Supporting Postsecondary Student Success

A TACTICAL GUIDEBOOK February 2016

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Strong support systems are necessary to help students complete their postsecondary programs, and these supports must come from both inside and outside the classroom. As communities work together to ensure that all students succeed in college, they must prioritize creating a completion culture with a sense of shared responsibility among different community stakeholders and they must target supports to underserved student populations to eliminate equity gaps in student retention and success.

Academic supports, such as advising and tutoring, can help students remediate needs and ensure that they will succeed in subsequent coursework instead of stopping out. **Career supports**, such as career counseling, mentoring, and work experience, can help articulate how coursework translates into high-quality employment after graduation. **Personal supports**, such as learning communities and comprehensive first-year experiences, can ensure that underserved students feel a sense of belonging as they adjust to an unfamiliar campus culture. And **financial supports** should not be limited to financial aid counseling but include supports for housing, transportation, legal services, and other holistic needs that realistically determine how affordable college is for low-income students.

But cross-sector partnerships that aim to improve rates of persistence and completion, particularly among underserved students, can be difficult to manage and maintain unless communities have clear guidance, objectives, and strategies. Community partners must work together to assess what kinds of programming and initiatives work best for the various student populations within their communities. In an effort to support community-based collaborations on postsecondary student success—education, business, policy, and nonprofit and community organizations—the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) has developed this tactical guidebook with support from Lumina Foundation. The guidebook explains how some communities within the Community Partnership for Attainment (CPA) network use cross-sector partnerships effectively to improve student outcomes.

We hope you will use this guidebook to learn more about different practices and tools communities are using to improve academic system alignment and support college readiness for all students, and to learn how you can adopt these practices and tools in your own communities. Our guidebook's opening **infographic** outlines different types of supports that community actors can provide to students to help them along their path to completion. Each subsequent chapter takes a deep dive into these distinct academic and nonacademic supports and includes **interviews*** with community leaders about their community partnership strategies and practices; **tactical tools** (such as **online coaching platforms**, **sample strategic plans**, **pathway design recommendations**, **first-year experience seminar workbooks**, and **career supports brochures**) that could help your community adopt these practices; and **additional resources** that provide more information for you to examine at your leisure. Finally, we introduce Beyond Financial Aid, a guidebook produced by Lumina Foundation that addresses college affordability and features an **institutional self-assessment** that can help campuses assess existing efforts and identify strategies to build their capacity to strengthen students' financial stability.

** Please note that all interviews are summaries of conversations and not verbatim records.*

IHEP

The Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to promoting access to and success in higher education for all students. Based in Washington, D.C., IHEP develops innovative policy- and practice-oriented research to guide policymakers and education leaders, who develop high-impact policies that will address our nation's most pressing education challenges.

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THE POSTSECONDARY STUDENT SUPPORTS MAP

BUILDING NUMBER	SERVICE PROVIDER	STUDENT SUPPORTS
1	Financial Aid Office	Financial Aid Counseling and Literacy
2	Community-Based Organizations	• Financial Aid Counseling and Literacy • Parental Engagement
3	Academic Departments	Degree Mapping Advising
4	Math and English Departments	Remedial Advising and Tutors
5	Online and Technology Services	Technology Supports
6	Writing Center	Writing Tutors
7	Math Center	Math Tutors
8	Student Affairs Office	• First Year Experience • Family Engagement
9	Academic Advising Office	• Early Warning Systems • Intrusive Advising
10	Residence Halls	First Year Experience
11	Registrar	• Flexible Scheduling • Transfer Advising

BUILDING NUMBER	SERVICE PROVIDER	STUDENT SUPPORTS
12	Testing Office	Prior Learning Assessments
13	Business Community	• Flexible Scheduling • Work Experience • Mentoring
14	Career Center	Career Counseling
15	Executive Office	Articulation Agreements
16	High Schools	Remedial Advising and Tutors
17	Diversity Office	• Learning Communities/Cohorts • First Year Experience
18	Office For Military Students	Support for Military Students
19	Counseling Center	Personal Counseling
20	Childcare Center	Childcare
21	Faculty Offices	Mentoring
22	Student Organizations	Mentoring
23	Institutional Research Offices	Early Warning Systems
24	English Language Learning Center	Language Supports

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Chapter One:

How can community partners provide academic supports that improve underserved student retention and completion rates?

Efforts to widen postsecondary participation in urban communities necessarily start well before senior year. It takes a village—or a city—pulling together to raise and sustain student aspirations for college. Robust partnerships involving colleges and universities, school districts, government, foundations, nonprofit organizations, and businesses can be important catalysts for change.

Moving the needle on postsecondary completion requires intervention at every stage of the college process. School districts, colleges, and nonprofits can partner early on to ensure students prepare for the application process and are familiar with placement tests. Nonprofit organizations can invest in providing students with coaching and support before, during, and after the college search. Students benefit when this coaching continues into college in support of a successful transition to campus life. The business community can play a part by helping students find their way to internship opportunities during college and to employment after graduation. Below are a few examples of intervention strategies that campus–community partnerships can use to support student college readiness, persistence, completion, and, ultimately, the transition into the world of work.

College Readiness Programs: *Does your community want to invest in programs and events that help prepare students for the application process, placement tests, and college-level work?* These programs can familiarize students with postsecondary options, help them apply, and reinforce the norms of a college-going culture. Local colleges and universities as well as nonprofit organizations with a focus on college access can be important partners for school districts at this stage.

Navigational Coaching: *Does your community want to provide students with one-on-one coaching and support as they navigate the college-to-career pathway?* Nonprofit organizations can partner with school districts and other community organizations to provide coaching aimed at college-bound students. Navigational coaches can partner with host institutions to connect students with resources, help them with career exploration, and help them stay on track to graduate. Employers can invest in career coaching programs that help students develop resumes, prepare for interviews, and secure interviews and job-shadowing opportunities. Nonprofits with roots in the community can often provide holistic support for students from underserved populations.

Learn While You Earn: *Does your community want to identify and develop opportunities for students to work in paid internship positions while earning college credit?* Credit-bearing internships allow students to explore a potential career path and continue progress toward graduation while earning money to support themselves. With paid internships, work doesn't distract students from focusing on their academics; rather, it can help sharpen and refine that focus.

This chapter features an **interview with the vice provost for academic support services and undergraduate studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston.** She explains how the Success Boston partnership came together in response to a low postsecondary completion rate for Boston Public Schools (BPS) graduates. This chapter also includes several resources that this partnership used to organize its work, set goals, and deploy resources. These resources include **a set of plans drawn up by the coalition and by individual campuses** to positively affect completion by BPS students and an **annotated bibliography on widening participation by underserved students**.

This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources** you can use to find more information about designing programming to promote first-year student success.

***Success Boston*, Boston, Massachusetts:** Widening College Participation Among Boston Public Schools Students

- *Dr. Joan Becker, Vice Provost for Academic Support Services and Undergraduate Studies, **University of Massachusetts Boston**; Strategy Group Member,* **Success Boston**

IHEP spoke with Dr. Joan Becker from the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB) to learn about the coalition of higher education institutions, community organizations, and foundations that built the Success Boston initiative. Becker describes how this initiative developed, outlines its four primary components, and provides evidence for the program's effectiveness in improving the completion rate for Boston Public Schools (BPS) students. The interview provides an example of synergy between higher education, government, foundation, and nonprofit partners, and describes an intervention strategy that is making significant inroads in improving outcomes for urban high school students.

Goals

IHEP: What is the *Success Boston* partnership, and how and why did it develop?

Success Boston is a citywide college completion initiative. The Boston Foundation, BPS, the City of Boston, nearly 40 colleges and universities, and several nonprofit organizations are working together to double the college completion rate for BPS students.

We have a long and deep history in Boston of collaboration between the higher education sector, the business community, and the K-12 system, beginning with the Boston Compact, which was in signed in 1982. In place for over 20 years, the Compact first took shape during the desegregation era. During that time, many local colleges stepped up to the plate to work with the K-12 system, not only to ease the transition related to desegregation, but also to help improve the outcomes for BPS students. We had formal agreements in which BPS committed to improve students' preparation, the colleges agreed to admit more BPS students and put more scholarship money on the table, and the business committee committed to hiring more BPS students. All along, our focus was on graduating more kids from high school, getting more kids enrolled in college, and getting more students hired into jobs.

