While there has been an increase in national high school graduation rates over the last two decades, millions of students “stop-out” — leave college without completing a degree — forfeiting the economic benefits that a college degree provides. The national six-year college completion rate continues to stall at 62 percent, however, there are widespread disparities among students who begin at public two-year colleges, Black, Latinx, and Native American students.

**TAKE ACTION**

Fund the Postsecondary Student Success Grants program (PSSG) at $165 million to help institutions invest in data-driven and evidence-based reforms to encourage postsecondary retention, and completion among students who are close to graduation, as well as those who stopped-out because of various challenges.
Targeted comprehensive support is needed to get more public two-year college students to the finish line where only 43% of students in the 2016 cohort completed degrees. There are additional disparities among Black and Latinx students with completion rates of 31% and 38%, respectively.

**Public two-year and community colleges six-year completion rates, 2016 cohort**

Borrowers who do not complete a credential are more likely to default than those who do. Students who started college in 2003-04 but stopped-out are twice as likely to default on their student loans compared to those who completed a degree within six years.

One model has emerged that is backed by an increasingly robust body of evidence: comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS). Seven CASS models — Bottom Line, CUNY ASAP | ACE, InsideTrack™, National Institute for Student Success (NISS), One Million Degrees, Project QUEST, and Stay the Course — have been evaluated using randomized control trials showing CASS programs’ impact on short-term outcomes, such as persistence and credit accumulation for students enrolled in community colleges and four-year colleges or universities. The PSSG presents an opportunity to build evidence with the replication and scale of evidence-based programs to meet the evolving needs of students in diverse institutional contexts.

The strong demand for federal support to help colleges increase completion among students who stopped out is evident with over 100 applications for the inaugural $5 million PSSG competition investment in the Postsecondary Student Success Grants program.

Inaugural grants were awarded to the following institutions:
- Austin Community College (Texas)
- Claflin University (South Carolina)
- Florida International University (Florida)
- Orangeburg–Calhoun Technical College (South Carolina)
- Passaic County Community College (New Jersey)
HOW GRANTEES PLAN TO USE FUNDS

Austin Community College

**Austin Community College Ensuring Student Success (ACCESS) Project**

Coaching Support: ACCESS will provide outreach and reenrollment coaching delivered by InsideTrack™ to improve enrollment, persistence, completion, and career readiness.

**Comprehensive Student Support:** ACCESS will support 1,000 students who stopped out after 2020 with comprehensive financial, personal, social, family, and technological support, including:

- Child Care
- Transportation
- Textbooks
- Tutoring
- Digital Devices
- Personal Counseling

**Building Evidence:** InsideTrack™ research-proven coaching methodology will help re-engage and re-enroll stopped-out students and currently enrolled students at-risk of stopping out.

Claflin University

**Targeting Recruitment and Supports to Students Who Stop-Out through Innovative Access to Success Pathway Project**

Wraparound Student Services: Students will receive personalized student outreach, coaching, scholarships, financial literacy resources, and institutional debt forgiveness.

Expanded Academic Offerings: CU is adopting new policies to award credit for prior learning and provide hybrid instructional opportunities.

**Building Evidence:** CU will implement practices tested and measured by The Power of Coaching study, which can inform the field on the effectiveness of coaching within the context of a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

Florida International University

**Addressing Barriers with Financial Resources and Wraparound Support**

Targeted Outreach: Scaling targeted outreach to students who have stopped out during the COVID-19 and at-risk of stopping out due to financial reasons. Additionally, identified students will have access to financial assistance and financial wellness support.

Financial Wellness Coaching: FIU will hire peer coaches to increase their financial wellness coaching program. Each student will be assigned either a peer or professional financial coach to identify root causes of financial barriers and help improve students’ financial literacy to disrupt cycles of financial challenges.

**Building Evidence:** FIU will continue to scale and evaluate these efforts while also building evidence from The Effects of Student Coaching An Evaluation of a Randomized Experiment in Student Advising in the context of financial wellness.

Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College

**Re-engagement and Completion Experience (RACE) to Finish**

RACE is designed to promote retention and completion for students who are currently enrolled at OCTech, as well as students who are close to completion (50% or more credits earned) who stopped-out because of challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic through two main strategies:

**First-Semester Experience:** Providing students college-wide support including the following:

- Expanded college-wide orientation activities;
- A revamped advising process
- Designated advisors to provide appreciative advising
- An online course success tutorial
- Community-building activities.

**Academic Calendar Expansion:** Increasing campus-wide flexibility including the creation of two seven-week terms in Fall and Spring semesters, increased hybridization and simulation, and the addition of the Weekend Warrior College program to provide working adults with open labs on Fridays and Saturdays.

Passaic County Community College

**Targeted Support for Stop-Out Students Program (PCCC-TSSS)**

Advising and Coaching: PCCC-TSS will scale the SUCCESS program, incorporate targeted outreach, advising, and coaching support to students who “stopped-out”. Additionally, PCCC-TSS is leveraging the PSSG award to incorporate InsideTrack™ Coaching—an evidence-based student completion strategy.

Financial Support and Resources: Participating SUCCESS students receive a $50 incentive and a $200 emergency aid stipend to assist with transportation, child care, laptop, and technology access.

**Building Evidence:** PCCC-TSS will build evidence on the scale of MDRC’s Evidence-Based Community College Scaling Up College Completion Efforts for Student Success (SUCCESS) at a Hispanic Serving community college.