research can be used to identify promising program practices. There is a rich evidence base that examines student outcomes in postsecondary education. MDRC and other researchers across the country have conducted randomized controlled trials of program models and components that have yielded positive effects for students in higher education. These models include programs proven to improve students' retention, credit accumulation, and graduation rates. This chapter first presents preliminary observations based on an analysis of 22 direct student support program grantees. Then it presents an overview of a synthesis of evidence that examined randomized controlled trials conducted by MDRC to assess which components were associated with positive effects for students. Then it briefly summarizes other postsecondary randomized controlled trials included in the What Works Clearinghouse to identify other components/practices that are found in the evidence base.¹ Last, it discusses the extent to which the 22 programs used models with components similar to those found in the evidence base, and which of those have showed promise in past studies.

DIRECT STUDENT SUPPORT GRANTEE OBSERVATIONS

Of the 59 SSAP grantees, 22 direct student support program grantees were analyzed to observe similarities between the MDRC and What Works Clearinghouse evidence-based components and the components observed in the 22 programs. Table 5.1 presents the prevalence of components observed in these 22 programs.

1. The What Works Clearinghouse, a repository maintained by the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, collects scientific evidence on educational programs, products, practices, and policies.

Table 5.1. Texas SSAP Component Definitions
(with Numbers of Programs in Parentheses)

Component	Definition
Advising (12)	This category includes descriptions of colleges that provide: advising where counselors take the initiative to reach out to students; success coaching to help students navigate academic challenges that stem from class performance issues (for example, time management) or personal needs (for example, those related to basic needs or mental wellness); and case managers who develop personalized support plans for students. This category also includes efforts to bolster mentorship relationships between students (that is, peer mentorship) or between students and faculty members. The length and timing of the interventions varied. Some efforts targeted students in their first year of college while others described mentorship as ongoing, as occurring at particular times in the year or semester, or as needed or as part of learning communities (in which groups of students who enroll at the same time take two or more courses together).
Basic-needs support (5)	This category includes components described as providing basic-needs support to students.
Communication campaigns/information awareness (8)	This category includes communication campaigns aimed at increasing students' awareness of the support services available to them, improving their college knowledge, informing them of opportunities to improve math skills, or keeping them apprised of other activities. Colleges hope that raising awareness induces students to make greater use of academic or basic-needs support.
Financial aid (3)	This category captures the provision of financial assistance to cover the costs of students transitioning into college (for example, by paying student fees/deposits or first-year tuition) to alleviate stress among incoming students. Other programs described financial aid as direct aid or direct student financial support provided to reenrolling students who had some college credit but no credential.
Other (13)	This category includes components described as career-preparedness activities, events or programs to engage students socially, academic support, and efforts to remove institutional barriers by centralizing student support services or streamlining enrollment processes for returning students who had withdrawn from enrollment for a time.
Predictive analytics/early detection (3)	This category includes efforts that were described as building predictive models or administering assessments to identify student strengths and need for support early and to connect students to resources so they do not fall behind.
Professional development and resources for staff and faculty members (10)	These components were described as providing professional development for faculty and staff members, as well as raising awareness of resources or increasing resources to help faculty and staff members learn about various topics such as first-generation college students, economically disadvantaged students, cultural competence, etc.

(continued)

Table 5.1. (continued)

Component	Definition
Summer bridge programs (3)	These components were described as providing students with increased opportunities to attend summer bridge programs that provide structured support (including success strategies) to help students begin in college-level courses and transition into university culture.
Curriculum/teaching reforms (5)	The components in this category were described as curriculum redesigns or expansion of supplemental instruction in subject areas such as math; faculty training to help instructors identify and build upon student strengths; and the identification of professional development programs for faculty members or instructional designers who are involved with online courses or who teach first-year courses.
Tutoring (1)	This component was described as an expansion of tutoring services, along with testing and supplemental academic resources to engage and support students who have not met math readiness standards under the Texas Success Initiative.

A SUMMARY OF A PREVIOUS SYNTHESIS OF EVIDENCE

An MDRC synthesis and associated analysis of community college programs that the organization evaluated using randomized controlled trials found that several important program components were associated with positive effects on student outcomes.²

First, the research consistently indicates that the effects of community college interventions tend to be larger in interventions that:

- **Are more comprehensive, as measured by the number of components a program has.** It seems reasonable to expect that interventions with multiple components that focus on multiple barriers to success in college would produce larger effects than interventions with fewer components. Different students may face different barriers that different components are designed to address. For example, navigating the complex bureaucracy of college can confuse some students, and information and support from enhanced advising might help them. In addition, for many students, there is no single financial, academic, system-level, or personal barrier that, if addressed, would lead to college success. Rather, many students face multiple barriers to success and the barriers can change in severity over time. Thus, interventions with multiple, complementary components that address multiple barriers to student progress over multiple semesters would seem to have more potential to improve

2. Scrivener and Weiss (2022); Weiss, Bloom, and Singh (2022). Much of the text on the pages that follow is taken from Scrivener and Weiss (2022).

an individual student's outcomes than interventions with fewer components that seek to address fewer barriers. It may not be surprising, therefore, that the quantitative synthesis found that programs with more components—that is, those that were more “comprehensive”—tended to have larger effects.

- **Promote full-time enrollment during fall or spring, summer enrollment, or both.** Across the interventions MDRC has evaluated, the promotion of full-time or summer enrollment came in different forms. For example, some strictly required full-time enrollment, where if students dropped to part-time enrollment, they lost out on some or all the intervention that semester. Other interventions nominally required full-time enrollment, but with no real penalties for dropping to part-time status. Some programs provided financial incentives for registering for 12 or more credits (in fall or spring) or enrolling in summer, and others provided financial incentives for earning 12 or more credits (in fall or spring). A few others conducted informational campaigns encouraging full-time or summer enrollment or structuring an intervention's course requirements around a full-time schedule. Eight out of the nine interventions with the largest estimated effects on credits earned through one year promoted full-time or summer enrollment in one or more terms.

Less consistent but still promising evidence suggests that the effects of community college interventions tend to be larger in interventions that:

- **Induce increased advising use among students.** MDRC's synthesis found that advising-program effects tended to be larger for interventions that yielded larger increases (compared with the control group) in the number of times students met with an adviser. However, it is important to note that 10 of the 15 interventions examined by MDRC's synthesis that included enhanced advising led to very small increases in advising use—an average of just one or two additional advising contacts over the course of a year. Only two interventions, the City University of New York (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) and ASAP Ohio—which are both comprehensive programs—increased advising by 32 contacts and 19 contacts over a year, respectively. CUNY ASAP includes six components: enhanced advising, enhanced tutoring, financial support, learning communities (defined and discussed further below), promoting full-time or summer enrollment, and a success course (also defined and discussed below). ASAP Ohio includes four of the same components, but not learning communities or a success course. It should be noted that when the ASAP programs are not included in MDRC's quantitative analysis, there is no discernable relationship between advising and effects on credits earned.
- **Induce increased tutoring use among students.** MDRC's synthesis found that tutoring-program effects tended to be larger for interventions that yielded larger increases in the number of times students attended tutoring. As is the case with advising, this relationship can largely be attributed to CUNY ASAP and ASAP Ohio. ASAP's tutoring model was more intensive than that of most of the interventions. It produced both much larger increases in tutoring use and larger effects on credits earned than any of the other programs in the synthesis.

- **Provide increased financial support to students.** MDRC’s synthesis found that the effects of interventions increased as they increased the amount of financial support that was provided students. However, after accounting for other intervention components in the analysis, there is no discernable relationship between increased financial support and effects. Among the 10 interventions with the smallest effects on credits earned after two semesters, none provided financial support, whereas among the 10 interventions with the largest effects, 9 provided at least some financial support. Among the interventions that offered financial support, however, there is no clear linear relationship between the amount of support and the size of the effects. The interventions with the largest effects offered middle-range financial support and a few interventions that offered financial support at the high end of the range had effects no larger than those of some interventions offering far less. Most of the interventions that provided financial support offered it in combination with other components. As noted above, some interventions provided incentives to encourage students to see their advisers or participate in other program services. Others provided tuition support to encourage full-time or summer enrollment. Others provided textbook vouchers to ensure that students had all the books they needed for their courses.

This research did not find evidence to support that the following community college interventions tend to have larger, positive effects on student outcomes:

- **Instructional reforms.** The component “instructional reform” in MDRC’s synthesis encompasses a wide range of reforms, including changing the pedagogy, content, and timing of developmental (remedial) math, English, and reading; changing the pedagogy and credit structure of developmental math courses by creating a computer-assisted, modular approach; and integrating content across courses within a learning community. About a quarter of the interventions studied included instructional reform. Given the relatively small number of studies and the wide variety of specific reforms encompassed in this component, the results from the synthesis should not be seen as a definitive answer on the promise of instructional reform generally.
- **Learning communities.** Learning communities enroll small, entering groups of students together in two or more courses, usually for one semester. They typically include instructional reform as well, with courses using mutually reinforcing themes and assignments and faculty members who try to coordinate their efforts. Learning communities occasionally provide added support in the form of advising or tutoring. An MDRC synthesis of studies of learning communities found that the typical one-semester learning community is not likely to lead to large effects on student outcomes, but a program with several added support services can have longer-term effects.³
- **Success courses.** Student success courses are designed to help new students navigate college and build relevant academic and personal skills. Common course topics include information about a college and its services, assistance in academic and career planning,

3. Weiss, Visher, Weissman, and Wathington (2015).

and instruction about setting goals and improving study skills. Just under a quarter of the interventions studied included a success course. It may not be surprising to some that the quantitative synthesis did not find a relationship between the presence of success courses and effects on student outcomes. The courses lasted one semester, typically did not offer college credits, and typically were part of an intervention but arguably not its central component.