In 2009, Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies released a report that said we're doing a fabulous job of getting students into college, but they're not completing. This was no surprise to me, nor to others who had been doing college access work. It's great to get students into college, but if they don't finish, what have we really done? Tom Menino—Boston's mayor at the time—cared deeply about education and wanted to do something to improve retention. He held a press conference at which the Success Boston initiative was launched, with a commitment of $5 million over five years from the Boston Foundation.

Success Boston has four components—*Getting Ready* is led by BPS and involves improving student readiness for college. A network of nonprofits led by the Boston Foundation support students through and after the college application process in the *Getting In* stage. UMB is lead on the *Getting Through* stage, in which 37 local higher education institutions committed to implementing strategies aimed at increasing the completion rates of BPS students on their campuses and have expanded campus-based supports for students. In addition, the colleges that enroll large numbers of BPS students partner with nonprofit organizations to provide students with coaches to help them thrive and graduate. The newest component is *Getting Connected*, led by the Private Industry Council (PIC), which looks at the question of employment after graduation.

IHEP: Besides the Northeastern report, did you find any other research useful in developing the *Success Boston* strategies?

We were already looking at our own retention rates as a campus around the time *Success Boston* launched. A report published by the Education Trust called *Advancing by Degrees* was very important for us at UMB. It described a framework for thinking about what we came to call "on-track indicators"—accumulating at least 30 credit hours a year, maintaining a certain grade point average, taking first-year courses in the first year, and completing math requirements early—the benchmarks that must be completed to get a degree. The report found that students who successfully complete these benchmarks when they're meant to be completed are much more likely to finish on time. We developed a whole on-track framework and launched a messaging campaign to students: "Start on Track, Stay on Track."

This also influenced development of the *Success Boston* strategies when we came to the table. Rather than only ensuring that students persisted, stakeholders focused instead on identifying the key, campus-specific benchmarks that students need to complete, and when they need to complete them.

IHEP: Has the partnership focused on specific student populations?

The initial report by Northeastern found a persistent achievement gap with regard to BPS students of color and white students. Specifically, college graduation rates for black (28.2%) and Hispanic (23.9%) BPS students are substantially lower than those for white (53.3%) and Asian (52%) BPS students. This population is a high priority for us, and through *Success Boston* we've started to move the needle. Black and Hispanic BPS students who worked with a *Success Boston* coach showed gains in one-year persistence rates of 17% to 22% over peers who didn't participate.

Given how effective the coaching intervention is, we've started to focus on the gaps and how we can make sure we're connecting all of our BPS students with a coach. Early in the initiative we were able to garner institutional funding that enabled us to hire our own navigational coach. As a result, since 2010, we have been able to provide all incoming first-time students with a coach. Approximately 50% of UMB students are transfer students, so we're developing coaching support for BPS students who start elsewhere and transfer here. Many BPS students start at community colleges and then go on to four-year institutions, and that transition can sometimes be less than successful.

At UMB, our work with *Success Boston* occurs in conjunction with several other initiatives that target specific student populations. We have the Federal TRIO Student Support Services Program and a Federal Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander Serving Institution Grant. We also have an ongoing partnership with the Dana-Farber/Harvard Cancer Center, which is working with us to provide opportunities for underrepresented minority students with an interest in biomedical careers to get involved in research projects involving cancer health disparities.

Partnership

IHEP: How did UMB work with Success Boston partners to develop its intervention strategies?

This was an area of challenge at first. We needed to find the best way for nonprofits to support, extend, and expand the work that campuses were doing to support students. If you look at the literature on retention, making connections to people on campus is crucial, particularly for low-income, first-generation students. We wanted to ensure that our nonprofit partners were "flying in formation" with us—that they were well connected to people and programs on our campus, that they understood how we were organized, and that we had an ongoing opportunity to provide guidance and insight. Further, nonprofits could have found themselves supporting students and hiring coaches to work on campuses all over the region. That didn't seem to be an efficient use of resources. Instead, we made a critical decision to concentrate these nonprofit resources at specific campuses rather than have all nonprofits working everywhere. Further, I assigned someone in our Advising Center to be a single point of contact for nonprofits working on our campus. I wanted to make it easy for us to quickly problem-solve and troubleshoot what issues needed to go where.

> "Boston is perhaps the most competitive higher education market in the world. Even though we compete with one another for students, we were able to park our self-interests at the door. Those meetings were about the success of Boston kids, and we kept our focus on how we collectively and individually could do that."

With additional funding from the Boston Foundation, I convened a committee and invited representatives from colleges and universities across greater Boston to participate. We made use of a team of consultants to help each campus develop a strategy to improve persistence to graduation specifically for BPS students. Each campus identified specific goals, new or repurposed funds to support those goals, and what more they could do with additional funding. We also held annual meetings with all of the campuses to provide updates and share best practices. Occasionally our nonprofit partners or BPS participated as well. These meetings were really useful in strengthening our partnership. Remember that Boston is perhaps the most competitive higher education market in the world. Even though we compete with one another for students, we were able to park our self-interests at the door. Those meetings were about the success of Boston kids, and we kept our focus on how we collectively and individually could do that.

IHEP: What challenges did you first encounter when developing the Success Boston partnership?

One challenge we encountered early on involved the extent to which campus-level data are publicly shared. In the run-up to the release of the Northeastern report, each campus had been given its institutional data. We understood that these data were for our own purposes and would not be made public. In its study, the Center for Labor Market Studies reported the data in the aggregate. Later on, the Center released individual college data in response to repeated queries from the *Boston Globe.* The campuses weren't trying to hide behind bad outcomes. Rather, we worried that the Globe wouldn't provide the appropriate context for the information. Further, we're enrollment driven. Publishing a story at a crucial time in the enrollment cycle can really hurt our ability to do the things we're trying to do to improve. I'm not reluctant to share data. I share data about UMB all the time. But context is important. Data are the data, but the story you tell about the data is a different matter. This continues to be a point of tension for our coalition. I think people would be more than willing to sign a data-sharing agreement if we had language in the agreement that obliged us to reach consensus as to the story we're going to tell.

Implementation

IHEP: Can you describe the four stages of the *Success Boston* initiative and how coalition partners led at each stage?

Getting Ready

As I've mentioned, BPS led the *Getting Ready* stage, but other partners played key roles in helping prepare students for the application process. The Boston Foundation funded a full-time staff position to help BPS organize and deliver college and career readiness programs. BPS also worked to help familiarize more students with the placement tests that colleges are using. UMB faculty worked with their counterparts at Bunker Hill to codevelop a course with teachers in one high school. We're in the process of rolling it out to other schools in the district. We also took advantage of a BPS-sponsored program for parents called *Parent University* to deliver presentations on *Success Boston* to BPS parents. Obviously it's critical for student success to help get parents on board as partners in this process.

As I mentioned earlier, *Success Boston* benefits from longstanding partnerships between the higher education sector, the business community, and BPS around improving outcomes, but these pre-existing partnerships can also pose a challenge. Any individual school in Boston may have multiple partners representing the business community, community-based organizations, and higher education partners, and it can be challenging to harness all that energy in service of a common agenda.

"The nonprofits provide really good navigational coaching. Their job is to teach the students how to navigate higher education—just like the old adage of teaching someone how to fish. These coaches are grounded in the community and thus have access to supports and resources that can address non-school-related problems students encounter."

Getting In

We're fortunate to have many nonprofit organizations in greater Boston that focus on college access and widening participation. They were in the lead with this stage of *Success Boston*. Several of them received funding from the Boston Foundation to provide what we've come to call *navigational coaching*. They ideally start working with students in high school—if not from the beginning, then by senior year—and continue to provide support over the summer and into the first two years of postsecondary schooling.

The nonprofits provide really good navigational coaching. Their job is to teach the students how to navigate higher education—just like the old adage of teaching someone how to fish. These coaches are grounded in the community and thus have access to supports and resources that can address non-school-related problems students encounter. For example, a student completes financial aid paperwork and is selected for verification. Dad's been laid off from his job, so his financial circumstances have changed, but neither parent speaks English. We don't always have the capacity as an institution to meaningfully intervene. That's where the nonprofits can have a significant impact and why our partnership is so important. The nonprofits have the resources, the reach, and the relationships to really make a substantive and meaningful difference in students' lives. Many of our nonprofit partners—like Freedom House or the Hyde Square Task Force—have missions focused on community development. Freedom House was founded during the civil rights movement. It has a deep, historic commitment to social justice and community development, and its work with students is grounded in that history. Partners like Freedom House are incredibly helpful because they really know our students and their families. They really are *of* the community, and that's usually really helpful.

