

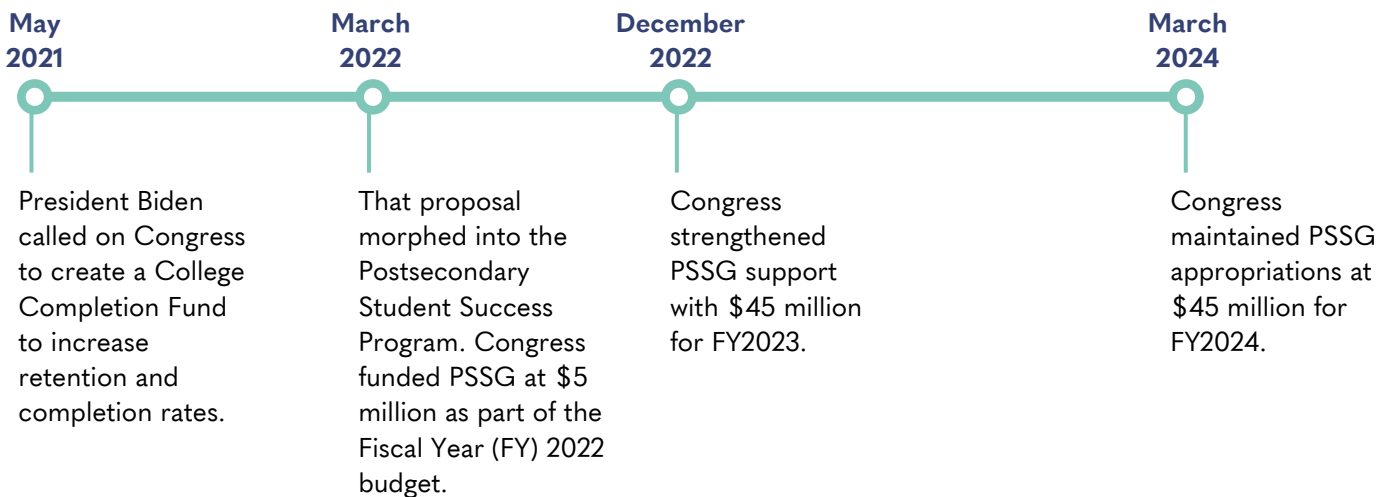


Four Ways the Federal Postsecondary Student Success Grant Program Can Make a Greater Impact for Students and Institutions

THE INSTITUTE FOR COLLEGE
ACCESS & SUCCESS

Heeding calls from [experts and other stakeholders](#) equitable college completion and educational attainment across the US, the Biden Administration called for a new College Completion Fund in 2021. Congress responded by creating and funding a competitive federal grant program in 2022 to identify and scale evidence-based completion strategies across college campuses. [The federal Postsecondary Student Success Grant \(PSSG\) Program](#) awards [grants to support evidence-based activities](#) to improve postsecondary retention and completion rates, including critical persistence benchmarks. Continuing to grow this fund will accelerate and spread the adoption of best practices to boost college completion across the country. Additional changes to the grant program, highlighted below, will increase its impact on students and colleges even further.

> Evolution from College Completion Fund to the Growing PSSG



In Fiscal Year 2022, [Congress funded PSSG at \\$5 million](#). The Department of Education [awarded two-year grants to five institutions](#) to support evidence-based practices to improve existing retention and completion efforts. Grantees included a Historically Black University (HBCU), a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), a community college, and a technical college.

In 2023, [Congress increased funding to \\$45 million](#) to address the substantial demand for the fund. The second grant cycle resulted in **four-year grants to 10 institutions, one state system, and a consortium which includes a four-year Minority Serving Institution (MSI), a community college, and an HBCU.**

> How does the PSSG program work?

PSSG is set apart by its evidence-based focus; projects and funding levels are selected based on their program and evaluation design, absolute priority tiers (see definitions below), or the level of research available to validate their effectiveness according to What Works Clearinghouse’s (WWC) evidence standards. Under PSSG, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) [may award early-phase, mid-phase, or expansion grants](#) that differ in terms of the level of prior evidence of effectiveness required for consideration for funding.

The Department convenes peer reviewers, or field readers, who score each PSSG application based on a [selection rubric](#) that measures a program’s significance, design and evaluation quality, and demonstration of promising, moderate, or strong evidence of improving student persistence, retention, and degree completion.