These analyses are not necessarily causal. There may be other explanations for the effectiveness of programs besides the presence of these components. The analyses show that, for example, interventions that promote full-time or summer enrollment tend to have larger effects. The analyses do not definitively show that promoting full-time or summer enrollment causes an intervention to have larger effects. It is possible that other features of the interventions, such as the local setting, cause larger or smaller program effects and are correlated with promoting full-time or summer enrollment.

SUMMARY OF WHAT WORKS CLEARINGHOUSE STUDIES

To complement the MDRC synthesis evidence of student success programs, the research team completed a preliminary synthesis of other rigorous evidence at both two-year and four-year institutions. Four main categories from the MDRC synthesis were used initially to organize this evidence: advising, tutoring, financial aid, and full-time enrollment. Like the MDRC synthesis, this framework also accounts for programs that had multiple components, as the MDRC synthesis demonstrated that programs with multiple components yielded the most positive outcomes for students. In conducting this analysis, the team first gathered non-MDRC randomized controlled trials that had been reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse. Then these studies were filtered to include only postsecondary interventions, including summer bridge programs but excluding precollege interventions housed in high schools. The team found that the four initial categories did not cover all the components included in these interventions, and so added four additional categories: skill building/teaching, mentorship, behavioral science, and nonacademic/basic-needs support. Detailed descriptions of these categories appear in Appendix Table D.1.

As part of this preliminary review, the research team reviewed 63 articles and excluded 20 articles that were either duplicates or captured findings associated with interventions housed at high schools that aimed to help high school students with their transition to college. (These latter programs were not included in the review of evidence since all the student support programs in this study were housed at colleges and universities.) Of the remaining 43 articles, 28 discussed interventions that had two or more components, 17 included advising, 17 included financial aid, 19 promoted full-time enrollment, and 17 included interventions that drew on behavioral science. Fifteen articles described interventions that included two components, 5 described interventions that included three components, 3 described interventions that included four components, and 4 described interventions that included five components.

Detailed component definitions (with frequencies) can be found in Appendix Table D.1. See Appendix E for a full list of articles reviewed in this section.

APPLICATION OF THE ANALYTIC STRATEGY

A statistical analysis of predictive relationships between features of college interventions and their effects on student progress as performed in the MDRC synthesis described above is beyond the scope of the project. The research team instead examined the grantees to see which of their programs had components that fell into categories in MDRC's synthesis of evidence, and which had components that fell into the additional four categories drawn from the What Works Clearinghouse. For more information about those four What Works Clearinghouse categories, refer to Appendix Table D.1.

The review of 22 direct student support programs identified 17 grantee programs with multiple components. (As noted above, the MDRC synthesis found that programs with multiple components were associated with larger positive effects on credits earned.) Of the 17 programs, 2 had two components, 10 had three components, 4 had four components, and 2 had five components. An example of one program that employs multiple components is Texarkana College's I AM FIRST program, which combines a student success coaching program with student-engagement-focused academic, social, and cultural activities.

The three components employed the most by grantees were advising, professional development for faculty and staff members, and communication campaigns/information awareness. Of these three, only advising and communication campaigns were similar to those recognized in MDRC's evidence base. However, in the MDRC synthesis, advising and informational-campaign interventions focused on inducing full-time or summer enrollment as opposed to raising general awareness of the support available to students. Only 1 of the 22 Texas programs offered expanded opportunities for tutoring.

Three programs had financial aid components (which the MDRC synthesis refers to as financial support to students). One program at South Texas College, for example, offers scholarships to reengage and reenroll students who are one to four courses away from completing their credentials.

Five grantee projects had program components that aimed to improve instruction, which were categorized as curriculum/teaching reforms. These instructional components were part of larger programs with multiple components ranging from two to four components in total. Some instructional components were combined with professional development for faculty and staff members, predictive analytics, or both.

Last, three summer bridge programs were among initiatives undertaken by SSAP grantees. While summer bridge programs were not one of the components in the MDRC synthesis,

they were studied in a randomized controlled trial by MDRC and not found effective after two years of follow-up data collection.⁴

Five grantee programs addressed students' basic needs. Studies that examined basic-needs interventions were not present in the MDRC synthesis, but there were studies of basic-needs interventions represented in the What Works Clearinghouse evidence. All these studies examined programs with multiple components, and in the MDRC synthesis, programs with multiple components tended to be associated with greater positive effects for students. In these studies, the multiple components included addressing students' basic needs as well as offering advising, basic-skills remediation, transportation assistance, occupational training, and employment assistance. The studies in the What Works Clearinghouse that examined basic-needs interventions demonstrated positive effects on student course completion and credential attainment. One example of a basic-needs program in Texas is Trinity Valley Community College, which has developed a holistic student support program aimed at providing students in need with food, clothing, and toiletries.

Some Texas programs had components that were not well represented in either of the reviews of the evidence base mentioned above. Two examples of such components were communications campaigns and professional development programs for faculty and staff members. Across SSAP programs, there were eight communication-campaign programs that aimed to increase students' awareness of the support services available to them, improve their college knowledge, inform them of opportunities to improve math skills, or keep them apprised of other activities. Communication-campaign programs sought to raise awareness of academic or basic-needs support with the goal of increasing students' usage of those services. There were 10 SSAP programs that provided a variety of professional development-related components. In some that meant directly providing professional development opportunities to faculty and staff members, while in others it meant raising their awareness of existing professional development resources or increasing the resources available. Three of the SSAP programs had predictive analytic components, which also were not represented in either synthesis mentioned above.

In summary, even though it was not required by the grant, several colleges are using evidence-based components. These components include providing comprehensive programs that may induce greater use of advising. For a complete list of Texas programs along with descriptions of them and their components, see Appendix C.

4. Barnett et al. (2012).

6

Case Studies

The five institutions selected for case studies were chosen to represent different institutional types, serving distinct student populations with differing programmatic approaches. The institutions also represent both direct and indirect student support efforts and new and existing programs. The case study institutions were also all chosen because they were available for follow-up interviews and participated in the focus groups. Each case study focuses on a specific topic or issue raised during implementation data collection or highlighted by staff members as salient to their grant efforts. These topics highlight the importance of issues such as (1) fostering a sense of belonging at a community college, (2) elevating students' voices, (3) using data to inform decision-making, (4) taking the initiative to provide comprehensive student support, and (5) collaborating with internal and external partners in promoting student success and positive student experiences. While these areas are not an exhaustive list of issues that may arise while attempting to serve students, they do highlight some of the many approaches staff members and administrators can consider in their efforts.

CASE STUDY #1: LAMAR STATE COLLEGE PORT ARTHUR

Seahawks Strategic, Opportunity, Academic, Retention (SOAR)—Building a Sense of Belonging at a Community College

Introduction: This case study focuses on the rationale for a mentoring program to promote students' sense of belonging in a community college context, and describes efforts to develop that program.

Program Description: Lamar State College Port Arthur is a two-year Hispanic-Serving Institution. Leaders recognized that students required additional support to become more engaged with the institution, especially first-generation college students, students who had been in the foster system, and students from low-income backgrounds. To meet this need, the campus

created a mentoring program to provide resources and connect students to peers, faculty members, and staff members. As one of the staff members involved in the program said:

My first semester here ... our suspension list was about 120 students and majority of them were our first-year students. Because they just gave up, they had a zero [grade point average], they just gave up. And they felt like they had nobody to go ask questions to, they didn't feel like they belonged. So with our mentoring program, we wanted to have a first-year experience in mentoring [and] have someone that they had a connection with, whether it's another student, or faculty member, or staff member.

The purpose of the Seahawks SOAR mentoring program is to focus explicitly on the social, emotional, and academic development of participants to create a sense of belonging to the institution.

Implementation: The program's design includes a combination of faculty, staff, and student/peer mentors involved in building a network and community for students struggling academically. Faculty and staff members were recruited into and trained for the program before the fall 2022 semester. During the fall, program staff members focused on recruiting and training student mentors; this activity continued through the spring 2023 semester. Program staff members are currently focused on using pop-up events to promote the program on campus, share information about the resources it provides, and recruit more students as mentors and participants. Throughout the course of the grant, students participating in the program have had an opportunity to participate in events including a trip to a museum, a tour of a four-year college to promote the idea of transferring, and an artistic painting event. In addition, the program has been able to provide faculty and staff members the opportunity to connect and develop relationships with the students.

One of our mentors ... she never sees students. So, this was her opportunity to be like, "Oh my God, what's your major?" Like, she really enjoyed that connection. Our faculty love the connection with the students that they don't have as students [in their classes].... They are engaging in the conversation.... They will ask the students about things in their life or what's going on at school.

Assessment and Sustainability: Program staff members have described how they plan to use what they learn from students in surveys and conversations to shape the program. They will use students' responses to design a more tailored experience that can help students become more engaged at the college and promote their sense of belonging. They also plan to examine data over time to see whether they can observe trends in academic outcomes such as grade point average and semester-to-semester retention for first-year students.

CASE STUDY #2: UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Enhanced Culture of Tutoring—Student Perspective and Voice

Introduction: This case study focuses on how students experienced the Enhanced Culture of Tutoring and their thoughts on strategies to improve the initiative for the future. Students' perspectives are an integral part of initiative development and implementation; including them helps ensure students ultimately do have access to resources and academic success.

Planning and Development: The Enhanced Culture of Tutoring initiative aims to build a campus-wide culture of tutoring by making students and faculty members more aware of the tutoring resources available and by expanding in-person and virtual tutoring services. In particular, the initiative hopes to create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable and confident receiving tutoring. The initiative was created to address students' academic struggles coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the initiative supports undergraduate students enrolled in classes with high drop, withdrawal incomplete, or failure rates.

At the University of Houston, students showed decreased academic preparedness following the pandemic, along with a reluctance to engage in in-person activities. One of the project directors explained the need to reduce tutoring stigma through the program by “normalizing the seeking of academic support and help. It’s something that all students do, and it’s not just something that students do who are struggling. You don’t wait ’til the last minute. I think we’ve routinely found that students see tutoring as something other students do and not them until it’s too late.”

