

TESTING A LOWER COST MODEL OF STUDENT SUPPORTS

One-Year Findings from the
SUCCESS Demonstration

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OVERVIEW

Community colleges and broad-access universities (those with minimally selective admissions policies) provide an opportunity for students across the United States to attain post-secondary degrees and achieve economic mobility. However, graduation rates from such colleges are often low and there are many obstacles that can be difficult to overcome, especially for students who must balance work or family responsibilities, older students, students from low-income backgrounds, and students of color who face additional systemic barriers.

A growing body of research points to the effectiveness of interventions that include multiple components and support students over several years. Referred to as comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS), these programs have been found to help students stay enrolled, earn more credits, and graduate. But they can be costly, which limits the extent to which they are expanded and broadly implemented. The goal of the Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success project, or SUCCESS, was to develop a CASS program that is less expensive and more sustainable for colleges and to evaluate its effects.

SUCCESS includes several evidence-based components: coaches engaged in active outreach to students, monthly financial incentives for students who meet program requirements, strategies to encourage students to enroll full time, and a data-driven program management system. The project began in 2019, when MDRC started working with 13 institutions across California, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Ohio, along with their state higher education agencies. This report presents findings from an evaluation of SUCCESS at 11 of these colleges, presenting effects on students' progress after one year for all colleges and after three years for an early cohort of colleges.

The impact findings through the program's first year for the full group of colleges show that, on average, SUCCESS led to small increases in students' full-time enrollment but had no effects on credits attempted or credits earned. Three-year findings for an early cohort tell a similar story.

The study provides some considerations for the implementation and expansion of CASS-like programs. First, the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly affected program implementation, and probably affected how students could respond to SUCCESS. Pandemic-era restrictions forced a move to virtual advising and many colleges dropped the full-time-enrollment requirement. Second, increasing full-time enrollment may be critical to generating impacts. SUCCESS had much smaller effects on full-time enrollment than other CASS models, leading to smaller effects on credits attempted and earned. Third, the model was less expensive than other CASS models because it offered fewer support services for students, such as tutoring, and smaller incentives. The financial incentives may be important on their own but also for implementing the full-time-enrollment requirement: staff members may be more willing to enforce the full-time requirement if it is attached to a financial incentive, and students may be more willing and able to adhere to it.

The findings add to that evidence base, albeit for a less expensive model that began during the pandemic. Further research is needed into whether more streamlined, less expensive CASS models can improve student success.

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The Authors

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community colleges and open access colleges in the United States play a key role in promoting social mobility. But most students who enter these colleges never graduate. Common barriers to finishing are the cost of college and a lack of advising and other supports to address students' academic and personal challenges.

Growing research documents one class of programs that can help more students stay enrolled and earn degrees. Called comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS), these programs typically include personalized and proactive coaching, financial support, real-time data, and other strategies to help students address barriers. Although these programs have been found to be effective, they are also costly, which limits the extent to which they have been more broadly implemented.

This report presents findings from an evaluation of SUCCESS (Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success), a less expensive version of a CASS model. SUCCESS includes key components of CASS models, such as comprehensive and proactive coaching, a full-time enrollment requirement, and financial incentives. However, it aims to be less expensive by building on existing scholarship programs, rather than providing additional financial aid, capitalizing on existing college resources, and including fewer components. The program was started at 13 colleges around the country between 2019 and 2023 and evaluated at 11 of those colleges using a randomized controlled trial to understand its effects on student outcomes. Key findings include the following:

- **In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges adapted the SUCCESS program.** As a result, the program that they implemented did not fully align with the original model, and there was variation across colleges in implementation and student experiences. For example, much of the SUCCESS coaching was provided virtually, rather than in person as originally intended. Additionally, just under half of the programs consistently required students to enroll full time.
- **Because of SUCCESS, students had somewhat different college experiences.** Students reported that they had more frequent interactions with coaches, that they more often heard about the importance of full-time enrollment, and that they felt more supported at college and had a staff member at the college they could turn to for advice.
- **On average SUCCESS had no discernable effect on students' academic progress or completion.** SUCCESS had no effect on credits earned during the first year for the full sample of colleges or degree receipt through the third year for an early cohort of students — the primary outcomes in the evaluation.
- **SUCCESS's effects on credits earned in the first year varied somewhat across the colleges.** An exploratory analysis found that more frequent coaching visits and a higher

quality of coaching were associated with more positive impacts on credits earned, although even these effects were smaller than those found in other CASS programs.

- **The direct costs of SUCCESS were low relative to other CASS programs**, with an average cost for the first year of \$1,250 per student.

A final report will present findings for the full sample through two years, to assess impacts on credit accumulation, degree receipt, and transfer.

SUCCESS Model

The SUCCESS model includes four components that have been central features in other successful postsecondary education interventions.¹ The first three components involve direct interactions with students.

- **COACHING:** Coaches, supervised by dedicated SUCCESS program coordinators, meet with all students at least once per month, with more frequent meetings for students with higher needs due to academic or personal challenges.
- **FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT:** Full-time enrollment requirements encourage students to attempt at least 24 credits per year over the three-year period.
- **FINANCIAL INCENTIVES:** Financial incentives of \$50 per month encourage students to meet with coaches and satisfy the full-time enrollment requirement.

The final component supports the implementation of the first three components.

- **DATA-DRIVEN PROGRAM MANAGEMENT:** A management information system provides real-time data to track student engagement and progress and to support program management and continuous improvement.

SUCCESS was targeted to degree- or certificate-seeking students in their first year of college who were willing to enroll in school full time. Students receive these services for up to three years.

SUCCESS Evaluation

SUCCESS was implemented at 13 colleges around the country, 11 of which participated in a randomized controlled trial evaluation of its effectiveness. Between 2020 and 2023,

1. Institute for College Access and Success. 2021. "Comprehensive Approaches to Student Success: Design Principles." Website: <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CASS-design-principles.pdf>.

a total of 4,153 students enrolled in the study: 2,410 students in the program group and 1,743 students in the control group. The student sample is racially diverse and roughly evenly split between traditional and nontraditional students, or those who were older, working full time, had children, or earned a GED instead of a high school diploma.

The evaluation of SUCCESS aims to understand the program's implementation, effects, and costs. Data collected for the study include advising reports collected by the colleges, a survey of students one year after study entry, college transcripts and degree records, data from the National Student Clearinghouse covering enrollment and degree or certificate receipt at over 97 percent of colleges nationwide, and data collected from the colleges on the personnel and other costs required to operate the program.

Implementation Findings

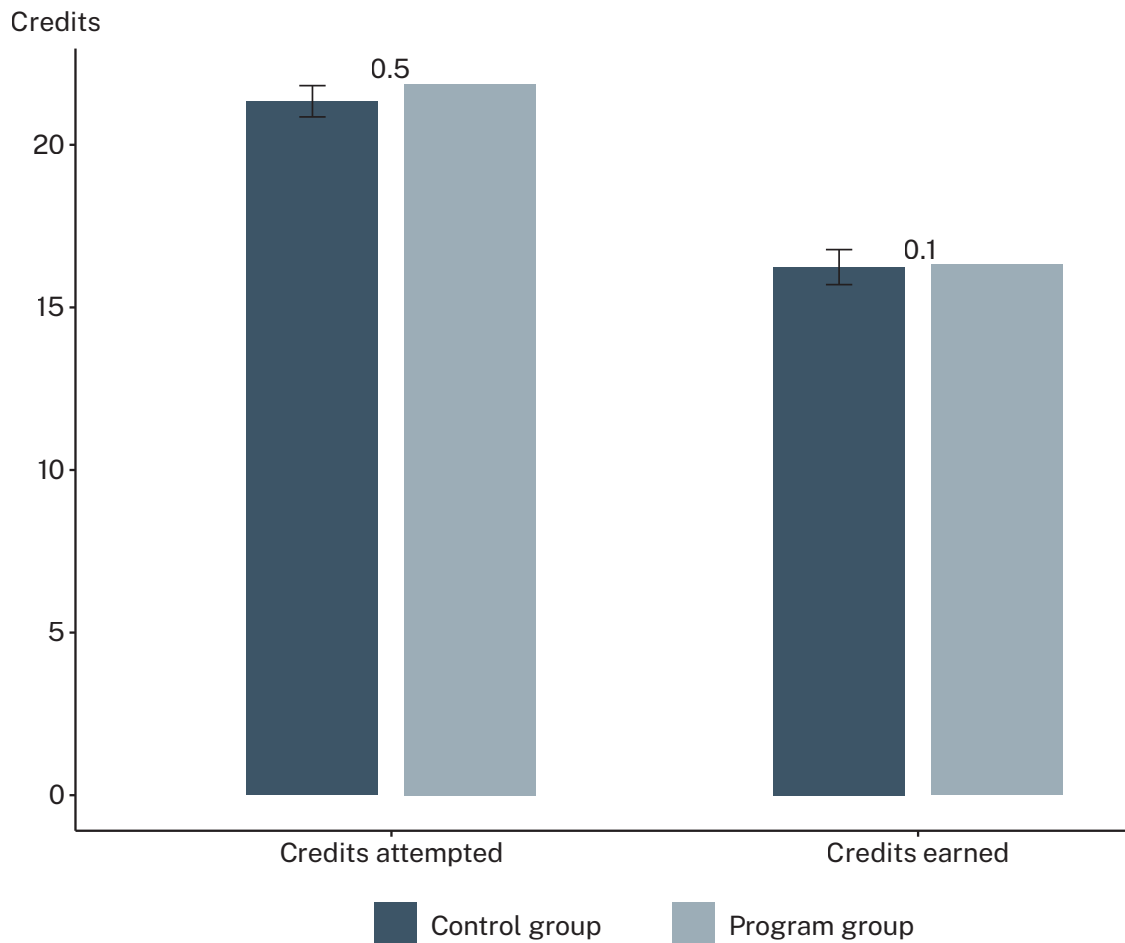
SUCCESS was not implemented as originally designed, in part due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. SUCCESS coaching, for example, was frequent and holistic, as intended, but most colleges provided coaching virtually at the start of the study, rather than in person as the original model called for. Also, just under half of the colleges consistently required students to enroll full time and some did not tie the monthly financial incentives to full-time enrollment, as intended. Colleges adapted the program in response to the pandemic. The pandemic created major challenges for the colleges, including the elimination of in-person services, and for the students, who struggled with the demands of all virtual classes and faced hardships outside of school. In the later years of program operations, the SUCCESS programs experienced substantial staff member turnover and students' participation in coaching and receipt of incentives decreased.

Despite these implementation challenges, students in the program group had a different college experience, on average, than students in the control group. Students in the program group reported more frequent interactions with coaches, felt more supported at college, and had a staff member at the college they could turn to for advice, although these effects varied across colleges.

Impact Findings

The key outcome assessed to measure students' academic progress in the first year of the program was credits earned. Data on credits earned were available through one year for the full sample of students across all 11 colleges and through three years for students who entered the study between fall 2020 and fall 2021 (about 70 percent of the full sample). Data for the full sample shows that SUCCESS had no discernable effect on credits earned through one year (see Figure ES.1). Students in both the program and control groups earned about 17 credits over their first year.

Figure ES.1 Cumulative Credits Attempted and Earned in Year 1



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

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation status, and whether the student intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The lines on each bar indicate 95 percent confidence intervals for the control group estimates.

Similarly, for the early cohorts, SUCCESS had no discernable effect on total credits earned over the three-year period. Additionally, by the end of the third year, about a third of students had earned a credential, most typically an associate's degree, with no difference between the program and control groups.

Given the variation in how fully the colleges implemented program components and some evidence of cross-college variation in program impacts, the study also looked at whether stronger implementation was associated with larger impacts. Colleges that created larger service contrasts for their students in individual model components, such as full-

time enrollment messaging, number of coaching visits, and the quality of coaching services, tended to have larger impacts on credits earned. Although exploratory, the analysis suggests that stronger implementation can lead to impacts, although the gains observed were small.

Finally, there is no evidence that the effects of SUCCESS differed by students' race or ethnicity. There is, however, some suggestion that its effects were more positive, although still small, for nontraditional students. These students saw larger increases in coaching as a result of the program, which is one possible explanation for this finding.

Cost Findings

SUCCESS costs an average of \$1,250 per student over the first year. The majority (79 percent) of program costs are attributed to personnel costs, most of which are for program coordinators and coaches. Financial incentives account for approximately 16 percent of program costs, with the remaining 5 percent attributed to supplies and facilities. For the early cohort of SUCCESS colleges, the average cost was \$2,730 per student for the full three-year duration of program eligibility. This cost per student is about half that of other, more intensive CASS models, such as the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP).

Conclusion

The findings show that SUCCESS was less costly to implement than more intensive CASS models but, on average across all colleges, did not lead to improvements in students' academic progress. Although the findings are disappointing, the study provides some considerations for the implementation and scaling of CASS-like programs.

First, the pandemic undoubtedly affected program implementation and probably affected how students could respond to SUCCESS. Pandemic-era restrictions forced a move to virtual advising and encouraged many colleges to drop the full-time enrollment requirement. Second, increasing full-time enrollment may be critical to generating impacts. SUCCESS had much smaller effects on full-time enrollment than other CASS models, leading to smaller effects on credits attempted and earned. Third, the model was less expensive than other CASS models because it offered smaller incentives and fewer supports for students. For example, SUCCESS did not provide tuition assistance, although with existing financial aid and, at some colleges, the availability of Promise Scholarships, many SUCCESS students likely pay little to no tuition.² SUCCESS also did not provide other supports available in many CASS models, such as tutoring and career services. SUC-

2 Promise Scholarships, offered by numerous states and localities, offer free college tuition, and sometimes stipends for books and other expenses, for recent high school graduates who attend college in a specific geographic area.

CESS also offered smaller financial incentives to students for continued engagement. For example, the incentive offered by ASAP included a monthly public transportation voucher and free textbooks for each semester. These financial incentives may be important on their own but also for implementing the full-time enrollment requirement: staff members may be more willing to enforce the requirement and students may be more willing and able to respond to the requirement.

Most colleges did not continue SUCCESS beyond the study period, despite their initial commitment to the program. Nonetheless, staff members at the colleges report continuing to think about how to advance comprehensive student services, given extensive evidence suggesting that these program components can improve students' academic progress. The findings from this evaluation, while not positive, add to that evidence base, albeit from a less expensive model that was started during the pandemic. Further research is needed into whether more streamlined, less expensive CASS models can improve student success.

1

Introduction

Community colleges and open access colleges in the United States play a key role in promoting social mobility. They serve more than 40 percent of all college students and a disproportionate number of students from families with low incomes, Black and Hispanic students, and older students.¹ But most students who enter these colleges do not graduate — only about a third of students entering community college, for example, earn a degree or certificate within six years.² Barriers to completion include the cost of college, lack of advising and other student supports to address students' needs, and the need for students to take remedial courses before taking credit-bearing courses.

In an effort to find what works to increase graduation rates, a growing body of research points to the effectiveness of interventions that include multiple components and support students over several years. Referred to as comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS), these programs have had larger effects on student outcomes than other, less intensive efforts.³ At the core of many CASS programs is personalized and proactive coaching, in which coaches actively reach out to students and meet to discuss personal and academic issues. Additional features typically include financial support, real-time data to monitor student engagement and program implementation, and other strategies to help students overcome barriers to completing college.⁴

CASS models have been found to help students stay enrolled, earn more credits, and graduate. But they can also be costly, which limits the extent to which they are brought to scale and broadly implemented.⁵ SUCCESS (or Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success) is one effort to address this impediment to broader implementation.

The goal of SUCCESS was to develop a CASS program that is less expensive and more sustainable for colleges and to evaluate its effects. SUCCESS is less expensive because it focused on a streamlined set of components and aligned the program with state initiatives, such as existing scholarship programs, and used existing college resources. Detroit Promise Path is another example of a model that achieved lower costs because it built on

-
1. Community College Research Center (2025).
 2. The Institute for College Access and Success (2019).
 3. Dawson, Kearney, and Sullivan (2020); Weiss, Bloom, and Singh (2022).
 4. Dawson, Kearney, and Sullivan (2020).
 5. Dawson, Kearney, and Sullivan (2020).

an existing scholarship program for graduating high school students (Detroit Promise) by adding coaching, financial support, and other services. An evaluation of the Detroit Promise Path program found promising effects on students' academic progress, but not on completion rates.⁶

SUCCESS extends the research on lower cost models by testing a similar set of supports in 11 colleges, including 2- and 4-year colleges, and for additional types of students, including older, nontraditional students. This report presents findings from an evaluation of SUCCESS at these colleges, presenting effects on students' progress after one year for all colleges and after three years for an early cohort of students.

The findings show that the program did not, on average, increase students' academic progress, for the full sample over one year or for an early cohort of students who were observed for three years. SUCCESS was not implemented as originally designed, in part due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may partly explain the limited impacts. A future report will examine the program's effects for the full sample for two years.

The SUCCESS Model

The SUCCESS model includes four components that have been central features in other successful postsecondary education interventions (see Figure 1.1). First, coaches, supervised by dedicated SUCCESS program directors/managers, meet with all students at least once per month. Second, full-time enrollment requirements encourage students to attempt at least 12 credits per semester (or 24 credits per year). Third, financial incentives encourage students to meet with coaches and satisfy the full-time enrollment requirement. Finally, a data-driven program management system provides real-time data for efficient program management and continuous improvement. The model supports students for up to three years.

