



Scaling Comprehensive Supports to Equitably Get Students to the Finish Line:

LESSONS FROM CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO
AND ONE MILLION DEGREES

March 2023

THE INSTITUTE FOR COLLEGE
ACCESS & SUCCESS

Increasing college completion offers tremendous promise for promoting social mobility, tackling poverty, and reducing racial and income inequality. However, it is insufficient to believe higher education institutions can improve college completion alone. COVID-19 exacerbated longstanding barriers to college success faced by students from low-income backgrounds, as well as for Black, Latino, and Indigenous students. Without proactive interventions and intentionally designed wraparound supports or comprehensive approaches to student success (CASS) support services, equity gaps in college completion and postsecondary outcomes will persist. Strong cross-sector partnerships, adequate funding, and policy enhancements are necessary to expand equitable access to high-quality comprehensive supports that get more students to degree completion.

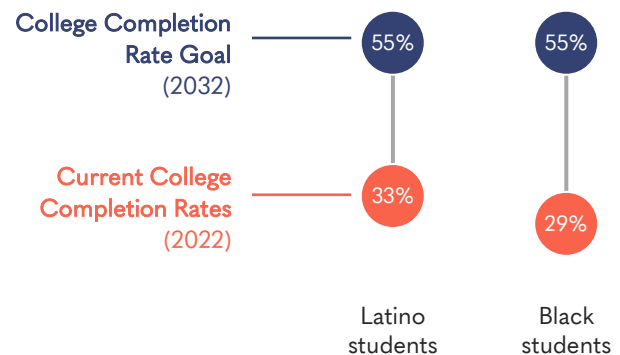
The City Colleges of Chicago (City Colleges) and nonprofit partner, One Million Degrees (OMD), provide one compelling partnership model for overcoming these barriers. Instead of seeing low completion rates as evidence that college is not for everyone, City Colleges, OMD, and their partners are considering the factors causing students to stop out. They are also scaling up support to ensure students complete college no matter their race, ethnicity, or economic background.



In Chicago, despite an increase in high school graduates and college enrollment, only one in four community college students graduate within three years. This is a national challenge. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nationally the three year graduation rate was 29 percent at public 2-year institutions. The multifaceted obstacles to degree completion range from cost of attendance to limited academic and career planning services, personal and familial responsibilities, and psychosocial barriers.

In response – and to combat low rates of degree completion – **leaders from City Colleges have set a goal to achieve a 55 percent college completion rate for students of all racial backgrounds by 2032.** They have paired this overall goal with an equity goal to improve postsecondary outcomes by 33 percent for Black and Latino students by 2026. **As of 2022, Latino City Colleges students complete at a 33 percent rate and Black students complete at a 29 percent rate**, leaving a gap of 22 and 26 percentage points to the 2032 completion goal, respectively.

City Colleges of Chicago's College Completion Rate Goal by 2032



City College's focused approach to student success catalyzed a stronger partnership with OMD to equitably expand access to wraparound supports, including academic and career advising, scholarships, mentoring, and navigational guidance for City Colleges' students. OMD serves nearly 900 community college students at 10 institutions across Chicagoland. The organization follows a model with extensive evidence of success improving outcomes among diverse student populations.

City Colleges of Chicago

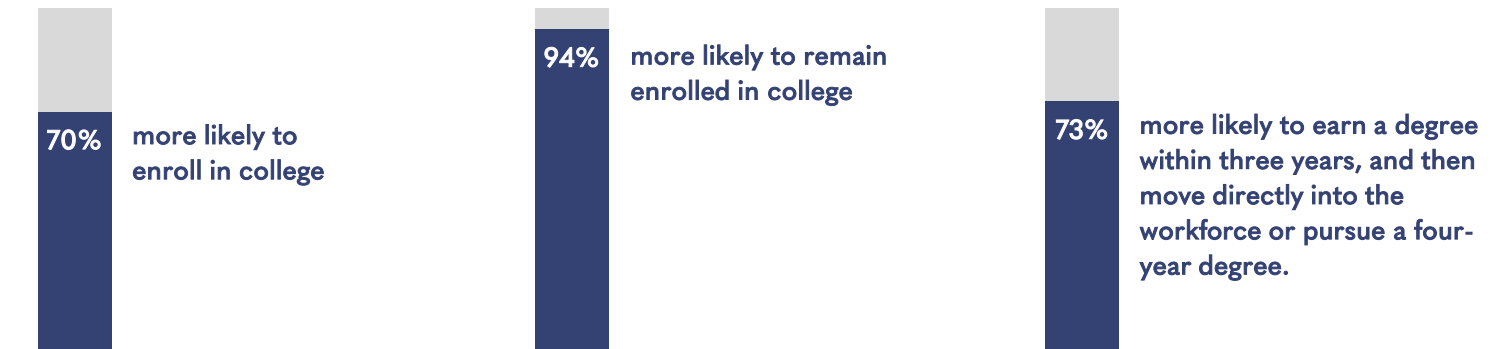
Chicago's community college system operates on seven campuses and five satellite sites, preparing more than 50,000 students each year to enter the workforce, pursue higher education, and advance their careers.