Implementation: In February 2023, the University of Houston held a tutoring symposium that brought together all campus tutoring options to educate both students and faculty about the resources available. These tutoring offerings included online individual support through an external vendor, Knack, and in-person group support through the on-campus organizations Launch and the Center for Academic Support and Assessment (CASA). Because the Knack tutoring program came from an outside vendor, students were only provided with 32 hours of free tutoring sessions per semester, after which they were asked to pay \$15 per session. This financial reality limited students' ability to maintain tutoring support throughout the academic year. One other challenge the initiative faced was a lack of advertising for Knack tutoring services, which resulted in limited student participation.

Student Experience: Students heard about the tutoring programs from professors, promotional emails, and other students. Students expressed that Launch and CASA tutoring services were well advertised, while most were unaware of Knack's services.

Overall, students highlighted the importance of peer-to-peer tutoring. One student stated: “It just felt good to have somebody else who was a student kind of on the same level issue, like working with you trying to figure it out and stuff.” Students who attended in-person tutoring

sessions with Launch and CASA said it was difficult to receive quality support during group sessions. Students who attended virtual sessions with Knack appreciated the accessibility of the online platform they could use at any time, even at home. Additionally, students felt supported by their tutors:

You have your individual tutor, you schedule your sessions, and they really want to help you make sure you understand. And then even my tutor will text me after my exam, “Hey, how did you do?” And if anything, I didn’t understand, he says, “Let’s go through the test. Let’s go through what you got wrong, and let’s make sure we understand this for the final, the next exam.”

Students also commented on the importance of learning from tutors who understand multiple methods for solving problems. Additionally, students advocated for tutors to have direct access to professors and coursework, so they can better understand the material and prepare students for tests.

Assessment and Sustainability: So that the university can continually assess and improve the Culture of Tutoring, the Knack application asks students to rank tutors and provide comments on their experiences. This information is shared with the University of Houston weekly. Surveys are sent to in-person group tutoring participants, tutors, and faculty members. To promote the program’s sustainability, the college will continue using the group tutoring materials past grant funding and increase its overall tutoring capacity. However, the Knack tutoring services will be difficult to sustain past the grant funding due to budgetary constraints.

CASE STUDY #3: BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

Planning for Student Success in Mathematics: Curriculum Redesign and Supplemental Instruction—Decision-Making Guided by Data

Introduction: This case study focuses on how Baylor University used institutional data to design and implement a program focused on student success in calculus courses.

Planning and Development: The Planning for Student Success in Mathematics: Curriculum Redesign and Supplemental Instruction in Calculus program at Baylor University was created when the institution analyzed student success data in calculus courses and discovered that underrepresented minority students and first-generation students were not succeeding at the same rates as their peers. In reaction, the program team developed an intervention that targeted students who were most likely to receive a mark of “drop,” “fail,” or “withdrawn” (DFW) in Calculus 1. Student data drawn from Baylor University’s student success portal was used to invite students from target populations (first-generation students and underrepresented minority students) to enroll in these redesigned courses and the supplemental

instruction program. The supplemental instruction program aims to provide support to 95 percent of calculus sections at Baylor University, and seeks to increase student success rates in calculus courses for first-generation and underrepresented minority students. A program manager discussed how using institutional data on student success in mathematics led the team to plan and develop the goals and components of this program:

Our action plan refocuses our instruction in mathematics with an equity lens. Student success in mathematics keeps multiple academic pathways open for students from target populations, and even creates the possibility that more students will serve as peer leaders, thus achieving greater representation and participation in supplemental instruction. Similarly, the mathematics department looked at disaggregated data and found that many of our underrepresented populations fell in the DFW range as well.... Their redesigned courses perfectly complement supplemental instruction as they are courses that students can enroll in for additional support in addition to peer-led review covering many needs of students.

Implementation: The program includes three main components. First, the program redesigned the college's calculus curriculum, and then designed a supplemental instruction program for underserved populations in calculus. Next, the program expanded its curriculum redesign efforts to include an additional business calculus course. Further, the program works to support faculty members who work in the curriculum redesign effort for this additional course. To accomplish the first component, Baylor University planned to completely redesign its calculus curriculum in the spring and summer of 2023, and implement the redesigned curriculum in at least 10 sections of the course in the fall 2023 semester. The second component, the supplemental instruction program, is a peer-to-peer academic support program where selected students attend the course and then in turn host two review sessions a week for students. Unlike traditional tutoring, these students are responsible for hosting the review sessions and facilitating the development of student study groups both within and beyond the course.

Upon implementing the program, the university observed some successes and challenges. First, the program team shared that results from a student survey indicated that students were excited about the increase in access to multiple sections of supplemental instruction since previously, supplemental instruction was only available for one course.

Assessment and Sustainability: The program collects the following data at the end of the semester: final mathematic course grades, final grades in the supplemental instruction course, and supplemental instruction course attendance. Those data points are disaggregated to examine trends for different demographic groups. Since the college plans to continue the program after the grant is completed, the program team plans to collect data on program participation rates, which will be used to inform future activity planning within the program. However, in order to sustain the program Baylor University will need to acquire additional funds to maintain the additional staff members who were hired to expand it.

CASE STUDY #4: MCMURRY UNIVERSITY

War Hawk Success Center—Taking Initiative to Provide Comprehensive Student Support

Program Description: McMurry University’s War Hawk Success Center (WHSC) provides academic success coaching, academic support, participatory learning experiences, and career preparation to specific student groups. WHSC has three main goals:

- Provide students with a personalized support program that can meet needs in a variety of areas
- Equip coaches and other campus personnel with the technology, skills, and professional development necessary to coordinate and deliver high-quality care for students
- Provide a career-preparation program in which students and staff members are in frequent contact

Through a study of student retention rates and work with several external consultants, the staff identified students who would receive increased support through outreach (direct phone calls and emails) and regularly scheduled monthly meetings. The program’s target population initially focused on students on academic probation (those below a 2.0 grade point average), but with the grant, the program expanded to target first-year students, sophomores, students from low-income backgrounds, and Black and Hispanic students who were struggling academically.

We did this three or four-year retention study, and we looked at all these different factors ... different ethnic groups, different Pell eligibility, first gen[eration college students], all sorts of things, and we looked at where our biggest gaps were, and we had a weighted score based on if they belong to those different gap areas.... If they had a score of six to eight, we would meet with them or try to meet with them biweekly ... and trying to proactively reach out to them at least biweekly, either through set meetings or through phone calls.

Academic success coaches take the initiative to make contact with students and provide targeted advising and coaching, seeking to address students’ issues early rather than responding after something negative has happened. The goal is to increase student retention. In addition, the center includes the Office of Experiential Learning and Career Planning, which promotes students’ engagement in activities outside the classroom to develop skills related to their majors, fields of postgraduate study, and careers.

Implementation: McMurry used grant funds to hire consultants to analyze data and help the college develop a more targeted approach to addressing gaps in retention rates. Following this analysis, the program was expanded to serve the additional student groups mentioned above. To facilitate this expansion, McMurry has hired additional staff members. The grant also paid for professional development focused on how coaches and other staff members can better help and communicate with students who may be struggling, including engaging with the institution's early alert system and reaching out to students before they begin to experience negative consequences due to poor academic performance.

We think about what they need to know and try to communicate that to them ahead of time. So when [course registration] holds are released, the registrar will send out a general email about it, but a lot of the students won't read that. So we have our coaches reach out personally because they're used to getting information from our coaches.... They do more of that proactive, individualized component for those students that's more targeted because we know that they may not be reading their regular email, so we might do a text message or something of that nature that's a little more personal.

By increasing the number of coaches and other staff members, providing additional professional development, and expanding the services provided by the center, the institution hopes to support students in ways that close gaps in retention outcomes across target populations.

Assessment and Sustainability: To examine how well coaches are supporting students, staff members examine student logs and data on, for example, the number of times students meet with coaches and the number of times they communicate. They also examine data on students' academic performance, in the form of grade point averages, for example. Institutionally, the WHSC has received widespread support. Through collaboration with other student support offices and investment from internal and external partners, the WHSC has expanded its services while providing the professional development described above. The college hopes to sustain the program in the long term.

We had some outside foundations that we are looking to help support ... and then we've been working with our advancement office to help find some other funding.... Our advancement office has been going to bat with us, trying to help us ... and then the university has chipped in and been covering the salaries and the departmental budgets for all of this also. So they've been very supportive of us in this.

This institutional support has been a key to the grant effort's ability to expand to serve more students over time.

CASE STUDY #5: SOUTH TEXAS COLLEGE

Student Re-Engagement Service Framework—Collaboration with Internal Units and External Partners

Program Description: South Texas College began implementing its Student Re-Engagement Service Framework in August 2022. The framework was designed to reengage students with some college credits but no credential, a population the college calls “stop-outs.” The college’s reengagement initiative began with organizational changes and technological investments. The organizational changes included creating an office specializing in the reenrollment of students, training staff members in the new office, and coordinating with other student support offices (for example, financial aid) to provide a more seamless reenrollment process to students. The technological investments were made to increase the college’s ability to send messages to students, build better relationships with students interested in reenrolling, and better manage data to monitor students’ reenrollment progress. Students who express interest in reenrollment are paired with a reenrollment specialist who helps students navigate the college’s reenrollment process (for example, financial aid and class registration) and connect to academic support and basic-needs support if they require them. The college is especially focused on adult learners 25 years old and older. In addition, the college is providing scholarships to entice stopped-out students who are one to four courses away from completing their credentials to reenroll.

South Texas College was led to develop the framework by a series of studies conducted in partnership with the Council of Adult and Experiential Learning and the Hope Center.¹ As the project director shared, “Now we’re really focused on reenrolling them and being intentional about addressing their personal life circumstances.” The studies identified the need to improve enrollment and student support services for Latino adult learners.

