

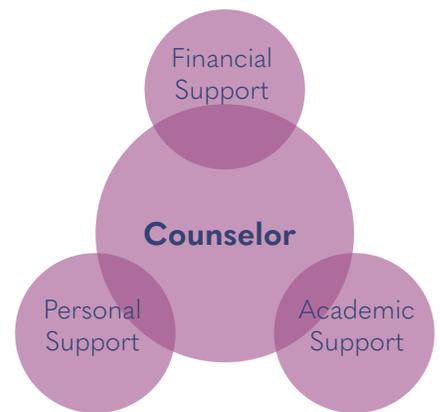
Comprehensive Approaches to Student Success Programs (CASS)

KEY LESSONS FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

Increasing college attainment offers tremendous promise for increasing social mobility, tackling poverty, and reducing racial and income inequality, aspirations that are more vital than ever as the devastating impact of the pandemic has fallen disproportionately on people of color. Yet for too many policymakers and practitioners, the path to growing our college completion rates for all students has been elusive. The U.S. has made steady progress in increasing college-going rates, but its success in increasing the proportion of Americans with college degrees has been more measured and inequitable. Completion rates are lower among Black and Latino students than white students, and among community college students than those attending four-year institutions.¹ As a result, the very students for whom a college degree could be a life-changing event are still left out of the college earnings premium.

What is a CASS program? Over the past decade, innovative leaders have pioneered a new approach to raising postsecondary completion rates that goes beyond financial support: comprehensive student success initiatives, or CASS. CUNY ASAP is the best known such program, but there are similar models throughout the country that employ an advisor, coach, or case manager to help students connect with customized support, often including financial help, academic support, and housing, transportation, childcare, career, and other assistance.

Rigorous evaluations of these initiatives have yielded striking results, and more research is underway.



A SAMPLE OF FINDINGS FROM STUDIES OF CASS PROGRAMS ²	
College Persistence	<p>InsideTrack yielded a 15% increase in retention rates of Pell-eligible students in one year.</p> <p>One Million Degrees led to a 47% increase in the persistence of full-time students in one year.³</p>
Degree Completion	<p>CUNY ASAP participants graduated from college at twice the rate of students in the control group, six years after enrolling.</p>
Student Earnings	<p>Project QUEST participants' earnings grew from an average of \$11,722 to \$33,644 over the course of the evaluation.</p>

CASS Impact and Potential: By the Numbers

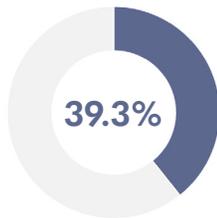
Average Cost Per Pupil of Evidence-Based CASS Models⁴

\$1,800-\$8,000

Annual Earnings Benefit of a B.A. and A.A. Degree⁶

134% | 30%

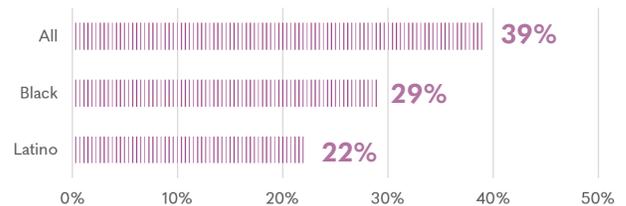
Average 6 Year Completion Rates for Students who Started at Two-Year Public Institutions⁸



Estimated Return on Investment of CUNY-ASAP Program⁵

\$3 to \$4 for every dollar invested

Racial Disparity in Degree Attainment (Community College and Higher)⁷



Average Per FTE student Cost of Public Two- and Four- Year Colleges⁹

\$16,856 | \$46,244

Recommendations

This research suggests that CASS is ready to scale and that doing so could double the community college graduation rate to 50 percent or higher within three years of entry. State policymakers can act on these lessons by:

- **Growing only what works** – expanding and replicating models with solid evidence of impact on postsecondary persistence and completion and student earnings, as demonstrated by significant and substantial positive findings in rigorous evaluations.
- **Empowering proven leaders to support emerging and ongoing efforts** – programs with a successful record of increasing college persistence and attainment, and increasing student earnings, are well-positioned to provide technical assistance and facilitate learning communities for newer programs statewide.
- **Allocating funds based on goals, need, and state strategies** – states should establish goals for reducing equity gaps and increasing postsecondary completion rates and allocate funds to institutions and non-profit organizations that can help achieve those goals.
- **Ongoing monitoring** – states should monitor grantees to ensure services are implemented with fidelity to the model.
- **Integrating CASS into institutional priorities** – CASS programs have the greatest impact when they are integrated into the strategic plans, budgets, and accreditation artifacts of schools.
- **Providing for a planning year** – ample planning time builds investment among institutional leadership and staff.

Endnotes

1. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. 2018. *Completing College: A National View of Student Completion Rates* <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport16/>
2. Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities. 2020. *Comprehensive Approaches to Increasing Student Completion in Higher Education: A Survey of the Landscape* <https://bit.ly/3n7Vkey>
3. The University of Chicago Poverty Lab. 2020. *The University of Chicago Poverty Lab Finds Community College Program Significantly Improves Enrollment and Persistence*. https://urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/attachments/f3375b155d8be74ff62b0e172b9bb869b16738af/store/41b366babe21a5f0f31666d3f7c72033cb08acfaacb509658c589c8de99/1_OMD+Press+Release_FINAL.pdf
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. National College Attainment Network. 2020. *What's Causing College Access Disparities, in 15 Charts* <https://www.ncan.org/news/539190/Whats-Causing-College-Access-Disparities-in-15-Charts.htm>
8. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. 2018. *Completing College: A National View of Student Completion Rates* <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport16/9>
9. National Center for Education Statistics. 2019. *Total expenditures of public degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by purpose and level of institution: 2009-10 through 2017-18* <http://bit.ly/38E6wqK>