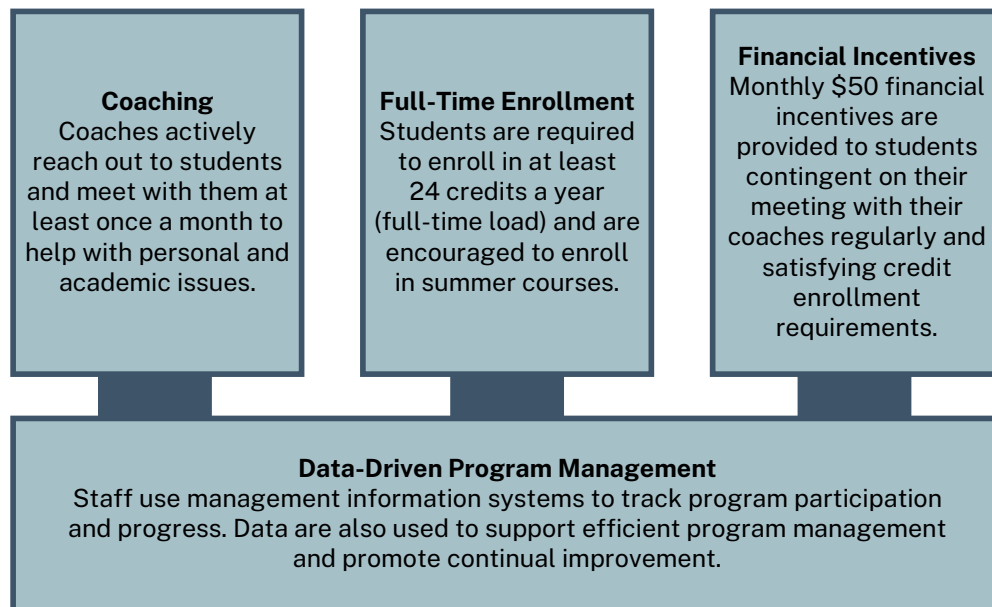
Underlying the program model is a commitment from state postsecondary leaders and colleges to build programs that are financially sustainable and that can be expanded to large numbers of students and colleges. In an effort to keep costs down, for example, SUCCESS did not provide tuition assistance. But with existing financial aid and, at some colleges, the availability of Promise Scholarships, many SUCCESS students likely pay little to no tuition.⁷ Another way in which SUCCESS is less expensive than some CASS models is in the size of the financial incentives provided to students for continued engagement. For example, the incentive offered by the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP) included a monthly public transportation voucher plus free textbooks for each semester.⁸

6. Brockman et al. (2025).

7. Promise Scholarships, offered by numerous states and localities, offer free college tuition, and sometimes stipends for books and other expenses, for recent high school graduates who attend colleges in a specific geographic area.

8. Scrivener et al. (2015).

Figure 1.1 SUCCESS Program Model



The project was launched in 2019, when MDRC began working with 13 institutions across California, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Ohio, along with their state higher education agencies. These college and state partners were selected because SUCCESS aligned with their priorities, and they were committed to sustaining the program and expanding it to additional students.

Eleven of the 13 colleges are participating in a randomized controlled trial, in which students from several entering cohorts were randomly assigned to either the program group, eligible to receive services from and participate in SUCCESS, or the control group, not eligible for SUCCESS but eligible for standard school services. Comparing the outcomes of students in both groups provides estimates of the program's impact, or value-added.⁹

SUCCESS targets degree- or certificate-seeking students in their first year of college who are willing to enroll in school full time. Although not formal eligibility requirements, some of the participating colleges have additionally focused on recruiting students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students who were the first in their families to attend college.

Previous Findings

This report is the fifth in a series of reports on SUCCESS. Initial reports documented the implementation of the program and shared early findings for a subset of the study col-

9. See <https://osf.io/u97ng> for the pre-analysis plan.

leges.¹⁰ Given the timing of the study, a key underlying theme throughout the evaluation has been the large disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evaluation started in fall 2020 at seven colleges, with four more colleges joining the study over the next two years. The onset of the pandemic in spring 2020 created unprecedented challenges for the colleges, faculty and staff members, and students.¹¹ Hiring freezes occurred at several colleges, leading to periods in which program staff members were stretched thin. Students faced a number of new challenges, including the difficulties of carrying a full-time course load online, challenges building relationships at college virtually, and uncertainty related to employment, health, childcare, and internet access.

The colleges managed to implement a version of SUCCESS, but it was a version that had been adapted to the existing environment and not the version that was initially intended. Most notably, the planned in-person coaching transitioned to virtual platforms. Additionally, some colleges relaxed students' full-time enrollment requirements.

The previous report, *Varying Levels of SUCCESS*, examined the implementation and effects of SUCCESS for up to three semesters for early cohorts of enrollees. The implementation research documented that the program's implementation varied by college and term and did not fully align with the original SUCCESS model, largely due to the adaptations made during the pandemic. However, students who were offered SUCCESS still had a different college experience from students in the control group — they were more likely to be told about the importance of full-time enrollment and, on average, they had substantially more contact with their coaches, both of which are central features of SUCCESS.

Despite changes in the college experience, analyses of academic data showed that, on average, there were no discernible positive impacts on persistence in college or credit accumulation for those early cohorts. However, the report documented that impacts on credit accumulation varied across colleges and cohorts, with larger impacts for groups that experienced stronger program implementation, such as more coaching contacts, high-quality coaching services, and stronger messaging about full-time enrollment.

This report updates that work, presenting one-year findings for over 4,000 students at all 11 study colleges and three-year findings for the early cohort. Chapter 2 presents the study design, data sources, and characteristics of the participating colleges and students. Chapter 3 presents findings on program implementation and service contrast, that is, the difference in services received and experiences between the program group students and the control group students. Chapter 4 presents the program's impacts on students' academic progress, and Chapter 5 examines how these impacts vary across types of students and by colleges. Chapter 6 presents the costs of the program, and Chapter 7 concludes.

10. See <https://www.mdrc.org/work/projects/scaling-college-completion-efforts-student-success-success> for the full list of publications.

11. Sommo, Lepe, and Ratledge (2022).

2

Sites, Evaluation Sample, and Data Sources

Starting in 2019, 13 institutions across California, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Ohio, along with their state higher education agencies, worked with MDRC to customize and launch SUCCESS. As a prerequisite to participation in SUCCESS, each college and state agency committed to sustaining SUCCESS during the evaluation and creating plans to scale operations to serve additional students. This chapter presents the study design, the data sources used, and the characteristics of the participating colleges and students.

Eleven of the 13 colleges are participating in a randomized controlled trial. Colleges were recruited on a three-year timeline, with the first round starting at seven colleges in the fall of 2020, and a second round including an eighth college starting in the fall of 2021. The final round, which began in the fall of 2022 at three Minnesota colleges, will conclude at the end of the spring semester in 2026.

Study Design

SUCCESS is being evaluated using a randomized controlled trial. Students at each college were recruited into the study by the college's program staff members in cohorts. Once recruited, students completed an informed consent process and were randomly assigned to either the program group, which can receive services from and participate in SUCCESS, or the control group, which may not participate.¹ Because a large number of students were randomly assigned, differences between the two groups in their subsequent outcomes represent a precise estimate of the causal effects of SUCCESS.

In the following chapters, the differences in outcomes between the program and control groups, referred to as the program's estimated impact, are calculated using a statistical model. This model also calculates how precisely the effect is estimated, including an indication of *statistical significance*, represented by the p-value. The p-value in statistical

1. College staff members recruited students. Random assignment occurred right after students completed an informed consent process and filled out a brief baseline survey.

terms represents the likelihood of observing a given difference if the true effect of the program is zero. In other words, the p-value can be thought of as representing the probability that the observed difference is due to chance. Effects are deemed statistically significant, or providing strong evidence of impacts, if the p-value is less than 0.10.

Data Sources

This report uses data from multiple sources.

- **BASELINE INFORMATION FORM:** Students in the study filled out a baseline survey before random assignment, providing demographic and other information.
- **COLLEGE TRANSCRIPT AND DEGREE DATA:** Academic data were collected from the participating colleges and the National Student Clearinghouse to calculate outcomes for each student and to analyze impacts by college.
- **MONTHLY COACHING REPORTS:** Colleges reported aggregate program participation monthly. MDRC researchers used information from these reports to support colleges in program implementation.
- **ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP STUDENT SURVEY:** A survey was administered to study participants approximately one year after they were randomly assigned. The survey covered topics such as sample members' participation in coaching sessions, the receipt of financial incentives, and messaging from the program about completing their degree in three years, full-time enrollment, and summer enrollment. The response rate to the survey was 67 percent with a difference between the research groups of 4.8 percentage points, falling within What Works Clearinghouse standards for differential attrition.²
- **STAFF MEMBER INTERVIEWS:** Interviews were conducted during the first semester of the second year of program operations at each college. MDRC researchers asked SUCCESS program coordinators and coaches about program implementation.
- **COST DATA:** MDRC researchers gathered cost data from each college every year, including personnel salaries, personnel time dedicated to the program, and expenditures on other items related to the program. MDRC researchers frequently had conversations with college staff members to ensure they understood the cost data and that it was accurate. The cost research also drew on the data collected as part of the implementation research.

2. See Appendix B for an analysis of survey responses.

Participating Colleges

Except for one four-year college in Minnesota, the colleges are all two-year institutions in urban, suburban, and rural settings. These geographically diverse institutions and states boast varied student populations and differ in the centralization of their higher education governance.

Table 2.1 shows the colleges included in the sample and describes their student populations.³ Total undergraduate student populations ranged from 2,828 at Ivy Tech Community College campus in Kokomo, Indiana to 26,873 at Bakersfield College in Bakersfield, California. Full-time enrollment, a component of the program model, also varied across colleges for the total student population, ranging from 18 percent at Ivy Tech Community College in Indianapolis, Indiana to 63 percent at Bemidji State University. Additionally, some colleges included financial need in SUCCESS eligibility criteria, often using Pell Grant eligibility status as a measure. As shown in Table 2.1, Pell Grant receipt at SUCCESS colleges ranged from 20 percent at Anoka-Ramsey Community College in Coon Rapids, Minnesota to 53 percent at Passaic County Community College in Paterson, New Jersey.

Participating Students

As noted earlier, SUCCESS targets degree- or certificate-seeking students in their first year of college who are willing to enroll in school full time. Beyond these eligibility requirements, some colleges also focused on recruiting students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students who were the first in their families to attend college.

Between 2020 and 2023, a total of 4,189 students were randomized into the program or control groups. After removing ineligible students and reductions due to attrition, 4,153 students were included in the analytic sample: 2,410 students in the program group and 1,743 students in the control group.⁴ As shown in Table 2.2, the sample is racially diverse, with Hispanic, Black, and White students each making up between 28 percent and 32 percent of the total. The sample is roughly evenly split between students under age 20 and those 20 or older, between students who were employed and not employed at the time the study began, and between traditional and nontraditional students (defined as those who were 25 or older, worked 35 or more hours per week, had children, or received a GED instead of a high school diploma). Women outnumber men in the sample by more than a two-to-one margin, and approximately one-fourth of the sample are parents.⁵

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3. MDRC also partnered with Chaffey College in California and Southwest Minnesota State University in Minnesota to launch SUCCESS programs. These programs were not included in the evaluation.
 4. More information on attrition and ineligible students can be found in a CONSORT diagram in Appendix Figure C.1.
 5. An omnibus F-test showed that differences in baseline characteristics between program group students and control group students were statistically significant ($p = 0.077$). (See Appendix Table A.1.) Impact analyses presented in this report control for these baseline characteristics as outlined in the study's pre-analysis plan.

Table 2.1 SUCCESS College Characteristics

COLLEGE	TOTAL STUDENTS	ENROLLED FULL TIME (%)	PELL GRANT RECIPIENTS (%)	GRADUATION RATE (150%)
Bakersfield College Bakersfield, CA City: large	26,873	27	29	22
Anoka-Ramsey Community College Coon Rapids, MN Suburban: large	7,902	33	20	22
Bemidji State University Bemidji, MN Town: remote	3,677	63	26	50
Hennepin Technical College Brooklyn Park, MN Suburban: large	3,974	33	26	33
Ivy Tech Community College Bloomington Bloomington, IN Suburban: midsize	5,277	21	25	29
Ivy Tech Community College Indianapolis Indianapolis, IN Suburban: large	14,845	18	40	27
Ivy Tech Community College Kokomo Kokomo, IN City: small	2,828	21	37	51
Owens Community College Perrysburg, OH Suburban: large	7,559	24	22	28
Stark State College North Canton, OH Suburban: large	10,031	25	27	20
Essex County College Newark, NJ City: large	6,466	46	51	17
Passaic County Community College Paterson, NJ Suburban: large	5,119	36	53	13

SOURCES: Data for all colleges except for those in the Ivy Tech Community College system come from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Data for each Ivy Tech campus was obtained from the Ivy Tech Community College System. Data for each college was pulled for fall 2022.

NOTE: For four-year institutions (Bemidji State University), 150 percent of normal time is equivalent to taking six years to complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree. For two-year institutions, it is equivalent to taking three years to complete the requirements for an associate's degree.

Table 2.2 Selected SUCCESS Sample Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	PERCENTAGE	SAMPLE SIZE
Race/ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	31	4,109
Black or African American	28	4,109
White	32	4,109
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	4,109
Asian or Pacific Islander	4	4,109
Multiracial	5	4,109
Age		
19 or younger	50	4,153
20 to 23	18	4,153
24 or older	31	4,153
Gender		
Male	32	4,121
Female	67	4,121
Nonbinary	1	4,121
Nontraditional ^a	46	3,953
Employed	57	4,044
Parent	23	4,046
Total sample size		4,153

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

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

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

^aNontraditional students are defined as those who were 25 or older, worked 35 or more hours per week, had children, or received a GED (instead of a high school diploma). Students are listed as nontraditional if they fit any of these characteristics.

These overall proportions, however, mask significant variation across colleges. As shown in Appendix Table A.2, the proportion of Black students varies among colleges, ranging from 4 percent to 73 percent; the proportion of Hispanic students ranges from 4 percent to 93 percent; and the proportion of White students ranges from less than 1 percent to 78 percent. Nontraditional and employed students make up from 10 percent to 75 percent and 28 percent to 72 percent of the sample, respectively, just as the percentage of students 19 or younger ranges between 17 percent and 96 percent.

As Tables 2.1 and 2.2, and Appendix Table A.2 show, the study includes colleges that differ in institutional and student characteristics and an overall sample of students that is diverse in terms of race/ethnicity and nontraditional status. This evaluation, therefore, tests the effects of the SUCCESS model at diverse institutions and for diverse student populations.

3

Program Implementation and Service Contrast

This chapter describes how the colleges in the study implemented their SUCCESS (or Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success) programs. The information is based primarily on interviews that MDRC researchers conducted with SUCCESS program coordinators and coaches and senior college administrators who were involved with the program. The interviews took place virtually during the first semester of each program's second year of operations. Additional information is from colleges' monthly reports on students' participation in coaching sessions and receipt of financial incentive payments.

The chapter also discusses differences in the experiences of program group students and control group students, or the service contrast. In a randomized controlled trial, it is important to examine the service contrast, as it is these differences in experiences that can cause differences in later outcomes, such as academic progress or graduation.¹ In order to assess the service contrast, a survey was administered to program group and control group students approximately one year after they were randomly assigned as part of the study.²

The chapter describes the SUCCESS programs' staffing and their implementation of the four program components: data-driven program management, coaching services, full-time enrollment, and financial incentives. It includes service contrast information about coaching and messaging about full-time enrollment, as well as information on the service contrast on students' engagement. The chapter concludes with a brief section on the longer-term implementation of the SUCCESS programs.

Key Findings

- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges adapted the SUCCESS program. As a result, the program that they implemented did not fully align with the original model.

1. Weiss, Bloom, and Brock (2014).

2. See Chapter 2 for more information about the survey and the response rate.

- Much of the SUCCESS program's coaching services were provided virtually, rather than in person as the original model called for. The coaching covered both academic and personal topics, as intended, and students in the program group reported more frequent interactions with coaches than control group students.
- Just under half of the programs consistently required students to enroll full time, as was called for in the original model. Overall, more students in the program group reported hearing about the importance of enrolling full time than in the control group.
- Colleges paid students a monthly financial incentive if they met their coaching requirement, but some colleges did not also tie the incentive to full-time enrollment, as intended.
- In the later years of program operations, the SUCCESS programs experienced substantial staff turnover and students' participation in coaching and receipt of financial incentives decreased.

Staffing

Each college had a SUCCESS program coordinator who managed the program and supervised the program's coaches. At most of the colleges (9), the program coordinator also coached some students. At the time of the staff member interviews, the program coordinators all worked full time and at the majority of colleges (7) they worked exclusively on SUCCESS. At the other colleges (4), the program coordinators also played a college-wide leadership role in student services, and they reported spending between 25 percent and 50 percent of their time on SUCCESS.³ At almost all of the colleges (10), at least one senior administrator oversaw the program. At the other college, the SUCCESS program coordinator also played a college-wide leadership role in student services.

At the time of the interviews, most of the colleges (8) had between one and three SUCCESS coaches, and most of them worked full time. A few colleges (3) had more SUCCESS coaches — between 7 and 14 — and most of them worked part time. Caseloads were generally larger for the full-time coaches, ranging from 64 to 147 students at the time of the interviews. Caseloads for the part-time coaches ranged from 20 to 65 students. In all the programs, the program coordinator and coaches met frequently to discuss topics including students' participation in the program and how to address the issues students were facing.

During the initial months of the pandemic, some colleges implemented hiring freezes, and some SUCCESS staff members were asked to do work outside of the programs and were stretched thin. In the interviews, which, as noted, took place during the first semester of

3. One of the SUCCESS program coordinators who did not work full time on SUCCESS did not say during the interview with MDRC researchers what proportion of the coordinator's time was spent on the program.

the second year of operations at each college, some program interviewees mentioned staff turnover. One challenge that was mentioned was that students who had been working with a specific coach had to build a relationship with a new coach. Some coaches said that more staff members would have been helpful to reduce the number of students each coach was responsible for working with and to reduce burnout.

Data-Driven Program Management

As described earlier in the report, one of the components of SUCCESS is data-driven program management. Staff members are expected to use management information systems (MIS) to track student engagement and progress, and to use data to support program management and improvement.

MDRC created an MIS for the SUCCESS project for colleges to use. The four colleges that did not already have an MIS that would work for the study's purposes used the MDRC MIS. The other seven used an existing college MIS. MDRC worked with all the colleges to ensure they could track the needed information. Most colleges also used other tools, such as Excel to keep program records, and Calendly and Setmore, to schedule appointments with students.