The college’s framework aims to address the basic needs of students by expanding nonacademic services in partnership with the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (which provides case management, mentorship, workshops, transportation, housing, and childcare) and InsideTrack (which provides student coaching). These partnerships allow South Texas College to connect students to services it cannot afford to offer. Second, the

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1. According to the organization’s website, “The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning was founded to help organizations succeed by providing expertise, resources, and solutions that effectively support adult learners as they navigate on- and off-ramps between education and employment.” See Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (n.d.). Meanwhile, according to its website, “The Hope Center at Temple University is an action research center transforming higher education into a more effective, equitable, and impactful sector using a powerful combination of applied scientific research, technical assistance and educational training services to colleges and universities, policy advising with state and federal governments and agencies, and strategic communications.” See Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice (n.d.).

framework redesigns the college's enrollment process through a newly established Student Completion Services Office.

Implementation: South Texas College saw its student reengagement framework and strategy of addressing institutional barriers and basic needs as a way to bring back and support people who were most affected by the pandemic. Unfortunately, the pandemic disproportionately affected students from low-income backgrounds and students of color.² As of June 2023, South Texas College has staffed and trained the new Student Completion Services Office to implement the first of its mobile-message reenrollment campaigns, with the assistance of a new student information system data portal and reports that monitor student enrollment progress. The new office met with other student-affairs units to secure their support and coordinate student reenrollment services and functions.

Assessment and Sustainability: The college is looking for alternative funding sources to support program components (for example, scholarships for students) currently offset by the grant. The college also plans to conduct a program assessment including focus groups to assess students' experiences with the program. It also continues to develop partnerships with social service providers in its area to meet students' basic needs.

2. Douglas et al. (2022); Nosek (2023).

7

Recommendations

The implementation research process uncovered several lessons learned from the Student Success Acceleration Program (SSAP) grantees. Information from all data sources was analyzed by research team members to inform the following recommendations. These findings can guide future efforts to support student success in Texas and nationally. These recommendations also hold relevance for grant administrators, institutional leaders, and practitioners developing direct service programs for students.

GRANT ADMINISTRATION

- Grant administrators should provide applicants with sufficient time for activities including application completion and submission, review and selection of grantees, and execution of any necessary contracts and other administrative tasks, before the anticipated program launch date. For example, although many grantees participated in a planning-grant process, providing three to six months would have given grantees an opportunity for more implementation time both to begin operating programs and to allow programs to run. Providing more time before the evaluation began may have led to different findings and recommendations, and grantees would have had more time to allow program changes to shape their students' experiences.
- For the purposes of conducting an evaluation, grant administrators should consider how grantees' expectations, timelines, and goals can affect how evaluations can be executed.
- When developing and implementing new programs, institutions need sufficient time to prepare for full implementation, especially in periods when hiring is challenging.
- Grant administrators should consider and make information available about how financial and bureaucratic processes may hinder implementation. Institutional leaders and finance offices should also be included in this dissemination of information.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

- Programs should actively ask students their opinions about the services and programs being provided.
- Future evaluations should generate causal evidence directly aligned with programs' purposes to determine their effectiveness.
- Implementation should include carefully planned communication with students about student support efforts and how and why those efforts are supposed to help them meet their educational goals.

DATA AND OUTCOMES

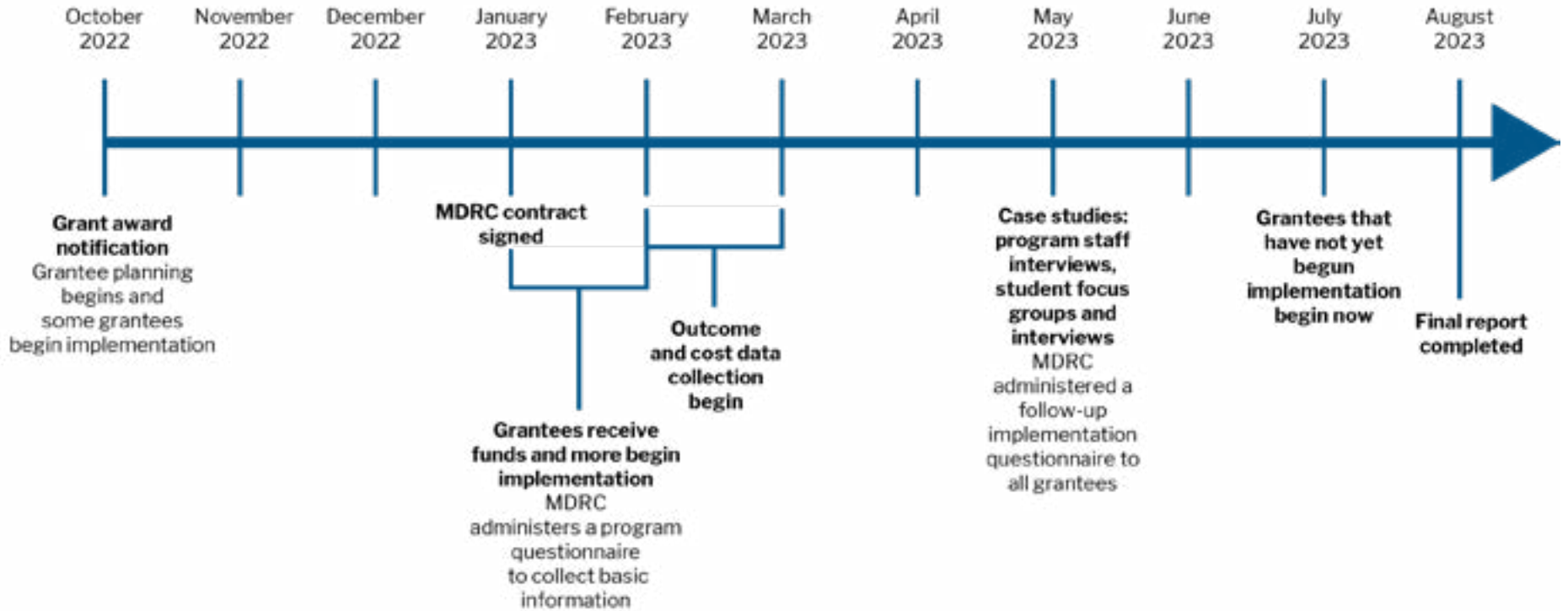
- When designing evaluation efforts, grant administrative timing should be used to determine whether evaluation efforts should be designed to be formative rather than summative. “Formative” evaluation is conducted during the development or execution of a program whereas “summative” evaluation involves making decisions about the efficacy of a program at its conclusion. Without substantial research design planning in partnership with colleges before grant distribution, it is difficult in many situations to draw causal conclusions about institutional practices. In this study, the compressed timeline allowed only for a descriptive, formative analysis.
- Data collection can impose burdens on programs, especially when they are under time constraints. Data requirements should be thoughtfully designed to allow data collection without discouraging participation. Even though data requirements were included in an appendix to the grant's initial request for applications, only about half of grantees provided cost or outcome data, probably because of time constraints once funding became available. However, at the same time as they impose some burdens, the data requested may be useful to institutions themselves as they assess their own programs once the grant ends.

APPENDIX

A

Project Timeline

**Appendix Figure A.1
Project Timeline**



APPENDIX

B

Program Outcomes and
Personnel Costs

Appendix Table B.1 Outcomes for Direct Programs in Spring 2023

Baseline Characteristic	Enrolled	Withdrew	Percentage	Completed With a Passing Grade	Percentage
Ethnicity					
White	705	11	2	558	79
African American	501	16	3	336	67
Hispanic	1,615	72	4	1,254	78
Asian	216	3	1	194	90
International	69	2	3	62	90
Other	244	8	3	140	57
Gender					
Male	1,450	51	4	1,095	76
Female	1,880	57	3	1,451	77
Eligible for Pell Grants					
Yes	1,881	80	4	1,354	72
No	1,053	27	3	822	78
Total (12 colleges)	3,350	112	3	2,544	76

SOURCES: The institutions represented are Baylor University, Baylor College of Medicine, McMurry University, South Texas College, Texarkana College, Texas A&M University–Central Texas, Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi, Texas A&M University–San Antonio, Texas Lutheran University, Trinity Valley Community College, University of North Texas, and University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley.

NOTES: Not all institutions provided all subgroup totals, so there may be slight variations in sample-size sums across subgroups. Total sample sizes and percentages for outcomes in the bottom row are based on ethnicity subgroup totals.

Appendix Table B.2 Outcomes for Indirect Programs in Spring 2023

Baseline Characteristic	Enrolled	Withdrew	Percentage	Completed With a Passing Grade	Percentage
Ethnicity					
White	794	49	6	677	85
African American	400	52	13	278	70
Hispanic	2,789	89	3	2,309	83
Asian	118	1	1	104	88
International	37	0	0	36	97
Other	466	24	5	372	80
Gender					
Male	1,760	58	3	1,422	81
Female	2,746	154	6	2,276	83
Eligible for Pell Grants					
Yes	2,720	133	5	2,176	80
No	1,659	79	5	1,404	85
Total (7 colleges)	4,604	215	5	3,776	82

SOURCES: The institutions represented are Blinn Community College, Collin College Consortium, El Paso Community College, Temple University, Texas Southmost College, University of Houston, and University of Texas Health Science Center.

NOTES: Not all institutions provided all subgroup totals, so there may be slight variations in sample-size sums across subgroups. Total sample sizes and percentages for outcomes in the bottom row are based on ethnicity subgroup totals.