One Million Degrees

A Chicago-based non-profit organization serving community college students in the Chicago metro area. OMD supports students financially, academically, personally, and professionally through last-dollar scholarships, skill-building workshops, advising, and coaching.

Strong data supporting the OMD model from the University of Chicago Inclusive Economy Lab's randomized controlled trial (RCT) study not only built confidence in the program among City Colleges' administrators and philanthropic funders, but also informed program design.

Students who applied to OMD before enrolling were...



Source: Inclusive Economy Lab: <http://bit.ly/3EvFxB>

Scale of Supports

Ultimately, this partnership has the potential to dismantle racial and economic barriers often attributed to the disruption of college completion for many students from low-income backgrounds, Black, Latino, and Indigenous, students. City Colleges' focus on equity drives the partnership, redesign, and expansion of OMD's program model, flipping from an "opt-in" model of support to an "opt-out" model wherein all eligible students at a City Colleges campus will automatically have access to OMD's support.

OMD and City Colleges will pilot the opt out model in at least two City Colleges over a four-year period from September 2022 through June 2026, reaching more than 3,000 students by the fourth year of partnership. The implementation and expansion of OMD services will begin at Olive-Harvey College, followed by Malcolm X College – both institutions serving large proportions of students of color and low-income students. If similar student outcomes are observed during the four-year pilot, the system will expand the opt-out model to serve thousands more eligible students across all seven City Colleges.

In addition to hiring four OMD program coordinators designated for the pilot, City Colleges, Olive-Harvey College, and OMD teams are integrating key activities and functions to efficiently serve students. They include the following:



Aligning data sharing practices and granting OMD staff access to City Colleges' student success database.



Integrating Olive-Harvey College's student success curricula with OMD's scholar development curricula.



Streamlining performance stipend distribution by integrating this process into City Colleges' financial system.

Conditions for Scale

Understanding the conditions that led to the development of this model can provide a blueprint for other higher education institutions and communities as they look to implement or expand CASS across higher education. **The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) interviewed stakeholders from City Colleges, OMD, and community and philanthropic partners to identify key conditions that make it possible to expand and sustain wraparound services for more students within City Colleges.** We learned an initiative of this magnitude requires cross-sector collaboration, trusted partnerships, and funding for success.

1 A Unified Vision for Student Success

In Chicago, the education, business, municipal, and philanthropic communities care deeply about investing in their city, creating talent pipelines, and increasing college completion for all students. Furthermore, City Colleges outlined a specific and measurable equity goal to share with all partners. This collective aspiration to improve postsecondary outcomes and the city's talent pool opened the door for discussions on how to improve college access and success, and determine the resources needed to advance their vision.

“*Strong local interest in Chicago students and City Colleges contributed to an infusion of philanthropy.*”

Lisa Castillo Richmond, Executive Director of Partnership for College Completion

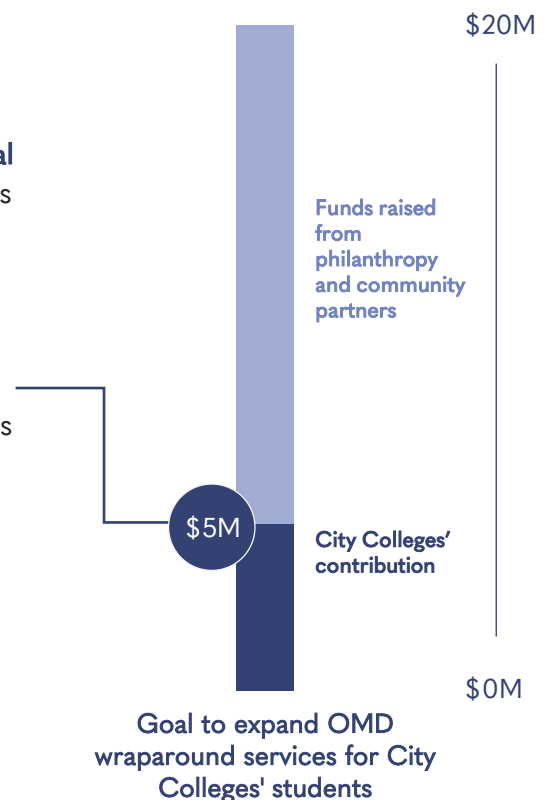
“*Industry leaders are seeing this not as giving these students and scholars a chance but as needing these students and scholars in their workplaces to be competitive in this day and age. I think it has gone from a pathway for a handful of young people to try to 'make it' in different industries to an incredibly diverse pipeline of incredible assets for Chicago's workforce.*”