➤ **Grantees can use PSSG funds on retention and completion strategies, including:**

- Providing comprehensive academic, career, and student support services;
- Providing financial assistance to students;
- Reforming course scheduling and credit awarding policies;
- Building career pathways or career and technical education; and
- Improving transfer pathways between community colleges and four-year institutions of higher education.

Eligible applicants include the following:

- > Institutions of higher education (IHE) designated as eligible to apply under Title III/V (which includes HBCUs, Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCUs), MSIs, and Strengthening Institutions Programs (SIPs);
- > Nonprofits that are not an IHE or part of an IHE, in partnership with at least one eligible Title III/V IHE;
- > A State, in partnership with at least one eligible Title III/V IHE; or
- > A public system of higher education institutions.

Priority Evidence Tiers

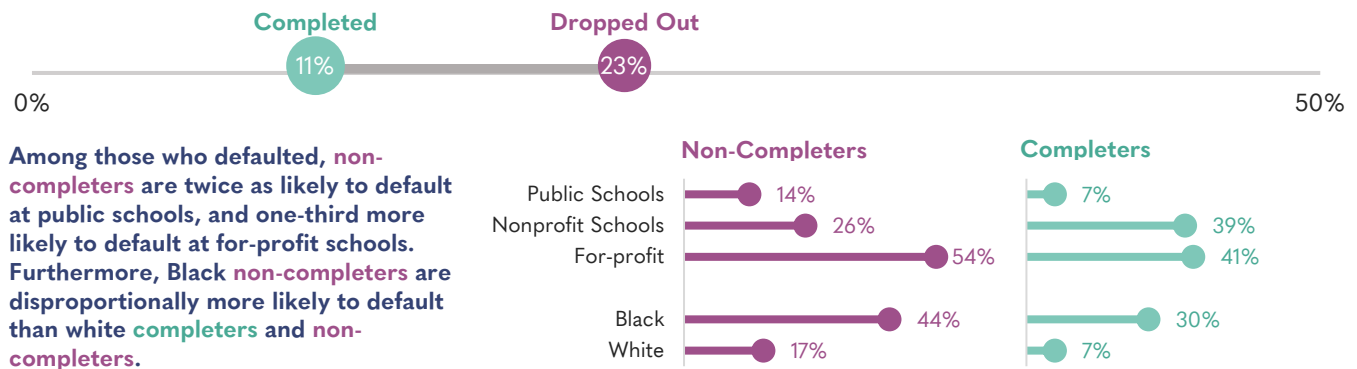
- > **Early-phase (Absolute Priority 1):** Proposed projects that demonstrate a rationale to improve postsecondary success for underserved students, including retention and completion. There are seven early-phase grants ranging from \$3-4 million.
- > **Expansion (Absolute Priority 2):** Proposed projects supported by evidence that meets the conditions in the definition of “[Moderate Evidence](#)” or “[Strong Evidence](#),” to improve postsecondary success for underserved students, including retention and completion. Projects under this priority must be implemented at multiple sites or include at least 2,000 students in the sample. There are three expansion grants ranging from \$7-8 million.

Why is the PSSG program necessary?

While high school graduation rates have increased, only [64 percent](#) of students who began seeking a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution in Fall 2014 completed that degree at the same institution within six years. Students of color and those from low-income backgrounds bear the brunt of this crisis, [completing college at lower levels than their peers and holding higher student loan debt and default rates.](#)

Students Who Started College in 2003-04 and Defaulted on Student Loans:

Source: [The Self-Defeating Consequences of Student Loan Default](#)



Nationally, as of 2021, the Some College, No Credential (SCNC) student population has reached [40.4 million](#), up 1.4 million from 39.0 million in the previous year.

> Four Ways the PSSG Creates Greater Impact for Students and Institutions

While the PSSG enables institutions to provide students tailored support, including academic, personal, financial, advising, and coaching resources, there are opportunities to strengthen its impact for students and institutions. In order to deliver results for students, policymakers, and the field of postsecondary education, the fund must concentrate its investments on building greater evidence for holistic approaches that could credibly yield scalable impacts on the re-engagement of stopped out students, and on retention and graduation for all students.

A handful of colleges, including Austin Community College, Claflin University, Long Beach City College, Passaic County Community College, and St. Peter's University, are implementing and scaling comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS) that provide students with a suite of data-driven advising and wraparound supports modeled by or in partnership with evidence-based CASS programs.