Appendix Table B.3 Direct Program Personnel Costs

Personnel Category	Per Hour (\$)	Max Cost Per College (\$)	Average (\$)
Administrators	55	109,696	27,331
IT staff	38	2,033	275
Admissions staff	20	2,395	212
Faculty	59	74,500	7,269
Advisers/counselors	20	261,746	28,357
Consultants	26	10,000	789
Other program staff	23	33,027	7,004
Total average cost (12 colleges)			71,238

SOURCES: The institutions represented are Angelo State University, Baylor University, Baylor College of Medicine, Collin College Consortium, McMurry University, St. Mary's University, South Texas College, Texarkana College, Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi, Trinity Valley Community College, University of North Texas, and University of Texas - Rio Grande Valley.

Appendix Table B.4 Indirect Program Personnel Costs

Personnel Category	Per Hour (\$)	Max Cost Per College (\$)	Average (\$)
Administrators	51	112,800	33,660
IT staff	47	30,200	3,053
Admissions staff	30	72,750	9,110
Faculty	34	51,355	9,040
Advisers/counselors	30	220,000	29,479
Consultants	35	10,928	1,675
Other program staff	27	8,523	1,944
Total average cost (12 colleges)			87,961

SOURCES: The institutions represented are Alamo College District, Blinn Community College, College of Biblical Studies Houston, El Paso Community College, Lamar State College Port Arthur, MD Anderson Cancer Center, San Jacinto College District, Tarleton State University, Temple College, Texas Southmost College, University of Houston, and University of Texas Health Science Center.

APPENDIX

C

Detailed Program Descriptions

DIRECT STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Existing Programs

Baylor University—Planning for Student Success in Mathematics: Curriculum Redesign and Supplemental Instruction in Calculus I (MTH 1321) and Business Calculus (MTH 1309)

Baylor University has an academic math support program. This program was created when the university analyzed student success data in calculus courses and discovered that underrepresented minority students and first-generation students were not succeeding at the same rates as their peers. This program focuses on redesigning the university's calculus curriculum, developing a supplemental instruction program for underserved student populations, and supporting faculty involvement in these endeavors. The program is designed to aid underrepresented minority students, first-generation students, and students not making satisfactory academic progress.¹

Central Texas College—SOAR Mentoring and Campus Dialogues

Central Texas College (CTC) has a program to support the retention of students who are at the college for the first time. This program was developed in response to data collected in 2019, 2020, and 2021 that demonstrated a decrease in enrollment or change to part-time status in the spring semester for students who enrolled at CTC for the first time in the fall. This program provides success mentoring and equity programs for first-time CTC students and holds campus dialogues on equity, success, and mentoring for students, faculty members, and staff members. The program is designed to support students who are at CTC for the first time, students from low-income backgrounds, and students not making satisfactory academic progress.

Collin College Consortium—Operation Degree Completion

Collin College Consortium has a program was developed in response to a growing population of students who started college but were unable to complete their degrees. Operation Degree Completion was replicated from a program in Oklahoma where over 2,000 students earned degrees in three years. This program serves three North Texas institutions and targets students who are less than 15 credits away from completing their degree, with a focus on adult learners (students 25 and older). These students are awarded money for tuition, books, or other supplies to help reduce their barriers to graduation.

¹ "Satisfactory academic progress" means receiving good enough grades and passing enough courses to maintain eligibility for federal financial aid.

Lamar University—Project CARDS (Cardinal Access, Resources and Diversity Services)

Lamar University has a summer bridge and mentorship program developed in response to academic challenges first-time-in-college students faced during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It targets students who are in college for the first time, with a focus on first-generation students and students from low-income backgrounds. These students will participate in a summer bridge program to prepare them academically and socially for the transition into college. After completion of the summer bridge program, students will be provided with academic coaching, financial literacy courses, and career-readiness services.

McMurry University—War Hawk Success Center

The War Hawk Success Center program at McMurry University works to guide students through their academic journeys, helping them overcome challenges, persist to graduation, and minimize inequitable retention gaps while fostering experiences outside of the classroom each year. It is based on an academic success coaching intervention plan implemented in 2019 for students on academic probation. The program offers a comprehensive range of services, including academic success coaching, academic support, participatory learning experiences, and career preparation. Success coaches assist students academically and connect them to additional support services, while also addressing their needs for food, clothing, accommodations, and mental health and wellness services. The program incorporates the Office of Experiential Learning and Career Planning to engage students in activities outside the classroom that develop skills relevant to their chosen majors and postgraduate studies or careers.

South Texas College—Student Re-Engagement Service Framework

South Texas College is implementing a Student Re-Engagement Service Framework to address the particular challenges experienced by students who have unenrolled for a time and to address a decrease in enrollment at the college, particularly among adult learners. The framework focuses on redesigning the enrollment process, assigning completion specialists to assist students, and expanding complementary services to address basic-needs insecurities. Completion specialists take the initiative in reaching out to students to help them reenroll, stay enrolled, and complete their credentials. The framework also involves customized marketing, recruitment, and completion strategies to accelerate credential completion for students once they return.

Texas A&M University—Central Texas—Stop-Out Student Reengagement Initiative

Texas A&M University—Central Texas has a student reengagement program developed in response to the over 4 million Texans who have some college credit but no credential, many of whom are also in debt. The Stop-Out Student Reengagement Initiative seeks to expand existing marketing initiatives, provide direct student financial support through scholarships, and offer additional support services for reengaged students through a third-party partner

called ReUp Education. This initiative serves students with some college education and no credentials.

Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi—Intensive Transfer Pathway Program

Texas A&M University—Corpus Christi has a program developed to address the needs of recent community college students transferring into this four-year institution, so they can ultimately earn credentials and obtain employment. The program, which focuses on students transferring from Del Mar College and Coastal Bend College, includes components such as on-campus outreach and advising sessions, engagement activities, and financial support to cover the cost of transition. It can serve up to 80 students in each entering class. Students selected must maintain satisfactory academic progress, enroll in a minimum number of credits, and participate in the engagement activities.

Texas A&M University—Kingsville—Javelina Summer Bridge Program

Texas A&M University—Kingsville offers a summer bridge program. The program was implemented in August 2022 with funding from a THECB planning grant. It seeks to counter learning loss, preparing students to be ready for college and calculus by the end of the summer. The Javelina Summer Bridge Program is an immersive experience in which students stay at the college and attend daily skill-building sessions in math, reading and writing, student success strategies, and financial literacy. Students also engage in social activities designed to build their sense of belonging on campus. This program serves students who did not meet admission requirements or did not pass the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA), as well as transfer students.²

Texas A&M University—San Antonio—Achievement Initiative for Minority Males (A.I.M.M.)

Texas A&M University—San Antonio has a student success and retention program created to help men from ethnic minorities in their first semester of attendance engage with campus leaders, stay enrolled, and graduate. The initiative provides life-skills training, mentorship and academic coaching, and academic resources to support its students. The program also tracks student progress through academic standing check-ins at the middle and end of each term, early alert check-ins, and focus groups and surveys to assess students' perspective on the program.

² The Texas Success Initiative Assessment is a state-approved standardized placement test developed by the College Board to measure college readiness in reading, writing, and math. See Texas Education Agency (n.d.).

University of North Texas—UNT TSI Math Success Project

The University of North Texas (UNT) offers an academic support program developed in response to a substantial increase in the number of students who failed the math TSIA, and a decrease in those students' overall grade point averages. The university seeks to increase the academic performance of students who failed the TSIA in math by doubling the size of the math summer bridge program, running a communication campaign with two public school districts encouraging high school students to become ready for college, and expanding the tutoring, testing, and supplemental academic resources available to students who fail the TSIA. In the long term, the university hopes this initiative will lead to the development of a college-readiness center for high-school-to-college-math transition support.

New Programs

Angelo State University—Lambs to Rams

Angelo State University has a financial wellness program. By exposing students to financial literacy, the program seeks to set them up to amass wealth that can benefit them and future generations. This financial literacy education is being integrated into freshman seminars with the goal of it being integrated into the core curriculum. Staff members investigated financial wellness programs at different Texas universities, consulted literature on best practices for engaging students in financial literacy, and surveyed students to inform program practices. The college developed this program specifically to close equity gaps for students from low-income backgrounds and Hispanic students.

Baylor College of Medicine—Discovery, Integration, Success, Community and Outreach (DISCO) Program

Baylor College of Medicine has an academic support program developed as a response to an increase in student academic failure rates resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. A five-year analysis of Baylor students who enrolled and matriculated into the college identified that students were facing issues such limited academic skill development, a lack of confidence in their own abilities, and other interpersonal challenges that hindered their ability to succeed in college. DISCO was developed in response to these challenges. DISCO targets students returning from a leave of absence, especially students who are at risk of failing courses and students underrepresented in medicine, and provides them specialized academic advising and other services.³

3 A leave of absence occurs when a student is no longer attending college but plans to return. Some reasons a student would go on a leave of absence include medical issues, family deaths, and other emergencies.

Northeast Lakeview College—NLC CONNECT

A response to a long-term decline in retention and graduation rates among part-time students, exacerbated by the social and financial instability caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Northeast Lakeview College (NLC) CONNECT aims to address enrollment barriers and improve the retention and graduation rates of part-time students. It focuses on access to services to meet students' basic needs and provides advising for part-time students. Through monthly phone outreach and supplemental communication, NLC CONNECT provides information on campus resources and connects students with services to help them overcome social, emotional, and educational barriers. The program employs trained student ambassadors who conduct outreach calls, offering peer-to-peer support and guidance in navigating the postsecondary system. A collaborative case management system facilitates follow-up support from NLC CONNECT staff members, ensuring each student receives individually tailored assistance.

Sam Houston State University—Bearkat Kickoff

The Bearkat Kickoff program at Sam Houston State University was created to support students of color and students experiencing financial stress who, emerging from the pandemic, were displaying greater reliance on mental health services, academic support, and disability services. The program works to provide effective and comprehensive support to incoming first-year students, ensuring they are adequately prepared for the academic, mental, and social challenges of higher education. The week-long program aims to create peer-led learning communities, focusing on academic skill building, introductions to various academic departments, information on student employment and support services, awareness of mental health and wellness, mindfulness training, and efforts to foster a sense of belonging and community. The overall mission is to promote student success, access, inclusion, and connection, while equipping students with the tools and knowledge for academic excellence and integration into the university culture.