Beth Swanson, CEO of A Better Chicago

2 Cross-Sector Investment in a Model that Works

Building on the unified vision for college success, **partners demonstrated their commitment to see more students graduate from college with financial investment in a model with strong evidence of success.** OMD's effectiveness with increasing degree attainment, connecting college and career success, and the possibilities for creating an inclusive economy in Chicago excited community and philanthropic partners. **This collective interest led to a \$20 million goal to expand and sustain OMD wraparound services for City Colleges' students. City Colleges contributed \$5 million toward the initial goal** – a signal to partners of City Colleges leadership's confidence in OMD's success and commitment to the expansion.

City Colleges and OMD are committed to evaluating the implementation and continuing data collection on student outcomes to better serve students and achieve their shared equity and college completion goals. The University of Chicago Inclusive Economy Lab's research team will remain deeply involved in the evaluation of the partnership for the next four years.



3 Collaborative Advising Approaches

Equitable access to advising supports are game changers to improve racial and ethnic postsecondary outcomes, and advisors need time and resources to provide students with high-quality experiences. OMD's staff and City Colleges' advising team will continue collaborating to increase capacity and create an environment where more students can proactively receive holistic advising, professional development, and financial support before encountering an academic, financial, or personal challenge. The expanded partnership between staff at both City Colleges of Chicago and OMD better positions both organizations to do the following:

- ✓ Collaborate as a cohesive team to connect students to and to provide holistic advising support.
- ✓ Create an improved sense of belonging on campus for students.
- ✓ Identify and proactively support high school seniors and returning adults navigate the post-secondary planning, enrollment, onboarding process.
- ✓ Ensure students meet critical academic milestones that lead to college completion and careers.

“ Before we launched this version of our partnership, our staff working at Olive-Harvey [College] were in a separate area from the advisors who worked on that campus. Now, they are in the same space. The idea is we are one team. We're not two teams. And the conversations that can happen organically and formally through that kind of a setup is huge

Aneesh Sohoni, Chief Executive Officer of One Million Degrees





State and Federal Policy Implications for Replication and Scale

College completion models, like OMD, that provide customized, holistic support to students from marginalized populations can have an enormous impact on students' educational trajectories. Yet far too many students – especially those from low-income backgrounds, Black, Latino, and Indigenous students – have limited access to [similarly evaluated programs](#). Insights from City Colleges of Chicago's partnership with One Million Degrees provide a roadmap to help other higher education leaders promote equitable access to wraparound student support and improve postsecondary outcomes. However, state and federal policy changes are needed to ensure all students have equitable access to wraparound support and are equipped with resources to finish what they start.

At a time when college completion remains stagnant and equity gaps in postsecondary outcomes persist, policymakers and higher education leaders should take steps to invest in more institutional or system-wide implementation of CASS supports or partnerships with evidence-based completion programs.

Recommendations for State and Federal Policy Leaders

-  **Incentivize cross-sector partnerships** between high schools, postsecondary institutions, and CASS programs to foster successful transitions to and through college.
-  **Leverage data to identify disparities** in postsecondary outcomes among communities and populations to implement targeted CASS supports to reduce inequities and increase college completion.
-  **Establish clearly defined equity goals** to identify targeted supports needed to equitably improve college completion.
-  **Increase funding for the Postsecondary Student Success Grants program**, a competitive federal grant available to postsecondary institutions and partnerships to replicate and scale evidence-based college completion programs such as OMD.
-  **Integrate CASS into institutional priorities** – CASS programs have the greatest impact when they are integrated into the strategic plans, budgets, and advising structures.
-  **Establish a state-funded college completion grant program** to replicate and scale CASS programs at state institutions.

State and federal investment in evidence-based comprehensive approaches to student success, like the CCC and OMD partnership model, offer great promise for increasing college completion rates by supporting students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and first-generation students to graduate at higher rates. In turn, these effective investments yield substantial benefits for individuals, while also generating economic and social returns for communities, states, and our nation.



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By Jhenai W. Chandler, Director for College
Completion and Lydia Franz, Policy Associate

1615 L Street, N.W. Suite 310
Washington, DC, 20036
202.223.6060