Getting Through

The Boston Foundation made a strategic decision early on to concentrate coaching resources at the colleges and universities that enroll the largest number of BPS students: UMB; the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology; and Bunker Hill, Massachusetts Bay, and Roxbury Community Colleges. Someone on my staff manages the coaches deployed to my institution. She's very clear with them about their role. They aren't meant to be academic advisors or financial aid counselors. Their job is to ensure that students work with their advisors and that the relationship is productive. She also plans regular meetings and activities for the coaches.

Initially, some of the nonprofits really struggled to connect with students. They had the capacity to serve more students than those they were currently working with, but FERPA [the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act] prevented us from simply assigning them a caseload. After the first year, they asked us to help them find more students. Eventually we found a solution. The University of Massachusetts has a category in its employment system for people who serve as unpaid contingent workers. For nonprofits with which we've had a longstanding relationship, we agreed to "hire" their coaches. The coaches sign an ethics agreement and receive an institutional e-mail account. In exchange, they agree to be supervised by the director of the Advising Center.

We were also able to get internal funding to hire more senior BPS students to serve as peer mentors. They help us get students to events on campus. And we got Admissions to code the incoming BPS students, so we can run lists and balance out caseloads. By the end of our second year, we were able to assign every single incoming BPS student to a coach.

The coaching is very important and very effective, but it's also very expensive. Depending on the agency, coaches have caseloads of approximately 75 to 100 students. If the staff in my Advising Center had caseloads that low, we wouldn't need coaches. We don't have a lot of places in the institution where we have that kind of capacity. I worry about this tremendously, because it's not clear how we—both the campuses and the nonprofits—are going to sustain this program over the long haul.

Getting Connected

The PIC is leading this next phase of *Success Boston*, which focuses on work-based learning and career connections. The PIC, the city's Workforce Development Board, already plays a significant role by connecting Boston high school students to jobs and internships. The PIC is extending its school-to-career strategy to include jobs and internships for community college students and eventually increased hiring upon graduation.

In January 2015, the PIC hired a postsecondary employment specialist through a one-year grant secured by the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development from the U.S. Department of Labor. The PIC has committed to maintaining this position as the grant expires in early 2016. The postsecondary employment specialist currently works with two Bunker Hill Community College career navigators to provide enhanced career advice and employment support to 125 BPS graduates attending Bunker Hill Community College. The PIC's postsecondary employment specialist will continue to provide employment support to these students and will work with Success Coaches to support additional students in 2016.

These early efforts are teaching us what it means to extend our goal beyond college completion to getting graduates connected to the career opportunities that a postsecondary education makes possible.

Impact

IHEP: What outcomes indicate that *Success Boston* is improving the postsecondary completion rate for BPS students?

The 2009 Northeastern University report found that only 35% of BPS students who enrolled in college or university had earned a degree within seven years of graduating from high school. *Success Boston*'s goal was to increase the six-year postsecondary completion rate for the BPS Class of 2009 from 35% to 52% and to double that same rate for the Class of 2011 to 70%. A 2013 report published by the Boston Foundation found that the Class of 2005 had achieved a six-year college completion rate of 47.4%. I've looked at some preliminary data and I think we're going to make our goal of 52% for the Class of 2009.

IHEP: So what's next?

I think getting to the goal of 70% is going to be a lot harder. We've already picked most of the low-hanging fruit. I think we'll still see increases in retention and graduation rates, but we're going to level off unless we can start tackling some of the more thorny issues like affordability. We're committed to doing our best to get there, but I do think it's going to take some strategies that we're not currently using. Going forward, we've identified several areas of focus that are critical for us to tackle if we're to provide additional momentum for *Success Boston*.

First, affordability and degree completion will continue to be critical issues for us. I have a student I've been working with for a long time. She's trying to graduate, and we're at that point in the semester where she's falling apart because she's overwhelmed. She's working 40 hours a week while taking classes and she's exhausted. She can't do both, so she's going to have to either slow down at school or reduce her work schedule. It's always a trade-off. Lots of people think it's a good cost-saving strategy for students to start at a community college. But if you're at a community college and you get stuck in developmental education and you blow through your Pell eligibility, then it actually isn't affordable for you.

Second, creating opportunities for students to acquire the experience that gets them out of the trap of a job and onto a career path is a big nut that we have to crack. Bunker Hill has an initiative called *Learn and Earn*. It's a relatively small program, but it's a credit-bearing paid internship program that's within particular fields. Students can find a paid internship related to their field of study and career goal while earning academic credit. It stops being an either/or, like I've got to go to work or I've got to go to class.

Third, we need more seamless pathways between K-12, community college, and four-year institutions—not just articulation agreements, but true integration. What you do at Bunker Hill in your first two years shouldn't look very different from if you'd done those first two years at UMB. That way, when you arrive at UMB, you're a true junior, not a student with 60 credits who still hasn't attained junior status in your major.

Finally, we haven't engaged policymakers and lawmakers in a strategic way about these issues. That's become part of the discussion now, in terms of how we begin to think about that part of the equation. The buying power of the Massachusetts state scholarships has eroded significantly. Twenty-five years ago these scholarships covered 80% of tuition and fees at a public four-year college in Massachusetts; today they cover only 9%. Good public policy can also help incentivize things like credit-bearing paid internships, which can give students the financial freedom to figure out their career aspirations.

IHEP: Finally, what advice do you have for other communities hoping to learn from or reproduce what *Success Boston* has achieved?

You've got to be in it for the long haul. The work is not easy. I think it's really important that people create safe spaces and are honest with each other, so that if one partner in the initiative is doing something that feels hurtful to another partner, they can speak up and talk about it. I think our students deserve and need us to be the best we can be. That means we can't afford to make nice at the expense of making progress. It doesn't mean that we don't behave civilly and that we yell and scream at each other, but it does mean we sometimes have to have difficult conversations.

Tools

Getting Through: Higher Education's Plan to Increase the College Completion Rates of Boston Public Schools Graduates

This report describes a regionwide strategic planning process in which participating campuses created plans to improve persistence and completion rates, along with estimates of funding needs. The report includes summaries of 25 campus plans as well as an annotated bibliography of college success studies.

Page length: 42

Beyond 12

This online platform provides college coaching and student data tracking analysis aimed at increasing the number of underserved students. The system improves the retention work of colleges and universities by sharing longitudinal data across K-12 and higher education and deriving data-driven insights that shape differentiated coaching plans.

Additional Resources

Effective College Access, Persistence, and Completion Programs, and Strategies for Underrepresented Student Populations: Opportunities for Scaling Up [2010: Center for Evaluation and Education Policy]

This 2010 study published by Indiana University's Center for Evaluation and Education Policy reviews current research on the outcomes achieved by postsecondary persistence and completion programs targeting students from underrepresented populations, identifies and describes promising intervention strategies, and reviews current programs at postsecondary institutions in Indiana.

The Effects of Student Coaching in College: An Evaluation of a Randomized Experiment in Student Mentoring [2011: Stanford University School of Education]

This study by two Stanford researchers investigated the effectiveness of individualized coaching provided to students at public, private, and for-profit postsecondary institutions. Coaching topics included goal setting, academic skill building, time management, and self-advocacy. The study found that involvement with a coach improved student persistence and was a more cost-effective retention strategy when compared with increased financial aid.

Chapter Two:

How can community partners ensure that college success includes career supports, particularly for disconnected students?

For regions to thrive and grow, they require an educated workforce whose skills align with available job opportunities and meet employer demands. The quality of life these places afford residents also make them strong attractors for talented newcomers.

Yet even successful regions often include thousands of people who find themselves disconnected from the education-to-career pathway. Failure to complete high school or stopping out from college restricts many people from job opportunities that provide a path to the middle class and wages able to support a family.

Efforts to re-engage these students can result in significant dividends for students, their families, and their communities. Educators, civic leaders, and regional employers can cocreate education-to-career pathways that offer people the chance to get back on track. Below are a few examples of pathway components that can help once-disconnected students thrive and grow.