St. Mary's University—Leadership Empowers Aspiring Determination (L.E.A.D.) Program

The L.E.A.D. initiative at St. Mary's University aims to improve academic support for first-year students by addressing inequities in high school academic readiness and the effects of COVID-19 on student well-being. The program focuses on mentor relationships, the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory assessment, and learning modules to provide learning strategies and support for first-year students, particularly those from underrepresented groups.⁴

⁴ The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory evaluates students' study habits and ways of learning. It measures academic strengths and weaknesses to enhance students' performance in the classroom. See Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (n.d.).

Texarkana College—I AM FIRST

Texarkana College's I AM FIRST initiative aims to provide better support for first-generation college students on social, emotional, and academic levels, to increase their credit-completion, persistence, and graduation rates. The initiative provides coaching tailored to meet each student's needs, with the intention of improving students' confidence in their own abilities and assets to serve them in college and future employment. Coaches meet with students alone or in groups, and use targeted messages to engage students. The program also strives to involve first-generation students in campus activities outside of class to foster a sense of belonging.

Texas Lutheran University—HECHO (Holistic Exploration of Careers through Hands-on Experiences) Program

Texas Lutheran University offers a comprehensive career services program. HECHO was created in response to a growing number of first-generation students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds at the university, paired with significant dissatisfaction with the institution's career-development services. The program seeks to increase career preparedness through personal exploration and participatory learning experiences. The university hosts workshops on personality and personal-strengths-assessment tools, offers job-shadowing programs, and provides professional development software to students. HECHO serves first-generation students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Trinity Valley Community College—Cardinal Advocacy Resource Center

Trinity Valley Community College has a comprehensive services program to meet students' needs outside of the classroom. Cardinal Advocacy Resource Center was developed to address student challenges pertaining to basic needs and promote student retention, which was eroded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program began in 2020, but through the grant it changed and became a multicampus initiative. With the additional resources, the program also expanded to operate a food and clothing closet, connect students with public benefits, and offer emergency monetary assistance, textbook and transportation subsidies, utility-assistance programs, technological tools, and social services. This program serves all students at the college.

University of Texas at Arlington—Online Mavs Success Program

University of Texas at Arlington's Online Mavs Success Program was created to increase course-completion rates, progression rates, and graduation rates, while eliminating equity gaps among student groups in online academic programs. This program used an online-readiness assessment to measure online learning readiness and will develop predictive modeling to allow for early and tailored support interventions. It will also develop a more focused set of support initiatives for students in online programs and build or identify development programs for faculty members, advisers, and instructional designers, with the goal of eliminating

equity gaps in online students' success. The Online Mavs Success Program serves students in the following undergraduate online programs: Bachelor of Science in University Studies, Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Science in Substance Use Treatment, Undergraduate Certificate in Managing Diversity in Organizations, and Undergraduate Certificate in Telehealth and Health Informatics.

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley—Activating Strategic Partnerships to Close Equity Gaps in Gateway English and Math Classes

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley offers an academic support and retention program. The Activating Strategic Partnerships program was developed to address low retention rates among students who fail one or more courses in their first term, to reduce equity gaps in course pass rates for first-generation students and those eligible for Pell Grants, and to mitigate the pandemic's negative effects on pass rates in gateway English and math courses.⁵ This initiative will implement peer writing tutors in English courses, as well as tutoring and a reassessment process if students are still struggling academically despite this additional tutor support. Both gateway classes have free course extensions for students who are close to passing at the end of the term but need more time to successfully complete their coursework. The college will also adapt its existing professional development series to cover topics such as belonging, engagement, student mental wellness, and equity-based curriculum design, while drawing on faculty-specific student performance data. Activating Strategic Partnerships serves students who are enrolled in first-year, gateway math and English courses.

University of the Incarnate Word—Somos Unidos - One Word

University of the Incarnate Word has a student success and retention program created to increase the retention rates of students who are in college for the first time, especially first-generation and Hispanic students, and to increase knowledge of and resources for faculty and staff members serving this population. This program expands an existing mentorship program at the college that assists students with financial literacy skills and pathways into health professions; the expanded Somos Unidos serves undergraduate and graduate students in all majors across the university. Somos Unidos also provides its staff members with professional development training specifically in serving first-generation and Hispanic students.

⁵ “Gateway” courses refer to the initial credit-bearing, introductory courses that students must pass to take more advanced courses and complete their degrees.

INDIRECT STUDENT SUPPORT EFFORTS

Campus-wide Initiatives

Alamo College District—Alamo Thrive

Alamo College District has a mental health initiative that serves its five district colleges. It conducted initial research on students' perspectives regarding mental health with the support of Hanover Research. Findings suggested that many students perceive seeking mental health care to be a sign of weakness and are unfamiliar with the mental health resources available. In response to this information, Alamo College District developed Alamo Thrive, which provides culturally responsive messages across the colleges on ways to gain access to mental health resources and training to faculty members, students, and staff members on strategies for conversing about mental health and ways to offer guidance for others with mental health issues. This initiative is open to all students, with a focus on LGBTQ+ students and Latinx/Hispanic students.

Blinn Community College—Navigators

Blinn Community College has an academic mentoring initiative developed in response to research that students who succeed in higher education are integrated into their college communities socially and academically. First-generation students and students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to be socially and academically integrated into their schools, and are more likely to leave college prematurely. Through Navigators, students are assigned faculty or staff mentors who connect them to college resources and aid them in developing and initiating a plan for success at Blinn College and beyond. Peer mentors serve as liaisons between faculty/staff Navigators and mentees. This initiative seeks to support students who have aged out of foster care, students from underrepresented minority groups, and first-generation students.

College of Biblical Studies Houston—Advising Students for Success

College of Biblical Studies Houston has a comprehensive advising and student success program developed in response to the negative effects COVID-19 had on students' academic success. This initiative seeks to support new students who are starting their college journeys, adult learners who are working or raising families, and students who are finalizing plans to graduate and transition into the workforce.

College of the Mainland—Identifying and Removing Barriers to Mental and Student Success in Admissions and Matriculation Processes

College of the Mainland has an initiative to assess students' needs and provide targeted resources to meet them. This initiative was developed because few students were taking

advantage of the college's community resource center and on-campus mental health services. The initiative will identify student needs based on comments and suggestions from all students. This information will be used to design comprehensive services such as mental health support, crisis interventions, and other services in the community. Faculty members, staff members, and selected students will be trained so they are more aware of available resources and can better recognize students' needs and ensure they receive help as needed. This initiative is open to all students but seeks to provide support specifically to students from minority groups.

Collin College—Student Success through Outreach, Advisement and Reflection (SOAR)

Collin College has an academic student success initiative that builds on a previous program model but specifically targets students who are in college for the first time, to provide them more direct support. With support from students' SOAR mentors and academic advisers, students have an opportunity to learn more about Collin College's resources, increase their social networks, and identify and articulate academic and career goals and stay on track to complete those goals. This initiative supports students who are in college for the first time and who are concerned about their math and reading abilities.

Dallas College—Dallas College Family Care Center

Dallas College has an initiative providing academic and nonacademic support services. The initiative was developed in response to systemic educational barriers and poverty issues that particularly affect student parents. The initiative provides direct support services such as childcare, parental support groups, and parenting classes, along with other forms of support such as food and diapers. Additionally, student parents work directly with success coaches and career counselors to ensure their academic goals are in alignment with their career aspirations. This initiative supports English- and Spanish-speaking student parents or expectant parents.

El Paso Community College—First-Year Experience

El Paso Community College's First-Year Experience initiative was developed to address the decline in enrollment seen across the college after students finished their first year. According to the college, many first-year students complete the year on academic probation or suspension and do not return to college the following fall. The purpose of the initiative is to provide students who are in college for the first time with high-quality academic advising and peer academic coaching services as a preventative measure. This program targets first-year students with a focus on students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation students, and students not making satisfactory academic progress.

Lamar State College Orange (LSCO)—LSCO Gator Care Team

Lamar State College Orange has a student success initiative developed in response to research from the Center for Community College Student Engagement and from Texas Pathways on strategies for improving student persistence and retention in college. The Gator Care Team has a TSIA prep course to teach high school students strategies for improving their scores on standardized math and English Language Arts exams. Additionally, the initiative has a real-time alert system that connects colleges students on probation or suspension with academic support and advising services. This initiative serves all students, with a focus on first-generation college students, working students, and students who are academically underprepared.

Lamar State College Port Arthur—Seahawks SOAR

Lamar State College Port Arthur has a nonacademic support services and retention initiative developed in response to the high number of its students who are at risk of not finishing their college credentials. The initiative offers a food pantry and supply closet with hygiene products and school supplies to ensure students have resources to meet their basic needs. Additionally, Seahawks SOAR has a program that supports the social, emotional, and academic development of students through quality mentoring and participatory learning experiences. This initiative supports first-generation students, students who have been in foster care, students from low-income backgrounds, students who are currently experiencing or who have experienced homelessness, and students facing food insecurity.

Laredo College—Accelerating Student Success through the Center for Learning, Academic and Student Success (CLASS)

Focused on increasing student retention rates and creating a sense of belonging and ownership for students, the CLASS program is based on empirical evidence on the importance of student-faculty contact outside the classroom. CLASS is an informational research center that provides students with academic and career-pathway advice through workshops and tailored advising sessions. Additionally, through CLASS, faculty members attend professional development workshops that highlight strategies for engaging students outside the classroom. Overall, CLASS works to foster a community of learners and support programs to promote student success and retention and to create an environment where students feel a sense of belonging.