Seven CASS models have been evaluated using randomized controlled 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.

- > **Bottom Line:** Bottom Line students are [53 percent more likely](#) to earn a bachelor's degree within six years after high school.
- > **CUNY ASAP:** ASAP students' graduation rate is [two times higher](#) than CUNY students who did not participate in ASAP.
- > **InsideTrack:** Students coached in the first year of entering the InsideTrack program were [15 percent more likely](#) to persist in college after 18-24 months of receiving coaching.
- > **Monitoring Advising Analytics to Promote Success (MAAPS):** Students at Georgia State University provided MAAPS advising services earned [higher GPAs](#) than students who were not a part of MAAPS.
- > **One Million Degrees (OMD):** OMD participants' Associate's degree attainment [grew by 19 percent](#) and is now being scaled at City Colleges of Chicago.

- > **Project QUEST:** Graduates of Project QUEST earned over [\\$4,600 more annually](#) in the eleventh year after exiting the program and more than \$31,000 over the entire 11-year follow-up period.
- > **Stay the Course:** Stay the Course increased Associate’s degree completion among enrolled women by [5 percentage points](#), nearly three times the graduation rate of those who did not participate in the program.

Sustained [student support over multiple years](#) has been shown to improve student retention and graduation in numerous studies and across the country. Efforts focused on single course or low-cost technological intervention may improve course outcomes but are unlikely to affect these multi-year outcomes.

Four Recommendations to Improve PSSG Impact

- 1 Distinguish PSSG as a “stop-out” and “wraparound support” grant by concentrating the program purpose as described in the [Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education \(FIPSE\)](#), which describes PSSG as a grant program designed to “support [individuals who have started but not completed postsecondary education](#) with the opportunity that will lead to degrees, certification, and credentialing that will increase student outcomes, while simultaneously reengaging individuals with higher education and providing essential wrap-around services.”
- 2 Prioritize applications from community colleges, Title III, rural institutions, and historically under-resourced institutions that serve the most vulnerable student populations, such as low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color.
- 3 Require applicants to demonstrate [at least two CASS design principles](#) to ensure projects provide students with data-driven and proactive comprehensive support. CASS programs such as CUNY ASAP, InsideTrack, MAAPS, Project Quest, One Million Degrees, and Stay the Course have been evaluated with randomized controlled trials and demonstrated success with improving student outcomes. These programs all provide students with the following:
 - A designated counselor, coach, or case manager
 - Real-time data systems
 - A multi-year program model or strategy to help students stay on track with:
 - > Academic Support
 - > Personal Support
 - > Financial Support
- 4 Prioritize applications that demonstrate a significant need and provide a clear rationale of how the proposed strategy addresses existing retention and completion disparities on campus, and advance student success for students who need it the most.

> **Examples of Funded PSSG Projects with Comprehensive Supports Reflective of Proposed Enhancements**

2022	<u>Austin Community College Ensuring Student Success (ACCESS Project)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Coaching Support: ACCESS provided outreach and reenrollment coaching delivered by InsideTrack to improve enrollment, persistence, completion, and career readiness.> Comprehensive Student Support: ACCESS supported 1,000 students who stopped out after 2020 with comprehensive financial, personal, social, family, and technological support.
	<u>Clafin University Access to Success Pathway Project</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Wraparound Student Services: Students received personalized student outreach, coaching, scholarships, financial literacy resources, and institutional debt forgiveness.> Expanded Academic Offerings: CU adopted new policies to award credit for prior learning and provide hybrid instructional opportunities.
2023	<u>Peacock Success by Optimizing Data and Support (PODS) Project</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Enhanced Data Systems: PODS will increase training and expand the University's retention-data platform enabling faculty and staff to monitor students' academic performance, provide early alerts, share information to increase student support and coordinate resources when help is needed.> Specialized Support Initiatives: PODS will position faculty as mentors to establish personal relationships with the students they advise. Pods will also establish a Male Resource Center (MRC) designed to increase academic, social, and cultural support for male students.
	<u>The Success and Completion Achievement Network (SCAN)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Transfer and Completion Support: Students will receive transfer and completion support from SCAN staff trained in academic advising. SCAN will develop a structured support system for students who do not immediately enroll in college after high school.> Transition Programs and Workshops: SCAN participants will have access to wraparound supports through a summer bridge program and monthly workshops.

> **Learn more about PSSG grantees and their proposals [here](#).**