

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

There are many strategies for increasing college persistence and completion, but one model has emerged that is backed by an increasingly robust body of evidence: comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS). Six CASS models – CUNY ASAP, InsideTrack, MAAPS, One Million Degrees, Project QUEST, and Stay the Course – have all been evaluated using randomized control trials. As a result, there is a strong body of evidence that shows CASS programs impact short-term outcomes, such as persistence, credit accumulation and more. CUNY ASAP, the best-known CASS model, has also been found to nearly double the graduation rate for participants after three years in both its initial program and in the three colleges in Ohio that replicated the program. Project Quest has demonstrated increased student earnings after graduation.

In partnership with MDRC, LEO, and Results for America, TICAS has been engaged in a community of practice with these six CASS programs throughout the past year and a half. Our goal is to understand these programs' impact and common design elements, as well as what it would take to scale these approaches to meaningfully move the needle on college completion among underserved students nationally. Though these programs operate in different contexts and communities around the country, and vary in significant ways, they have three core elements in common and share several more.

The three central design elements shared among all CASS programs are:

- 1. A counselor or case manager.** Though the programs use different terms to describe the staff they employ to support students, the role these individuals play is similar: they work with students to identify the challenges they face, and connect them with customized resources, such as tutoring or personal support, to help them meet those challenges. Counselors meet frequently with students, encourage them, and hold them accountable for following through with their commitments. In CASS programs, working with a counselor is not optional and it is not a passive resource that is available to students who take the initiative to seek it out. Instead, advisors proactively reach out to students, especially when data indicates that they may need additional help. Counselor to student ratios vary, but generally range from 60-125 students per counselor – lower than typical caseloads at postsecondary institutions. The methods of communication and overall approaches used by counselors to connect with students also vary, but all CASS programs leverage strong human connections to help students succeed.
- 2. A real-time data system.** Use of real-time data to track student progress towards meeting benchmarks is the second essential element of CASS programs. Such systems allow CASS programs to identify students before they fall off track and help get them the resources and support they need to succeed. Programs regularly track metrics, such as student performance in academic courses, attendance at meetings with advisors, enrollment in credits leading to a degree, and more, and raise issues with students as they arise. These early warning indicator systems provide an opportunity for students to access resources when they are needed to help them continue in college.
- 3. A strategy to help students stay on track.** Some programs require students to enroll full-time; others provide financial incentives for students who meet programmatic requirements. All incorporate elements that encourage students to stick with their commitment to completing college and help them to follow through. Regular counseling meetings themselves, in fact, serve as a form of accountability by providing a forum to check in on progress towards meeting the goals students set for themselves.

Are all wraparound services CASS programs?

No. CASS programs are a specific type of wraparound service. A distinguishing feature is a case manager who proactively works with students and connects them to a variety of supports that can help them succeed in college, depending on the students' needs.

Other design elements that are common within CASS programs include:

1. **A multi-year approach** – Most CASS programs work with students throughout their educational journey, helping them advance from enrollment to graduation. This multi-year approach strengthens the relationship between advisors and students and sends a signal to the students that they will have a reliable partner in their college journey.
2. **Academic support** – Several CASS programs run their own tutoring programs; others refer students to other academic support programs. Counselors, with the use of strong data systems, can note when additional academic support is needed and connect students quickly with the help they need.
3. **Financial support and incentives** – Financial incentives and support for participants are frequently found in CASS models. These awards can vary from scholarships to offset tuition and fees, to stipends for books, supplies, emergency assistance, living expenses or other costs, to MetroCards, to incentivize students to continue meeting with their counselor regularly. These investments offset the cost of college and incentivize students' ongoing participation in the CASS programs.
4. **Personal support** – Some CASS programs also help connect students with childcare, housing, healthcare, transportation, food assistance and other personal support to help them navigate the challenges of going to school as a low-income adult. Often, CASS programs leverage community resources, such as food pantries or state safety net programs, by letting students know that they may qualify for these programs and helping them access the benefits.

CASS programs operate all over the country, in urban and suburban areas, in areas.

- **CUNY ASAP** – CUNY ASAP began at the City University of New York in New York in 2007 and has since been implemented in 9 CUNY colleges, and in community colleges across 5 states, including Nashville State Community College in Tennessee, Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, Cuyahoga Community College, and Lorain County Community College in Ohio, San Mateo County Community College District in California, and West Virginia Community and Technical College System in West Virginia. CUNY ASAP provides an advisor, financial assistance in the form of tuition stipends, textbook assistance, an unlimited MetroCard, academic, and career support to students who enroll full-time. With a laser-like focus on completion, CUNY ASAP connects students with an advisor, a tutor, a career specialist and other support to help them get through college. CUNY has been evaluated through a [randomized controlled study](#) and a [replication study](#) and found to nearly double graduation rates among participants.
- **InsideTrack** – Operating on 4,500 public, private, and proprietary campuses across the country, InsideTrack provides proactive coaching, primarily by phone and text, to students, who are largely nontraditional, to help them persist and complete college and achieve career success. InsideTrack coaches focus on eight areas: academics, school community, commitment to graduation, career, managing commitments, finances, health, and personal effectiveness. A [randomized control study](#) found that participating students were more likely to still be enrolled one year after enrolling than those in the control group.
- **MAAPS** – Monitoring Advising Analytics to Promote Success (MAAPS) provides intensive, proactive advising to first-generation and low-income students at risk of not completing college at 11 large research universities nationwide: Arizona State University, Georgia State University, Iowa State University, Michigan State University, The Ohio State University, Oregon State University, Purdue University, University of California Riverside, University of Central Florida, University of Kansas, and the University of Texas at Austin. The program uses data, such as the student performance, and real-time alerts to notify students when they go off path. Targeted, proactive advising interventions help get students back on track. This program has been shown through a [rigorous evaluation](#) to have a small but persistent impact on credit success and GPA among students at one site, Georgia State University.

- **One Million Degrees** – One Million Degrees (OMD) is aimed at helping students overcome whatever challenges they confront. The program provides comprehensive, personal, proactive, intensive advising as well as tutoring, financial and professional support to participants in 10 community colleges in Chicago, including 7 city colleges. In addition to coaches, OMD also offers program coordinators on each campus where it operates to oversee the program, spot trends, and support the coaches. OMD is currently in the fourth year of a rigorous evaluation and early results indicate that the program significantly increases full-time college enrollment and persistence.
- **Project Quest** – Project Quest was founded in San Antonio, Texas in 1992 to fulfill the growing need for job training for adults seeking to move from manufacturing jobs, which were declining in scale, to higher paying jobs in in-demand fields. Since its inception, the program has been replicated across the state of Texas serving over 7,700 people. Project Quest serves those that have interests in careers in health care, manufacturing and trades, information technology, and/or an associate degree but are not currently attending college. Centered around an intensive case management approach, Project Quest helps students access financial assistance, academic enhancement, and more career counseling, work readiness, as well as support services such as childcare and transportation. A randomized control trial over nine years found that Project Quest substantially increased student earnings, moving participants out of poverty and into the middle class.
- **Stay the Course** – Run by Catholic Charities in Fort Worth, Texas, Stay the Course provides proactive advising, financial support, and referrals to academic tutoring to participating students throughout the five campuses of Tarrant County Community College (TCC) in Tarrant County, Texas. In 2018, Stay the Course served 3,000 TCC students. A rigorous evaluation found promising signs of effectiveness.