Flexible and Accessible Pathways: *Does your community want to promote access to education and training opportunities for people who are disconnected from school and career?* Many people experience personal, financial, or other barriers that may hinder their ability to re-engage. Think about designing flexible pathways that offer “multiple onramps” to help students get back on track. Be sure to consider student input when developing strategies to widen access.

Work-Based Learning: *Does your community want to provide young people with opportunities to explore the world of work while still in school?* Job tours, internships, job shadowing, and apprenticeships offer multiple benefits to students. These programs can provide the opportunity to explore prospective career paths, make connections with employers, and learn more about workplace norms. Involvement may also further encourage student persistence. The business community can help by identifying and sponsoring internship placements, hosting job shadowing and tours, and providing coaches to help students hone interview skills and develop resumes.

Align Pathway Destinations With Employer Needs: *Does your community want to help disconnected students acquire the training and skills needed to access high-need job opportunities?* Regional employers can play an important role in cocreating pathways that deliver graduates prepared to respond to employer demands. Consider how available data sources on high-growth job areas and labor market needs can inform your decision making.

Provide Adult Learners With Accelerated Pathways to Postsecondary Credentials: Does your community want to help adult learners earn college credit while completing GED requirements? Adult education programs that allow students to enroll in courses at technical colleges while completing their GED speed the time to degree while accelerating access to jobs in a range of high-demand fields.

This chapter features an **interview with leaders from *Made in Durham*—a public–private partnership in Durham, North Carolina—**who work to re-engage young people who are disconnected from both school and career opportunities. This chapter also includes several resources that this partnership used to organize its work, set goals, and deploy resources. These resources include **a 2012 report that described the problem of disconnected youth in the Durham region** and **a policy brief outlining *Made in Durham*’s education-to-career strategy.**

This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources** you can use to find more information about intervention strategies that respond to disconnected students as well as how best to develop education-career pathways.

***Made in Durham*, Durham, North Carolina:** Building Community Partnerships in Support of Connecting Young People With Careers

- *Lydia Newman, Youth Transitions Strategist,* ***Made in Durham***
- *Laura Wendell, Business Engagement Strategist,* ***Made in Durham***

IHEP spoke with Lydia Newman and Laura Wendell from Made in Durham to learn about how their public–private partnership—made up of educators, civic leaders, and the business sector—is working to ensure that all of Durham's young people have graduated college and found career employment by age 25. Newman and Wendell describe the catalyst for this partnership, how it uses data to develop education-to-career pathways, and its focus on re-engaging young people who are completely disconnected from school and career opportunities. The interview illustrates an example of a promising practice in developing intervention strategies informed by assessment of a targeted population's needs.

Goals

IHEP: Can you explain why the *Made in Durham* initiative developed?

[Lydia Newman] *Made in Durham* is a community partnership that brings together educators, the business community, government leaders, and community organizations. We've mobilized around an ambitious shared vision: that all young people in Durham will complete a postsecondary credential and earn a wage sufficient to support a family by age 25.

A 2012 report by a community organization called MDC provided the initial catalyst for our work. This report found that approximately 40% of Durham's young people were outside what we've come to think of as the education-to-career system. This population includes students who have dropped out of high school or are at risk of doing so, as well as young people who aren't currently pursuing any further education, training, or employment. Durham is in a fast-growing region with great alternative educational programs, colleges and universities, and job opportunities. We estimate that employers will create more than 23,000 middle-skill jobs over the next 10 years. If we don't act, these young people won't be able to take advantage of the opportunities Durham has to offer them.

We created a task force made up of civic, community, and business leaders to tackle the problem. They decided what was needed was better coordination and alignment between educational institutions; data-supported decision making; career, internship, and training programs; and employment opportunities. And that's why *Made in Durham* was created.

IHEP: Does *Made in Durham* focus on supporting any specific student populations?

[Lydia Newman] We've been very intentional in stating that we serve all Durham young people, with special attention to what we call *opportunity youth*—young people between the ages of 14 and 24 who are really disconnected from both school and career employment.

We're in the process of developing a re-engagement strategy to better serve these students. To that end, we want to better understand the students currently served by Durham's alternative education programs. What kinds of students are thriving in these programs and who isn't being served as well? What do we need to do to re-engage our opportunity youth? Is it just a matter of adding capacity to existing programs, or do we need to imagine something entirely different? We don't want to be in the business of creating solutions that don't fit the population we're trying to serve.

Partnership

IHEP: Can you explain how *Made in Durham*'s partners are working together to build education-to-career pathways?

[Laura Wendell] It's an incredibly exciting time for this initiative. NCWorks (our regional workforce group) has just issued a set of criteria for certifying education-to-career pathways. It's having a tremendous impact on how Durham works with other communities to develop more regionally focused pathways aligned to employer needs. *Made in Durham* is helping by bringing together education, workforce development, and business partners from throughout the region to support the pathway initiative. We're also involving young people as cocreators. We have a youth network made up of about 20 young people who will help shape the pathways we're developing. So far, their insights have been especially helpful with regard to how young people learn about the world of work, who their key influencers are, and how their families, schools, and communities can best support them.

[Lydia Newman] We've learned from this youth network that these pathways need to be flexible to be responsive to young peoples' circumstances. We need multiple access points so that a young parent who left high school early can return, graduate from high

> Employers really are key partners for us in a lot of ways. Their perspective absolutely informs pathway design, training, and program criteria. Success here absolutely relies on developing pathways that produce graduates who employers actually want to hire.

school, go on to college, and start a career. And I agree with Laura: Feedback from engaged employers is really critical so that we can provide students with the training and experience that make them good hires. Right from the start we've had a huge commitment from the business community to generate work-based learning opportunities. Employers really are key partners for us in a lot of ways. Their perspective absolutely informs pathway design, training, and program criteria. Success here absolutely relies on developing pathways that produce graduates who employers actually want to hire. If we're successful, the curriculum informing these pathways won't look all that different from what employers would have created themselves in developing the kind of employee they're looking for.

[Laura Wendell] The program is growing really quickly. We started with one initial pathway in Durham linking four schools (an elementary school, middle school, high school, and community college) and focused on health and life science. As we expand into a more comprehensive, regional program, we're also identifying best practices for how employers engage with schools and communities—from mentoring, afterschool programs, and community lab programs to job shadowing, company tours, internships, and apprenticeships. We are doing this through mapping the landscape of companies offering work-based learning opportunities. The first step will be a meeting with our education partners to determine which companies are most deeply engaged in their programs right now. We will use the results from that process, as well as the connections we have made through our work to date, to identify companies leading the way in work-based learning. We will then assemble an action team of those groundbreaking employers to help us develop a strategy for supporting, expanding, and scaling their work-based learning. The action team will also help us promote the benefits of work-based learning to other companies through established peer networks and other channels. It's exciting to see our community invest in the intersection between classroom learning and the world of work, and how that investment will motivate our young people.

[Lydia Newman] In time, we intend for *Made in Durham* to be a central point of contact between employers and education/training providers. Our staff will play a facilitative role at every stage of the pathway—educating stakeholders about labor market trends, working with employers to identify and build work experience opportunities, and helping employers become "youth ready."

IHEP: How are you using data to inform development of these pathways?

[Lydia Newman] Many of our partners already gather data that they use to track student progression and graduation rates. They made these data available when we first started another program called *Durham Futures* and we've used it when we've applied for grants.

[Laura Wendell] Ensuring our education-to-career pathways are data informed is one of NCWorks' certification criteria. In this context they mean data on labor markets and projections as to future high-growth job areas. We pull data from labor reports available from North Carolina's Department of Labor. We also run focus groups with area employers to complement what the reports tell us. The focus group participants talk with us about their most pressing labor needs, how they account for the difficulty in filling these positions, the positions' salary ranges, and their future projections for the labor market. We use these data to help us zero in on the focus and destination of the pathways we're developing.

Our pathways are structured around particular occupations within career clusters or sectors. An ongoing challenge for us is getting to the right level of granularity in identifying a set of competencies and skills with sufficient labor market demand to justify including a credential in the pathway.