For the most part, the programs implemented data-driven program management as intended. All of the SUCCESS programs tracked coaching appointments and students' eligibility for monthly financial incentive payments. This was critical, since students were only eligible for financial incentives if they attended a prespecified number of coaching sessions. Most of the programs (9) kept notes from coaching sessions that coaches sometimes reviewed before meeting with students. Most of the programs (9) used college MIS systems to look up information on students, such as course enrollment, grade point average (GPA), and information on participation in other campus supports, such as tutoring services. Just over half of the colleges reported using the MIS to send emails or text messages to students. Programs sent group communications about topics such as important dates or deadlines, including registration periods or financial aid deadlines, and individual communications about upcoming coaching sessions or to check in. Most of the program coordinators (9) used data to help manage the program. Specific practices varied, but coordinators periodically reviewed information on the number of coaching sessions, incentives, and notes from coaching sessions and discussed with coaches topics such as students' engagement and particular issues students were facing.

Coaching

Coaching Implementation

The original SUCCESS model, designed before the COVID-19 pandemic, called for two in-person coaching sessions per month during students' first semester in the program.

In later semesters, the model called for two sessions per month for students identified by program staff members as having “high need,” such as those struggling academically or experiencing personal issues. Other students were expected to meet in person with coaches once a month and have another check in by telephone, email, or text.

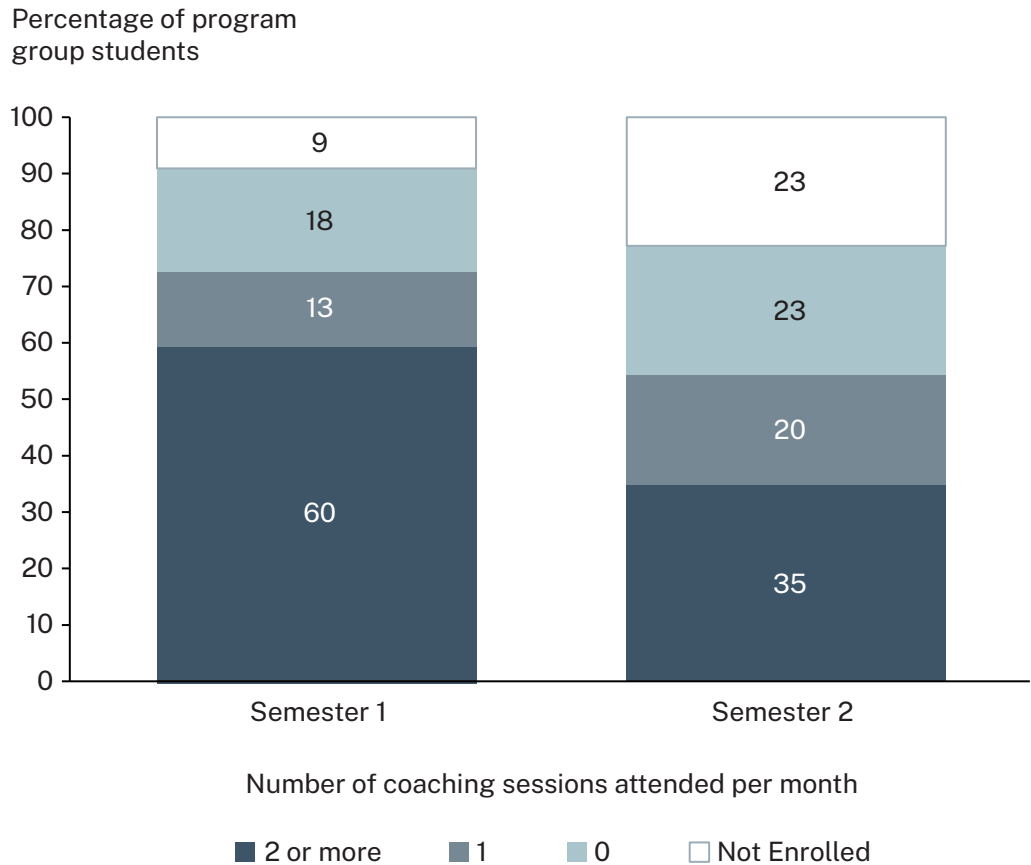
Most of the programs provided coaching exclusively virtually at the start of the study. As discussed earlier in the report, seven of the colleges’ first cohort of students began in the fall 2020 semester, during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected college operations in multiple ways, including forcing most course instruction online and limiting in-person campus services. Another college’s first cohort began the study in the fall 2021 semester, and its program provided exclusively virtual coaching at first, too. Among the three colleges’ cohorts that began the study in the fall 2022 semester, two initially provided coaching both virtually and in person, and the third initially provided exclusively virtual coaching before transitioning to a hybrid model. All of the programs shifted to providing at least some coaching in person over time, but the programs varied in the degree to which they encouraged in-person contact.

Aligning with the model, staff members in all of the programs expected students to participate in two coaching sessions per month in their first semester and they consistently communicated that expectation. In the second and later semesters, most of the programs assessed students — based on factors like GPA, academic and personal challenges, and the perceived need for support — and expected two coaching sessions per month for students deemed as “high need” and one session per month for other students. A few programs (3) expected two coaching sessions per month for all students in all semesters.

Figure 3.1 shows the average number of monthly coaching sessions in the SUCCESS programs during program group members’ first and second semesters in the study, based on colleges’ records. The colleges included substantial contacts that they counted toward the students’ monthly coaching requirement, but they typically did not include brief telephone calls, emails, or text messages. Each bar on the figure shows the full program group, including students who did not enroll in the semester. As is shown in the first bar on the figure, SUCCESS programs met with an average of 60 percent of the program group students at least twice each month in the first semester. The programs met with an average of 13 percent of the program group students once a month in the first semester and an average of 18 percent zero times.

As the second bar in Figure 3.1 shows, in the second semester, SUCCESS programs met with an average of 35 percent of the program group students at least two times each month. The fact that this percentage is lower than in the first semester is not surprising, given that, as described above, only some students in the program were expected to attend two sessions per month in their second semester and an additional 14 percent of students were no longer enrolled. The programs met with an average of 20 percent of program group members once a month in the second semester. During interviews, some coaches and program coordinators said it was challenging to get some students to attend coaching sessions for various reasons including students’ schedules.

Figure 3.1 Average Monthly Participation in Coaching in Year 1



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using coaching participation from monthly reports and enrollment information from transcript data provided by the study colleges.

NOTES: The number of coaching sessions attended per month was calculated by taking the average number of students who attended 2+, 1, and 0 coaching sessions in each of the three full months within the relative semester (September, October, November for fall terms and February, March, April for spring terms.)

Based on interviews, SUCCESS coaching appears to have covered both academic and personal topics, as the model intended. Coaches reported discussing an array of topics with students including choosing and registering for classes; how classes are going and issues with instructors; financial aid; the need for and referrals to other services, such as tutoring and counseling; time management skills; study skills; nonacademic issues that may be affecting students’ academic performance, including what is going on at home and at work; and work-school-life balance. A coach from one program said, “I’m here available for [the students] whenever they have any questions. I don’t limit them to just two coaching sessions a month. I let them know my door’s always open. Whenever you need assistance with anything, I’m here to help you. So basically, my role for [SUCCESS] is trying to blanket basically all of my students’ needs, make them feel as comfortable as

possible at the college and make them focus on what they're here for, [which] is to be successful within three years."

All of the coaches communicated with students in person and by video. Some coaches also described communicating with students on the telephone and through emails and text messages. Communicating via video and other modes that were not in person offered flexibility and allowed more frequent, shorter contacts. One coach said, "A lot of our students ... are working full-time, they're parents, they're nontraditional students. So, I've had students that have Zoomed me from the hospital room and I'm like, 'What are you doing?' But it's very convenient. They'll Zoom if they're driving, they'll Zoom from work, on their lunch break. It helps because for those students that don't have the time to come in and meet face-to-face, this is allowing them to get that coaching and accountability piece that they need, the support services part." When asked to rate their coach on the student survey, most program group members (91 percent) rated their coach as good or excellent. Even though much of the program's coaching happened virtually, students viewed these services very positively.

Coaching Service Contrast

MDRC administered a survey to students in the study to assess the service contrast on coaching and other components of SUCCESS. Fielded one year after study enrollment and capturing responses from two-thirds of the study sample (with a differential of less than 5 percentage points between program and control group students), the student survey sheds light on how program group students' experiences differed from control group students' experiences in the first year.

Survey responses indicated that the SUCCESS program increased students' communication with a coach or adviser and widened the number of topics discussed. Table 3.1 shows the impacts of the program on coaching and advising in the students' first year.⁴ Almost 9 in 10 students in the program group spoke with a coach during their first year, an increase of 9 percentage points from the control group. On average, students in the program spoke with a coach more than 16 times in the first year, over 8 times more than students in the control group. This impact falls within the high-end of the range of MDRC-evaluated interventions that increase coaching use.⁵ It should be noted that this counts any interaction reported by the student and may not necessarily fully align with the coaching sessions counted in the colleges' monthly reports, shown in Figure 3.1.

Given the timing of the pandemic, roughly 40 percent of all students who ever spoke with a coach did so via video chat, and fewer than 50 percent of all students met with a coach

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4. The one-year student survey asked students about their experiences with a coach or adviser in order to capture interactions with all service providers across the college and provide an accurate reflection of the service contrast. All references to coaching as part of the student survey and service contrast should be interpreted in the context of coaching or advising.
 5. Scrivener and Weiss (2022).

Table 3.1 Student Coaching in Year 1

OUTCOME	SAMPLE SIZE	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	DIFFERENCE	P-VALUE
Ever spoke with a coach (%) ^a	2,765	87.6	78.5	9.1 ***	0.000
Average number of times spoke with a coach in the first year	2,705	16.49	8.25	8.25 ***	0.000
<i>Among those who spoke with a coach</i>					
Average time spent during visit with a coach was... (%)					
15 minutes or fewer	2,293	31.1	35.1	-4.0	
16 to 30 minutes	2,293	50.6	46.3	4.3	
31 minutes or more	2,293	18.3	18.6	-0.3	
In what ways have you interacted with a coach? (%)					
In-person meetings	2,310	46.2	47.1	-0.9	
Telephone calls	2,310	69.6	49.0	20.6	
Emails	2,310	69.8	68.8	1.0	
Text messages	2,310	25.6	10.7	14.9	
Social media	2,310	0.8	1.2	-0.4	
Video chat	2,310	41.0	38.0	3.0	
Topics discussed with coach: (%)					
Academic goals or progress	2,294	94.4	85.1	9.3	
Internships, job opportunities, or career planning	2,294	41.5	27.2	14.4	
Course selection	2,294	77.3	79.8	-2.5	
Major	2,294	62.2	54.2	7.9	
Requirements for graduation	2,294	51.7	47.8	4.0	
Transfer credit policies, probation, and add/drop policies	2,294	39.4	32.6	6.8	
College services such as financial aid, tutoring, and counseling	2,294	56.7	43.6	13.1	
Personal matters	2,294	36.5	17.7	18.8	
Something else	2,294	1.6	1.7	-0.1	
Quality-of-advising scale (avg.) ^b	2,285	3.53	3.30	0.23	
Survey respondents sample size (total = 2,781)	2,781	1,662	1,119		

(continued)

Table 3.1 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC's one-year student survey.

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

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent. Variables without listed p-values were not considered experimental and were not tested for statistical significance.

^aThe student survey asked students about their experiences with a coach or adviser. For brevity, tables only use the term “coach”.

^bThe quality-of-advising (“coaching”) scale is a weighted average of a student’s response to five questions administered in the SUCCESS program’s one-year student survey. Additional details can be found in Appendix B.

in person during the first year. However, the program appears to have increased the proportion of students who spoke with a coach over the telephone or by text message, evidence of the SUCCESS coaches using more flexible modes of communication.

During these conversations, students interacted with their coaches about an assortment of topics across both program and control groups, however more students in the program group tended to report discussing each topic listed on the student survey. While most students reported speaking with a coach about academic items such as progress and course selection, it is worth noting that the largest differences in the topics discussed related to nonacademic topics, reflecting the program’s focus on holistic advising. Students in the program group were more than twice as likely to speak with a coach about personal matters, and many more program students tended to discuss career pathways and other college services with a coach. Additionally, students in the program group reported a higher quality of coaching, on average, than students in the control group. The average program group student agreed more strongly with at least one question about high-quality coaching than the average student in the control group. See Appendix B for the list of questions that the survey asked to assess coaching quality.

Full-Time Enrollment

Full-Time Enrollment Implementation

The original SUCCESS model called for programs to require students to enroll full time during the fall and spring semesters and to encourage students to take courses during the summer.⁶ Based on interviews, just under half of the SUCCESS programs (5) reported

6. Full-time enrollment was typically defined as 12 credits per semester but in some programs was defined as 24 credits per academic year.

that they consistently called on students to enroll full time with very few or no exceptions. A SUCCESS program coordinator who did push for full-time enrollment said, “[Y]ou do have to be full time. So, it is a big part of every conversation. And actually, we don’t even give them the choice. If you’re in SUCCESS, you know, we’re going to register you full time....”

The other programs (6) reported that they did not consistently call on students to enroll full time. Three of the six had gotten approval from MDRC, in the context of the pandemic, to allow each student a “grace semester” during which they could enroll part time but tended to encourage full-time enrollment otherwise. The other three generally encouraged full-time enrollment but made exceptions for some students, such as those who were on academic probation or students who said that they really did not want to or could not enroll full time, often because of work or family obligations. All of the programs allowed part-time students to receive coaching services and some allowed them to receive incentives (see below for more discussion about the incentives).

The program coordinator from one of the programs that did not consistently push for full-time enrollment said, “I will say it’s been really hard lately because it seems like...students don’t want to be enrolled full time. You know, they could go do a job and make more money than they would with a degree anyways. So, what’s the point? ‘Why am I pushing myself to be full time?’ So...[these are] some of the hard conversations that we’ve had.” A coach from another program that did not consistently push for full-time enrollment said, “I think that the biggest challenge is, like I’ve shared earlier, it’s the full-time requirement that was needed for the program.... Because when we look at our data, you know, 60 percent of our students are part-time students. And so, getting students to get to full-time status was always a challenge.”

Just over half of the programs (6) reported that they consistently encouraged students to enroll in the summer. Program staff members said that they described summer courses as a way to graduate sooner or to reach full-time enrollment status across the academic year. The other programs said that they encouraged summer enrollment for some students — such as students who said they wanted to accelerate their progress through college or students who the coach thought could “handle” the compressed courses — but not all. At the four-year college in the study, most students tended to go home for the summer and taking courses during the summer was not that common.

Full-Time Enrollment Messaging Service Contrast

As shown in Table 3.2, students across the study in the program group were more likely to ever hear college staff members or faculty members speak about the importance of enrolling in school full time and enrolling during the summer semester than students in the control group. Nevertheless, only half of the program group students said they heard these messages often or very often, reflecting what was heard during interviews with staff members that more than half of the study colleges did not regularly enforce the full-time enrollment component of the program. Chapter 5 discusses this variation by college.

Table 3.2 Student Messaging in Year 1

OUTCOME (%)	SAMPLE SIZE	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	DIFFERENCE	P-VALUE
Ever heard college staff members or faculty members speak about:					
The importance of enrolling in school full time	2,724	77.0	66.2	10.8 ***	0.000
That it is a good idea to enroll in school during the summer semesters	2,721	78.6	68.1	10.4 ***	0.000
Often or very often heard college staff members or faculty members speak about:					
The importance of enrolling in school full time	2,724	50.5	37.9	12.5 ***	0.000
That it is a good idea to enroll in school during the summer semesters	2,721	44.5	33.7	10.7 ***	0.000
Survey respondents sample size (total = 2,781)	2,781	1,662	1,119		

SOURCE: MDRC's one-year student survey.

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

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Financial Incentives

The original SUCCESS model included a \$50 monthly financial incentive for students who were enrolled in college full time and met their coaching requirements in a given month. Based on interviews, all of the SUCCESS programs tracked students' eligibility for the monthly financial incentive and successfully paid students who had earned the incentive.

All of the programs tied the financial incentive to meeting monthly coaching requirements but only seven programs reported also consistently tying the incentive to full-time enrollment, as intended by the model. Three other programs sometimes tied the incentive to full-time enrollment but made exceptions for some students, such as students who were on academic probation. The interviewees from one of the programs described tying the incentive solely to meeting the coaching requirements and did not mention enrollment as a factor.

Records from the colleges' monthly reports showed that in an average month in the first semester, 60 percent of program group students earned an incentive. That proportion aligns with the coaching finding from the college monthly reports shown in Figure 3.1 — that the programs met with an average of 60 percent of the program group students at least twice each month in the first semester. This suggests that the financial incentive was connected to meeting the coaching requirement.

The colleges' records show that in an average month during the second semester, 49 percent of program group students received a financial incentive. This proportion falls between the average percentage of program group students who had one coaching session per month and the average percentage of program group students who had two or more sessions per month (shown in Figure 3.1). It is likely that during the second semester some students had to attend two coaching sessions in order to receive the incentive, but some students only had to attend one. These data, however, cannot discern which students earned the incentive each month or each semester. However, on the student survey, about three-fourths (76 percent) of the program group students said they received at least one monthly financial incentive payment during their first year in the study.

The programs paid the financial incentives using physical gift cards, virtual gift cards, checks, bookstore gift cards or vouchers, and direct deposits to students' bank accounts. Some colleges switched from physical cards to virtual cards early on because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The types of gift cards used include Amazon, Walmart, Target, gas station, grocery store, restaurant, and Visa cards. Based on responses to the student survey, program group students most commonly purchased food or gas with their financial incentives.

Student Engagement and Support

Not only did program group students participate in more coaching sessions and hear program-related messages, but they also reported a better support system and more participation in other student services. According to the student survey data shown in Table 3.3, about 86 percent of program group students said they had all or most of the services and support they needed to succeed, and 85 percent had a college employee they could turn to for advice. This rate was more than 10 percentage points higher than students in the control group, as fewer than three in four control group students reported these same levels of support.