Our Lady of the Lake University—Cultivating IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access) for Student Belonging

The Cultivating IDEA for Student Belonging initiative aims to keep students enrolled by promoting their a sense of belonging, which it hopes to do in turn by assessing and enhancing the university's commitment to inclusion, equity, diversity, and accessibility. The initiative provides professional development opportunities for faculty and staff members in these areas and provides digital badges to signify their completion of training. Through this train-

ing, the college aims to infuse the principles of IDEA into various aspects of the institution, including student-affairs programs, course evaluations, and staff and faculty evaluations.

San Jacinto College District—Neurodiversity and Support Services

The Neurodiversity and Support Services initiative at San Jacinto College District aims to increase training on student support services, including mental health and neurodiversity services, for students, faculty members, and staff members. It seeks to implement the work developed during the planning grant process and provide a space for stress reduction and mindfulness to improve the well-being of neurodiverse students. The program focuses on holistic student support, appreciative advising, and the establishment of a division of student support services, aiming to enhance student support and create a safe space on campus.⁶ The initiative will use student engagement and completion data to gauge its success.

Schreiner University—Increasing Student Success Through Intentional Advising and Academic Coaching

The Increasing Student Success Through Intentional Advising and Academic Coaching initiative aims to enhance Schreiner University's commitment to student success by enhancing advising and academic coaching, particularly for first-generation students and students from underserved populations. The initiative is implementing advising practices to help students make informed decisions, avoid unnecessary courses, and streamline their degree progress. The initiative also focuses on providing accurate and timely financial aid information and creating clear transfer pathways for dual-credit students, improving accessibility and affordability.⁷

Stephen F. Austin State University—Stephen F. Austin Lumberjack Wellness Network

The Lumberjack Wellness Network was developed to educate the Stephen F. Austin State University community about student well-being, with a focus on the emotional and intellectual dimensions of wellness, particularly among student athletes. By collaborating across various departments, the initiative aims to solidify and advance the network to meet the needs of students. The grant has paid for staff members' attendance at conferences related to alcohol and drug abuse prevention, mental health, sexual violence prevention, and violence-risk assessment. Upgrades and additions to programs, equipment, and supplies are intended to meet the diverse needs of college students, including emotional, physical, environmental, and intellectual aspects of wellness. The initiative also supports the creation of spaces for relaxation and recharge, as well as expanding existing programs such as Destress Fest that provide support throughout the semester.

6 Appreciative advising asks open-ended questions so that students can set their own goals and realize their academic and career potential.

7 Dual-credit students are high school students who earn high school and college credits at the same time. They can take college courses at their high school, online, or at a college campus.

Tarleton State University—Accelerating Student Success through Increased Affordability

The Accelerating Student Success through Increased Affordability: Building Infrastructure for Affordable Course Material Usage initiative at Tarleton State University aims to implementing a university-wide strategy to adopt low- or no-cost course materials, making college more affordable and increasing access to necessary content. Tarleton State University has set an ambitious goal to have 90 percent of general education courses (non-major-specific courses required of all students, such as math and English) using Open Educational Resources or other affordable course materials by 2025.⁸ The university plans to invest in converting 10 to 20 courses each academic year to using these resources. Tarleton has also proposed collaborations between various university departments and the Online Learning Consortium, a leading global provider of digital learning solutions. The Online Learning Consortium will offer strategic advising and support in implementing a course grading system, and will provide customized professional development opportunities for faculty members using Open Educational Resources.

Temple College—Circle of Access and Retention in Education (CARE)

The CARE initiative at Temple College aims to address barriers to student success, particularly for adult learners of color, by examining and changing the college's structures, processes, and culture. Specifically, it will focus on redesigning student enrollment services to provide a seamless, holistic, and personalized enrollment process; enhancing service quality and accountability through professional development to better serve adult learners, particularly those from diverse backgrounds; and offering targeted support during students' first year. Data summits will be conducted periodically to assess the effects of these services.

Texas A&M—Texarkana—Advising and Career Experience (ACE) Center

The ACE Center integrates formerly separate academic advising and career development offices at Texas A&M University—Texarkana as a way of improving outcomes for students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, and students at risk of not finishing their college degrees. The program uses coaches to provide an integrated advising and career experience focused on helping students align their programs of study with their career goals. It also partners with admissions and recruitment to align platforms, resources, and services from recruitment to graduation.

⁸ According to OER Commons, affordable course materials are teaching and learning materials that students may freely use and reuse at no cost, without needing to ask permission. These resources have been authored or created by an individual or organization that chooses to retain few, if any, ownership rights

Texas A&M International University—Mental Health and Financial Support for the Underserved Students in South Texas

Texas A&M International University has a mental health and student support initiative created in response to a substantial rise in reported student mental health challenges and the need for behavioral health services and financial support. The college aims to provide counseling, career, and emergency financial services, using grant funds to enhance psychiatry telehealth for students, bolster grants and services for students experiencing unexpected hardship, provide mental health first aid training for counselors, and expand professional development services. This initiative works with all students, but seeks to provide support to Hispanic students, students eligible for Pell Grants, and first-generation students.

Texas A&M University System—Texas A&M University System Accelerating Student Success: A Focus on Stopped Out Students

The Texas A&M University System offers a student reengagement initiative developed to increase the number of students who reenroll after unenrolling for a time. Initially, the Texas A&M University System used its THECB planning grant to review and evaluate its current practices and policies and identify areas in need of improvement. Drawing on this knowledge, the institution seeks to expand successful efforts in four areas: marketing and communication, admissions policy and practice, financial resources and policy, and student support resources. This high-level initiative includes a Community of Practice to enable campus leaders to collaborate, further investigation of critical need areas, and assessment of performance indicators through an expanded partnership with a vendor.

Texas Southern University—College of Transdisciplinary Studies - Project Reconnect

Texas Southern University has a student reengagement initiative developed in response to the significant number of Texans who have some college education and no degree. This initiative seeks to increase reenrollment among students who have unenrolled for a time by developing a new College of Transdisciplinary Studies and establishing a pathway for students to return to college to complete a degree. Project Reconnect offers 12 degree programs through the College of Transdisciplinary Studies and assigns each student to an adviser who serves as that student's main point of contact for academic resources, support, and guidance. Additionally, the college uses vendors to assist with aspects of the reenrollment process such as transcript evaluation, financial aid processing, admissions, and academic program support.

Texas Southern University Consortium—Complete U at TSU

Texas Southern University also has a student success initiative developed to provide a pathway to a bachelor's degree for community college students who have completed their associate degrees and are in the workforce, in a nurturing environment that facilitates their success. The initiative engaged a consortium of five community college partners to help students successfully transfer to Texas Southern University, where they can complete their

bachelor's degrees. The initiative includes several different types of advising designed to serve vulnerable populations.

Texas Southmost College—Capitalizing on Scorpion Assets

Texas Southmost College has a technology and nonacademic service initiative developed to enhance the college's current practices, provide students with professional development, meet students' basic needs, and increase faculty and student interaction. The college seeks to redefine recruitment, enrollment, and retention efforts targeting students from diverse backgrounds through the implementation of a customer relationship management platform and early alert system. The new software will provide staff members with communication and tracking tools to identify specific student populations and support their academic and basic needs. Capitalizing on Scorpion Assets has created a student-faculty engagement center, tutoring provided using three different strategies for courses with high failure rates, and a centralized location for students to receive nonacademic services from campus and community organizations. Capitalizing on Scorpion Assets serves all students, with a focus on "special student populations" such as underserved students, first-generation students, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.⁹

Texas State Technical College—Texas State Technical College SSAP Scholarships

Texas State Technical College has a financial support initiative developed to mitigate the cost barrier for required tools in technical programs at the college, which can put students at risk of falling behind in technical classes or prevent them from completing their programs. Through this initiative, the college will provide scholarships of up to \$2,500 to full-time technical students who have financial need and apply for scholarship assistance. Once the award has been granted, the college will review retention and grade point average information for scholarship students to assess the program's effects. This initiative serves first-semester students who have demonstrated financial need and have yet to collect the appropriate tools and equipment.

Texas State University—Mindfulness, Stress Reduction and Emotional Intelligence Initiative

Texas State University has a mental health initiative developed in response to high levels of anxiety, stress, and suicidal ideation among Texas State students relative to national data. This initiative seeks to develop skills among student groups who may have less exposure to or experience with Mental Health First Aid training, Therapy Assistance Online modules, and

9 "Underserved" students are students who lack equitable access to the same resources as their peers. In higher education, these students often include students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation students, adult learners, and racial and ethnic minorities, though this list is not exhaustive.

principles of emotional well-being.¹⁰ Through the initiative, Texas State offers interactive, video-based instruction; live workshops; curated, on-demand campus reflection and relaxation spaces; self-help resources; campus-focused Mental Health First Aid; invited expert speakers; and panel events. The initiative serves all students.

Texas Woman’s University—High-Quality Advising and Proactive Intervention: Communication, Onboarding, and Basic Needs

Texas Woman’s University offers an academic support and nonacademic services initiative developed to serve the significant proportion of the college’s students who receive Pell Grants, experience food insecurity, or experience anxiety or depression. It targets all students and offers clear communication channels, a summer bridge program, and funding for basic needs resources.

University of Houston—University of Houston Enhanced Culture of Tutoring

University of Houston has an academic support initiative created in response to university data that indicated that students who receive traditional tutoring outperform students who do not. The university therefore desired to promote awareness of these resources. It seeks to establish a “culture of tutoring” through three initiatives: focusing tutoring support on students taking courses where high proportions receive a grade of D, withdraw, do not complete the course, or fail, through a flexible, remote, on-demand, app-based format; offering weekly group tutoring opportunities through a central tutoring office; and developing vocal faculty advocacy for out-of-class tutoring. This initiative serves all undergraduate students at University of Houston, with a focus on students in courses that could present barriers to degree completion.