We also want to measure the impact work-based learning has on skill development for young people. Specifically, does the experience influence career exploration, how students make meaning of the skills and experience they're developing, and how they present themselves on resumes and in interviews? We know testing can help assess how well students have mastered content, but measuring skills acquisition and meaning making is more complex. We'd really welcome ideas and suggestions for how best to gather that kind of data.

All this matters because employers often use an earned credential plus so many years of experience as shorthand for the skills they're looking for. I think this approach overlooks people who lack the credentials but have the skills and experience, and vice versa. So when we think about moving the needle on widening participation by young people, we have to think about assessing and improving soft skills and interviewing skills, and providing opportunities to address deficiencies.

Implementation

IHEP: How is *Made in Durham* working to improve outcomes for young people?

[Lydia Newman] *Made in Durham* includes an opportunity youth action team, which we call *Durham Futures*. The team consists of three executive directors from three alternative education programs, senior-level administrators with the public school system, and representatives from our local community college. We have about 250 students enrolled in the alternative education programs. Our job is to help them navigate the education-to-career system.

Two previous reports helped guide our decision making as to how best to re-engage disconnected youth. The first report was released in 2008. It called attention to the degree to which young people in Durham are disconnected from education and career opportunities. The report provided specific data on population distribution, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and unemployment. We used these data to identify demographically vulnerable groups and the circumstances correlated with disconnection. The report concluded that finding a way to help disconnected youth attain a postsecondary credential was our region's ultimate challenge.

I previously mentioned the second report, which led to the creation of *Made in Durham*. It specifically recommended the development of an education-to-career system, led by a broad coalition of community partners and responsive to employer and labor market demand.

We've identified three intervention strategies to help us reach that goal. The first is to connect students with work-based learning opportunities, like an internship or a job tour. Seeing what it's like to work at a company can help them better understand how classroom learning can affect life after high school and college. We started this program this past summer with 15 students. We'll use what we've learned to grow the program this coming year.

The second strategy involves using funds from the United Way to create two positions. One position will be an employer engagement associate. This person's role will be to ensure our young people are getting the work-based learning experiences they need, and that we're building lasting relationships with employers and helping employers connect with educators. We're also hiring a resource specialist who can provide career and college guidance and support—anything that can help students successfully transition to college, and then to persist and graduate. Three Durham alternative education schools will share these two positions. That's an unprecedented arrangement for us. These schools hadn't been working together prior to the formation of *Made in Durham*. Finally, we're launching a program to identify peer and adult mentors who we can match with students in these three schools.

IHEP: What challenges have you encountered in developing the *Made in Durham* partnership?

[Laura Wendell] One challenge is that our partners collectively have a broad range of different interests and focuses involving our target population. Some focus specifically on court involvement and what to do about youth involved in the justice system. Others think about career and technical education and how to encourage students into careers in construction. Others want to focus on college access. Incorporating all of these perspectives into a shared vision for Durham's young people is tricky, but each organization has a role to play.

[Lydia Newman] On a more day-to-day level, sometimes we encounter challenges in getting access to the data we feel we need to move the needle. The Durham Public Schools have to be mindful of FERPA [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act] when sharing data. We're also working through issues in getting data from our community college partners. But it's nothing we can't resolve because we have so many of the right people at the table. For example, our board and action team talked about the need to understand how and if young people are more successful when they receive more career counseling. The superintendent of schools, who is on the board, is now looking into how to use National Student Clearing House data to find more answers.

Impact

IHEP: What is your plan for assessing the effectiveness of *Made in Durham*'s efforts to improve outcomes for young people?

[Laura Wendell] It's still early days for us in terms of assessment. We're still developing and implementing our initial strategies. Of course, within our *Durham Futures* work, we can measure success by assessing student completion of a high school credential, then a postsecondary credential, and then getting a job. So there are some really nice, measurable outcomes there. As a whole, we're looking at how we can incorporate continuous improvement practices, both into our work organizationally and into the work of the partnership across the board. We don't want to wait until it's time to publish an annual report before we learn how well we're doing.

[Lydia Newman] Our partners were already doing their own individual evaluation work before *Made in Durham* began. Now that we have a collective vision, we need to determine the way we're measuring our progress. We don't want to be comparing apples to oranges. Our evaluative process still very much a work in progress.

IHEP: So what's next?

[Laura Wendell] I think one important next step for us is to get vertical and horizontal alignment with our partners. We've got a clear vision with some important pieces in place, and *Made in Durham* is bringing partners to the table. But I think there's work left to do with regard to complete system alignment. We're hoping to access some technical assistance from Lumina to help us build deeper understanding among our partners of how to work in a collective impact environment. I sometimes feel like we're building a bridge by starting at both banks, and now we've got to get that bridge to meet in the middle. And we're pretty sure we'll get there, but until then we need to continue evaluating and measuring our progress.

[Lydia Newman] We've had boots on the ground from the beginning, so it's important for us to help our partners also see themselves in this work and the contributions they can make. I think it's going to take a lot for people to fully understand the system change that will be necessary. And that isn't just the view from the top, like when a CEO says she understands what role her organization can play. We need to help that CEO figure out how to lead the change so that the entire organization is invested.

[Laura Wendell] Exactly. When we have leaders around the table thinking about this problem, we need to ensure they have what they need to build our shared goals into their organizations' planning processes. We haven't fully accomplished this yet.

IHEP: Finally, what advice do you have for other communities hoping to learn from *Made in Durham*?

[Lydia Newman] It's going to take a whole community pulling together to get us to our goal. I think it's been extremely important to make sure to get buy-in, to make sure everyone feels like they're a part of the process. Conversely, leaving some groups with the sense that they weren't part of the process will cost you down the road. Right from the start, *Made in Durham* involved lots of different stakeholders across the board. When you're trying to develop a collective impact organization, you spend a lot of time investing in the partnership and mobilizing the people involved. That's really critical work. You're going to need buy-in from your high schools, your community colleges, and the various organizations that touch the populations of interest if you want to move the needle.

I'll also say that although it's important to ensure everyone's on the same page, feeling included, and being heard, it's essential that you keep a laser focus on a shared vision that everyone is committed to working toward.

"Working through dissent is a real strength of collective impact organizations. I think the end result is greater trust and investment. It's not always comfortable, but if you don't have someone in the room in dissent and asking hard questions, you probably don't have all the right people around the table."

[Laura Wendell] I think that's absolutely right. We're working toward consensus, but it's important to be prepared to sit with the dissenting voice in the room. We've learned so much from partners who were in disagreement. Working through dissent is a real strength of collective impact organizations. I think the end result is greater trust and investment. It's not always comfortable, but if you don't have someone in the room in dissent and asking hard questions, you probably don't have all the right people around the table.

Tools

Disconnected Youth in the Research Triangle Region: An Ominous Problem Hidden in Plain Sight

This 2008 report by MDC investigates the phenomenon of "disconnected youth"—individuals ages 14 to 24 who are disconnected from both school and career opportunities. Researchers conducted an environmental scan—including interviews with civic, education, business, and government leaders and surveys of frontline social service providers—to better understand the problem. The report concludes with a set of recommended action steps to re-engage young people in education-to-career pathways.

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Made in Durham: Building an Education-to-Career System

Taking the recommendations from *Disconnected Youth* as a starting point, this 2012 policy paper provides program design recommendations for the development of education-to-career pathways, including goals, outcomes, structure, strategies, and prospective partners. The report serves as a useful blueprint for communities interested in developing public–private partnerships to re-engage disconnected youth.

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Additional Resources

Mentoring: At the Crossroads of Education, Business, and Community [2015: Ernst & Young & MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership]

This study reports on the benefits of business-sector involvement in mentoring programs for young people, provides a business case for corporate engagement, identifies promising practices and case studies drawn from current programs, and outlines a set of recommendations for future mentoring initiatives.

Education to Employment: Designing a System That Works [2012: McKinsey Center for Government]

This report takes an international and comparative approach to seeking better understanding of the problem of disconnected youth, including an analysis of over 100 education-to-career initiatives in 25 countries.

Findings From the Field: Regional Pathways to Prosperity Model Development [2014: North Carolina New Schools]

This brief describes efforts to develop pilot education-to-career pathways in two North Carolina regions. Each regional profile includes a list of key partners, initial findings, and lessons learned that are informing continued program development. The authors recommend using relevant data metrics and investments in cross-regional networks to share promising practices as future areas of focus.