Unlike some other student support programs, SUCCESS did not incorporate tutoring services into the model and the student survey shows that roughly a quarter of all students engaged in tutoring, whether individually or as part of a group. However, the program did seem to increase the number of students who participated in some form of career services at the college, from 20 percent to almost 30 percent. It is worth noting that during the pandemic, tutoring and other supports were limited.

Longer-Term Implementation

In the later years of operation, the SUCCESS programs experienced substantial staff member turnover, and some programs reduced their staffing levels. Some programs had to replace coaches, and some had to replace program coordinators. In some cases, staff positions were combined and the coordinator served as the coach. For example, one program had a full-time program coordinator and two full-time coaches but by the end of the program had just one half-time program coordinator and no coaches. There were fewer students in the program by then, but the student-to-staff member ratio was higher.

Over time, program group students' engagement in SUCCESS diminished. It is useful to examine participation rates for students who were enrolled in college, because students who were not enrolled were not eligible to participate in the program, and the proportion of students who were not enrolled tended to increase over time. In each semester over the study's three-year follow-up period, the proportion of enrolled program group students who had at least one coaching session in an average month decreased from 81 percent in the first semester to 22 percent in the sixth.⁷ Generally, the proportion of enrolled program group students who received an incentive declined over time, as well.

7. The proportion of all program group students who attended at least one coaching session in an average month was 73 percent in the first semester and 10 percent in the sixth semester.

Table 3.3 Student Engagement and Support in Year 1

OUTCOME	SAMPLE SIZE	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	DIFFERENCE	P-VALUE
Had all or most services and support needed to succeed (%)	2,655	85.6	74.0	11.6 ***	0.000
Had a college employee to turn to for advice (%)	2,642	84.9	72.7	12.2 ***	0.000
Integration and sense of belonging at school (avg.) ^a	2,644	2.86	2.82	0.04 *	0.060
Participation in other student services (%)					
Career services, one-on-one or group	2,663	29.0	20.2	8.8 ***	0.000
Tutoring services, one-on-one or group	2,663	26.1	24.5	1.6	0.356
Survey respondents sample size (total = 2,781)	2,781	1,662	1,119		

SOURCE: MDRC's one-year student survey.

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

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThe integration and sense of belonging scale is a weighted average of a student's response to nine questions administered in the SUCCESS program's one-year student survey. This scale has a range of 1 to 4, with 4 indicating a high integration or sense of belonging. Additional details can be found in Appendix B.

4

Impacts

The earlier report on SUCCESS (or Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success), *Varying Levels of SUCCESS*, presented findings after one year for students in the subset of colleges that began study enrollment early in the study. This chapter presents one-year findings for the full sample across 11 colleges and effects after three years for the early cohorts.

Key Findings

- Across all students at all colleges, SUCCESS had no effect, on average, on student academic progress during the first year, with no discernable impact on credits earned.
- For the early cohort of students, SUCCESS had no discernable effect on credit accumulation or degree receipt through three years.

Effects Through One Year for All Colleges

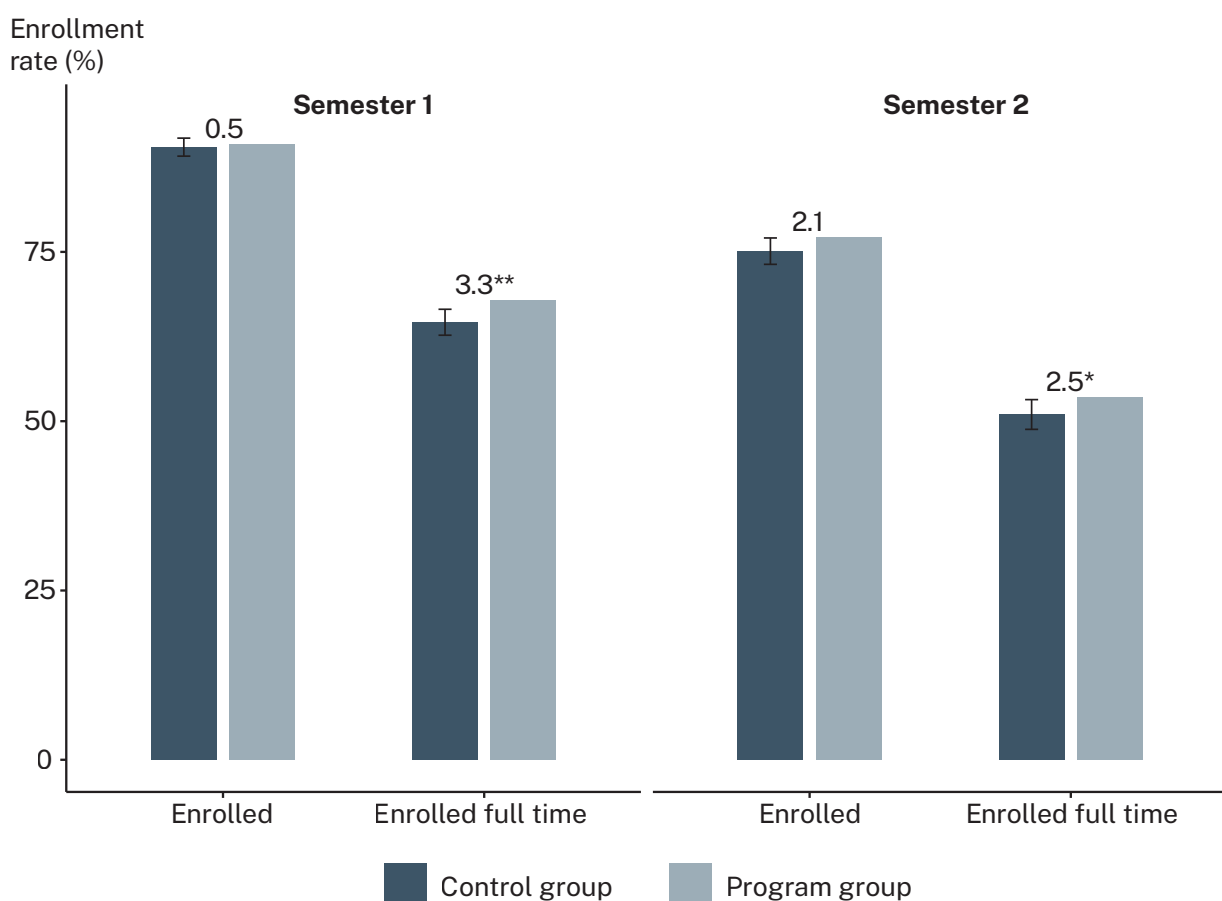
The primary outcome used to assess students' academic progress is credits earned, as it best captures progress toward a degree. Secondary outcomes, which should be affected by the program and contribute to credits earned include enrollment each semester, full-time enrollment, and credits attempted. See Appendix Table C.1 for the full set of impacts.

Figure 4.1 presents effects on enrollment. First, overall enrollment rates for the control group students (part-time or full-time) illustrate a typical pattern of falling enrollment at community colleges. Just over 90 percent of students were enrolled in the first semester, dropping to 75 percent in the second semester. SUCCESS had no discernable effect on enrollment—rates were very similar for students in the program and control groups in semesters one and two.

In the intended SUCCESS model, colleges were to require students to enroll full time as part of program participation. As noted in Chapter 3 however, fewer than half of the colleges consistently enforced this requirement. Figure 4.1 shows that the program led to small increases in full-time enrollment. In semester one, 65 percent of control group students were enrolled full time, compared with 68 percent of program group students,

for an estimated impact of 3.3 percentage points. The increase in full-time enrollment in semester two is an estimated 2.5 percentage points. Impacts in both semesters are statistically significant.

Figure 4.1 Student Enrollment by Semester



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using transcript data from the study colleges and data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation status, and whether the student intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

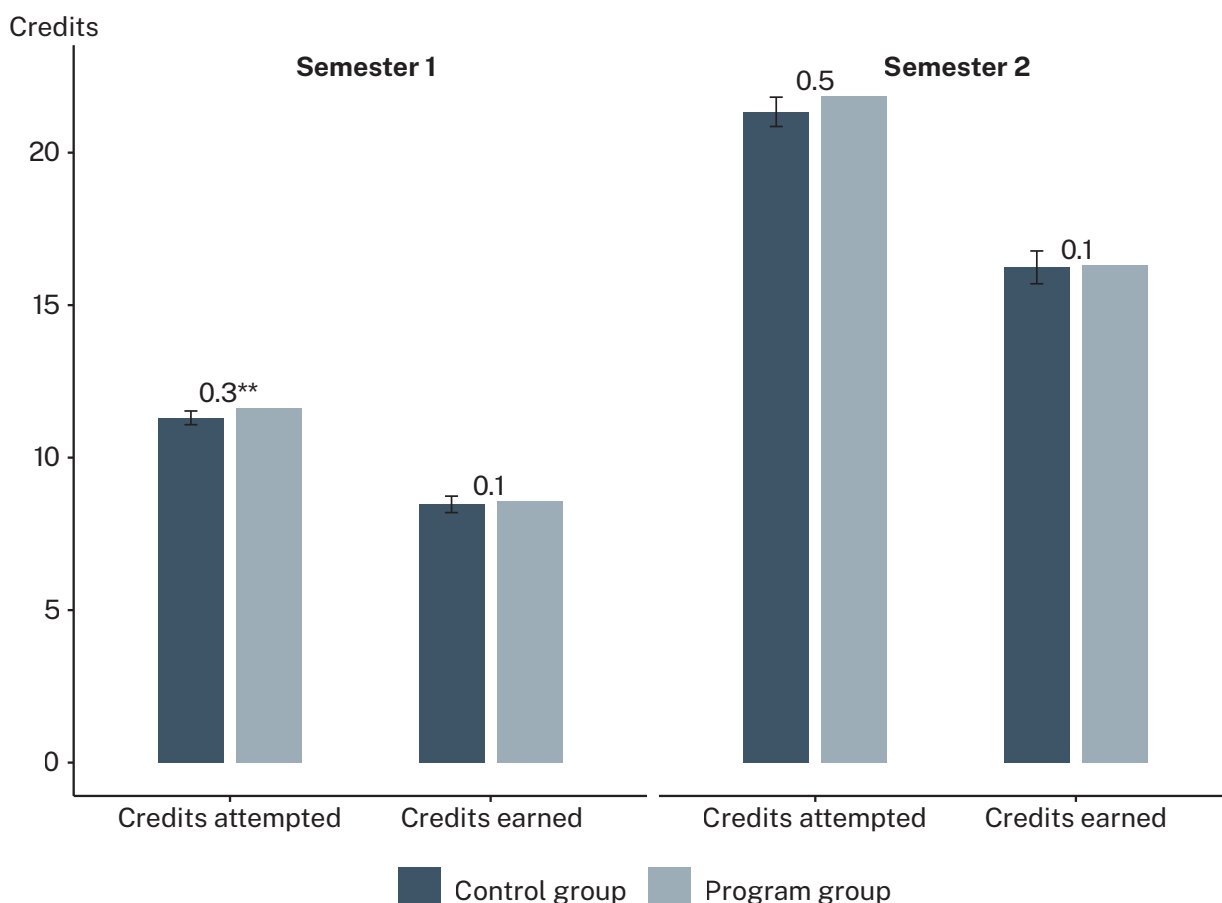
The lines on each bar indicate 95 percent confidence intervals for the control group estimates.

Full-time enrollment is defined as attempting 12 or more credits and is based on data from the college of random assignment only.

Figure 4.2 presents impacts on cumulative credits attempted and earned over the first year. Students attempted 11 credits on average in the first semester and 21 credits through the second semester. The average of 11 is somewhat less than full time (12 or higher), as it is calculated over all students, including part-time enrollees, full-time enrollees, and students who were not enrolled (who are included with zeroes). SUCCESS led to a small

increase in credits attempted in semester one, reflecting its positive impact on full-time enrollment in that semester. Students earned an average of eight credits in the first semester, reflecting a 75 percent pass rate among credits attempted. SUCCESS had no impact on credits earned in either semester.

Figure 4.2 Cumulative Credits Attempted and Earned by Semester



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

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation status, and whether the student intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The lines on each bar indicate 95 percent confidence intervals for the control group estimates.

Spring and summer semesters have been combined for the credits attempted/earned outcomes.

Effects Through Three Years for Early Cohorts

Longer-term findings are available for student cohorts that enrolled early in the study period — fall 2020, spring 2021, and fall 2021 at the first eight colleges in the study. For this group, data are available for three years, or six semesters, which is a common timeframe

to examine graduation rates for community college students. The previous report, *Varying Levels of SUCCESS*, presented effects for this group, showing positive impacts on full-time enrollment for the first three semesters but no discernable effects on total credits earned, measured through two semesters.¹

As noted in Chapter 3, students' engagement in SUCCESS diminished over time, with less than half of enrolled students having at least one coaching session by the sixth semester. The programs also experienced substantial staff member turnover across multiple roles, including coaches and program coordinators.

Figure 4.3 presents enrollment rates. Enrollment rates drop over time. For the control group, for example, full-time enrollment falls from 63 percent in the first semester to 11 percent in the fifth semester.

SUCCESS had few discernable effects on overall enrollment rates, with the exception of an increase of 3.3 percentage points in the fifth semester. The program did increase full-time enrollment rates in the first and fifth semesters, with effect estimates ranging from 2.4 to 4.1.

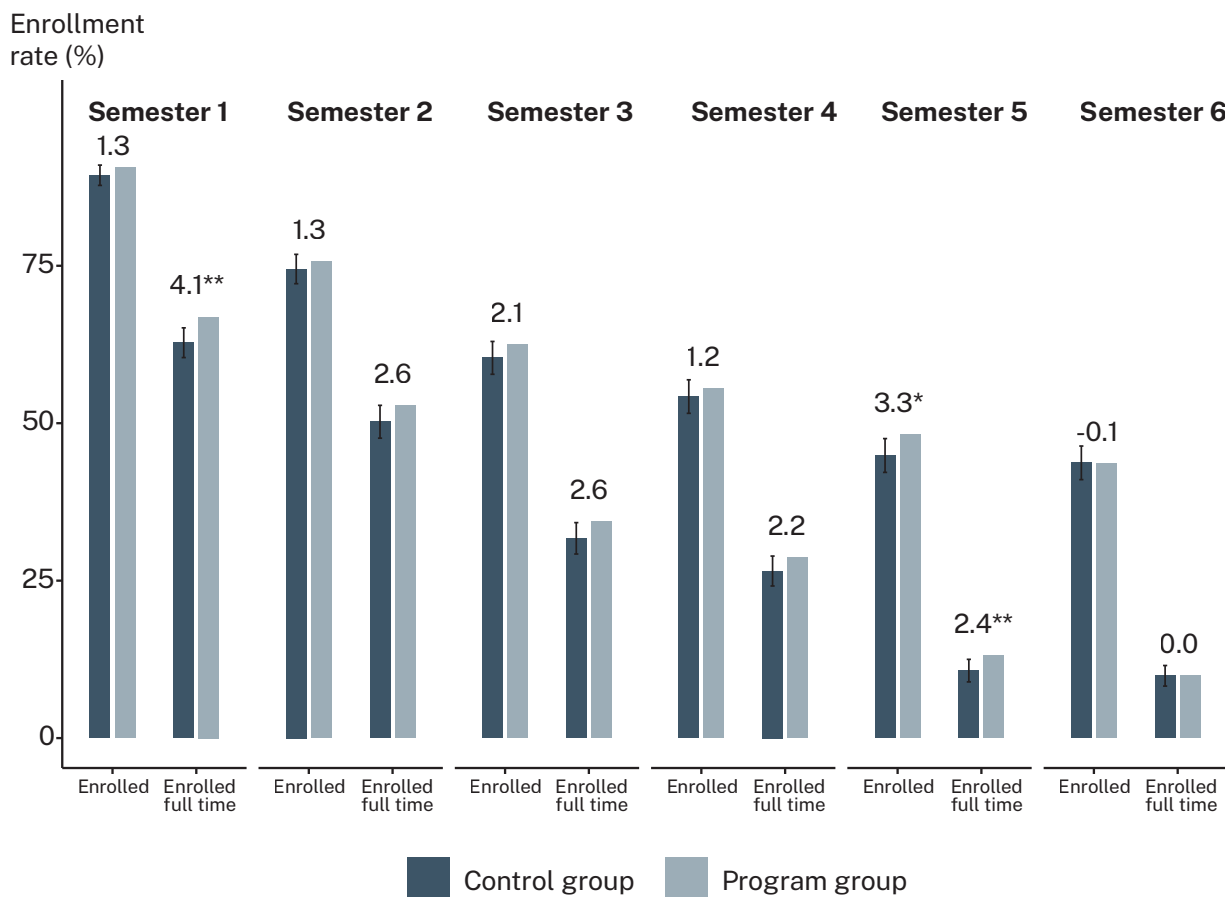
Figure 4.4 presents effects on cumulative credits attempted and earned. By the end of the sixth semester, students in the control group had attempted 38 credits, on average, and earned 29 credits. Although there is some evidence SUCCESS led to a small increase in credits attempted, the program had no effect on credits earned — the central indicator of academic progress.

Finally, Table 4.1 presents effects on credentials earned and transfers. By the end of the third year, 33.4 percent of students in the control group had earned any credential, with the majority of those credentials being associate's degrees (26 percent). Transfer rates to four-year colleges jumped to 15 percent in the fifth semester and almost 20 percent had transferred by the sixth semester. SUCCESS had no effect on these outcomes, as rates for the program group were very similar.

In sum, SUCCESS had no discernable effects on measures of academic progress, either through one year for the full sample of students or through three years for an early cohort of students. The program led to small increases in full-time enrollment, but those increases were not large enough to lead to increased credits earned or degree receipt. Chapter 5 examines how effects vary across the colleges and for different types of students.

1. The third cohort of students at Owens Community College is included here but was not included in the previous report's analysis.