University of Houston—Clear Lake—Mental Health Awareness CErT program

The University of Houston—Clear Lake offers a mental health initiative developed to continue Mental Health First Aid training already offered at the university in a more targeted, shorter, and lower-cost format. This initiative will train students, faculty members, and staff members in recognizing signs of mental health issues, connecting students to resources, preventing poor mental health outcomes, and ensuring retention and success. Through this initiative, the university hopes to connect students to one another, empower students to seek help by providing them information, refer students to the appropriate resources, and help students succeed. The initiative aims to serve populations that historically underuse mental health services.

¹⁰ Mental Health First Aid is competency-based training course that educates people in strategies to recognize and respond to mental health and substance use issues. This training course was developed by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing. See Mental Health First Aid USA (2023). Therapy Assistance Online is a free online resource that provides a variety of evidence-based tools to support overall mental well-being. It includes resources such as psychoeducational sessions, a mindfulness library, and journals for reflection. See TAO Connect, Inc. (n.d.).

University of Houston—Downtown—Basic Needs Project

The University of Houston—Downtown offers an initiative developed in response to a rising number of students experiencing food, housing, and financial insecurity as well as students' underuse of and dissatisfaction with previous basic-needs services. The university seeks to increase retention and graduation rates for students through the creation of a centralized and virtual location for students to gain access to resources. That central location will also provide financial support for students with unexpected basic-needs emergencies that could lead them to unenroll. This initiative serves all students who require basic-needs support.

University of Texas at Austin—Undergraduate Equity and Excellence

The University of Texas at Austin has a mental health and student success initiative developed to address an increase in mental health issues and reduce equity gaps in its student population. This initiative seeks to improve student well-being by providing culturally responsive, mental health-oriented staff development opportunities; financial support for students who register for the Medical College Admission Test; and one-time funding for pilot projects promoting degree completion for marginalized populations or supporting student mental health.¹¹ The initiative serves all students.

University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA)—UTSA Thrive: A Strengths-Based Approach to Student Success

The University of Texas at San Antonio offers a student success initiative created in response to a rising number of first-time freshmen on academic probation and warning, a decrease in student engagement rates, and equity gaps for first-generation students, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and students of color. This initiative will provide students with additional resources and coach counselors to support their academic progress and personal achievement.

University of Texas at Tyler—Rise as One for UT Tyler's Students' Success

The University of Texas at Tyler has a student success initiative created to help students who have historically struggled and improve their academic entry, advising, and orientation experiences. This initiative will implement professional development opportunities for faculty members and advisers who teach transfer students and students who are in college for the first time. That professional development will assist faculty members and advisers to encourage a growth mindset (students' belief that they can improve with effort), a sense of belonging, and engagement in academic courses, and will help them better support students who are underprepared. Additionally, the university will implement an engaging virtual

¹¹ "Marginalized" student populations are defined as those who have historically experienced a combination of social, economic, educational, and other factors that make it harder for them to succeed in college or earn degrees. These groups often include Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students; students from low-income backgrounds; and first-generation college students, though this is not an exhaustive list.

orientation experience for undergraduate students. This initiative serves all undergraduate students, with a focus on students who are in college for the first time and transfer students.

West Texas A&M University—Utilizing a Curricular Approach to Develop a Holistic, Intentional and Effective Curriculum to Improve the College Experience for our Students

West Texas A&M University offers a student engagement initiative. The Utilizing a Curricular Approach initiative focuses on redesigning how learning and engagement opportunities occur in the classroom by educating and training faculty members. In the training sessions, faculty members learn how to develop objectives, put their lesson plans in a logical sequence, help students built their skills, and create learning experiences to achieve the objectives they have developed. This new approach is intended to help faculty members assess students' needs and areas for curricular improvement more accurately.

Technology & Infrastructure

McLennan Community College—Enhanced Basic Needs/Wrap Around Services Coordination for Student Success¹²

McLennan Community College acquired new student-success-management software that was introduced because previously, the college had multiple management systems and processes that delayed students' connection to success services. The new management software will improve interdepartmental communication and will support faculty members, staff members, and students, with a focus on students who are in college for the first time.

MD Anderson Cancer Center—Increasing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) College and Career Access for Underserved Populations Statewide

This initiative aims to implement a customer relationship management system at MD Anderson's School of Health Professions to enhance outreach to and recruitment among underserved populations. It is designed to improve bachelor's degree completion rates among early college high school students in Texas while ensuring such students have access to high-paying positions in the health care field. The effort encompasses a range of efforts, namely, targeting pilot early college high school campuses and establishing communication with them through the customer relationship management system, streamlining communication and recruitment processes, and establishing relationships with community colleges statewide to create more opportunities for associate degree holders to transition seamlessly into bachelor's degree programs.

12 McLennan Community College withdrew its participation from the grant in May 2023.

University of Saint Thomas—UST Student Success Data Analytics Program

The University of Saint Thomas has an initiative developed to address student success and graduation rates across campus with a focus on two groups of students who have been identified as underperforming: Hispanic and Asian male students. The university purchased Watermark Student Success software using its THECB planning grant and currently offers faculty and staff members training focused on high-quality, culturally appropriate, theory-based interventions to maximize software usage.

University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio—The UT Health San Antonio School of Nursing Writing Lab

The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio offers a new writing lab that was developed in response to a lack of writing-intensive support services and courses for nurse practitioners during their graduate program. The writing lab serves as a virtual resource for graduate students to learn effective writing strategies, innovative thinking, and ways to grow academically. It offers flexible hours and online appointments to accommodate the demanding schedules of graduate nursing students. This initiative will collaborate with faculty members to provide workshops during class time as student participation opportunities, and will employ a writing support team to provide writing support workshops, individual consultations, and writing retreats.

Victoria College—Increasing Student Success Through a Transformed Student Engagement Strategy

Victoria College has an initiative developed to redesign the student engagement experience at the college by creating outreach to underserved students that is inclusive of all groups, including noncredit students. This initiative consolidates multiple stand-alone systems the college uses for engagement functions into one customer relationship management system; this change will streamline how students register for services and track targeted populations' responses based on how they interface with the system. In addition, the initiative will bolster digital outreach efforts to link more underserved students to the new system.

APPENDIX

D

Component Definitions from the Review of What Works Clearinghouse Evidence

Appendix Table D.1. What Works Clearinghouse Component Definitions and Frequencies

Component (Number of Articles Including That Component)	Definition
Advising (17)	These 17 articles examined advising interventions and their effect on student outcomes. Results varied greatly within this category. While some studies observed advising to have positive effects on persistence in school, degree attainment, and wage increases, other studies observed no statistically significant effects on these same outcomes. Further, advising was implemented in different ways. For example, some studies included academic advising in text-message campaigns intended to increase positive academic behaviors. Other studies included advising that students received either in a course, or through a program that required them to use advising intended to help them remain enrolled.
Financial aid (17)	Some interventions in this category aimed to increase the percentage of students who completed the FAFSA (Federal Application for Federal Student Aid); others offered financial assistance to students in the form of scholarships or in tuition waivers. Findings varied widely within this category. For example, some text-message interventions were able to demonstrate increases in FAFSA submission rates, which in some cases resulted in more students remaining enrolled. Other financial aid interventions aimed to provide students with stipends or scholarships; some studies found that this type of aid helped more students earn degrees, yet other studies found that it had no positive effects.
Full-time enrollment (19)	Full-time enrollment could be required of students as part of a program, a scholarship, or a degree pathway program. Studies of interventions that had full-time enrollment requirements as components had varied findings.
Behavioral science (17)	Research in the field of behavioral science has demonstrated that small changes in the way information is delivered can influence decisions and make it easier for people to act. These small changes may be accomplished by simplifying processes, providing reminders, or setting default options to help people achieve positive outcomes. ^a Interventions based on behavioral science can include elements such as text, phone, and email message campaigns that address students' "growth mindset" (belief in their ability to improve with effort) or sense of belonging. These intervention components overlapped with other components such as financial aid and academic advising. While some studies observed positive outcomes as a result of interventions based on behavioral science, it is unclear whether the component is associated with positive effects consistently.

(continued)

Appendix Table D.1. (continued)

Component (Number of Articles Including That Component)	Definition
Skill building/teaching (10)	Skill building and teaching components focused on interventions that aimed to provide students with training in certain skills. These courses included basic-skills instruction, courses offered on an accelerated timeline, improvements to online learning environments, and instruction in skills needed to succeed in college or the workplace. Broadly, skills-training courses prepared students to enter college, to enter certain occupations, or to begin college-level courses. While some studies observed positive effects (such as increased credits earned, increased wages, or decreases in attrition from first-year courses), it is unclear whether the component is associated with positive effects consistently.

NOTES: Components that occurred less frequently were tutoring (5 articles), summer enrollment (2), mentorship (8), and nonacademic support/assistance meeting basic needs (3).

^aFarrell, Anzelone, Cullinan, and Wille (2014); Dechausay, Anzelone, and Reardon (2015); Baird, Cullinan, Landers, and Reardon (2016).

APPENDIX

E

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MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization, is committed to finding solutions to some of the most difficult problems facing the nation. We aim to reduce poverty and bolster economic mobility; improve early child development, public education, and pathways from high school to college completion and careers; and reduce inequities in the criminal justice system. Our partners include public agencies and school systems, nonprofit and community-based organizations, private philanthropies, and others who are creating opportunity for individuals, families, and communities.

Founded in 1974, MDRC builds and applies evidence about changes in policy and practice that can improve the well-being of people who are economically disadvantaged. In service of this goal, we work alongside our programmatic partners and the people they serve to identify and design more effective and equitable approaches. We work with them to strengthen the impact of those approaches. And we work with them to evaluate policies or practices using the highest research standards. Our staff members have an unusual combination of research and organizational experience, with expertise in the latest qualitative and quantitative research methods, data science, behavioral science, culturally responsive practices, and collaborative design and program improvement processes. To disseminate what we learn, we actively engage with policymakers, practitioners, public and private funders, and others to apply the best evidence available to the decisions they are making.

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