Improved Adult Education Support Critical to Georgia's Bottom Line [2015: Georgia Budget and Policy Institute]

Intended for policymakers, this report makes the case for additional public investment in adult education programs as a strategy to improve Georgia's competitive economic standing while addressing a pervasive opportunity gap for adult learners. Included is a description of an initiative that provides students who lack a high school diploma the opportunity to enroll in technical college while completing the requirements for a GED.

Chapter Three:

How can community partners design personal supports that ensure underserved students adjust well to college and are more likely to succeed?

Colleges play a critical role in providing access to career advancement through a postsecondary credential for a diverse spectrum of learners. These learners often face significant academic, financial, and logistical barriers that may constrain persistence to completion. Competing responsibilities, financial constraints, and other challenges may compel students to stop out for a semester or longer. Failing to return can leave students saddled with college debt while still lacking the credential that could otherwise help them advance.

Students arrive on campus at varying stages of preparedness for college-level work. Academic pathways that allow students to quickly resolve deficiencies and move on to the next level can help students stay engaged, progress to completion, and save time and money. Incoming students benefit from a campuswide focus on quickly orienting them to campus, integrating them into campus life, and connecting them to faculty mentors in their chosen discipline.

More broadly, postsecondary partnerships with "upstream" (e.g., school districts) and "downstream" (e.g., employers) stakeholders can help provide holistic support for students before, during, and after college—from presearch coaching and advising to internships, job shadowing, and career skill development. These community partnerships are essential to intervention strategies intended to boost postsecondary completion for all students.
Below are a few examples of student support programs and courses that advance a persistence and completion agenda through targeted interventions and partnership building.

First-Year Success Programs as an Intervention in Support of Equity and Inclusion: *Does your institution want to reimagine how it welcomes, integrates, and supports incoming students as a strategy to support broader equity and inclusion goals?* Initiatives aimed at helping incoming students adjust and get connected to campus life can also advance institutional equity and inclusion goals. Consider programs that specifically target student populations (e.g., students from low-income households, first-generation students) that may face additional barriers to persistence and completion.

Convocation: *How can your institution celebrate entry for incoming students in a way that helps them feel involved in campus life and excited for the challenges ahead?* Convocation exercises and other welcome rituals for new students—a common feature at traditional, four-year institutions—may be even more critical for students from underserved communities. Convocation can be a powerful way for institutions to inspire new students to connect and engage.

Success Seminars: *Does your institution want to offer courses to students that introduce student support services, academic skill building, and budgeting, while also helping reduce their time to degree?* Credit-bearing courses can help students acquire the academic, career planning, and budgeting skills that position them for success in college right from the start. Such courses also provide additional opportunities to connect students to critical college support people and services (e.g., writing centers, career development centers).

Intensive Bridge Courses: *Does your institution want to offer short-term, intensive Bridge courses that can help students both address academic deficiencies and quickly progress?* Many students test at the high end of a range of English or math proficiency while still not quite crossing the threshold to the next level. Two-week, intensive Bridge courses can quickly prepare some students to move to college-level English or math without requiring an entire semester of remedial coursework.

These pathways allow students to make quick progress on their academic plan, saving them time and money.

Mentoring and Coaching: *Does your institution want to seek community partners to support student success through mentoring and coaching programs?* Research suggests that mentoring can have a significant impact on student engagement, integration, and persistence. Consider developing or leveraging relationships with community partners (e.g., employers, civic and professional organizations) to identify prospective mentors. Mentorship programs should be responsive to institutional characteristics and demographics. Adult students will likely have very different needs and expectations than traditionally aged students will. Community college students' timelines will differ from that of students enrolled in four-year programs.

This chapter features an **interview with the vice president for access and completion at Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C)**, who describes her institution's First-Year Experience (FYE)—an intervention strategy intended to increase completion rates. We include a **student workbook** developed by Tri-C faculty and administrators for use in a credit-bearing First-Year Success seminar—a component of the FYE initiative. An **FAQ document** (designed for a student audience) also identifies and explains the FYE program goals and describes its five components. We also include a brief that summarizes Tri-C's **strategic plan**. This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources** you can use to find more information about designing programming to promote student success.

Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland, Ohio: A Campuswide Commitment to Helping All First-Year Students Thrive, Progress, and Complete

- *Dr. Karen Miller, Vice President for Access and Completion,* ***Cuyahoga Community College***

IHEP spoke with Dr. Karen Miller from Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) to learn about the institution's First-Year Experience (FYE) program—a comprehensive suite of programs, events, and courses designed to positively impact completion rates for new students. Miller recalls how Tri-C faculty, administrators, and students collectively shaped development of FYE, describes FYE's specific components, and explains the rationale for making student participation mandatory. The interview suggests a promising strategy for getting students off to a great start, with completion as their ultimate goal.

Goals

IHEP: What is the FYE program, and why did it develop?

FYE is the umbrella title we've given to several interrelated programs that are required for all new students at Tri-C. These programs have been designed to help new students start their college career on the right path. The four major goals of FYE are to help students *connect*, *engage*, *plan*, and *succeed*. Students navigate a series of programs and activities that are customized to each person's needs and designed to help them succeed.

A critical catalyst for FYE was the arrival of our new president (Dr. Alex Johnson) in summer 2013. Dr. Johnson had been very involved in the national conversation on the importance of completion in the community college sector. Even as we'd already been active on this front, he really changed the culture and the tone at Tri-C. He took every opportunity to raise the issue—in small gatherings, at town hall meetings on campus, and at convocation. Everyone quickly got the message that this was going to be a critical area of focus for us. He created the right environment for us to advance the systemic change necessary to get the results we needed.

State officials were also very interested in completion. They asked us to put together a plan for increasing completion levels. We knew we needed to move the needle on this, and that it likely meant shifting people and fiscal resources around to support the work we knew was important.

IHEP: Does Tri-C focus on supporting specific student populations?

Well, we've been focused on some populations for quite a while. For instance, students who come to us at a developmental level have been a population of concern for some time. When we first started as an *Achieving the Dream* institution several years ago, we were focused on first-time students, students of color, and underprepared students. That focus absolutely informed our decision to develop and commit resources to a reimagining of FYE.

Equity is an important value for us. We continue to experience an achievement gap between our students of color and our white students. Our students of color are not progressing at the same rate as other students. We're also concerned about our Pell-eligible students and our adult students. Tri-C's new strategic plan explicitly commits us to finding ways to close this gap in hopes of making completion attainable for all students, regardless of age, race, or economic standing. With this end in mind, we're currently developing new persistence, retention, and completion goals for these three populations of concern and what the plan will be to get us there.

Partnership

IHEP: I know Tri-C involved the entire campus in developing the program. Can you describe how you built this partnership? Were off-campus stakeholders involved?

We used an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach to collectively build the FYE initiative. Rather than focusing on problems to be solved, AI starts with what works well within an organization—what is critical about what we do—and then leverages that experience to imagine where we want to go.

We pulled hundreds of people together from across Tri-C to engage in this process. We invited representatives from every constituency on campus. Tri-C faculty and staff were integrated into the cross-functional teams of stakeholders that we developed. We particularly wanted to hear from everyday students about their experiences and what they wanted Tri-C to be like. We also held several collegewide meetings that attracted about a hundred people each. We used this process to discern our vision of what FYE might include, what the student experience of FYE should deliver, and what the desired outcomes were.

We also included representatives from the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) in our AI process to develop the FYE initiative. We frequently work collaboratively with them to ensure student success, as they are one of our biggest supporters and provide a direct pipeline for students to the college. Their input, as well as the input of our students, faculty, staff, and administrators, collectively contributed to the final product. I believe it was well worth the time and effort we put into the process, and I think our CMSD partners would agree.

We rolled out the newly imagined FYE program components in August 2014.

Implementation

IHEP: Can you explain how the specific components of the FYE program came about?

Development of the FYE initiative took place as we were developing a new strategic plan for the institution. Through that process we identified several key metrics—total degrees and certificates awarded every year, our three-year Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) graduation rate, the fall-to-spring retention rate, the fall-to-fall retention rate, the percentage of students who complete gateway English and math in one year, and the percentage of students who complete FYE in their first term. These metrics all fit into the broader conversation we're having about equity—ensuring that all of our students persist and complete.