Figure 4.3 Student Enrollment by Semester, Cohorts 1-3



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using transcript data from the study colleges and data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

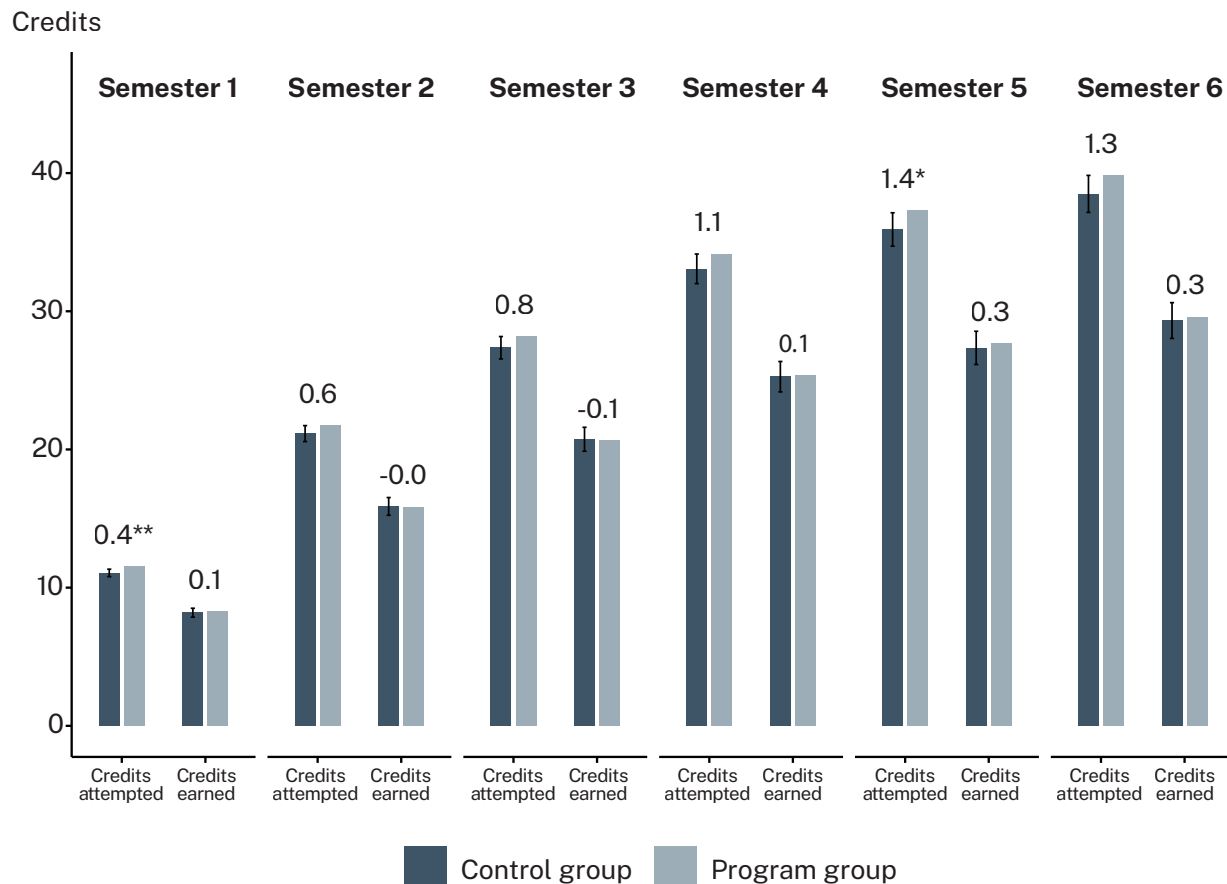
NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation status, and whether the student intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The lines on each bar indicate 95 percent confidence intervals for the control group estimates.

Full-time enrollment is defined as attempting 12 or more credits and is based on data from the college of random assignment only.

Figure 4.4 Cumulative Credits Attempted and Earned by Semester, Cohorts 1-3



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

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation status, and whether the student intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The lines on each bar indicate 95 percent confidence intervals for the control group estimates.

Spring and summer semesters have been combined for the credits attempted/earned outcomes.

Table 4.1 Degrees Earned and Transfers to Any Four-Year Colleges, Cohorts 1 to 3

OUTCOME (%)	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	IMPACT ESTIMATE	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE	SAMPLE SIZE
Ever earned any credential from any college						
Semester 1	2.1	1.8	0.3	0.5	0.539	3,015
Semester 2	7.0	7.7	-0.7	0.9	0.464	3,015
Semester 3	12.1	11.7	0.4	1.1	0.734	3,015
Semester 4	21.7	23.4	-1.7	1.5	0.259	3,015
Semester 5	27.3	27.3	0.0	1.6	0.999	3,015
Semester 6	33.8	33.4	0.4	1.7	0.826	3,015
Highest degree earned						
Certificate	5.7	6.3	-0.6	0.9	0.505	3,015
Associate's degree	26.2	25.8	0.4	1.6	0.800	3,015
Bachelor's degree or higher	1.4	1.0	0.4	0.4	0.329	3,015
Registered in a four-year college						
Semester 1	1.1	1.1	0.0	0.4	0.972	3,015
Semester 2	2.7	2.9	-0.2	0.6	0.766	3,015
Semester 3	5.5	5.4	0.1	0.8	0.890	3,015
Semester 4	7.5	7.6	-0.1	1.0	0.907	3,015
Semester 5	14.5	15.3	-0.8	1.3	0.528	3,015
Semester 6	18.3	18.6	-0.3	1.4	0.839	3,015
Sample size	1,716	1,299				3,015

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using degree data from the study colleges and data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

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

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

5

Impacts for Subgroups of Students and Across Colleges

Exploring the effects of the SUCCESS (or Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success) program for different types of students and across colleges can shed additional insight into how the program and its components operated across student populations and colleges. This chapter presents impacts for selected subgroups of students. It also explores variation in impacts by college and investigates the relationship between program implementation at each college, measured through service contrast, and impacts on credits earned.

Key Findings

- SUCCESS's impact on credits earned in the first year varied by traditional student status. Nontraditional students saw positive effects from the program while traditional students saw slightly negative effects, although neither impact was statistically significant at the 10 percent level.¹ These differences were also observed through three years for the early cohorts of students.
- There was no evidence of discernable variation in effects by race/ethnicity, gender, or students' self-reported advising needs.
- Effects on credits earned in the first year varied somewhat by college. An exploratory analysis using measures of service contrast suggests that above a certain threshold, more frequent coaching visits and a higher quality of coaching were associated with greater impacts on credits earned.

1. A statistically significant effect is one that can be attributed with a high degree of confidence to the program or intervention being studied and is unlikely to have been observed if the program had no true effect.

Impacts for Subgroups

Table 5.1 shows the disaggregated effects of SUCCESS on credit accumulation in the first year of the program for each cohort, by the study's two confirmatory subgroups, race/ethnicity and traditional student status. The estimated effects of the program by students' race/ethnicity were near zero for the three prespecified subgroups (Black or African American students, Hispanic/Latino students, and White students) and show no discernable variation in effects between subgroups.

The different effect estimates for nontraditional students compared with traditional students, however, were more than would be expected by chance if the effects were the same for both groups. The estimated effects for each group are less than one credit earned in either direction — the program is estimated to have had a slightly positive effect on credits earned for nontraditional students ($p = 0.28$) and a slightly negative effect on credits earned for traditional students ($p = 0.20$), although neither difference is statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

There is a similar pattern in the three-year outcomes for the first three cohorts, as seen in Tables 5.2 and 5.3.² After six semesters, there were still no significant effects on cumulative credits or degrees earned for Black or African American students, Hispanic/Latino students, or White students and no evidence that effects varied by race or ethnicity.

However, there continued to be some signs of variation in impacts on credits earned by traditional student status through three years. The estimated impact on cumulative credits earned for nontraditional students grew over the following two years for the earlier cohorts of students, with nontraditional students in the program group earning on average 2.4 credits more than those in the control group by the sixth semester. In contrast, traditional students in the program group earned over one fewer credit after three years than traditional students in the control group, although this difference was not statistically significant. Differences in any credential earned after three years by research group for traditional and nontraditional students followed the same pattern as credits earned, but the differential effects were not statistically significant.

The reasons for these differential effects on credits earned are uncertain, but several hypotheses are explored. One possible explanation is that they could be an artifact of which colleges served higher proportions of nontraditional students. If the colleges where SUCCESS was more effective also served a higher proportion of nontraditional students, then larger effects for nontraditional students could be observed because of where they tend to attend college rather than because they are more responsive to the SUCCESS program than traditional students. However, the evidence does not support this hypothesis.

2. One-year impacts restricted to only the first three cohorts also exhibit some evidence of variation by traditional student status ($p = 0.14$).

Table 5.1 Credits Earned in Year 1, by Race/Ethnicity and Traditional Student Status

SUBGROUP	PROGRAM GROUP MEAN	PROGRAM GROUP SIZE	CONTROL GROUP MEAN	CONTROL GROUP SIZE	DIFFERENCE IN MEANS	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE	DIFFERENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE
Race/ethnicity								
Hispanic/Latino	17.81	683	17.91	581	-0.10	0.67	0.8819	
White	17.16	777	17.08	536	0.08	0.65	0.9077	
Black or African American	13.35	682	13.54	449	-0.19	0.71	0.7855	
Traditional student status								
Nontraditional ^a	14.53	1,065	13.91	758	0.62	0.57	0.2780	†
Traditional	17.78	1,226	18.44	904	-0.66	0.51	0.2000	†
Sample size (total=4,153)		2,410		1,743				

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using transcript data from the study colleges and baseline information collected during study intake.

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

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment. Subgroup characteristics were excluded as covariates in individual subgroup analyses.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Differential significance levels are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^aNontraditional students are defined as those who were 25 or older, worked 35 or more hours per week, had children, or received a GED (instead of a high school diploma). Students are listed as nontraditional if they fit any of these characteristics.

Table 5.2 Credits Earned Through Year 3, by Race/Ethnicity and Traditional Student Status

SUBGROUP	PROGRAM GROUP MEAN	PROGRAM GROUP SIZE	CONTROL GROUP MEAN	CONTROL GROUP SIZE	DIFFERENCE IN MEANS	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE	DIFFERENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE
Race/ethnicity								
Hispanic/Latino	34.74	610	35.15	521	-0.42	1.49	0.7789	
White	26.64	469	26.94	316	-0.31	1.68	0.8551	
Black or African American	25.49	495	24.38	355	1.11	1.66	0.5032	
Traditional student status								
Nontraditional ^a	25.60	805	23.15	566	2.44 *	1.26	0.0526	††
Traditional	33.30	831	34.65	673	-1.35	1.29	0.2972	††
Sample size (total = 3,015)		1,716		1,299				

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using transcript data from the study colleges and baseline information collected during study intake.

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

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment. Subgroup characteristics were excluded as covariates in individual subgroup analyses.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Differential significance levels are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^aNontraditional students are defined as those who were 25 or older, worked 35 or more hours per week, had children, or received a GED (instead of a high school diploma). Students are listed as nontraditional if they fit any of these characteristics.

Table 5.3 Percentage of Students Earning a Credential Through Year 3, by Race/Ethnicity and Traditional Student Status

SUBGROUP	PROGRAM GROUP MEAN	PROGRAM GROUP SIZE	CONTROL GROUP MEAN	CONTROL GROUP SIZE	DIFFERENCE IN MEANS	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE	DIFFERENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE
Race/ethnicity								
Hispanic/Latino	33.18	610	32.70	521	0.49	2.79	0.8612	
White	36.14	469	39.02	316	-2.89	3.52	0.4117	
Black or African American	31.37	495	28.79	355	2.58	3.25	0.4268	
Traditional student status								
Nontraditional ^a	33.40	805	31.39	566	2.02	2.57	0.4324	
Traditional	34.52	831	35.24	673	-0.72	2.49	0.7719	
Sample size (total=3,015)		1,716		1,299				

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using degree data from the study colleges, data from the National Student Clearinghouse, and baseline information collected during study intake.

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

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment. Subgroup characteristics were excluded as covariates in individual subgroup analyses.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Differential significance levels are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^aNontraditional students are defined as those who were 25 or older, worked 35 or more hours per week, had children, or received a GED (instead of a high school diploma). Students are listed as nontraditional if they fit any of these characteristics.

Another hypothesis is that service contrast also varied by traditional student status, resulting in disparate impacts on credits earned. A look into three key measures of service contrast by traditional student status found that nontraditional students did see greater impacts on the number of coaching contacts. SUCCESS caused both nontraditional and traditional students to speak with a coach or adviser more often during their first year. However, the increase was larger for nontraditional students (10 more times) compared with traditional students (6 more times). So, there is evidence in support of the hypothesis that SUCCESS's larger effects for nontraditional students may have been a result of the program having larger effects on nontraditional students on the number of contacts with advisers.

It is possible that the program encouraged more frequent advising for the students who tended to speak with a coach less often (nontraditional students in the control group reported speaking with a coach or adviser less frequently than traditional students in the control group). However, nontraditional students in the program group reported almost two more contacts with a coach in the first year than traditional students in the program group, on average. This suggests that even after accounting for lower levels of advising for nontraditional students without the program, nontraditional students appeared more likely to engage more with their coach or adviser. This could be due to nontraditional students having greater advising needs or finding greater benefits from the holistic advising offered by the SUCCESS program. In contrast, with already higher levels of credit accumulation for both program and control groups, traditional students may have been less inclined to increase the frequency with which they spoke to their coach or adviser by as much as nontraditional students if they saw fewer benefits from the advising.

While both traditional and nontraditional students saw positive impacts on the quality of advising and receiving messages about the importance of full-time enrollment, there did not appear to be evidence of variation by traditional student status.

Additional exploratory subgroup analyses in Table 5.4 can add context to the variation in effects between nontraditional and traditional students. A look at impacts by gender showed that neither men nor women appeared to see substantial effects from the program in the first year, and there was no evidence that this differed by gender or students' self-reported advising needs. However, effects did appear to vary by age, one of many factors that can constitute a student's nontraditional status.

The youngest students, those under 19 years old, saw roughly no change in credits earned by the end of year one, while students between the ages of 20 and 23 saw a decrease of almost two credits earned. Students who were at least 24 years old (most of whom are considered nontraditional students) saw an increase of just over one credit earned after year one.

Students with higher self-reported needs tended to see more positive differences between program and control groups than those with lower needs, though these differential effects are not statistically significant. This could support the earlier hypothesis that students with lower self-perceived advising needs, such as traditional students, saw less benefit from the program.

Table 5.4 Credits Earned in Year 1, by Gender, Age, and Self-Reported Advising Need

SUBGROUP	PROGRAM GROUP MEAN	PROGRAM GROUP SIZE	CONTROL GROUP MEAN	CONTROL GROUP SIZE	DIFFERENCE IN MEANS	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE	DIFFERENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE
Gender								
Female	16.18	1,588	16.11	1,168	0.07	0.45	0.877	
Male	16.68	781	16.41	552	0.28	0.67	0.679	
Age								
19 or younger	18.17	1,197	18.24	892	-0.07	0.51	0.889	††
20 to 23	13.15	454	15.05	313	-1.90	0.88	0.031**	††
24 or older	15.08	759	13.96	538	1.11	0.67	0.095*	††
Self-reported advising need								
High	15.42	325	14.83	248	0.59	1.05	0.574	
Neutral	16.38	1,246	15.93	851	0.45	0.51	0.377	
Low	16.58	804	17.64	595	-1.05	0.63	0.093*	
Sample size (total=4,153)		2,410		1,743				

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using transcript data from the study colleges and baseline information collected during study intake.

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

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment. Subgroup characteristics were excluded as covariates in individual subgroup analyses.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

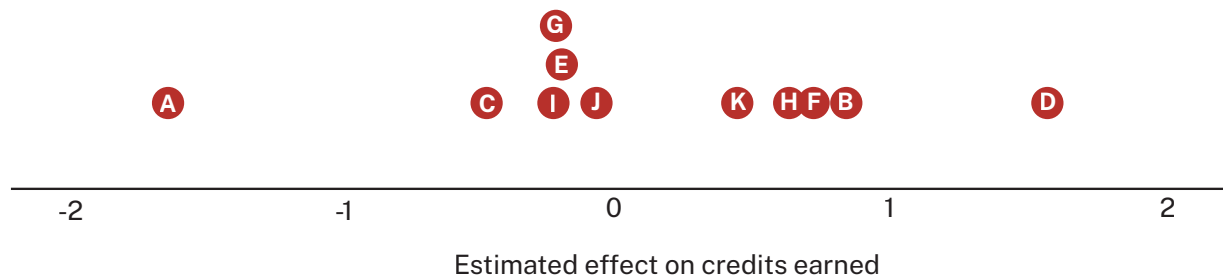
Differential significance levels are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

Variation in Impacts by College

Whenever an intervention is implemented at multiple colleges, it is plausible that it will be more effective at some colleges and less effective at others. This can occur because the intervention is implemented differently across colleges, the types of students attending the colleges differ and are differentially responsive to the intervention, or because the alternative services available to students vary across colleges. To explore these issues, this evaluation studied the extent to which SUCCESS's impacts varied across colleges.

There was some evidence of variation in the program's effects on credits earned by college in the first year, although it was not statistically significant ($p = 0.21$). Figure 5.1 shows the estimated distribution of the impacts of SUCCESS on cumulative credits earned in the first year across all 11 study colleges.³ The previously published one-year findings from the first three cohorts of students suggested SUCCESS's impact on credits earned varied by college and cohort. When impacts vary across contexts, a natural question is – what factors predict this variation in impacts? In this case, the variation in impacts was associated with the variation in program implementation and the service

Figure 5.1 Estimated College-Level Distribution of Effects on Cumulative Credits Earned in Year 1



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

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation status, and whether the student intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Adjusted Empirical Bayes estimated effects are presented here (Bloom, Raudenbush, Weiss, and Porter, 2017).

Estimated effects are adjusted to appropriately represent the estimated distribution of effects. Letters within each data point represent the college (e.g., College A).

- Adjusted Empirical Bayes estimated effects, which use data from all colleges to better predict the true distribution of effects, are presented in Figure 5.1. While Empirical Bayes estimated effects provide the best prediction of the true effect at a given college, they tend to underestimate the variation in true effects and, thus, were adjusted to appropriately represent the estimated distribution of true effects, as described by Bloom, Raudenbush, Weiss, and Porter (2017).

contrast.⁴ This section further explores these patterns in variation with data on the full set of study colleges and cohorts.⁵

With full-time enrollment and coaching being two primary components of the SUCCESS program, the research team looked at how the program's impacts on full-time enrollment messaging, quantity of coaching/advising, and reported coaching/advising quality varied across colleges in the first year, and the extent to which this variation was correlated with impacts. See Chapter 3 for estimates of the average service contrast on these topics for the full sample.

Figure 5.2 presents the findings for these three hypothesized mediators of program effects on academic progress, along with a composite mediator score combining all three. (See Appendix Table D.2 for more details.) Estimates reporting the frequency with which students heard about the importance of enrolling in school full time and spoke with a coach or adviser were positive in all but one college. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, not all SUCCESS colleges were able to fully implement the model as intended, due in large part to the pandemic. For example, some colleges did not consistently maintain the full-time enrollment requirement, while others adjusted their definition of full-time enrollment in order to accommodate different student schedules, which became evident with the variation in impacts on full-time enrollment messaging across colleges.

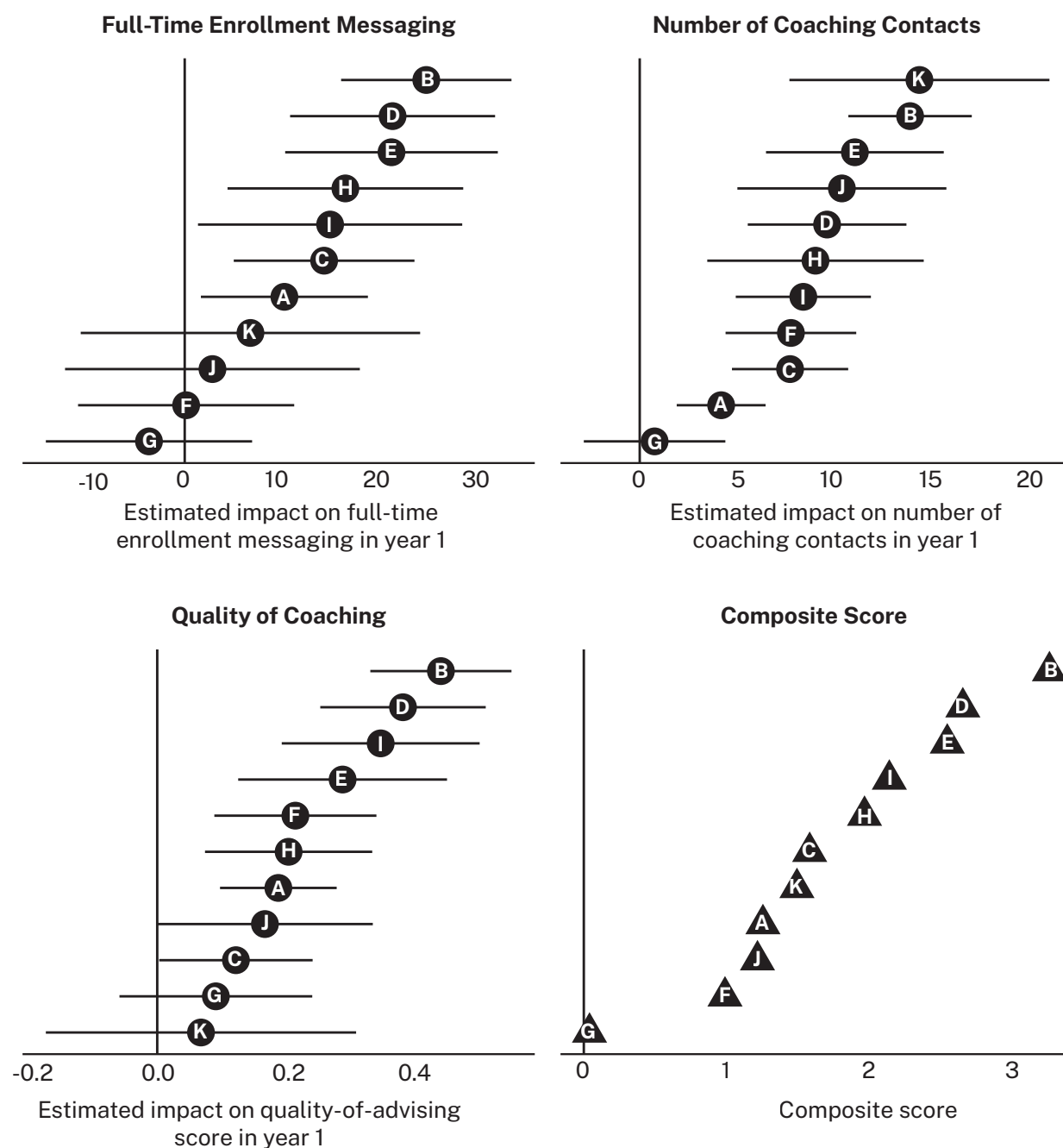
To examine the extent to which a larger service contrast was associated with a more positive impact, Figure 5.3 plots each college's estimated service contrast (and the composite score) against the college's estimated impact on credits earned in the first year. In each graph, the grey bubbles represent a study college, with varying sizes to represent each college's sample size. A look at the graph on coaching contacts within the first year shows that in the college with the highest impacts on credits earned (more than two credits), program students on average saw a coach or adviser 10 to 11 more times than control group students in their first year in the program. The red line over each graph illustrates the relationship between the two measures; for example, colleges that saw larger impacts on the number of advising contacts students had in the first year also saw larger effects on credits earned.

Calculations of these relationships show that there was a positive association between the effects on full-time enrollment messaging and credits earned, frequency and quality of advising, as well as the composite program implementation score, and impacts on credits earned. This suggests that colleges that had greater service contrasts along these dimensions tended to also have greater effects on credits earned. A full table with the

4. Sommo et al. (2023).

5. After looking across seven different cohorts, there was not substantial evidence of more variation in effects by cohort that would not be expected due to random chance ($p = 0.23$). However, with smaller sample sizes for each group by college and cohort creating additional challenges for investigating variation by college and cohort, this report continues to examine patterns in variation in impacts by college only.

Figure 5.2 Effects on Service Contrast by College



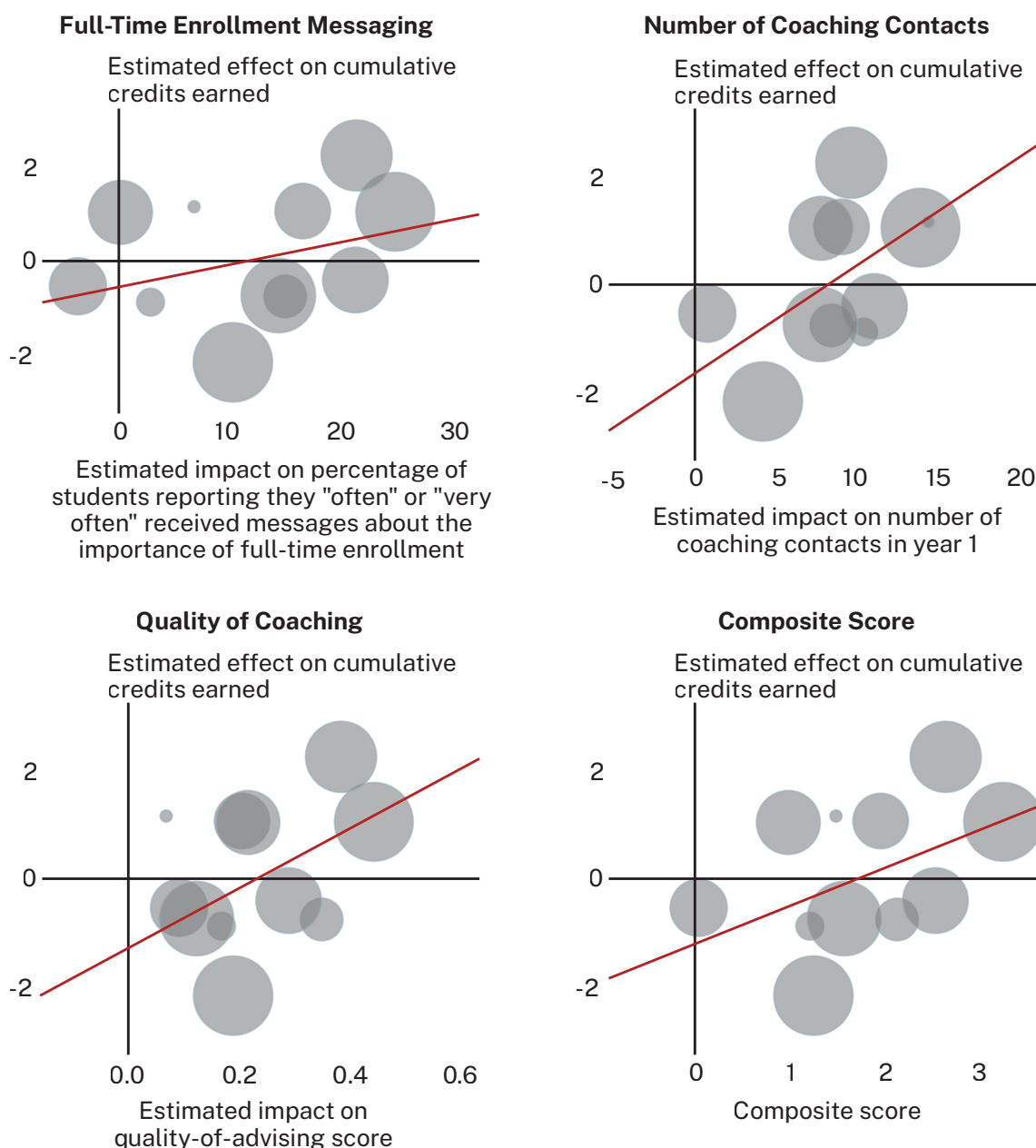
SOURCE: MDRC calculations using MDRC's one-year student survey.

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Shapes represent the estimated impact for each college and corresponding bars indicate the 90 percent confidence interval. Letters within each data point represent the college (e.g., College A).

The quality-of-advising ("coaching") scale is a weighted average of a student's response to five questions administered in the SUCCESS program's one-year student survey. Additional details can be found in Appendix B.

Figure 5.3 Estimated Impacts on Cumulative Credits Earned in Year 1, by Effects on Service Contrast



SOURCE: MDRC calculations using transcript data from the study colleges and MDRC's one-year student survey.

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation status, and whether the student intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Each bubble represents one college. Bubble size represents college sample size (ranging from 172 to 551).

The quality-of-advising ("coaching") scale is a weighted average of a student's response to five questions administered in the SUCCESS program's one-year student survey. Additional details can be found in Appendix B.

The red lines over the figure illustrate the predictive relationship between SUCCESS's average effect on each factor and SUCCESS's average effect on credits earned.

predicted relationships of each measure can be found in Appendix D. While differences in service contrast across study colleges may be able to explain some of the variation in program effects, this analysis is exploratory and does not necessarily imply that these differences caused larger impacts.

6

Cost Analysis

SUCCESS (or Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success) was designed to include the key components of comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS) programs but at a lower cost. This chapter documents the SUCCESS program's costs, covering administration costs, staffing for program management and coaching, incentives, and supplies. These costs reflect an estimate of the expected additional funding required to operate SUCCESS and can inform discussions about sustainability and scaling. This cost analysis may also serve as a useful data point for policymakers and practitioners considering the level of resources CASS models require to meaningfully affect student outcomes.

Key Findings

- SUCCESS achieved its goal of being a relatively affordable and comprehensive support program, with an estimated annual cost of \$1,250 per student for the first year of program participation.
- The average cost was consistent across nine of the 11 colleges, ranging between \$1,050 and \$1,580.
- Most of the cost (79 percent) supports personnel, with the remainder covering financial incentives (16 percent), and supplies and facilities (5 percent).
- For the early cohort of SUCCESS colleges, the average cost was \$2,730 per student for the full three-year duration of program eligibility (roughly \$910 per year).

Methodology

Cost data for fiscal years 2021 through 2024 were collected from each study college annually in July using a template developed by MDRC. Data included employee salaries and benefits, the percentage of employees' time that was spent on the SUCCESS program, financial incentives disbursed, technology fees, and other supply expenditures. When reported data did not align with expectations, the research team clarified and revised the data through email and online meetings with college staff members. Data from the col-

leges on salaries, including fringe benefits, were adjusted to national average prices and averaged with Bureau of Labor Statistics data to mitigate local labor market distortions. Colleges did not report office space or computer usage; however, the research team assumed each full-time equivalent employee required 150 square feet of office space and one computer and included the cost of these items in the cost of the program.

Total costs in each fiscal year were divided between the fall and spring semesters based on the share of enrolled SUCCESS students in each semester and then were assigned to each cohort based on that cohort's share of enrollment in each semester. These by-semester-and-cohort costs were then divided by the number of students in that cohort that were offered the program in that semester to estimate the cost of SUCCESS per student by semester and cohort.¹ Each cohort's first two semester costs were summed to estimate the cost per student in the first program year. These estimates were then weighted based on the number of SUCCESS students in each cohort and at each college to get the average costs for each college and overall.

Costs were disaggregated by cost category (personnel, financial incentives, materials, and facilities). Costs were adjusted based on the consumer price index and regional price parities, expressed in 2024 dollars and national average prices. While this cost analysis is conducted from the college perspective, potential costs to other stakeholders, such as students and state governments, are also discussed.

Originally, this study intended to conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis to estimate the cost per additional credits earned (the confirmatory outcome). However, given that the estimated effect on credits earned is near zero, a cost-effectiveness analysis was not conducted.

Main Findings: The Direct Costs of SUCCESS

SUCCESS achieved its goal of affordability with an estimated cost of \$1,250 per student in the student's first year in the program. Some of these costs are associated with the inefficiency of starting a new program at each college. When looking at costs for only the later cohorts within each college, the program cost \$1,050 per student in the student's first program year.

The average cost per student in the first program year at nine of the 11 colleges ranged between \$1,050 and \$1,580. The average cost per student was lower at one college (\$790) and higher at one college (\$2,260), largely driven by whether personnel dedicated more or less time per student to the program.

-
1. Many students stopped or dropped out over time. Thus, the cost per student reflects the cost per student who signed up for the program. This is different from (and lower than) the cost per student enrolled in the program.

The majority (79 percent) of program costs are attributed to personnel costs. Within this category, a small portion is attributed to senior leadership, with the remaining costs evenly split between program coordinators and coaches. Financial incentives account for approximately 16 percent of program costs, with the remaining 5 percent attributed to supplies and facilities.

Exploratory Findings: Indirect Costs and Revenue

COSTS DUE TO INCREASED COURSE TAKING: Because the program increased credits attempted by an estimated 0.5 credits, SUCCESS likely created some small induced instructional and operating costs for colleges, as well as additional tuition revenue and state funding to offset these costs. Considering community colleges typically charge approximately \$150 per credit, states provide approximately \$100 per credit, and colleges likely have marginal instructional and operating costs under \$250 per credit, these induced costs and revenues were likely less than \$150 and largely offsetting from the college perspective.

SUBSTITUTION OF ADVISING SERVICES: On the other hand, SUCCESS may have caused students to participate in traditional academic advising, outside of their SUCCESS advising/coaching, to a lesser extent than control group students, offsetting some of the costs of the program. A rough estimate of the potential savings is provided by the survey. Control group students reported meeting with an adviser 8.25 times on average in the student's first year, with meetings typically lasting 16 to 30 minutes (approximately four hours total per student). If SUCCESS caused students to reduce their traditional (non-SUCCESS) adviser visits by half and each visit required 30 minutes of adviser time, SUCCESS would have reduced adviser time by two hours per student. At an average hourly wage (with fringe benefits) of \$42, this would have resulted in savings of approximately \$80 per student in the first year.

THE OPPORTUNITY COST OF TIME: The final cost to consider, which is not included in the main cost analysis, is the opportunity costs to students for their time participating in the program. One assumption might be an opportunity cost of \$15 per hour for students, reflecting their ability to earn additional wages or engage in other valued activities instead of participating in the program. Program group students reported meeting with a coach or adviser 8.25 more times than control group students on average, with meetings typically lasting 16 to 30 minutes. Assuming 30 minutes of student time per visit, SUCCESS caused students to spend approximately four additional hours meeting with coaches or advisers in their first year. Program group students also attempted half a credit more than control group students, translating into an additional 7.5 hours of seat time. Assuming an equivalent amount of time for outside study, SUCCESS caused students to spend an additional 15 hours in their first year on coursework, totaling approximately 19 hours that could have been used differently in the absence of the program. Combined with an opportunity cost of \$15 per hour, this results in a total cost of approximately \$285 per student in their first year, representing foregone wages and other valued activities. These costs, however, are

mostly offset from the student perspective by the approximately \$200 of financial incentives students receive in their first program year on average.

Longer-Term Costs

For the early cohort of SUCCESS colleges, the average cost is estimated at \$2,730 per student for the full three-year duration of program eligibility. This average cost likely would have been lower if the study colleges had sustained, or even grown, the programs rather than phasing them out. As a result, this average cost per student includes both an inefficient start-up and phase-out period, and the colleges never achieved a steady program state for a three-year period of time.

At six of the seven colleges, the average cost per student was within \$800 of the overall average, ranging from \$1,960 to \$3,420 per student for the three-year duration of program eligibility. The program was more expensive at one college (\$4,860).

Through the end of three years, program students attempted 1.4 more credits than control group students. As described in the one-year cost findings above, these additional credits create additional instructional and operating costs for colleges, as well as additional tuition revenue and state funding. These additional costs and revenues at the three-year mark are likely less than \$400 per student and largely offsetting from the colleges' perspective.