The components we built into FYE were very much shaped by the thoughts, concerns, and desires of the constituencies who participated in the process. For example, our counseling faculty feels very strongly about the value of orientation for students. Without orientation, they don't get to develop relationships with key people who can help them succeed. They also don't get a feel for the culture of the campus they're going to attend. For these reasons, we knew it was important to embed new-student orientation into the FYE initiative.

"Research suggests that students benefit from early connections to their disciplines. That's what gets them excited. We know that's why they're here. With convocation we saw an opportunity to connect them with people in their program right from the start."

We also piloted a one-credit success seminar that covered topics like time management, financial responsibility, and good study skills. We found that students who had taken the seminar persisted at a higher rate and had higher GPAs than students who hadn't taken the course. These First-Year Success seminars also became a component of FYE. Incoming students now have to register for an FYE course. We offer a number of options to make the course fit students' schedules easily, but it is a requirement. Through the course, they learn about Tri-C's student success resources, they develop an academic plan, and they connect with a faculty member and peer mentors. There's a financial literacy component as well. By the time they complete the course, students know what resources we offer to help them manage their money as well as how the choices they make now will impact them when they leave us.

We also tried something different with our convocation exercises. We hold campus convocations, which are more similar to what you'd find at a traditional four-year institution. We wanted to get students excited, not just about participating in orientation or starting at Tri-C. We wanted them to keep the end in mind—to get excited about graduation. The message we hoped to send is that we want them to graduate just as much as they do, and that we're going to help them stay on that path.

Convocation also helps connect students with their disciplines. Research suggests that students benefit from early connections to their disciplines. That's what gets them excited. We know that's why they're here. With convocation we saw an opportunity to connect them with people in their program right from the start.

Like most community colleges, we use math and English tests at entry to place new students. We often find that some students will test at the highest end of a range but not quite cross the threshold into the next-higher level. In addition to FYE, we've created two-week Bridge courses in intensive math and English for students who fall into this category. We retest them at the end of the course. About half of the math Bridge students move to the next-higher level, while 75% of English Bridge students move to the next-highest level.

We'd always offered math and English placement practice tests, but students seldom took them. Now, we've started requiring students to complete these practice tests and we've seen great results.. For instance, preintervention, 72% of students tested into developmental English. After we started requiring students to take the practice test, 70% of students were placing into college-level English. Accelerating the pace at which students successfully meet program criteria means we can quicken the time it takes them to complete their degree and enter the workforce.

IHEP: Did implementing FYE require additional resources?

Well, it mostly involved reallocating existing dollars. There was no new money. We already had a team of people working on orientation, so that didn't really change. We had faculty teams working to create the FYE success seminars. Once we made the seminars mandatory, enrollment in these courses jumped from a few hundred students to a couple thousand. That meant adding additional sections and hiring adjuncts, although our full-time faculty and then our counseling faculty had first right of refusal. Of course, if we succeed in retaining more students, we gain revenue.

IHEP: Participation in FYE is mandatory. Can you explain the rationale for that decision?

We took note of what other colleges were doing through our affiliation with *Achieving the Dream*, our involvement with AACC [American Association of Community Colleges], and the broader conversation about the importance of completion. We decided we needed to be much more intentional in designing a first-year experience for students, rather than have them experience the college by chance. We knew we needed additional structure and intentionality on the front end with college-readiness and to tighten up the experience on the back end with career readiness if we wanted to affect persistence and completion. MDRC's research has found value in connecting students with academic pathways right from the beginning. My dissertation research found that students who are satisfied, engaged, and feel like part of the campus culture tend to be retained at higher levels. And then, of course, the positive outcomes we saw from piloting the FYE course made an impact. At the end of the day, we believed making participation mandatory and creating change at scale were necessary to make a significant difference in our outcomes.

IHEP: What challenges did you encounter in implementing the FYE program?

We struggled with compliance during our first year. Roughly 900 of 3,500 incoming students didn't complete the required FYE course. We expect students to register for an FYE course and for convocation, but when they dropped one, the system didn't always catch it. These technological loopholes make monitoring student progress time intensive for our staff. We have a lot of people in our student affairs offices assigned to triaging the FYE groups. Students who fail to complete the FYE program have holds applied to their student accounts, so they can't register without intervention. This kind of case management requires a lot of staff time. We're committed to continuous improvement, making adjustments as we go. We're especially interested in closing loopholes and finding ways to use technology to reduce staff time on triage.

Impact

IHEP: What outcomes indicate that participation in FYE is improving the completion rate for Tri-C students?

I think the initial impact has been tremendous with regard to improved outcomes for students. As you know, community college students are quite different from students at a traditional four-year college. They're at great risk with regard to attrition. They don't enroll continuously until graduation. They start, stop out, return, and leave again. Not surprisingly, we've really struggled with our completion rate. We don't always agree with how the measure is determined, but we don't make excuses.

When we started, our IPEDS rate for first-time full-time students starting in the fall was 4.2%. Our president challenged us to do better, and in our first year we got the rate up to 5.5%. Our third-year goal was 8%—we hit 9.2%. This year, he's challenged us to improve to 15% by the end of summer 2016. Given our total population of 25,000–29,000 students, that's no small number.

Success requires us to be very intentional about that work. It means getting everyone's eyes on our numbers. Not only at the highest level, but with our faculty, in all leadership groups, across all campuses. Everybody knows where we are with our key metrics at the end of every semester.

This experience also sets an important precedent for us. We now know that when we all pull together across the institution, we can make some pretty significant changes in a short amount of time. I think we realize now the power that we have to make a difference, and that's exciting. Everyone at Tri-C knows the direction we're headed in. No one is unclear about his or her role with regard to promoting student success and completion. Our president recognizes our accomplishments, but he hasn't let up on us in terms of the ongoing challenges. And that's a good thing.

IHEP: So what's next?

We're focusing now on students who haven't been as successful. We're targeting not only the first-years and the completers, but also the students who are somewhere in the middle. As we continue to fine-tune FYE, we're now talking about redefining our student population. We think now in terms of first-year students, sophomores, and upper-class students. For us, sophomores are any students with two semesters under their belt but who have yet to complete college-level math and English. And that's where the majority of our students are. We've got to do what we can to move those sophomores

You must have engaged leadership from the top down. Everyone needs to be focusing on the same thing. If you get mixed messages from leadership about what the priorities are, you won't be able to get everyone on the same page. You need someone at the top who knows exactly where you need to go and can effectively convey that message to leadership at all levels of the institution.

along. It's important to us that all our students succeed and that we're moving the dial for everybody in terms of retention and completion. It's a question of equity for us, and that value is driving the conversation.

We're also working on reshaping the student experience of academic majors by developing metamajors. Metamajors are an array of academic programs with common or related content. We're creating what we call "care teams" of support made up of faculty, counseling faculty, and support staff, all clustered around students in the disciplines. We're still figuring out what that's going to look like.

We're still engaged in the same campuswide process we used to develop FYE. Our efforts are now focused on how we can continue to reshape the Tri-C student experience to ensure everyone is both engaged from entry and guided on a direct path to completion.

IHEP: Finally, what advice do you have for other communities hoping to learn from what Tri-C has achieved?

You must have engaged leadership from the top down. Everyone needs to be focusing on the same thing. If you get mixed messages from leadership about what the priorities are, you won't be able to get everyone on the same page. You need someone at the top who knows exactly where you need to go and can effectively convey that message to leadership at all levels of the institution. You need very specific targets, very specific outcomes, benchmarks, and a realistic timeline. Once you have buy-in on the plan and campus constituencies start driving the conversation, collecting feedback, encouraging involvement, and keeping it positive, you can achieve some incredible things.

I don't mean to suggest this was easy. It's definitely not easy. We're a large institution: four campuses, two corporate colleges, and a district office. It's a big ship to turn. I don't think any of us thought that we could have moved so quickly. But if we can do it, then with the right leadership anybody can do it.

Tools

Tri-C Challenger's Guide: Practical Advice for College Success and Personal Growth

This workbook was developed by Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) faculty and administrators for use by students enrolled in the college's credit-bearing First-Year Success seminars. Topics include time management, test-taking and study skills, career exploration, wellness, and money management. Learners are also encouraged to make connections with student support advisors and programs at the college.