The cost analysis documented that SUCCESS was, in fact, less expensive for colleges to implement than the more intensive CASS models. For example, a replication of the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) was conducted in three community colleges in Ohio.² The evaluation of the replication included a cost analysis, which estimated a cost of about \$7,300 (in 2024 dollars using national average prices) per student over the three years of program operation, more than twice the estimated cost of SUCCESS.³

2. Miller, Headlam, Manno, and Cullinan (2020).

3. Slaughter, Hill, Weiss, and Cullinan (2022).

7

Conclusion

SUCCESS (or Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success) was designed to be like evidence-based comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS) models, with the goal of being less expensive and thus a more sustainable model while still achieving large positive effects. The SUCCESS model included frequent meetings with coaches, full-time enrollment requirements, incentives for participation, and data systems—key features of other successful programs. The goal was to change the student experience and lead to sustained full-time enrollment and more progress toward a degree.

Among CASS models, SUCCESS was relatively inexpensive, at about \$1,000 per student per year. However, the impact findings through Year 1 for the full group of colleges show that, on average, although the program led to modest increases in students' full-time enrollment, it did not increase credits attempted or credits earned. Findings over three years for an early cohort of students, which represent the majority of the full sample, show a few positive, but small effects on full-time enrollment and, on average, no effects on credits earned or degree receipt, the primary outcomes of this evaluation.

SUCCESS was not implemented as originally designed, in part due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. SUCCESS coaching, for example, was frequent and holistic, as intended, but most colleges provided coaching virtually at the start of the study, rather than in person as the original model called for. Also, just under half of the colleges consistently required students to enroll full time and some did not tie the monthly financial incentives to full-time enrollment, as intended. The pandemic resulted in major challenges for the colleges, which stopped in-person services, and students, who struggled with the demands of all virtual classes and faced hardships outside of school. In the later years of operation, the SUCCESS programs experienced substantial staff member turnover and students' participation in coaching and receipt of incentives decreased.

Despite the challenges in implementation, students in the program group had a different college experience, on average, compared with students in the control group. Most noticeably, students in the program group had more frequent interactions with coaches, felt more supported at college, and were more likely to report that they had a staff member at the college they could turn to for advice. These are many of the mechanisms that were expected to translate to improved academic progress and completion—but in this instance that did not come to fruition.

Because there was variation in how fully the colleges implemented program components, the study was able to look at whether stronger implementation was associated with larger impacts. In fact, impacts on credits earned were larger in colleges that created a stronger service contrast for their students in individual model components, with respect to full-time enrollment messaging, number of coaching visits, and the quality of coaching services. These findings are consistent with other research on the effectiveness of these components and suggest that a model like SUCCESS can work when fully implemented. That said, the evidence from this evaluation suggests that even at colleges where SUCCESS may have led to academic progress, gains were modest.

Putting the Findings in Context

To understand the lack of impacts on student progress, it may be helpful to compare SUCCESS impacts on intermediate outcomes with effects from other CASS programs. In terms of advising visits, for example, SUCCESS had notable but relatively smaller impacts. The program led students to meet with their advisers eight times more than they would have otherwise during their first year. In contrast, in the evaluation of the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP), the program led to an increase of 32 advising visits in Year 1.¹ In the Ohio Replication of ASAP (known as ASAP Ohio), the impact was about 19 visits.²

Full-time enrollment is a key component of these models. Both CUNY ASAP and ASAP Ohio led to large increases in the percentage of students reporting that they often or very often heard about the importance of enrolling full time or graduating in three years — increases of about 30 percentage points.³ SUCCESS, in contrast, had a much smaller effect on this messaging. It led to an increase of 13 percentage points in the number of students often or very often hearing the message about the importance of full-time enrollment.

Messaging can be important, but the goal is for students to enroll full time. The requirements and messaging also led to much larger impacts on full-time enrollment in the two evaluations of ASAP named above, as well as the ASAP replication at the State University of New York at Westchester Community College, referred to as Viking ROADS.⁴ In the first year, impacts on full-time enrollment for these three programs ranged from 9 to 20 percentage points. Detroit Promise Path, although not enforcing full-time enrollment, led to increases in full-time enrollment of 6 to 11 percentage points.⁵ SUCCESS, in

1. Scrivener et al. (2015).

2. Miller, Headlam, Manno, and Cullinan (2020). The evaluations of CUNY ASAP and ASAP Ohio included a student survey like the instrument used in the SUCCESS evaluation, allowing for comparisons across studies on these measures. Similar information was either not collected or is not available from other CASS evaluations.

3. Scrivener et al. (2015); Miller, Headlam, Manno, and Cullinan (2020).

4. Dai, Warner, and Sommo (2025).

5. Ratledge et al. (2021).

contrast, increased full-time enrollment by about 3 percentage points in each of the first two semesters.

The comparison programs also affected students' time enrolled through other mechanisms. All four increased overall enrollment (either full-time or part-time), CUNY ASAP led to larger increases in intercession (that is, summer or winter) enrollment, and Detroit Promise Path led to a large increase in summer enrollment. SUCCESS did not increase overall enrollment rates.

Lessons

The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the effectiveness of SUCCESS is hard to assess but its influence on program implementation and context was substantial. The pandemic wreaked havoc on colleges as they attempted to switch methods of instruction and support struggling students. It affected program implementation in very direct ways, such as leading to a move from in-person to virtual coaching. It also led some colleges to drop the full-time enrollment requirement, with the argument that many of their students found it too challenging to take a full-time, virtual course load. The pandemic also affected students outside of college, as they faced uncertainty related to employment, health, childcare, internet access, and a variety of other issues. Thus, the pandemic likely affected how students were able to respond to the program, as it was implemented or even if it had been implemented fully.

One CASS program (Viking ROADS) was implemented and tested during the pandemic and led to sizable impacts on students' credits earned and degree receipt. With the exception that much of the coaching was virtual rather than in person, the model was fully implemented, including the requirement that students enroll full time. However, that program was running for a full year before the pandemic, which may have helped it better weather the disruption.

The full-time enrollment requirement may be critical to generating impacts. The importance of full-time enrollment is highlighted when comparing SUCCESS with the other models. In the ASAP models, the full-time enrollment requirement was strictly enforced and, consequently, led to very large increases in full-time enrollment. Increased full-time enrollment leads automatically to more credits earned, as long as some of those additional credits are passed. Detroit Promise Path staff members also chose not to enforce a full-time requirement for many of the same reasons as several of the SUCCESS colleges, based on the argument that requiring full-time enrollment would put the program out of reach for many of the highest-need students who might benefit the most. That program led to a modest increase in full-time enrollment, although it also increased summer enrollment.

Students may need greater incentives and supports. SUCCESS was less expensive than other CASS models in part because it did not offer tuition assistance, although many students likely did not require it, and because its financial incentives for participation were

somewhat less generous. CUNY ASAP, for example, offered students free textbooks and a monthly metro pass, which amounted to much more than \$50 per month. Students may have been more likely to meet the full-time enrollment and other program requirements with larger incentives. In addition, staff members may have been more willing to enforce a full-time enrollment requirement if students received more money for meeting it. Similarly, many of the CASS models include other supports, such as tutoring and priority registration, which were not offered by SUCCESS. Thus, a lower cost version of CASS may not be enough to generate sizable impacts on student progress.

Most colleges did not continue SUCCESS beyond the study period, despite their initial commitment to the program. Nonetheless, staff members at the colleges report continuing to think about how to advance comprehensive student services, given extensive evidence suggesting that these program components can improve students' academic progress. The findings from this evaluation, although not positive, add to that evidence base, albeit from a less expensive model that was also implemented during the pandemic. Further research is needed to learn how to successfully bring these models to scale.

Appendix A

SUCCESS Sample Characteristics

Appendix Table A.1 Selected SUCCESS Sample Characteristics, by Research Group

CHARACTERISTIC (%)	FULL SAMPLE	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	DIFFERENCE	P-VALUE
Gender					
Male	32.4	32.2	32.5	-0.3	0.832
Female	66.8	66.9	66.7	0.3	0.848
Nonbinary	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.0	0.927
Race/ethnicity					
Hispanic/Latino	30.8	30.7	31.0	-0.3	0.798
Black or African American	27.5	27.9	26.9	1.0	0.422
White	31.9	31.7	32.1	-0.4	0.763
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.0	0.8	1.4	-0.6 **	0.049
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.9	4.0	3.6	0.4	0.554
Multiracial	4.7	4.7	4.7	0.0	0.950
Another race/ethnicity not listed above	0.2	0.2	0.3	-0.1	0.313
Age					
19 or younger	50.4	51.0	49.7	1.2	0.378
20 to 23	18.3	18.4	18.1	0.3	0.824
24 or older	31.3	30.6	32.1	-1.5	0.268
Parents' highest level of education					
Not a high school graduate	12.7	13.0	12.3	0.7	0.482
High school diploma/GED	31.7	32.1	31.1	1.1	0.474
Some college	15.2	15.1	15.2	-0.2	0.896
College degree	30.8	29.7	32.3	-2.6 *	0.078
Do not know	9.7	10.1	9.2	1.0	0.299
Employment					
Employed	56.6	56.8	56.2	0.7	0.671
Not employed	43.4	43.2	43.8	-0.7	0.671
Living situation					
With parents	58.4	58.3	58.5	-0.2	0.876
Not with parents	41.7	41.7	41.5	0.2	0.876
Parental status					
Parent	23.3	23.8	22.7	1.1	0.388
Not a parent	76.7	76.2	77.3	-1.1	0.388

(continued)

Appendix Table A.1 (continued)

CHARACTERISTIC (%)	FULL SAMPLE	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	DIFFERENCE	P-VALUE
Planned enrollment intensity					
Full-time	94.9	94.8	95.1	-0.3	0.597
Part-time	5.1	5.2	4.9	0.3	0.597
Highest degree planning to attain					
Certificate	1.8	2.0	1.6	0.4	0.393
Associate's degree	19.0	19.0	19.0	0.0	0.988
Bachelor's degree	47.7	47.3	48.2	-0.9	0.590
Master's degree	21.8	21.8	22.0	-0.2	0.877
Professional or doctorate	9.6	9.9	9.2	0.7	0.468
Self-reported advising need					
High	13.9	13.7	14.3	-0.6	0.560
Neutral	51.4	52.4	50.2	2.2	0.166
Low	34.6	34.0	35.5	-1.6	0.295
Sample (total = 4,153)		2,410	1,743		

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

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

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

An omnibus test was conducted to test for differences in sample characteristics at baseline. The differences were statistically significant with a p-value of 0.077.

Appendix Table A.2 Selected SUCCESS Sample Characteristics, by College

CHARACTERISTIC (%)	COLLEGE										
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
Race/ethnicity											
Hispanic/Latino	93	40	5	66	4	13	11	5	17	15	10
Black or African American	4	51	35	15	8	21	73	7	40	48	9
White	0	4	50	13	78	59	1	59	26	24	73
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	10	0	0	1
Asian or Pacific Islander	1	3	4	4	5	1	7	3	10	8	1
Multiracial	1	2	5	1	4	6	9	16	7	4	6
Another race/ethnicity not listed above	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age											
19 or younger	96	44	32	60	34	43	17	83	62	22	27
20 to 23	2	21	22	22	23	24	21	11	21	23	16
24 or older	2	35	46	18	43	33	62	5	17	55	57
Gender											
Male	27	43	23	47	26	30	20	36	35	44	23
Female	73	57	76	53	74	69	80	61	63	55	76
Nonbinary	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	2	2	1
Nontraditional ^a	10	45	63	33	61	54	75	21	32	68	75
Employed	28	50	71	48	56	65	70	65	71	72	52
Parent	2	25	39	12	21	28	47	4	11	46	49
Sample size	551	544	498	464	412	397	342	330	250	193	172

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

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

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values.

Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aNontraditional students are defined as those who were 25 or older, worked 35 or more hours per week, had children, or received a GED (instead of a high school diploma). Students are listed as nontraditional if they fit any of these characteristics.

Appendix B

Survey Response Bias Analysis and Survey Scales

The student survey asked study participants a variety of questions, including questions about their participation in and experience with student services, academic experiences, work experiences, and financial situation. This survey was fielded to all of the 4,153 sample members in all seven cohorts and took place approximately one year after random assignment, between September and January of the following year for students randomly assigned in the fall semester (cohorts 1, 3, 5, and 7) and between March and June of the following year for students entering in the spring semester (cohorts 2, 4, and 6). A total of 2,781 responses were collected, leading to an overall response rate of 67 percent with a program-control group differential response rate of 4.8 percentage points.

Comparison of Program and Control Group Respondent Baseline Characteristics

Appendix Table B.1 compares baseline characteristics for respondents in the program and control groups to determine whether the respondents' characteristics were similar across both research groups. This comparison provides a way to assess whether differences between the research groups' survey responses can be interpreted as being the result of the SUCCESS programs. As shown in the table, with the exception of students identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, survey respondents in the program and control groups report similar characteristics.

Comparison of Respondent and Nonrespondent Baseline Characteristics

Appendix Table B.2 presents baseline characteristics for the full study sample, survey respondents, and survey nonrespondents. Overall survey respondents look fairly similar to the full sample, although there are a few differences between respondents and nonrespondents. Respondents and nonrespondents differed with regard to race, age, and gender. On average, survey respondents were more likely to be female, less likely to be within the age range of 20 to 23 years old, and more likely to identify as Asian or Pacific Islander than survey nonrespondents. These differences suggest some caution when generalizing findings from the survey to the full study sample.

Comparison of Academic Impacts for the Respondent and Full Samples

Another way to assess generalizability is to compare impacts for survey respondents and the full sample using administrative data. Appendix Table B.3 presents impacts on credits earned for both samples. On average, survey respondents earned about 2.5 credits more than the full study sample, suggesting that they were more academically successful, were more supported, or both. However, the impact on credits earned is very similar for both samples, suggesting that the impacts presented using survey data can be generalized to the full sample.

Appendix Table B.1 Selected SUCCESS Sample Characteristics of Survey Respondents, by Research Group

CHARACTERISTIC (%)	NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS	ALL SURVEY RESPONSES	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	P-VALUE
Race/ethnicity					
Hispanic/Latino	2,754	31.4	31.4	31.1	0.818
Black or African American	2,754	28.3	28.2	28.2	0.990
White	2,754	30.3	30.2	30.5	0.821
American Indian/Alaska Native	2,754	1.0	0.7	1.5 *	0.067
Asian or Pacific Islander	2,754	4.3	4.7	3.6	0.156
Multiracial	2,754	4.6	4.6	4.7	0.879
Another race/ethnicity not listed above	2,754	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.436
Age					
19 or younger	2,781	50.8	51.4	49.7	0.318
20 to 23	2,781	17.4	17.1	17.7	0.702
24 or older	2,781	32.1	31.6	32.7	0.499
Gender					
Male	2,763	29.4	29.2	29.6	0.819
Female	2,763	70.0	70.0	69.5	0.775
Nonbinary	2,763	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.798
Nontraditional ^a	2,653	45.6	44.9	46.2	0.467
Employed	2,715	56.3	56.2	55.9	0.872
Parent	2,724	23.7	23.8	23.3	0.791
Sample (total = 2,781)		2,781	1,662	1,119	

SOURCES: MDRC's one-year student survey and baseline information form collected during study intake.

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

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values

Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aNontraditional students are defined as those who were 25 or older, worked 35 or more hours per week, had children, or received a GED (instead of a high school diploma). Students are listed as nontraditional if they fit any of these characteristics.

Appendix Table B.2 Selected SUCCESS Sample Characteristics, by Survey Response

CHARACTERISTIC (%)	NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS	FULL SAMPLE	SURVEY RESPONDENTS	SURVEY NON-RESPONDENTS	P-VALUE
Race/ethnicity					
Hispanic/Latino	4,109	30.8	31.0	30.4	0.597
Black or African American	4,109	27.5	27.1	28.3	0.378
White	4,109	31.9	31.7	32.1	0.766
American Indian/Alaska Nat.	4,109	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.850
Asian or Pacific Islander	4,109	3.9	4.2	3.1 *	0.057
Multiracial	4,109	4.7	4.6	5.1	0.488
Another race/ethnicity not listed above	4,109	0.2	0.3	0.1 *	0.098
Age					
19 or younger	4,153	50.4	50.7	50.0	0.622
20 to 23	4,153	18.3	17.6	19.8 *	0.091
24 or older	4,153	31.3	31.8	30.3	0.299
Gender					
Male	4,121	32.4	30.3	36.7 ***	0.000
Female	4,121	66.8	68.8	62.8 ***	0.000
Nonbinary	4,121	0.8	0.9	0.6	0.281
Nontraditional ^a	3,953	46.1	45.3	47.8	0.112
Employed	4,044	56.6	56.1	57.4	0.427
Parent	4,046	23.3	23.2	23.5	0.781
Sample (total = 4,153)		4,153	2,781	1,372	

SOURCES: MDRC's one-year student survey and baseline information form collected during study intake.

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

Sample sizes may vary because of missing values

Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aNontraditional students are defined as those who were 25 or older, worked 35 or more hours per week, had children, or received a GED (instead of a high school diploma). Students are listed as nontraditional if they fit any of these characteristics.

Appendix Table B.3 Credits Earned in Year 1, by Survey Response

STUDY SAMPLE	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	IMPACT ESTIMATE	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE	SAMPLE SIZE
Full sample	16.32	16.24	0.08	0.37	0.834	4,153
Survey respondents	18.78	18.77	0.02	0.43	0.966	2,781

SOURCES: MDRC's one-year student survey and transcript data from the study colleges.

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college and cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Creation of the Quality-of-Advising Survey Scale

The quality-of-advising measure is based on five questions administered in the SUCCESS programs' one-year student survey. Students were asked to indicate if they strongly agreed (4), agreed (3), disagreed (2), or strongly disagreed (1) with the following statements:

1. You are satisfied in general with the academic advising/coaching you have received.
2. You have received accurate information about courses, programs, and requirements through academic advising/coaching.
3. Academic advisers/coaches kept you informed about deadlines related to institutional policies and procedures, such as drop/add periods, withdrawal deadlines, and registration periods, etc.
4. Academic advising/coaching has been available when you needed it.
5. Sufficient time has been available when you met with academic advisers/coaches.