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First-Year Experience Program: Frequently Asked Questions

Designed for a student audience, this publication uses an FAQ format to provide introductory information about Tri-C's First-Year Experience (FYE)—a suite of programs, courses, and events designed to support, integrate, and retain incoming students. Topics include program components, eligibility, cost, and deadlines.

Page length: 4

Sharpening Focus: Strategic Plan FY16–18

This publication outlines Tri-C's six strategic focus areas, which include student completion, student experience, and equity in outcomes. The document provides a critical institutional context for the development of the FYE program, objectives, intended outcomes, and target population.

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Job Link Services

This brochure describes Tri-C's Job Link Services—a student support service that works in partnership with local employers and civic and community organizations to provide career coaching and skill building.

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Additional Resources

A Matter of Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success [2012: Center for Community College Student Engagement]

This report describes promising practices intended to advance engagement, persistence, and completion for underprepared and underserved students; identifies design principles for effective intervention strategies; and includes perspectives from students and faculty on student engagement and the college experience.

Unheard Voices: First-Generation Students and the Community College [2015: Pacific Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers]

The author (a community college administrator) reports the results of a qualitative research study that investigated the experiences of first-generation students enrolled at one of several Oregon community colleges. Students reported that off-campus employment often inhibited campus engagement and academic success (a finding in line with prior studies of student attrition). Female students' circumstances (e.g., caregiving responsibilities) often imposed additional barriers that their male counterparts did not face. Older students often reported that their experience was not validated in the classroom. The study provides useful insight into the experiences of an understudied setting for first-year success.

Community College Orientation Basics: How to Structure a New-Student Orientation Program [2008: National Academic Advising Association]

Intended for community college administrators tasked with developing an orientation program for new students, this article provides a set of organizing questions to help identify goals, desired outcomes, and resources; develop a schedule; and determine a format. The authors also provide case studies that detail how orientation programs were developed at two community colleges in the Midwest.

Urban Colleges Dealing With Unique Retention Issues [2015: Diverse Education]

Published in Diverse Education, this article profiles the challenges public and private urban institutions face in promoting student persistence and completion. Large populations of part-time and commuter students often mean that students' time on campus is limited, which restricts their access to student support services and diminishes engagement. The article also describes how one university is using student data to develop intervention strategies, while another is building high-impact educational practices into its core curriculum.

Is College Worth It for Me? How Adults Without Degrees Think About Going (Back) to School [2013: Kresge Foundation]

Postsecondary administrators interested in reimagining how their institutions engage with and support adult student success may find this report helpful. Researchers identify and describe expectations, attitudes, and needs of prospective and incoming adult students. Although respondents reported less concern about social integration than their traditionally aged peers, they are less convinced of their potential to succeed and are less likely to have concrete plans for college.

The Pell Partnership: Ensuring a Shared Responsibility for Low-Income Student Success [2015: The Education Trust]

This report provides graduation rate data for Pell Grant recipients at over 1,100 four-year public and private nonprofit postsecondary institutions and argues that closing the achievement gap between Pell and non-Pell students will require focus on both access and outcomes. Examples of successful intervention strategies from a range of institution types provide helpful suggestions for promising practices.

Chapter Four:

How can communities provide holistic financial support for low-income students?

College affordability is central to any discussion about the completion agenda. Although nearly all households worry about how to pay for college, costs pose an even higher hurdle for low-income students. Although traditional financial aid resources like grants, scholarships, and loans can address tuition and fees, they fail to holistically address the costs students incur before they even set foot on campus. Housing, food, transportation, and childcare are all significant expenses that many students must consider in order to make college a realistic option. Class schedules also limit the hours that students can work to cover these costs, which can stop students in their tracks just as much as tuition bills do.

Improving postsecondary access and success requires reimagining financial supports for low-income students. Campuses can work to better understand who their low-income students are, what financial hurdles those students routinely encounter, where institutional resources can best be targeted, and how their institutional processes and policies may have unintended impact on low-income student access and persistence.

Institutions can also help connect students with public and community resources that can fill in the gaps. Nonprofits working with low-income communities should consider extending their reach to students on campus. Below are a few examples of intervention strategies that stakeholders can use to make college more affordable for low-income students.

Linking Campus and Community Resources: *Does your community want to bundle critical financial resources to improve access for low-income students?* Bundling resources like food assistance and family health care with campus services like legal aid and career coaching can provide students with holistic support—in both their on- and off-campus lives—and may make them more likely to access services.

Audit Institutional Policies and Processes: *Does your campus want to evaluate its administrative processes to identify any unintended financial barriers to low-income students?* Student academic or financial policies, processes, and deadlines may have unintended consequences for low-income students. Review your institution's administrative practices from the lens of a low-income student and consider updates or modifications as appropriate to respond to needless barriers.

Campus–Community Partnerships to Support Low-Income Student Well-Being: *Does your community want to develop a coalition of campus, civic, and nonprofit organizations in support of low-income students?* Consider investing the time in developing a coalition of campus, civic, faith-based, and nonprofit organizations with a shared interest in low-income student well-being. Partnerships like these can further strengthen and expand networks of care and make it more likely that low-income students won't fall through the cracks.

This chapter profiles the **Beyond Financial Aid guidebook**, a resource developed by Lumina Foundation that helps campuses build their capacity to strengthen the financial stability of students.

This chapter ends with a list of **additional resources** that you can use to find more information about making college more affordable for low-income students.

Beyond Financial Aid:
An Approach to Meeting Students' Unmet Financial Need

Even after receiving financial aid, many low-income students have an unmet financial need that can significantly contribute to their failure to complete educational goals. Institutions can mitigate this unmet financial need by integrating supports that enable students to address the broader spectrum of financial hardships—nutrition, housing, transportation, and childcare, as well as financial, tax, and legal services—while providing greater academic supports.

The Beyond Financial Aid (BFA) guidebook is designed to support community colleges and four-year institutions in facilitating discussions about strengthening students' financial stability in order to improve student success and completion. The centerpiece of BFA is an institutional self-assessment that can help campuses assess existing efforts and identify strategies to build their capacity to strengthen the financial stability of students.

In addition to the self-assessment, BFA includes a primer that makes the case for broader financial supports and lays out a framework of six concrete strategies for providing this support— strategies distilled from best and promising practices at colleges across the country.

THE SIX BFA STRATEGIES TO INCREASE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

1. Know the low-income students at your institution by reviewing quantitative and qualitative institutional data to better understand their experiences.

2. Provide supports to help low-income students overcome practical barriers by bundling diverse on-campus and off-campus resources and centralizing their access.

3. Leverage external partnerships for service delivery by connecting with groups that have shared missions and values and can help bring services to students.

4. Empower low-income students to use available resources by normalizing the use of financial supports. Also, consider opt-out versus opt-in models.

5. Review your internal processes from the student's perspective. This can uncover unintended impacts and suggest ways to revise and streamline processes and policies.

6. Implement other effective practices that strengthen the academic progression of all students, knowing that these practices can make a greater difference for low-income students.

To learn more, visit the BFA website at http://www.luminafoundation.org/bfa where you can (1) browse the BFA website and materials, (2) sign up for periodic updates delivered straight to your inbox, (3) join the BFA electronic mailing list, (4) listen to archived webinars and obtain resources, (5) provide feedback on BFA through a brief survey, and (6) share your college story. Please e-mail bfa@luminafoundation.org if you have any questions or would like assistance in adopting and implementing BFA strategies.

Additional Resources

College Affordability and Transparency Center [2015: U.S. Department of Education]

This resource spotlights institutions with the highest and lowest tuition and net price. Students and families can also search for costs across several types of institutions, including public and private, for-profit and nonprofit, and four-year and two-year programs.

College Affordability: What Is It and How Can We Measure It? [2014: Lumina Foundation]

This paper takes a student-centered approach at moving toward a more meaningful understanding of financial accessibility of postsecondary education for students in different circumstances. It proposes defining and tracking an integrated set of metrics over time to monitor changes in college affordability.

College Affordability for Low-Income Adults [2014: Institute for Women's Policy Research]

This report argues that affordability must expand beyond a singular focus on cost to reflect the variety of circumstances that may affect low-income students' decisions to enter college and succeed. As low-income students are more likely to be financially independent, to be first-generation students, to be students of color, and to be parents, they have greater time constraints, less access to relevant postsecondary information, more unmet needs, more health challenges, and a higher likelihood of serious material scarcity.