The quality-of-advising scale is the average of a student's responses to these questions, weighing each item equally. Respondents had the option to skip or refuse any of the five questions, so a small number of students responded to some, but not all five questions. If a student answered one or two questions in the scale, the quality-of-advising measure was not calculated for that student.

Creation of the Integration and Sense-of-Belonging Scale

The integration and sense-of-belonging measure is derived from nine questions asked in the MDRC student survey. Students were asked to indicate if they strongly agree; agree; disagree; or strongly disagree with the following:

1. College is an unfriendly place.
2. I do not feel that I fit in or belong in college.
3. The instructors and staff understand who I am and where I am coming from.
4. It is difficult to make good friends with other students.
5. The other students do not understand who I am and where I am coming from.
6. College has the feeling of a community, where many people share the same goals and interests.
7. Many people at college know me by name.
8. I do not feel I am part of college life.
9. I feel that I matter to the college instructors, staff, and other students.

Each question was adjusted to a scale of 1 to 4, where a 4 indicates a greater sense of belonging. Thus, a response of 'strongly agree' would have a value of 1 for questions 1, 2, 4, 5, and 8, but the same response would have a value of 4 for questions 3, 6, 7, and 9. The sense-of-belonging scale is the unweighted average of a student's scaled responses to all nine questions. Respondents had the option to skip or refuse any question in the scale; a small number of students responded to some but not all of the nine questions in the scale. If the student answered five or fewer questions in the scale, the scale was not calculated. For students who answered six or more questions in the scale, the scale was calculated as the average of that student's responses to the questions that were answered.

Appendix C

Estimated Effects on Academic Outcomes

Appendix Table C.1 Estimated Effects on Academic Outcomes (What Works Clearinghouse Table)

OUTCOME	INTERVENTION CONDITION			CONTROL CONDITION			EFFECT ESTIMATE	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE
	ANALYTIC SAMPLE	ADJUSTED MEAN	UNADJUSTED STANDARD DEVIATION	ANALYTIC SAMPLE	ADJUSTED MEAN	UNADJUSTED STANDARD DEVIATION			
Semester 1									
Enrolled (%)	2,410	90.94	29.10	1,743	90.47	29.04	0.47	0.91	0.6078
Enrolled full time (%)	2,410	67.93	47.28	1,743	64.61	47.23	3.32 **	1.31	0.0115
Credits attempted	2,410	11.61	5.44	1,743	11.30	5.31	0.31 **	0.15	0.0432
Credits earned	2,410	8.57	6.21	1,743	8.47	6.07	0.11	0.18	0.5622
Semester 2									
Enrolled (%)	2,410	77.19	42.40	1,743	75.11	43.02	2.08	1.33	0.1195
Enrolled full time (%)	2,410	53.52	49.96	1,743	50.99	49.95	2.53 *	1.50	0.0926
Credits attempted	2,410	21.87	11.28	1,743	21.34	11.36	0.53	0.33	0.1086
Credits earned	2,410	16.32	12.19	1,743	16.24	12.26	0.08	0.37	0.8338
Sample (total = 4,153)									

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using transcript data from the study colleges and data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

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

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Credits earned in spring and summer semesters are combined.

Full-time enrollment is defined as attempting 12 or more credits and is based on data from the college of random assignment only.

Appendix Table C.2 Estimated Effects on Academic Outcomes, Semesters 1 to 6, Cohorts 1 to 3 (What Works Clearinghouse Table)

OUTCOME	INTERVENTION CONDITION			CONTROL CONDITION			EFFECT ESTIMATE	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE
	ANALYTIC SAMPLE	ADJUSTED MEAN	UNADJUSTED STANDARD DEVIATION	ANALYTIC SAMPLE	ADJUSTED MEAN	UNADJUSTED STANDARD DEVIATION			
Enrollment (%)									
Enrolled									
Semester 1	1,716	90.63	29.25	1,299	89.37	30.53	1.26	1.11	0.2550
Semester 2	1,716	75.74	43.31	1,299	74.48	43.19	1.25	1.58	0.4282
Semester 3	1,716	62.46	48.66	1,299	60.37	48.64	2.08	1.78	0.2417
Semester 4	1,716	55.47	49.79	1,299	54.23	49.71	1.24	1.80	0.4906
Semester 5	1,716	48.18	49.95	1,299	44.87	49.85	3.31 *	1.81	0.0681
Semester 6	1,716	43.63	49.51	1,299	43.71	49.73	-0.08	1.81	0.9646
Enrolled full time									
Semester 1	1,716	66.88	47.55	1,299	62.78	47.94	4.10 **	1.62	0.0114
Semester 2	1,716	52.85	49.99	1,299	50.23	49.99	2.62	1.77	0.1384
Semester 3	1,716	34.36	47.13	1,299	31.72	47.05	2.64	1.69	0.1175
Semester 4	1,716	28.72	44.81	1,299	26.53	44.78	2.20	1.60	0.1699
Semester 5	1,716	13.08	33.64	1,299	10.71	31.50	2.36 **	1.18	0.0453
Semester 6	1,716	9.91	29.65	1,299	9.89	30.33	0.02	1.11	0.9891
Credit attainment									
Cumulative credits attempted									
Semester 1	1,716	11.51	5.38	1,299	11.07	5.32	0.44 **	0.18	0.0158
Semester 2	1,716	21.74	11.37	1,299	21.15	11.56	0.59	0.39	0.1315
Semester 3	1,716	28.19	16.01	1,299	27.36	16.21	0.83	0.55	0.1324
Semester 4	1,716	34.15	21.03	1,299	33.07	21.51	1.08	0.73	0.1355
Semester 5	1,716	37.29	23.64	1,299	35.92	24.01	1.37 *	0.82	0.0934
Semester 6	1,716	39.83	26.08	1,299	38.49	26.58	1.34	0.91	0.1396

(continued)

Appendix Table C.2 (continued)

OUTCOME	INTERVENTION CONDITION			CONTROL CONDITION			EFFECT ESTIMATE	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE
	ANALYTIC SAMPLE	ADJUSTED MEAN	UNADJUSTED STANDARD DEVIATION	ANALYTIC SAMPLE	ADJUSTED MEAN	UNADJUSTED STANDARD DEVIATION			
Cumulative credits earned									
Semester 1	1,716	8.29	6.14	1,299	8.19	6.02	0.11	0.22	0.6177
Semester 2	1,716	15.84	12.16	1,299	15.88	12.26	-0.04	0.43	0.9324
Semester 3	1,716	20.67	16.44	1,299	20.74	16.60	-0.07	0.59	0.9055
Semester 4	1,716	25.37	20.89	1,299	25.27	21.22	0.10	0.74	0.8920
Semester 5	1,716	27.68	22.88	1,299	27.35	23.05	0.33	0.81	0.6873
Semester 6	1,716	29.58	24.53	1,299	29.33	24.88	0.26	0.87	0.7698
Degree/transfer (%)									
Ever earned any credential from any college									
Semester 1	1,716	2.13	14.91	1,299	1.82	12.91	0.31	0.50	0.5392
Semester 2	1,716	7.02	26.09	1,299	7.70	26.17	-0.68	0.92	0.4636
Semester 3	1,716	12.14	33.11	1,299	11.75	31.60	0.39	1.15	0.7337
Semester 4	1,716	21.72	41.18	1,299	23.44	42.45	-1.71	1.51	0.2585
Semester 5	1,716	27.34	44.52	1,299	27.34	44.70	0.00	1.62	0.9995
Semester 6	1,716	33.76	47.22	1,299	33.38	47.29	0.38	1.72	0.8264
Enrolled in a four-year college									
Semester 1	1,716	1.12	10.74	1,299	1.11	10.33	0.01	0.38	0.9722
Semester 2	1,716	2.71	16.66	1,299	2.89	16.42	-0.18	0.60	0.7658
Semester 3	1,716	5.54	23.21	1,299	5.42	22.74	0.12	0.83	0.8896
Semester 4	1,716	7.52	26.47	1,299	7.64	26.67	-0.11	0.97	0.9074
Semester 5	1,716	14.45	34.75	1,299	15.28	36.40	-0.83	1.31	0.5283
Semester 6	1,716	18.29	38.29	1,299	18.59	39.26	-0.29	1.43	0.8388

(continued)

Appendix Table C.2 (continued)

OUTCOME	INTERVENTION CONDITION			CONTROL CONDITION			EFFECT ESTIMATE	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE
	ANALYTIC SAMPLE	ADJUSTED MEAN	UNADJUSTED STANDARD DEVIATION	ANALYTIC SAMPLE	ADJUSTED MEAN	UNADJUSTED STANDARD DEVIATION			
Highest degree earned after six semesters									
Certificate	1,716	5.74	23.97	1,299	6.32	23.48	-0.58	0.86	0.5050
Associate's degree	1,716	26.17	43.65	1,299	25.76	44.14	0.41	1.61	0.8004
Bachelor's degree or higher	1,716	1.41	11.75	1,299	1.02	10.33	0.39	0.40	0.3290
Sample size (total = 3,015)									

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using transcript/degree data from the study colleges and data from the National Student Clearinghouse.

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

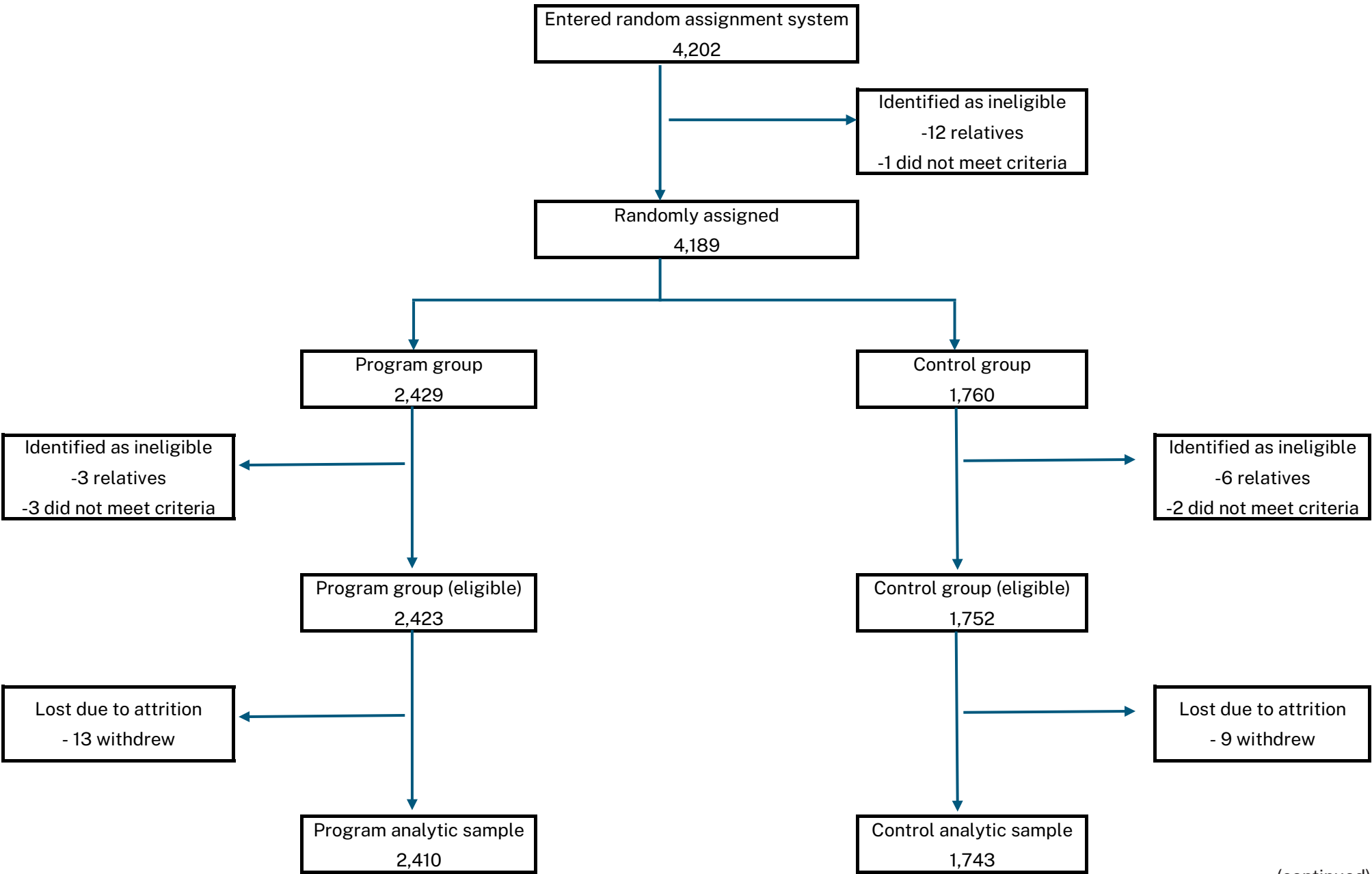
Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Credits earned in spring and summer semesters are combined.

Full-time enrollment is defined as attempting 12 or more credits and is based on data from the college of random assignment only.

Appendix Figure C.1 CONSORT Diagram



(continued)

Appendix Figure C.1 (continued)

SOURCES: MDRC random assignment extracts and decision logs.

NOTES: The CONSORT diagram describes the flow of students from recruitment through the study. Students may be removed from the sample due to not meeting program eligibility criteria, having a close relative already enrolled in the study, or by requesting to withdraw.

Appendix D

Service Contrast and Predictive Relationships on Estimated Impacts

Appendix Table D.1 Measures of Service Contrast, by Traditional Student Status

SUBGROUP	PROGRAM GROUP MEAN	PROGRAM GROUP SIZE	CONTROL GROUP MEAN	CONTROL GROUP SIZE	DIFFERENCE IN MEANS	STANDARD ERROR	P-VALUE	DIFFERENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE
Often or very often heard college faculty or staff members speak about the importance of enrolling in school full time (%)								
Nontraditional ^a	47.0	714	35.5	468	11.6	2.9	0.000***	
Traditional	53.7	840	40.1	578	13.6	2.7	0.000***	
Average number of times a student spoke with a coach ^b								
Nontraditional	17.14	707	7.20	468	9.94	0.97	0.000***	††
Traditional	15.80	827	9.35	582	6.45	0.98	0.000***	††
Quality-of-advising scale (avg.) ^c								
Nontraditional	3.53	623	3.29	369	0.24	0.04	0.000***	
Traditional	3.55	732	3.30	459	0.25	0.03	0.000***	
Survey respondents sample size (total=2,781)								
		1,662		1,119				

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using survey data.

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

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment. Subgroup characteristics were excluded as covariates in individual subgroup analyses.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Differential significance levels are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^aNontraditional students are defined as those who were 25 or older, worked 35 or more hours per week, had children, or received a GED (instead of a high school diploma). Students are listed as nontraditional if they fit any of these characteristics.

^bThe student survey asked students about their experiences with a coach or adviser. For brevity, tables only use the term “coach.”

^cThe quality-of-advising scale is a weighted average of a student’s response to five questions administered in the SUCCESS program’s one-year student survey. Additional details can be found in Appendix B.

Table D.2 Measures of Service Contrast, by College

COLLEGE	FULL TIME MESSAGING (%)			NUMBER OF COACHING CONTACTS			QUALITY OF COACHING		
	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	DIFFERENCE	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	DIFFERENCE	PROGRAM GROUP	CONTROL GROUP	DIFFERENCE
College A	52.3	42.2	10.1	12.97	8.52	4.45	3.49	3.30	0.19
College B	66.0	41.7	24.3	19.11	5.19	13.92	3.60	3.16	0.44
College C	45.4	32.3	13.1	15.51	7.14	8.37	3.54	3.39	0.14
College D	60.8	39.8	21.0	17.95	7.42	10.53	3.61	3.21	0.39
College E	51.2	30.3	20.9	20.67	10.50	10.17	3.55	3.26	0.28
College F	43.1	41.5	1.5	16.41	10.33	6.08	3.57	3.38	0.19
College G	31.3	39.5	-8.1	10.59	9.60	0.99	3.25	3.15	0.10
College H	54.5	38.9	15.6	20.08	10.79	9.29	3.56	3.37	0.19
College I	47.9	33.3	14.7	16.13	7.18	8.96	3.69	3.27	0.41
College J	35.0	33.8	1.2	15.83	5.12	10.70	3.61	3.42	0.19
College K	49.3	42.6	6.6	20.23	6.89	13.34	3.40	3.40	0.00

SOURCE: MDRC's one-year student survey.

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

Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation student status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

The quality-of-advising ("coaching") scale is a weighted average of a student's response to five questions administered in the SUCCESS program's one-year student survey. Additional details can be found in Appendix B.

Appendix Table D.3 Predictive Relationships of Estimated Impacts on Credits Earned in Year 1

SERVICE CONTRAST MEASURES	ESTIMATED PREDICTIVE RELATIONSHIP	P-VALUE
Often or very often heard college faculty or staff members speak about the importance of enrolling in school full time (%)	0.05	0.233
Average number of times a student spoke with a coach ^a	0.21 **	0.042
Quality-of-advising scale (avg.) ^b	5.58 *	0.078
Composite score ^c	0.71 *	0.084

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using transcript data from the study colleges and MDRC's one-year student survey.

NOTES: Estimates are adjusted by college, cohort, gender, race/ethnicity, age, parental status, employment status, living situation, high school education, first-generation status, and whether the students intended to enroll full time at the time of random assignment.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThe student survey asked students about their experiences with a coach or adviser. For brevity, tables only use the term "coach."

^bThe quality-of-advising ("coaching") scale is a weighted average of a student's response to five questions administered in the SUCCESS program's one-year student survey. Additional details can be found in Appendix B.

^cThe composite score is a standardized average of the impact on hearing messages about full-time enrollment, impact on number of advising visits, and impact on quality of advising. Full-time enrollment messaging was weighted twice as heavily as quality and quantity of advising.

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ABOUT MDRC

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.

MDRC works in almost every state and all the nation's largest cities, with offices in New York City; Oakland, California; and Washington, DC.